Ecosophy and socially engaged art.
A practical investigation into contemporary curatorial production

Vanessa Saraceno

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of the Arts London
Chelsea College of Arts
March 2022

ABSTRACT

This research unfolds through a sequence of curatorial projects that I carried out in Britain and Italy, and explores the implications of embedding Félix Guattari's ecosophy into socially engaged curatorial practice.

Moving In / Moving Out addresses ecology as both a matter of ethical values (Fowkes, 2006) and of socio-political critique (Miles, 2014), and questions curating as an authorial and selective practice. Looking at ecology through the lens of Guattari's ecosophy (1989) – an ethico-aesthetic articulation of everyday praxis that rejects hierarchies and favours interdependence – *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures* explores the effects that the notions of transversality and heterogeneity have had on the identity and ethics of my practice.

Questioning the theoretical underpinnings of the work of selected curators (O'Neill, 2012; Thompson, 2011; Lind, 2010; Jacobs, 1993), *Practices of Sustainability* uses ecosophy to challenge hierarchical mental habits that still shape contemporary art production. "Vulnerability", "grounded listening" (Gablik, 1992; Kester, 2005) and interdisciplinarity are understood as tools for a renewed ecology of practices (Haraway, 2016).

My activity as communication coordinator at Manifesta 12 Palermo identifies the curatorial with a networked series of activities and movements of associations (Latour, 2009) that engage with the unknowable potential of what is called "the public" (Arden, 2014).

Riflessioni sull'Abitare addresses the aesthetics as a place for a collective ecocritical inquiry (Morton, 2009), and plays with the traditionally opposed categories of proximity and distance to question how identities and relations are formed, perceived and challenged.

Ecosophy enables an understanding of the curatorial as an agency and responsibility shared by all involved in socially engaged art projects. In these projects, the curator is not an "enlightened expert" (Rancière, 1991), but an engaged citizen who uses a passionately weak (Majewska, 2019), interdisciplinary and critical practice to transform the mentality of life in the shared οἶκος.

Contents

Introduction

I. Ecology and the curatorial: an ecosophical approach

This research unfolded through practice-led curated interventions aiming at offering an ecosophical approach to the curation of socially engaged art projects: an approach that could address the art experience as a site for social and mental transformations of the relations existing both within and outside of the art production process, even if this would eventually lead to a fundamental rethinking of what the curatorial means in my practice.

I have worked both as an independent practitioner and as an employee of art organisations, focusing on projects which aimed at investigating issues of ecology in contemporary European cities by the means of socially engaged art. This research project is evidently bound to a certain unsustainable, existential precarity that is typical of neoliberal, capitalist societies: a condition that has brought me to live and work in seven different cities in ten years, moving from the US (New York) to the UK (London) and to Italy (Rome and Palermo), finally spending some months in France (Marseille) and The Netherlands (Amsterdam) before moving back to my hometown in Sicily (Messina). Considering the complexity of the subject and the enormous variety of art practices tackling the issues of ecology, I do not aim to make comparisons between the UK and Italy, or Italy and the rest of Europe. Expressions such as "Europe" and the "West" are not meant to establish these as places for a universal approach on sustainability and ecology. On the contrary, their function is to help me situate my practice and the knowledge I developed through it, and to keep both practice and knowledge anchored to the ambivalences of my rather partial, yet grounded perspective.

Throughout this thesis, I shall explore the development of a practice-based research that unfolded through a malleable spatial and temporal framework, and that has been deeply influenced by my own personal experiences and encounters with other cultural practitioners and research. Most importantly, I have come to this investigation on ecosophy and socially engaged art practice after my studies in philosophy, and particularly in aesthetics. I do not have any academic or institutionalised knowledge in curatorial studies, and do not really consider myself a professional curator, although this research has also been nurtured by curatorial theory and practice. I started my curatorial activity as an investigation on different notions of ecology and sustainability, and on the implications such notions have in contemporary art practice and theory. Specifically, I argue that the fashionable ideals of ecology and sustainability that can be seen so recurrently in contemporary art spaces and projects, if thoughtfully examined, preserve rather than challenge the mentality and socio-political conditions that cause the climate breakdown we are currently experiencing.

This research starts from the following assumption: if cultural producers believe in art's potential to be sincerely engaged with a specific "social", eventually participating to a process of amelioration of lives among different – human and non-human – communities, then a thoughtful examination of issues of "ecology" should also lead to a redefinition of roles and functions within the process of production of socially engaged art projects. As you will see in these pages, my practice-based research looks at ecology through the lens of ecosophy, described by philosopher Félix Guattari as an articulation of thought and practice, a sensitivity leading to "a type of revolution of mentalities [...] that would give back to humanity a sense of responsibility not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet".[1] Nevertheless, what are the implications of embedding Guattari's ecosophical sensitivity into the curatorial production of socially engaged art projects? This is the question this thesis attempts to answer.

II. The aesthetics of my ecosophical practice

I started organising exhibitions and art interventions in collaboration with other professionals as a way to investigate how ideas are represented, and communities formed through aesthetic experiences. In my previous studies, I have always addressed aesthetics following Immanuel Kant's definition of it as a kind of judgement based on feeling, and whose distinctive role is that of making a claim to the universal starting from a given particular. In Kant's philosophy, aesthetics is not merely about beauty (and the beauty of nature): it is a faculty in its own right because it makes cognition possible by virtue of an exercise of reflective judgement. Arising from a disinterested encounter between a subject and an object, aesthetic judgement actively stimulates the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding in their engagement with the object. However, this research borrows most of its arguments not from Kantian theory but from some recent understandings of aesthetics developed by contemporary philosophers, such as Theodor Adorno and Timothy Morton, and that explicitly engage with Kant's aesthetic categories.

To further investigate the crisis of meaning in both art and society in 1970s Europe, Theodor Adorno, one of the members of the Frankfurt School, states that contemporary aesthetics is first of all a theoretical activity, for its purpose is both to interpret the works of art and, as Max Paddison writes, "to develop the con-

1. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis. An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (1992; Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), 119-120.

cept of understanding itself in relation to artworks".[2] Moved by the need to denounce the mental attitude of modern society that establishes nature as "something over there" in order to dominate and exploit it, Adorno states that the thinking process is in essence the encounter with the nonidentity. In his view, aesthetics is that moment of the thinking process wherein "the appearance of the affirmative *ineffabile*, the emergence of the nonexistent as if it did exist"[3] occurs.

British philosopher Timothy Morton develops further Adorno's theorisation of aesthetics as a resilient movement against the fixation of thought on universal concepts. Whereas Adorno identifies the aesthetic with a dimension that dissolves the subject's petrification in his or her own subjectivity, as a shudder that momentarily cancels the distance between the perceiver and that which is perceived, Morton describes aesthetics as "a place where our ideas about things drop away".[4] According to Morton, in the aesthetic experience, the *ineffabile* becomes visible not only *as if it did exist*, but as if it *could* exist, whilst that which already exists becomes contestable and changeable. Particularly referring to our ideas of "nature" and of the οἶκος at the heart of ecology, Morton's dark ecology rethinks the aesthetic experience as the opening up of questions of epistemology that are deeply connected to the contemporary ecological crisis. In fact, this is seen primarily as a crisis of reason, in as much as environmental thinking has focused mainly on the content and form of its object of studies, whilst Morton's dark ecology invites us to question how we, as humans, can know what we know about nature, and how we can verify what we know.

Following both Adorno and Morton, this practice-based research addresses the aesthetic experience as a key moment for a new cultural and ecological awareness, and identifies the thinking process with an active movement towards a radical otherness. In the practical interventions I discuss in this thesis, aesthetics becomes a place to reflect upon how identities and values are constructed and communicated, and how communities both perceive and represent themselves in relation to other people, communities and species. Specifically, I investigate how I developed my socially engaged practice fighting against a certain tendency in contemporary art exhibitions and public projects that objectifies both "nature" and the "social". Through curated, socially engaged interventions in public spaces, I attempted to highlight how a certain perception of the environment transforms the relations occurring within and across that environment, and to expose the ethical ambivalences and socio-political

2. Max Paddison, "Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory'," *Music Analysis* 6, no. 3 (October 1987): 357.
3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (1970; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), 64.
4. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 24.

implications hidden behind the process of making. Addressing ecology as ecosophy – Guattari's ethico-aesthetic articulation of thought and practice leading to a revolution of mentalities and to new modalities of group-being – I developed strategies of production, communication and presentation of socially engaged projects that could highlight and eventually challenge the way capitalism forges contemporary ways of seeing nature, and of relating to human and non-human others. Nurtured and constrained by the existential contingencies that shaped my personal life, my research arose from the historical and political contexts it wanted to make sense of, approaching the curatorial as a speculative and critical practice. Borrowing an expression from Patricia MacCormack and Colin Gardner's investigation on Guattari's transversality, this research addresses the curatorial as "an activist philosophy"[5] in the attempt to identify the implications of an ecosophical approach to socially engaged curating.

III. Overview of the following chapters

Chapter One of this thesis examines how ecology has been defined by different philosophers and addressed in contemporary art theories and projects, comparing these theories and curatorial strategies with the understandings I was developing through the curated socially engaged interventions I was co-producing in London and Cambridge.

This research starts with an overview of different definitions of ecology by Ernst Haeckel, Murray Bookchin, Arnae Naess and Gregory Bateson. In order to investigate the implications in socially engaged art practice of a different understanding of ecology, an understanding that can overcome the objectification of nature denounced by those theorists, I critically engage with ideas arising from the principles of sustainability by curators Maya and Reuben Fowkes and the expanded notion of ecology developed by critic Malcom Miles.

While in Maya and Reuben Fowkes's theory, sustainability in contemporary art turns the form from a matter of aesthetic values into "a matter of ethical values",[6] through my collaboration in *Moving In / Moving Out* in Wembley, in north-west London, I experienced that such ideas, if thoroughly examined, lead to a practice that might be sustainable in the form, but that does not really address the complexities of working with the social as a form.

5. Patricia MacCormack and Colin Gardner, *Ecosophical Aesthetics Art, Ethics and Ecology with Guattari* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 23.
6. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Sensuous Resistance: The Legacy of Modernism for Sustainable Art", *Documenta 12 Magazine* (July 2007), http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=en&page=3&id=352.

Following Malcom Miles' invitation to consider ecology as "an expanded field overlapping politics and social thought",[7] the second section of Chapter One unfolds with an analysis of two different exhibitions held in Britain and in Italy respectively, and that address the ecological crisis as just a matter of representation: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet* at the Barbican, London and *Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities* at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin.

Through my curatorial activity at *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures,* I started questioning what an "expanded notion of ecology" meant in my life and practice. The mental dimension of ecology as elaborated by Guattari convinced me of the need to look at ecology through the lens of ecosophy. I started understanding ecology not as a given concept or a set of definitions, but as a multidimensional domain approachable through a specific questioning attitude whose main aim was that of challenging the apparently unsolvable dualisms (culture and nature, subject and object, art producers and art participants) that govern humans' existence in the shared οἶκος. My ecosophical articulation overlaps social and political thought, but also takes into account the mental and environmental dimensions of ecology, unfolding as an investigation of how the relations that model the shared οἶκος are perceived and understood.

Chapter One concludes with a reflection on how Guattari's ecosophy, understood as a sensitivity that unfolds through a renegotiation of values, hierarchies and meanings, eventually led me to focus on the implications that such a questioning attitude has on socially engaged curatorial practice. In fact, while trying to embed ecosophical principles into my practice, I felt I had also to negotiate my own role and identity within the net of heterogeneous and mutable relations that were making the socially engaged art projects.

Chapter Two explores affinities and divergences between ecosophy and contemporary socially engaged theories and practices. In particular, it examines the methods and inspirations I used to embed ecosophical principles into contemporary socially engaged curatorial practice and offers an analysis of some of the most important contributions in the field.

While socially engaged art is defined ambiguously as "a social interaction that proclaims itself as art",[8] in Guattari's vision, ecosophy is way of thinking and acting that

7. Malcom Miles, Eco-Aesthetics, *Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change* (London: Bloomsbury: 2014), 67.
8. Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 1.

calls up "the logic of desiring ambivalences" for it keeps moving transversally between poles and "no longer imposes a 'resolution' of opposites".[9] In this thesis, I intend to play with what Claire Bishop describes as "the ambiguities of social engagement, which might refer to a wide range of work"[10] to collectively practice Guattari's logic of ambivalences and cultivate response-abilities – borrowing Donna Haraway's expression – towards the shared οἶκος.

After discussing the works of three feminist artists whose practices have deeply inspired my methods and methodology, I focus on three approaches to socially engaged art theory: Suzanne Lacy's *New Genre Public Art,* Suzi Gablik's *Connective Aesthetics* and Grant Kester's *Dialogical Aesthetics*. Through these theories, I learned the importance of vulnerability, listening and doubting in the context of a practice, as the socially engaged, that is based upon "the distinct shift in the locus of creativity from the autonomous self-contained individual to a new kind of dialogical structure",[11] as Gablik writes.

The second section of Chapter Two highlights how the processes of heterogenesis between theories and practices connected with Guattari's ecosophical paradigm have affected the work of selected contemporary curators working in the field of socially engaged art. It was never my intention to make comparisons between highly institutionalised, professional curatorial activity, and my experimental, practice-based cultural investigation. Rather, I have used this research as an opportunity to situate my practice in a network of heterogeneous practices and theories that overlap and become hybridised. I focus particularly on the work by Mary Jane Jacobs, Paul O'Neill, Nato Thompson and Maria Lind who turn socially engaged art projects into platforms for alternative, more ecologically inspired models of curating.

Chapter Two concludes that it is exactly in relation to the contradictions and constraints of a self-sustained research occurring outside of institutional settings and logics of corporate sponsorships that ecosophy becomes a fruitful, critical source for new meanings and associations of ideas. As I learned through the making of *Practices of Sustainability* with Sabine Bolk, to truly challenge old mentalities the new ecosophical paradigm should never fixate the creative energy into standardised forms and roles, constraining both art experience and art practices into a set of expectations or list of tasks. Ecosophy should be used as a critical force to investigate also the mental boundaries shaping the

9. Ibid, 34.
10. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 1.
11. Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism," in *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, ed. by Suzanne Lacy (1995; Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 76.

way cultural producers work and relate to themselves and to their "publics".

Chapter Three investigates how my collaboration at the European biennial Manifesta 12 Palermo nurtured the identification of an ecosophical approach to socially engaged curatorial practice. For the twelfth edition of the biennial, titled *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence,* I was not working in the curatorial department but as communication coordinator. The pre-biennial series of community-based events I designed and executed with my colleagues, as well as the communication strategy we developed in collaboration with artists and participants allowed me to test the problems of an ecosophical approach to socially engaged practice from another, non-curatorial perspective and in relation to the local public of an international art event. Even without performing the role of curator, in what I was doing at Manifesta 12 I could still see traces of "the curatorial", identifying with this expression a physically present, networked series of negotiated activities. In particular, I focused both my research and my day-to-day activity on investigating what "the public" or the "social" may mean, especially for projects like the Manifesta biennial, that aim to have an impact on the context where they take place. Specifically, I borrow the notion of "impossible public" by curator Holly Arden, for whom the political and democratic potential of artists' desired audience lies precisely in "the impossibility of pinning it down" and identify it as a unified entity.[12]

On the other hand, Latour's notion of the social as movements of associations and its methodological approach to inquiry known as Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) helped me address the making of the pre-biennial community projects and my own activity as communication coordinator as an act of tracing the multiple trails of associations that a project like Manifesta could prompt in Palermo. In my role at Manifesta 12, I learned that in an ecosophical articulation of curatorial practice the public should not be addressed as an entity that already exists or that has to be produced by cultural workers, but as people's and communities' constant movements of associations that often transcends and challenge the expectations and intentions of the curator.

Chapter Four explores the implications of working transversally in the conceptualisation, production and presentation of a hybrid project, that mixes the traditional

12. Arden's argument on the plurality of the public of socially engaged art recalls Habermas' notion of the public sphere. According to the German philosopher, the public sphere cannot be characterised as a group of individuals or as a crowd, but it is the place where private people gather to regulate against the public authority. Habermas' theory allows us to consider "the public" not as an entity but as a critical site where authority can be contested and public opinions and wills formed. However, as Nancy Fraser pointed out, such a "public" is still thought by Habermas as mono-dimensional, accessible to one social class only – the bourgeoisie – that gathers following the need to discuss the public good in the name of its private interests.

aesthetic categories of proximity and distance, and plays with the tension between the traditionally opposed discursive and exhibitionary formats. One year after Manifesta 12 Palermo, I co-organised a small-scale, sustainable and self-budgeted project in the same neighbourhood where I had spent two years working as the communication coordinator of the biennial. In the making of this project, ecosophy translated into the need and desire to return to all the contradictions that had arisen during the biennial, while trying to engage with the local community that we wanted to reach as our first audience of reference. Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, read through Bruno Latour's understanding of the social as a series of interconnected and overlapping networks, and Timothy Morton's ecocritical movement, have inspired the making of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, a project made in collaboration with various practitioners who were living and working in Palermo during the Manifesta.

Riflessioni sull'Abitare was characterised by the fact that we were intentionally working outside pre-established definitions and roles, engaging with the local communities in ways that were not regulated by the logic of the "enlightened expert" of neoliberal institutional structures, but sharing responsibilities and negotiating creative agencies in the process of production and presentation of the project. The conceptualisation and production of the project was based on the methodological assumption to accept the social engagement as a moment for a fruitful, intersubjective vulnerability: not only between the cultural producers and the plurality of "publics" around us, but also among the cultural producers themselves.

Such an ecosophical way of working can be accused of "weakening" both curatorial practice and environmental thinking, but in the conclusion to this thesis I argue that only dismantling heroic notions of identity and homogenising processes of discursive and creative engagement, socially engaged art practice can embed ecosophy and "bring about an authentic political, social and cultural revolution, reshaping the objectives of the production of both material and immaterial assets",[13] as Guattari argued. Although being "weak", in the sense given by philosopher and activist Ewa Majewska, "as an alternative to the predominantly straight and masculine notions of heroic activism"[14] and models of identity, my ecosophical practice also acknowledges the strength and stubbornness it takes to question the shared οἶκος through a restless, critical enquiry and the exposure of personal and collective experiences of failures, desires and constraints.

13. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (1989; London: continuum, 2008), 20.
14. Ewa A. Majewska, *Feminist Antifascism: Counterpublics of the Common* (London: Verso, 2021), 22.

IV. Methodological considerations

In alignment with the theoretical underpinnings presented in the first section of this introduction, I turn on the methodological stance that has shaped the way this research has been conducted and produced. This thesis attempts to offer a personal report of an investigation into the cultural production of socially engaged art projects that took place between Britain and Italy. Moved by an ecological sensitivity and aiming to question the implications of Guattari's ethico-aesthetic articulation in socially engaged curatorial practice, this research unfolded through improvised collaborations *in situ*, bartered collections of materials and ideas, discursive interruptions in daily life, public conversations and this written post-reflection. Specifically, through these curated interventions, this practice-based research questions the implications of embedding Guattari's ecosophical principles in socially engaged curatorial practice.

In this thesis and in my practice, I advocate for Donna Haraway's defence of the privilege of a partial perspective on scientific inquiry. Haraway writes: "Only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see".[15] I take this to mean that approaching socially engaged art as a woman living and working in foreign contexts, with a background in aesthetics and history of art and self-taught at curating granted me the possibility to develop a material understanding on the significance that gender, status and roles have in the processes of art production. The fact that I was a self-taught expat approaching the art world "from below" gave me the possibility to investigate the implications of an ecosophical approach to cultural production without the worries, limitations and expectations that an institutionalised professional would face. Although acting in different contexts of production, with this research I have tried to commit myself to collaborative interventions that could help me trace "embodied accounts of the truth",[16] pledging to Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledges as a way to "learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name".[17] Working within the advantages, constraints

15. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 583.
16. Ibid, 578.
17. Ibid, 582.

and struggles of situated micro-interventions, using the materials and stories that were available in a specific, local context, engaging with the objects and the people inhabiting it, and trying to always return to an ethico-aesthetic reflection on the processes of production and of the relations it produced, was my way to develop a situated knowledge of the implications of ecosophy in the curatorial production of socially engaged art projects.

To stress even further the partiality of my perspective, throughout this text I often refer to the vague expressions of "West" or "Europe". Guattari's vision of ecosophy as a multidimensional and anti-capitalist sensitivity certainly implies a shift towards non-European and non-Western paradigms and perspectives. However, as already stated at the beginning of this introduction, with expressions such as the "West" or "Europe", I do not intend to re-establish a supposedly universal, neoliberal and eventually colonising point of view, but to highlight the fact that this research is tied to my own personal experiences of being an independent curatorial researcher living and working between Britain and Italy. In this research, I always tried to keep my investigation tied to the kind of relations and questions arising from the process of making, working almost exclusively with what was already present in the social and environmental context of reference. This was my way to embed ecosophy in my practice, understanding it as a sensitivity that aims at exposing the socio-political relevance of a mentally and physically grounded dimension of ecology. In all the interventions I discuss in this research, I attempt to develop new strategies to subvert mental and social habits related to the art experience. I invited passers-by into a half-empty space to create installations on walls with other strangers, bartered everyday objects and personal stories with experimental artworks, designed communication strategies for temporary social projects, and eventually exchanged opinions, memories and information on the way such projects have influenced the liveability of a specific neighbourhood. All these strategic moves were my personal attempts to activate networks that could go beyond the traditional, elitist network of the institutionalised art world, and that are capable of translating the negotiation of meanings and values that ecosophy implies into the daily language of the specific communities the project is meant for and developed by.

Blurring the boundaries between those who create and those who experience the art project, challenging traditional hierarchical structures, roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process of production, and always adapting to collaborations with practitioners I did not always choose to work with, allowed me to turn back to this writing with a critical, transversal yet profoundly grounded awareness of how

each of the collaborative projects discussed here has transformed my own practice. As a consequence, this thesis follows the order of the events and of my discovery of certain theories and case studies, for it tries to walk the reader through the process of becoming aware of what ecosophy meant in my practice. Specifically, I discuss how the frictions, ambivalences and limitations arising in the making of a project have been used as theoretical assumptions for the making of other projects. This way, the whole research, and not only the projects it consists of, can be seen as an ecosophy-inspired project, for it constantly tries to keep the connections that link each collaboration with the other under tension, and to offer such connections to the reader for further investigations. Indeed, my practice-based research attempts to visualise the multidimensional, rhizomatic movement that ecosophy is, and that was described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a movement that "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles".[18] Replacing Descartes' image of knowledge as a tree with that of the couch grass, Guattari and Deleuze propose to think of the rhizomatic as a movement that does not only connect, but also hybridises all that it connects. To stress this idea further, I borrow Donna Haraway's definition of tentacular thinking: a methodological approach that unfolds through the "patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here and yet to come [...], a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking and sorting".[19]

As Martin Hammersley pointed out, feminist methodology such as Haraway's is not only characterised by the assumption that power and "gender differences structure personal experience and belief".[20] Another key feature of feminist methodology is "the emphasis on the validity of personal experience as against the conventional (and, it is claimed, masculinist) scientific method".[21] Qualitative research methods that are typical of feminist methodology, such as conversations, observations and narrative analysis of the processes of making, are ideal for research such as mine that aims at playing with traditional aesthetic and theoretical binary sets such as nature and culture, proximity and distance, art producers and art "publics". Feelings and personal histories can hardly be turned into figures. Similarly, the ways an ecosophical approach to thinking and making changed my own understanding of my curatorial

18. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome." In "Community" in *Question: Conversations on Art, Activism, and Community*, vol. IV (2008: The Think Tank that has yet to be named): 7.
http://www.wearethethinktank.org/readers/reader-vol4.pdf.
19. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with The Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.
20. Martyn Hammersley, "On Feminist Methodology," *Sociology* 26, no. 2 (May 1992): 187.
21. Ibid, 188.

practice-based research can be certainly described and analysed for further reflections but can't be measured.

In the attempt to find a way of working that could actualise the cultural shift advocated by Guattari in *The Three Ecologies,* I started studying the works and writings of feminist critics such as Lucy Lippard, and artists such as Lygia Clark, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Adrian Piper. In particular, I focused on these artists' practice for their work is always profoundly situated in a specific socio-political context, arising from concrete situations experienced by these artist-women in their everyday life, and yet always conducted across collaborations with people who are outside of the art system. The contingencies of such an approach led them to develop a research strategy based on what Miwon Kwon calls "a problem-idea": instead of focusing on the aesthetic categories their work should adhere to, they turned the contradictions and weaknesses of their work into fruitful opportunities for new social investigations and new works.

As Barbara Du Bois claims, as for many feminist practices, the challenge is to address the lives and experiences of those who are excluded by the negotiations of meanings of ecology "in their own terms",[22] meaning an understanding of ecology that is grounded in their actual experience of the world and in the language they use in their everyday life. Also, in all the projects I have tried to re-use what was already present in the space instead of buying and displaying something new, following Du Bois' invitation "to see what is there, not what we have been taught is there, not even what we might wish to find, but what is".[23] Emphasising the importance of material histories and the privilege of a partial perspective, feminist methodology allowed me to trace and question – or to interpret and assess, to use a Guattarian terminology – both the controversies and ambivalences which have arisen in the curatorial production of the projects described in this thesis, and to use them not as a problem but as problem-idea: a fruitful opportunity to mutate the project, and my practice, accordingly.

Surfing the precariousness of a life that struggles to sustain itself through a socially engaged, research-driven curatorial practice, I ended up addressing my research as a place where to accommodate paradoxes and expose vulnerabilities, in order to make them fruitful, in an ecosophical twist, for a collective investigation. While helping me identify the curatorial as a polyphonic, multidimensional and networked series of ac-

22. Barbara Du Bois, "Passionate Scholarship: Notes on Values, Knowing and Method in Feminist Social Science," in *Theories of Women's Studies*, ed. by Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein (London: Routledge, 1983), 110.
23. Ibid.

tivities, ecosophy has also made me hesitate from defining my practice following the lexicon of the old museology. Instead of closing the questioning into fixed solutions and in the petrification of labels, functions and roles, the ethico-aesthetic articulation of my "weak" practice critically engages with disciplinary boundaries, social hierarchies and mental habits of neoliberal systems of cultural production.

Chapter 1
Ecology, ecosophy and the expanded field

This chapter examines the ambiguous and contested understanding of ecology, through both ecological and contemporary art theories. Focusing on the way certain artists, thinkers and cultural producers at large thought and addressed ecology in their writings, and critically reflecting on my own curatorial activities in socially engaged projects, I aim at highlighting the implications, both in practice and in everyday life, of a critical reflection on ecology and contemporary cultural production. To answer these questions, I will first explain how ecology has been approached historically and in contemporary art thinking and practice, addressing research that I have conducted both in Britain and in Italy, two important sites in which to investigate contemporary European culture in relation to ecology.

This cultural research is evidently bound to that "existential precarity" that has forced me to change seven cities in twelve years to find ways to make a living through a critically-driven production of socially engaged art projects. Specifically, in the last ten years, I have worked – both as an independent cultural practitioner with no curatorial education, and as an employee of art organisations. My research-based activity on different projects aimed at investigating different interpretations of ecology in contemporary Europe by the means of socially engaged art projects. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to meet and discuss the virtues and contradictions of developing an ecological approach to art practice in today's Europe with many cultural practitioners. As I will investigate in this and in the following chapter, both these personal and professional experiences have convinced me of the need for a radically critical rethinking of ecology in art practice, as well as new strategies for the cultural production of socially engaged art projects. I argue that such new strategies shall inevitably lead to a reconfiguration of roles within the art system of the so-called West. I share T.J. Demos' argument that in Europe too many recent art projects, publications and exhibitions investigating issues of ecology eventually ended up "reproducing the very objectification of nature that has got us into trouble in the first place",[1] leading to a "dangerous depoliticisation" of both the topic and of the practices involved in tackling its ambiguities, as I will discuss in the second section of this chapter through the reading of two selected art exhibitions. When I use vague expressions such as "Europe" or "the West", I do not aim to erase or flatten the differences between European countries, or between Europe and the USA. I am aware that I am using very fluid, ever-shifting expressions. However, this research follows the development of my own cultural practice that has been unfolding mainly in Italy and England, which is thus very much influenced by the specificities of these two countries. It is not the aim of this research to investigate how historically conditioned ideas of the so-called West have influenced contemporary notions of Nature and environmental thinking in general. Nevertheless, the highly politicised expressions "the West" and "Europe", and all the contradictions they bring about are indeed meaningful for this practice-based research questioning issues of ecology, inasmuch they force us to think of our *household* or *home* not as a "thing" but as a "question".

1. T.J. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology", in *Radical Nature: art and architecture for a changing planet, 1969-2009*, ed. by Francesco Manacorda and Ariella Yedger (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009), 20.

The following reflection attempts to shed light on the fact that, as Timothy Morton argues, in ecological discourses and practice, "*Place* is caught up in a certain *question.* It takes the form of a question, or questioning attitude",[2] and that such questioning attitude has implications for the understanding of one's own practice in this contemporary historical context, where none can escape the effects of globalisation, environmental disaster, professional and existential precariousness. Such effects are not the same for everyone in the world: it is undeniable that these effects are extremely unequally divided between the societies that grew wealthy on colonialism, and those that were dispossessed by the colonizers. I believe that those who were born and raised in wealthy and colonising countries such as Italy and Britain, can never totally understand the real effects that capitalism, colonialism and globalisation have on other, non-European cultures. The risk is to look at these cultures through the lens of our colonising gaze and culture: the same gaze and culture that have caused the current, troubling inequalities and environmental damage. However, that does not mean cultural producers raised in countries with a colonial history such as Italy and Britain should not work and find ways to critically reflect and change that gaze, and the mentality behind it. This is the reason why, throughout this thesis, I bring forth my own personal experiences of the effects of the contemporary ecological crisis, taking advantage of my partial perspective as an emergent cultural producer living and working between Italy and the UK, in order to expand the investigation to include as many, grounded and partial perspectives as possible.

In the last section of this chapter, I examine how a critical analysis of contemporary art theories and the experiences developed through my own curatorial activities helped me to identify my own understanding of an expanded notion of ecology and sustainability as an issue that "can not and must not only concern 'a small minority of nature lovers or accredited experts'",[3] as Félix Guattari argues, and that the only true response to the ecological crisis "brings about an authentic political, social and cultural revolution".[4] This cultural revolution is what the French philosopher identifies

2. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 170.
3. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (1989; London: continuum, 2008), 35.
4. Ibid, 20.

with a new *ecosophical* sensitivity. However, what are the implications of embedding Guattari's ecosophical sensitivity into the curatorial production of socially engaged art projects? This is the question this thesis attempts to answer.

1.1

Rethinking ecology

Ecology has its roots in the Greek term οἶκος = household and λόγος = science, reason or "reasoning power". Bringing the meaning and understanding of ecology to the fore, this practice-based research questions what the οἶκος might be in today's globalised social space and hypercomplex organisational structure. Is it possible to test through cultural experiences, as suggested by Félix Guattari in 1989, "new modalities of group-being"[5] that will not only help European cultural practitioners define "ecology" differently, but also live and understand the world with a new ecological sensitivity? I prefer the term "ecology" to "sustainability" because my research does not only focus on the role played by art and art practitioners to sustain life and biodiversity on this planet, but it also explores the way we inhabit our world and establish relations with human and non-human others through the means of art practice. Since the 1980s, sustainability as a term has been mainly used as human sustainability on planet earth, or what humans can do to sustain life and biodiversity on planet earth. The most widely accepted definition of sustainability is in fact the definition of "sustainable development" given by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as Brundtland Commission after the name of its chairman, Gro Harlem Brundtland. In its 1987 *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future,* the commission states that "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".[6] Today, many people would not think of sustainability in the terms set by the Brundtland Commission, as "sustainable development". As Sacha Kagan noticed, the use of the term sustainability rather than sustainable development, "reflects a concern, on the part of NGO and academic environmentalists, that development is seen as synonymous with growth, and therefore that sustainable development means ameliorating, but not challenging, continued growth".[7] Nevertheless, the aim of this research is not just that of "framing the future humanity in terms of its balanced evolution, linking social and ecological issues",[8] as the use of the term "sustainability" still suggests. In its being so tied to the future of humanity, the term "sustainability" reflects a certain anthropocentric perspective and sounds too dangerously ambivalent and limiting in the context of this practice-based research. The same etymology of the word "ecology" already brings to the fore both objective needs and subjective desires and feelings, for it identifies the world humans and non-humans inhabit as *home*, rather than as a resource to be guaranteed and maintained for future usage. There is a criticality implicit to the word "ecology" as one cannot avoid questioning whose *home* is the one we as humans are reasoning about, and what is left outside of humans' understanding of such *home*. Nevertheless, it must be said that ecology is an ambiguous concept, for different scientists at different times and in different places have approached the matter differently, offering definitions of the term "ecology" that are often in contradiction to each other.

The word "ecology" was coined in 1866 by zoologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel who promoted and popularised Charles Darwin's work and contributions to the science of evolution. In his most famous and ambitious publication, the *General Morphology of Organisms*, he defined "ecology" as "the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including, in the broad sense, all the 'conditions of existence'. These are partly organic, partly inorganic in nature; both, as we have shown, are of the greatest significance for the form of organisms, for they force them to become adapted".[9] Since its very first definition, it seems clear that ecology combines social processes and creations with personal experiences: it is the science of relations among different organisms, and between these and the environment. Furthermore, the conditions of existence among different entities that Haeckel calls about are partly "organic" and partly "inorganic", although his fervent Darwinism does not allow the zoologist to move beyond the perspective of an evolutionary, hierarchical conception of growth for all those organisms that are able to adapt to environmental changes and challenges, eventually presuming the human species at the top of the evolutionary chain. Since Haeckel's first attempt to define ecology and throughout the twentieth century, there have been plenty of bodies of ideas and definitions around ecology which evolved within the European and "Western" rationality in general. I will focus specifically on Murray Bookchin's "social ecology", Arne Naess' "deep ecology", Gregory Bateson's "ecology of mind" because they have greatly influenced Félix Guattari's articulation of ecosophy as well as my own understanding of ecology.

5. Ibid, 24.
6. "The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future", United Nations Documents, accessed 1 June 2021, http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm.
7. Sasha Kagan, *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity* (2011; Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 10.
8. Ibid.
9. Ernst Haeckel, *General Morphology of Organisms* Vol. II (Berlin: Reimer, 1866), 286.

In his attempt to integrate socialist and ecological ideas, theorist Murray Bookchin argues that the root of environmental problems is to be found in the ethically and politically unjust centralised and coercive organising systems in Western societies. Following the nineteenth-century anarchist Peter Kropotkin, Bookchin believes that humans survive only through practices of solidarity, and thus he proposes to replace a society's propensity for hierarchy with that of cooperation and freedom. Nature in his writings is not something separated from the organisms that need to adapt to it, but as the participation in life-forms which, if understood and respected in their diversity, may become a source of freedom. Since "The link between evolution of external nature and social nature is profound",[10] Bookchin opposes organic, self-organising models of society as found in nature to the centralistic, bureaucratic apparatuses of contemporary, capitalist societies from which humans must be liberated. However, as professor and theorist Malcolm Miles argues, by extending a view of nature as basis of society, Bookchin eventually "mythicises nature as a realm which, liberated from human domination, engenders freedom".[11] Yet, his contribution to the field is still invaluable, for its linking social and ecological approaches, and for being one of the first intellectuals to highlight that "the project of human liberation has now become an ecological project, just as, conversely, the project of defending the Earth has also become a social project".[12]

Arne Naess' "deep ecology" links the study of the relations with the environment to a certain economic ideology defining value judgement and praxis on a global scale rather than to the political and capitalist apparatuses. From his perspective, the general inertia towards environmental and ecological issues is "the result of ideologies structuring in a profound way, through customs and habits, the greatest number of people".[13] Bringing to the fore the hierarchical view of the world that we found both in the dominant economic ideology and in the scientific rationalism founding it, Naess' "deep ecology" proposes a model of natural systems strictly interconnected and interdependent not only for their survival but also for their own self-realisation. This irreducible co-dependence of man and nature leads the philosopher and mountaineer to radically refuse human superiority over nature, and to propose instead an ethical-inspired model of ecology, based on two principles: the biocentric equality of all living species, and the primacy of self-realisation, which means identification

10. Andrew Light, ed. *Sociology After Bookchin* (New York: Guildford Press, 1998), 6.
11. Malcom Miles, *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change* (London: Bloomsbury: 2014), 37.
12. He concludes by stating: "Social ecology as a form of eco-anarchism weaves these two projects together". Murray Bookchin, *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991), 131.
13. Simon Levesque, "Two Versions of Ecosophy: Arne Naess, Félix Guattari, and their connection with Semiotics", *Sign Systems Studies* 44, no. 4 (December 2016): 522.

with the non-human "so that to harm nature is self-harm".[14] The Norwegian philosopher replaces the hierarchic anthropocentrism of traditional notion of ecology with an ecocentric orientation that gives humans and non-humans equal status and "attempts, within obvious kind of practical limits, to allow all entities (including humans) the freedom to unfold in their own ways unhindered by the various forms of human domination".[15] In fact, the realisation of Self that "deep ecology" envisions "must not lead to self-centredness, but rather to a connectivity with all things which goes beyond mere altruism".[16] This movement from a hierarchical to an ecocentric approach to ecology is exemplified in the diagram by architect and urban designer Steffen Lehmann depicting humankind as part of the same circle of life as other species, rather than controlling both life and the other species from the above (fig. 1.1).

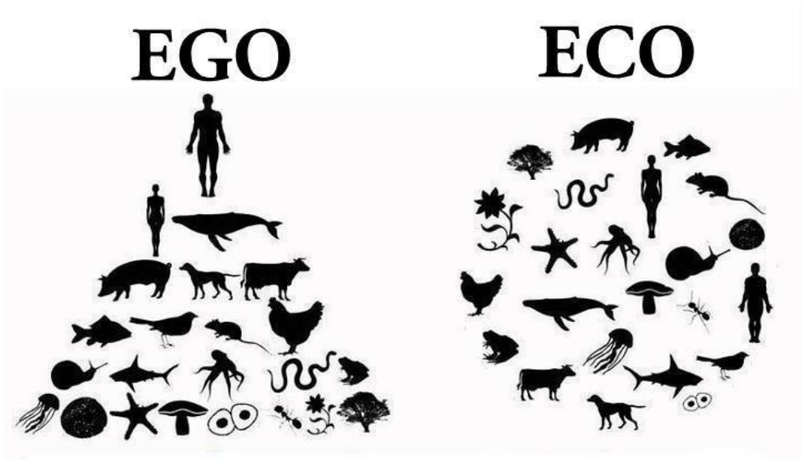


Fig. 1.1: Diagram "Ego-Eco"-Humankind is part of the ecosystem, not apart from or above it (see: Dr S. Lehmann, *Reconnecting with Nature: Developing urban spaces in the age of climate change,* 2010). Available at: https://bit.ly/2YxaRWV.

Such new ecological awareness and consequent ethic is defined by Naess as *ecosophy*, a term that identifies a practice of the self aimed at realising a form of togetherness with nature that is beneficial not at an individual level, but at the "Bigger Self" level: a level that is "transindividual, interspecific and ecosystemic".[17] I will discuss later the differences between the notions of ecosophy propounded by Arne Naess and Félix Guattari. In this context, it is important to outline that Naess' deep ecology has the great merit of introducing an ethical dimension and qualitative criteria within the scientific debates around ecology, since it expressly aims at an ideological change "that would essentially entail seeking a better quality of life rather than a raised stan-

14. Ibid.
15. Warwick Fox, "The Meanings of 'Deep Ecology'," *The Trumpeter* 7, no. 1 (1990): sine pagina.
16. Ian G. Simmons, *Interpreting Nature: Cultural Constructions of the Environment* (London: Routledge,1993), 134.
17. Levesque, "Two Versions of Ecosophy: Arne Naess, Félix Guattari, and their connection with Semiotics", 527.

dard of living".[18] Nevertheless, although Naess' definition of ecology acknowledges the universal right to live and blossom, in the contemporary historical conditions it is very hard "to read nature as a pure system which looks after itself, rather than evolving co-product of human intervention through farming, fishing, dwelling, industrialisation, urbanisation and political contestation",[19] activities that are paradoxically among the main reasons of the contemporary ecological crisis.

Anthropologist and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson shares with philosopher Arne Naess the belief that a major cultural shift is needed, and that "there is an increasing necessity for an awareness for being part of relational contexts".[20] While outlining the fallacies of Western civilisation, Bateson argues that the unit of survival is not the family line or the species, as Darwin thought, but the organism itself plus the environment. The unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical to the unit of mind, inasmuch as ecologists have previously thought of a hierarchy of *taxa* (individual, family line, the species, etc) as units of survival. Choosing the wrong epistemological unit causes the fatal error of approaching the world in dualistic terms, with a man-against-nature approach:

> "There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess. When you narrow down your epistemology [...] you forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is a part of your wider eco-mental system – and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of your thought and experience".[21]

Instead, since "it takes at least two somethings to create a difference [...] and the whole affair must be such that news of their difference can be represented as a difference inside some information-processing entity",[22] Bateson suggests to focus on the pattern which connects all the living creatures, and to consider ecology as the study of the interactions of ideas and programmes whereas "the aggregate is greater than the sum of its parts because the combining of the parts is not a simple adding but is of the nature of a multiplication".[23] The ecology of mind envisioned by Bateson is based on a strong aesthetic sensibility seen as a heightened responsiveness towards

18. Arne Naess and Per I. Haukeland, *Life's Philosophy: Reason and Feeling in a Deeper World*, translated by Roland Huntford (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 108-109.
19. Miles, *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*, 37
20. Foreword by Sergio Manghi in Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity* (1979; New York: Hampton Press, 2002), xii.
21. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 484.
22. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity* (1979; New York: Hampton Press, 2002), 64.
23.. Ibid, 81.

not only the world around the subjects who observe, but also towards the meta-patterns uniting all the living world, including the observing subjects and those aspects that make possible their understanding of the world. The aesthetic dimension becomes crucial, in Bateson's view, because it allows the mind to exceed purposive rationality and consciousness, and to grasp "the complex layering of consciousness and unconsciousness".[24] As Sacha Kagan notes, "Bateson viewed this aesthetic sensibility as rooted in the biological, and not a uniquely human quality",[25] and it is precisely this aesthetic sensibility that "can provide that sense of aesthetic unity (and an ecological ethics in the same process) that modern societies are critically lacking".[26] Without such an aesthetically inspired wisdom, "purposive consciousness short-circuits the mental process and mistakes its short-circuits for straight lines of causality".[27] This is why Bateson calls for academics and scientists to start considering art and culture as the royal roads for the human mind to move from a narrow "purposive rationality" to an expanded, aesthetic reflexivity.[28]

Being sensitive to the complexity of the inter-relations existing at multiple levels between all living organisms draws the attention of ecologists and environmental thinkers on the subjective and mental dimension of ecology. In his late work, *Mind and Nature*, Bateson writes: "It was rather, the more complex, the aesthetic, the intricate and the elegant aspects of people that reflected nature [...]. I was seeing there the roots of human symmetry, beauty and ugliness, aesthetics, the bodily grace, and even his habit of making beautiful objects are just as 'animal' as his cruelty. After all, the very word 'animal' means 'endowed with mind or spirit' (*animus)*".[29] However, this approach tends to reaffirm unity *against* diversity, rather than within it, and to flirt with the risk of a holistic, totalising understanding of nature and the relations it consists of. This is why theorist Sacha Kagan proposes to move beyond Bateson's sensibility to the *pattern which connects*, and to focus instead on the sensibility to the *patterns that connect*. For Bateson, the pattern which connects provides a sense of aesthetic unity that is critically missing in contemporary societies, causing that epistemological mistake that prevents a sustainable, ethico-inspired relation between the humans

24. Noel G. Charlton, *Understanding Gregory Bateson: Mind, Beauty and the Sacred Earth* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2008), 105.
25. Kagan, *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity,* 228.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, 230.
28. Bateson states:
> "It is, however, possible that the remedy for ills of conscious purpose lies with the individual. There is what Freud called the royal road to the unconscious. He was referring to dreams, but I think we should lump together dreams and the creation of art, or the perception of art, and poetry and such things. [...] What is required is not simply a relaxation of consciousness to let the unconscious material gush out. To do this is merely to exchange one partial view of the self for the other partial view. I suspect that what is needed is the synthesis of the two views and this is more difficult."

Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), 414.
29. Bateson, *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*, 5.

and their surroundings. Conversely, Kagan proposes that aesthetics should not be understood as a form of holistic responsiveness between entities that unite only with other similar entities, as Bateson does, but as multiple relations occurring all at once and based on a specific sensibility to complex, multi-dimensional systems: as patterns that connect.

Although they represent just a small fraction of the many different definitions and approaches to ecology, these three very different understandings shed light on the fact that ecological thinking has always forced humans to consider that they are constantly immersed and affected by the world they want to analyse and represent, and that there is a profound connection between aesthetics and ecology, between how the word is perceived and experienced, and how it is lived and shared with others. Unlike sustainability, which is always strictly linked to ideas of quantitative growth and balanced evolution, ecology brings to the fore the social, ethical and epistemological mistakes that make humans' relation with the environment and co-existence with other species so problematic. Ecology addresses simultaneously local issues and global concerns, tackling issues of social and cultural change while pointing at power dynamics and relations. When it comes to contemporary cultural production and theory – and specifically to the production of socially engaged art projects – ecology turns into a critique of unsustainable social and economic models, and enables us to think about new models and systems of production. Since this planet is home not only to humans, but also to millions of different species and also non-living entities, and that humans themselves have a multitude of ways to acknowledge and inhabit this home, ecology shall be seen as the domain where everyday dichotomies such as personal/collective and global/local collapse. There have been and still are artists and curators whose research focuses mainly on the environmental impact of the production and distribution of their work, and who are not necessarily interested in the networks of relations which is claimed to be the object of the study of ecology. These practitioners, whose research is as interdisciplinary as ground breaking, radically question art's role in today's society, the sustainability of the art structure and the terminological legitimacy of a sustainable art, being that art practice and sustenance so dramatically affected by the current, neo-liberal, polluted and corrupted economic system. Nevertheless, my interest revolves around those approaches that understand ecology as a complex of cultural, ethical and political concerns towards the environment in both physical and social terms: as a matter of coexistence of people, species, narratives and ideas. I argue that ecology should be thought and embodied in practice not as an already given set of definitions, but as a series of questions to be posed to our own self, the environment and others around us. All cultural practices tackling

issues of ecology shall also imply care and ethical considerations towards that which is also meant to be their object of study – the οἶκος and the relations between the subjects that inhabit it. This is why my research investigates the consequences that cultural producers should face if ecology starts being addressed as a quest for a different sensitivity, a rethinking of the way humans experience the world they share with other species.

1.2

Ecology, sustainability and the expanded field

Lately, there have been, not surprisingly, many research projects, publications and exhibitions dedicated to art, ecology and sustainability from the '60s onwards. Both historically and contemporarily, many theorists and practitioners – especially those with a particular focus on socially engaged art practice – have reflected on the claims and limits of what "sustainability" and "ecology" may mean in art practice and theory. In this chapter, I will focus specifically on the notion of an expanded notion of sustainability, as given by curators and critics Maja and Reuben Fowkes in their essay "The Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art", and on the theoretical underpinnings of an expanded notion of ecology as defined by Professor Malcolm Miles in his 2014 book *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*, stressing how they inspired the first curatorial activities of this research and eventually helped me to identify the possibilities of an ecosophical approach to curatorial practice.

Maja and Reuben Fowkes have been the first to denounce that, in contemporary art practice and theory, ecology and sustainability have often been misunderstood, inasmuch as some critics limited their influence to Environmental and Land artists only. The London-based art critics and curators have been among the first practitioners to offer a thoughtful investigation of the effects of ecological concerns in art and curatorial practice, and among the first to point out the need for an expanded notion of sustainability.[30] Both the Fowkes and Malcolm Miles link the sustainability of contemporary art and ecological aesthetics with the model of the expanded field

30. Specifically, they state:
> "Our interest in issues of art and ecology developed quite organically, from dealing with the notion of a dichotomy between civilisation and the natural world in our show Human/Nature (2003) to a reassessment of landscape as a genre in contemporary art in Unframed Landscapes (2004), an exhibition which was shown in the UK, Hungary and Croatia. In 2006 we shifted our focus to organising an international symposium on Sustainability and Contemporary Art at Central European University Budapest, which was pioneering in the sense that it brought together contemporary artists, environmental scientists and ecological activists to explore common ground around an expanded notion of sustainability."

Rod Bennison and Giovanni Aloi, "In conversation with Maja and Reuben Fowkes," Antennae. The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture, Issue 10 (Summer 2009): 21.

introduced in 1979 by the North-American art critic Rosalind Krauss. With such expression, Krauss tries to make sense of the transformations occurring in art practice, and particularly in the field of sculpture during the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, the issue raised by Krauss is how to describe artistic phenomena like land art and earthworks when traditional art categories that could have helped explain them were stretched by these works to their breaking points:

> "This is because these terms (sculpture, architecture, landscape) express a strict opposition between the built and the not-built, the cultural and the natural, between which the production of sculptural art appeared to be suspended. […] For, if those terms are the expression of a logical opposition stated as a pair of negatives, they can be transformed by a simple inversion into the same polar opposites but expressed positively […], By means of this logical expansion a set of binaries is transformed into a quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it. It becomes a logically expanded field…"[31]

According to the critic, art becomes *expanded* in the sense that, by moving into hybrid, interdisciplinary and even performative modes, it manifests itself in negative forms only: it turns into *not*-architecture, *not*-landscape, *not*-sculpture and so forth. The logical opposition of this pair of negatives is not resolved in the dialectical resolution into a third entity, a unified subjectivity experiencing the world through a Cartesian mind/body approach. Rather, the tension between these binary sets is used to multiply both the original opposition, the relations informing this opposition and the implications of the opening up of new connections and oppositions within the original one. The new logic of complexity – whose movement of multiplication of binary sets is shown in Krauss' diagram illustrated in fig. 1.2 – seems to follow in a certain sense the development of the academic debate on ecology that I have illustrated in the previous paragraph, and that reckons ecology not only in biological or evolutionary terms, but as a social, ethical and epistemological dimension. This process of deconstruction and opening up of new connections between different dimensions is part of a specific, programmatic vision aimed at making space for new art practices and methodologies. As Helmut Draxler pointed out, this movement towards the complexity of the expanded field of contemporary art and sculpture has been made necessary both by certain conditions that are typical of the contemporary era (globalisation, mass consumption, and homogenisation), both by effects that these conditions have had on contemporary art practitioners, to such an extent that "the notion of art was being replaced by the very context of the object of their investigation".[32]

31. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): p. 37.
32. Helmut Draxler, "Letting Loos(e): Institutional Critique and Design", in *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006), 177.

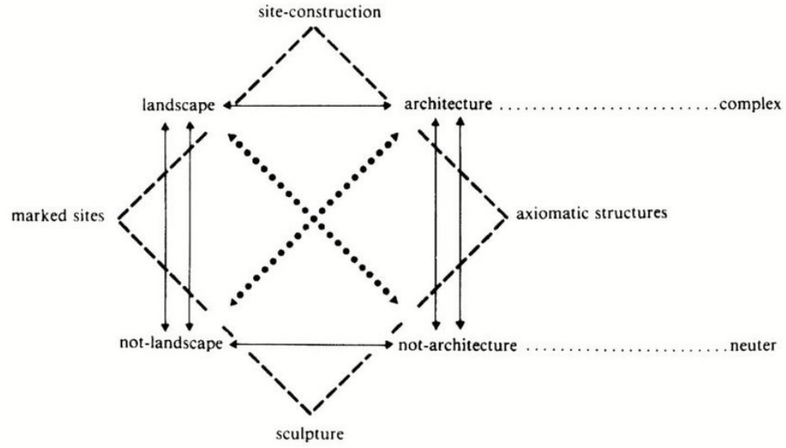


Fig. 1.2: *The Expanded Field*, diagram by Rosalind Krauss. Reprinted from Krauss, R. (1979). *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. October, 8, p. 37

Maja and Reuben Fowkes' research starts from the curators' refusal "to talk about a trend or movement of Sustainable Art at this point, but rather of the spread of an understanding of sustainability into artistic practice, often on an intuitive rather than theoretical level".[33] Drawing attention to the implication of a broad notion of sustainability for the whole contemporary art, rather than solely with Environmental and Land Art, they have certainly radically expanded the research field to include community art projects, educational activities and art-activist campaigns for social rights. For the London-based curatorial researchers – who are also founders and directors of Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, a centre for transnational research into East European art and ecology[34] – the principles of sustainability in the arts unfold through the interconnectedness and complexity of art and life, humans and nature, private and public, thus it is possible for artists to develop a more sustainable practice while acting within an unsustainable global economy. This *sustainable practice* would be one that takes on the role of alternative knowledge producer, to understand ecology and ecological problems as a complex of cultural, ethical and political issues. Therefore, it is inevitable for these artists to also question the concept of ecological citizenship, acknowledging their obligation towards the biotic community and to expand the notion of social rights (for instance, to include the right to quality of life). As part of the 2011 exhibition *Loophole to Happiness* (fig. 1.3), the Fowkes decided to include "works that touch upon the theme of adjusting working environment and everyday life to the requirements of economic mobilisation of human passions",[35] di-

33. "In Conversation with Maja and Reuben Fowkes", interview by Giovanni Aloi and Rod Bennison, *Antennae*, no. 10 (Summer 2009): 22.
34. For further information, please visit www.translocal.org.
35. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Loophole to Happiness," Translocal.org, https://translocal.org/page47.html.

rectly linking the current ecological crisis to "the mental pollution resulting from the excess of information" and capitalist systems of production. In their practice as well as in their writings, the curators stress that these principles of sustainability in art also imply a shift away from that anthropocentric culture after which Western systems of values have been conceived. Mirroring such anthropocentric culture, according to the *Translocal* curators, Land Art still considers the human species at the centre of the living world, uses or is dependent on hydrocarbon-intensive capital machinery associated with the extractive industries, and does not question the ethical implications of its means and modalities of production and reception. As such, it is not sustainable. To be understood as sustainable, a practice must take into account other species' perspectives, needs and narratives, as well as the ethical implications of its own production. An example of this approach in curatorial practice is the exhibition *Like a Bird. Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art,* where the London-based curators use the exhibition as a medium to investigate "the dynamic counterpoints between the anthropocentric tendency to perceive birds as metaphors and the rival post-humanist affinity for intra-species dialogue"[36] (fig. 1.4).

As the artists they work with are giving priority to ethical concerns, rather than aesthetic issues, Maja and Reuben Fowkes can safely deduce that "if for modernism form was a question of aesthetic values, in the sustainability of art, form is a matter of ethical values".[37] By extension, in order to develop a sustainable cultural practice, a practitioner should give precedence to ethics over aesthetics. Walter Benjamin rightfully argued that it is not enough for the tendency of an artwork to be correct; the form must also be so, for "the correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality because it includes its literary tendency".[38] If cultural producers aim at investigating issues of ecology in their practice, the process of production of their work and its presentation should also attempt at being sustainable. Yet, would this be enough to respond to the current ecological crisis and develop a collective ecological sensitivity through cultural practice?

For cultural producers, it is always extremely hard to combine a sustainable sensitivity towards the environmental impact of the work, and the aesthetic consequences

36. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Like a Bird. Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art," Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art.
http://translocal.org/page17.html.
37. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, "Sensuous Resistance: The Legacy of Modernism for Sustainable Art", *Dokumenta* 12 (July 2007),
http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=en&page=3&id=352.
38. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings 1931-1934*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 769.

Fig. 1.3: *Loophole to Happiness,* curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, installation view at Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz, 2011.

Fig. 1.4: *Like a Bird. Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art,* curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, installation view. Trafo Gallery Budapest, 2014.
Photo by Surányi Miklós.

of the choices made in the production and execution of the work, particularly in the context of socially engaged art practice where, as I will investigate further in the next chapter, the form is the result of collaborative efforts. Maja and Reuben Fowkes are well aware that "bringing the principles of sustainability into the sphere of contemporary art has complex implications, as it questions the wider context around the production and reception of artworks".[39] Yet, they argue that "in the sustainability of art, form is a matter of ethical values",[40] as if any aesthetic considerations nurtured by an art project could not challenge and eventually transform the very same ideas of both art and sustainability of those involved in the process of making. I argue that, by bringing principles of sustainability into the sphere of contemporary art, what seems to become expanded is not only the notion of sustainability, but of cultural practice as a whole. Boundaries between creative languages, disciplines and traditional roles within and outside of the contemporary art world are collapsed, and this is the first and more important consequence of the ecological turn, defined by Dr Cathy Fitzgerald as a series of creative practices, strategies and studies aimed at developing a critical understanding of humans' current relationship with the world and with other humans and non-humans.[41] I argue that the interconnectedness between multiple systems that a reflection of ecology inspires should affect not only the form and content of art projects, but also the ways different practices coexist and perceive themselves within the process of production and presentation of the socially engaged art project.

1.3

The making of *Moving In / Moving Out*

Further to the insights given by T.J. Demos and Maja and Reuben Fowkes, I have also experienced in my own practice this troubling tension between my desire to develop a sustainable project and the constraints and contradictions of working collaboratively on so many different understandings of ecological citizenship. In 2013, artists Antonella Ferrari and Silvia Forese organised an exhibition in an abandoned warehouse in north London (fig. 1.5).

Titled *Moving In / Moving Out,* the project brought together recent or newly commissioned works by Ferrari and Forese, all revolving around the issues of migration and displacement. Specifically, as stated in the press release, *Moving In / Moving Out* consisted mostly of a "new series of site-specific works, video and tape installations, evoking atmospheres and feelings of everyday life". Forgotten ephemera and records of dismissed moments aimed at recalling imageries of spatial and temporal transitions that form our collective destiny in a globalised world.

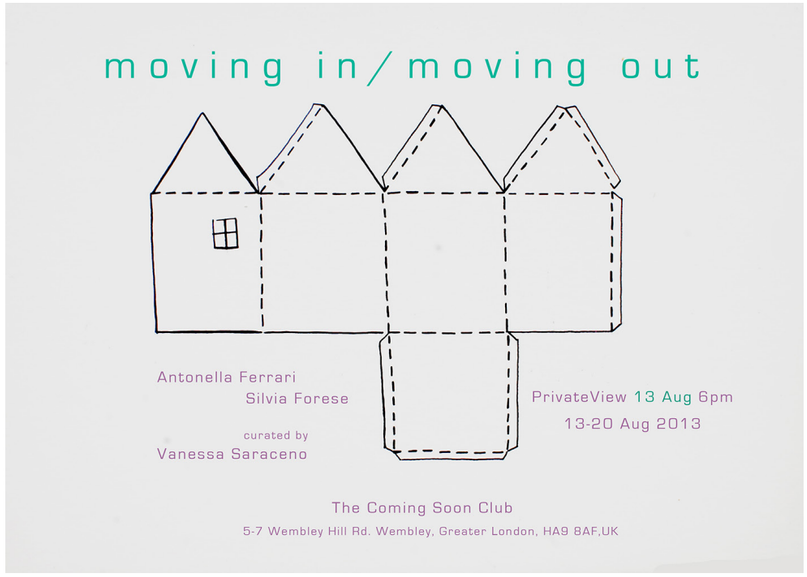


Fig. 1.5: Invitation to *Moving In / Moving Out,* curated by Vanessa Saraceno, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Design by Silvia Forese.

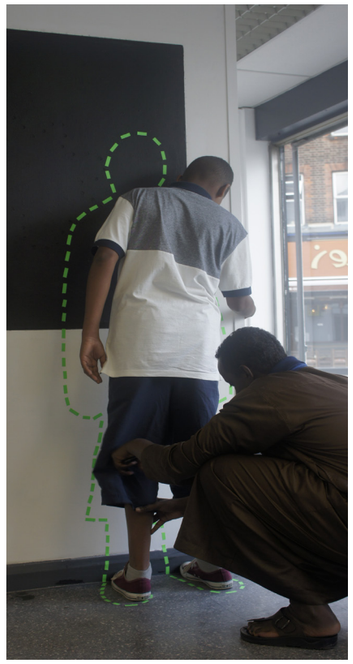
Exactly because it was meant to be a reflection on memories and transits of a supposedly collective history, while installing at the The Coming Soon Club in Wembley Hill Road, Silvia Forese and I decided to invite random passers-by to become active participants in our quest, and left bare some walls of the space to host these people's creative interventions. Occasional as well as ordinary visitors were invited to *impromptu* collaborations with the artist using exclusively coloured tapes (figs. 1.6 and 1.7). These people were free to realise any object or shape they wanted. We only asked them to realise something that, in their own experience, had to do with feelings of belongingness and abandonment, social and existential precarity and mobility. This way, we tried to also collect their understandings and personal approaches to the current climate crisis, their histories of precarity and displacement as well as

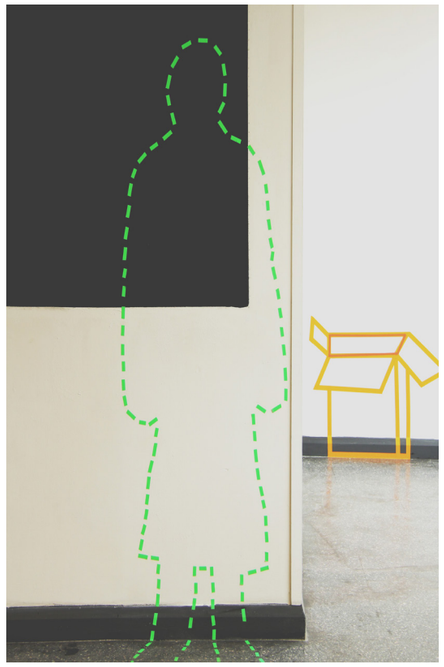
39. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, *The Ecology of Post-Socialism and The Implications of Sustainability for Contemporary Art* in *Art and Theory After Socialism,* ed. by Mel Jordan and Malcolm Miles (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), 101-111.

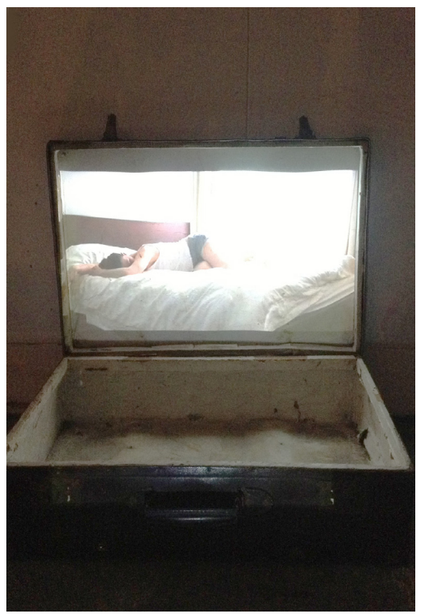
40. Fowkes, "Sensuous Resistance: The Legacy of Modernism for Sustainable Art."

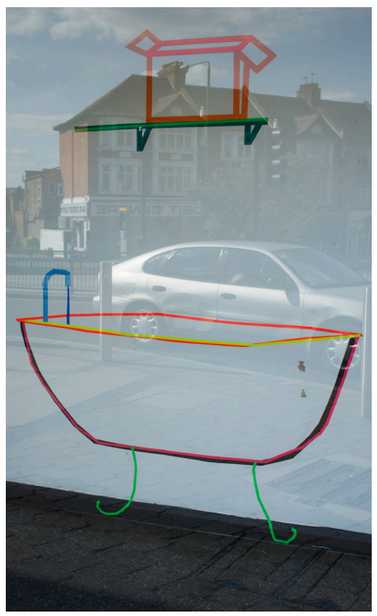
41. Dr. Cathy Fitzgerald defines the "ecological turn" in the following terms:
> "A paradigm shift toward an ecological turn presents challenges for contemporary art practice that aim to inspire their audiences toward meaningful change. Effective ecological art practices are characterised by long-term creative engagement with communities and environments to foster understanding of local eco-social wellbeing. These practices appear seemingly diverse because they involve complex constellations of art and non-art activity; thus, they are radically distinct from modernist artworks that may refer to environmental, nature or landscape themes."

Cathy Fitzgerald, "The Ecological Turn: Living Well with Forests to Articulate Eco-Social Art Practices Using a Guattari Ecosophy and Action Research Framework" (PhD diss., School of Visual Culture, The National College of Art and Design, A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland, 2018), 28.









Figs. 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013.
Photos by Silvia Forese.

to the transformations which had occurred in recent years in their neighbourhood. The project became certainly richer thanks to the mural taped interventions realised the day of the opening by residents and passers-by in Wembley, and that eventually took the form of ordinary domestic objects (a kitchen scale, a plate, etc) or moments of intimacy and belongingness (a tub still pouring hot water, and silhouettes leaving traces all around) (fig. 1.9).

Our effort was to find a curatorial strategy that could make these understandings and personal approaches become part of the exhibition. This strategy forced the artist and I to improvise the overall design of the exhibition, with many walls being left bare for the collaborative, in situ installations of Silvia and the visitors. The other artist collaborating on this project, Antonella Ferrari preferred to set her two video works in the back room (fig. 1.8), where the lighting was also more suitable, and to create an installation with Silvia for which a constant source of electric power was needed. The installation depicted an empty living room, with a sofa designed on the wall, a real floor lamp always on and a vinyl record still spinning. Forese and Ferrari also collaborated on another site-specific installation with abandoned furniture they found in the backroom of The Coming Soon Club. I would have preferred that the whole project had been realised without using so much electric power and with what was already inhabiting the place the project was about: the chairs and tables left abandoned in the warehouse, the residents' shapes on the walls. Nevertheless, I felt that it was not my role to tell Forese and Ferrari what to do, since the project was not entirely mine, but co-authored. Furthermore, going around the streets to invite people in, I was able to improvise a new understanding of my own role, and to take the risk of working on a project that could eventually result in chaotic and poorly curated assemblages, and only because it felt right to let the space open to different understandings of what people in Wembley call "home". Here lies the reason why the project *Moving In / Moving Out* was pivotal for this research. Working on it with two different artists, with different intentions and sensibilities, I learned that the tension between ethics and aesthetics, between the intentions behind a project and the way it takes form, can be proficuous for contemporary cultural practitioners precisely because it is problematic. In *Moving In / Moving Out* working with two different practitioners on the ecological issues of a specific urban environment, I became aware that the constant negotiation of values and forms is an essential part of the process of making socially engaged art projects. In spite of its hybrid and informal format (fig. 1.10), or maybe thanks to it, *Moving In / Moving Out* was not experienced by our audience as a traditional art project. People walked in, moved by the curiosity to know what was happening in the building that they had seen lying abandoned for years: I could

Figs. 1.10 and 1.11: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013.
Photos by Silvia Forese.

experience this myself, since I started promoting these collaborations in the streets of Wembley, inviting other people to take part and hearing their responses to my invitation. This informal, non-arty situation allowed us to build more authentic conversations and relations with these people, eventually convincing them to actively take part, with their bodies and personal histories, in our visual investigation on ecology and the hyper-globalised public space of Wembley.

In this project, I was not curating in a traditional sense, since I was not selecting works or projects to be exhibited, nor designing the space by myself: people were free to create what they wanted with the given tapes, and to place their creation wherever they wanted. Working collaboratively with two different artists, I tried not to impose a specific way of working or a specific sensitivity towards the issues that the project aimed at highlighting. Instead, I considered my role and my practice as being part of a network of ideas and experiences that went beyond the traditional distinction between those who make art and those who engage with it. After *Moving In / Moving Out*, I started to question what curating in the context of my investigation on ecology and socially engaged art practice could mean, and decided to focus my research into the consequences in cultural practice of such an open-ended approach and critical tension among the ethical imperatives, the sustainable ideals and the aesthetic efficacy of a cultural project on ecology.

For how they have been considered traditionally, curators should always keep in mind the aesthetic consequences of their decisions,[42] and leaving half of the exhibition space empty and available for *impromptu* interventions certainly implies a big risk. It may be said that by accepting such a risk in Wembley, I decided to give preference to ethical issues rather than aesthetic, since the whole work was developed after the conversations with these strangers who eventually became co-producers, and since these conversations on the liveability of London as a contemporary global city were an essential part of the project. However, I had the opportunity to experience through practice that ecology in the production of socially engaged

42. Kate Fowle, *Who Cares? Understanding The Role of The Curator Today*, in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, apexart, New York, 2007, p. 16: "The actions and attitudes of both Szeeman and Hopps highlight key factors in curating today: namely, that it provides a platform for artists' ideas and interests; it should be responsive to the situations in which it occurs; and it should creatively address timely artistic, social, cultural or political issues. It could be said that the role of the curator has shifted from a governing position that presides over taste and ideas to one that lies amongst art (or object), space and audience". As I will discuss more in Chapter Four, this research gave me the opportunity to develop another understanding of my practice that radically differs from this definition of contemporary curating offered by Kate Fowle. However, at the time I curated *Moving In / Moving Out*, Fowles' definition of contemporary curating was a main point of reference to me. I had the opportunity to collaborate with Kate Fowle and her team at the curatorial hub Independent Curators International in New York for a six-month internship in 2012, and that experience deeply influenced my first curatorial interventions.

art projects challenges the role and functions of contemporary cultural practice, exactly because it exposes the contradictions between any ethical judgement and aesthetic actions, and their consequences on the environment. Such opposition between the ethics of ecology and its aesthetic representation seemed not to be solved in a dialectical reconciliation – a synthesis all the people in the space of *Moving In / Moving Out* could agree on – but rather formed an aggregation of differences that "is of the nature of multiplication",[43] as Bateson suggested. Cultural producers need to question not only what and how it is made, but also to respect by whom and for whom their socially engaged projects on ecology are done. Maja and Reuben Fowkes state that "it is perfectly possible for a work to be sustainable without having a direct political or environmental message. The perpetual dualism of form and content comes to the fore in a new way here, and, arguably, it is sustainability of form that takes priority over content".[44] For the London-based, Translocal curators, it is not enough for a project to focus on the ecological crisis or to inspire an eco-logical sensitivity: first and foremost, the sustainability of an art project has to take into account the impact the project has on the environment. However, I wondered whether this is really possible and even ethical in relation to the "expanded" notion of sustainability. A different approach to issues of ecology and sustainability in art practice must also imply a reconsideration of the aesthetic means of certain con-temporary practices not only on a formal level, as Maja and Reuben Fowkes do, but also on a much more critical level. I believe that all creative practices arise from the tension between creative intentions and specific material (physical, but also social and political) conditions. While Fowkes' sustainability of arts unfolds mainly as an ethical reflection on the forms the work of art takes, I argue that when talking about the ecology of art practices it is not possible to avoid a critical reflection on why the work came to be in that specific way and had a certain environmental impact, by whom and for whom it has been thought and made, and what kind of relations it produced.

43. Bateson, *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*, 80-81.
44. Fowkes, *The Ecology of Post-Socialism and The Implications of Sustainability for Contemporary Art*, 104.

1.4

Ecology and the politics of display: the exhibition *Radical Nature*

The need for a critical understanding of the modalities of production and presentation of artworks and exhibitions on the current ecological crisis was already denounced by art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos in 2009. In an essay titled "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology", Demos argues that "the growing momentum of such projects would appear salutary for their contribution to the focusing of public attention on the environment and the threats posed by the climate crisis. However, that achievement should not distract or prevent us from forming a critical assessment of [...] the tendency to accept the flattening of representation's complexity and to surrender intellectual criticality in the face of the real urgency of climate change. The danger here is the public's passive deferral of responsibility".[45] Demos' critical assessment takes into account the need "to scrutinise the diverse meanings of ecology and denaturalise the rhetoric of sustainability", offering reflections only to projects that critically challenge environmental proposals. "In fact, some of the most compelling recent practices and exhibitions develop a political ecology that does not only [...] question the automatic assumptions of 'sustainability', but also critically considers the unequal division of the benefits and risks of climate change's effects, as well as evaluates the politics of environmentalist responses to global warming".[46] Demos argues that the "automatic assumptions of sustainability" have been too often used to spectacularize ecology, rather than to explore its different meanings and implications for the future: "As such, we can perhaps only affirm the need for a critical realism that both refuses to relinquish the validity of scientific paradigms and remains dedicated to a guardedly analytical approach to ecological discourse as a system of representations forged at the intersection of power and knowledge".[47] I agree with Demos that we are in the need of critical realism; however, such a move should also address both ecological discourses and the validity of scientific paradigms that are as much "forged at the intersection of power and knowledge" as all other systems of representations created by humans to make sense of the world. It is not my intention to reject 'science' or underestimate "scientific paradigms" or epistemological progress. On the contrary, I would like to stress that a truly critical approach should also focus on its own theoretical assumptions and also consider to what extent such scientific paradigms have also contributed to "the very objectification of nature that – in the words of Demos – has got us into trouble in the first place".[48] As Guattari pointed out, Western "scientistic" approaches tend to reify psychic entities, and con-

45. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Contemporary Art and Ecology", 18.
46. Ibid, 19.
47. Ibid, 18.
48. Ibid, 20.

demn passions and emotions as subjective and unreasonable, and as such are not valid for an objective and scientifically unquestionable definition of ecology. Félix Guattari calls for the need to get rid of this "scientistic" mentality and for a reclaiming of the importance of the mental dimension of ecology. He argues that the cultural revolution ecological thinking should bring about "must not be exclusively concerned with visible relations of force on a grand scale, but will also take into account molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire",[49] investing both humans' actions on the environment and the theories, feelings and assumptions behind them.

The essay "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology" was published in conjunction with an exhibition that, as stated by Demos, was "intent on participating in the ethico-political reinvention of life in the face of climate change".[50] Presented as "the first exhibition to bring together key figures across different generations who have created utopian works and inspiring solutions for our ever-changing planet",[51] *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969-2009* was an exhibition held at the Barbican in London from 19 July through 18 October 2009, and paradoxically sponsored by the British energy company Npower. The exhibition featured works by key figures of Conceptual and Land Art, such as Joseph Beuys, Agnes Denes, Hans Haacke and Robert Smithson among others, and it was curated by Francesco Manacorda who also commissioned new works in outdoor places around the Barbican, like the installation of the architectural collective EXYZT and re-presentation of land artworks from the past such as Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982). Somehow, following the aspirations of Maja and Reuben Fowkes, whose first writings on the principles of sustainability in art were released just a few years before the exhibition, *Radical Nature* expanded the reach of ecological discourses in contemporary art practice by not limiting the selection of works and artists to environmental art only. Nevertheless, the anthological format of the exhibition chosen by the curator did not really leave room for a *sensuous* investigation of the issues of the ecology, as many of the presented works and practices would have required. Most of the works part of *Radical Nature* were actually conceived by the artists as works belonging to the public sphere and devoted to the direct involvement not of an individual viewer, but of many active citizens participating in the process of making. At the Barbican, the works were crystallised in pure, dead forms resembling apocalyptic scenarios of contemporary natural landscapes, or laboratories (figs. 1.12 and 1.13).

49. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 20.
50. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Contemporary Art and Ecology", 18.
51. "Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009", Barbican Art Gallery, 2009, https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2009/event/radical-nature-art-and-architecture-for-a-changing-planet.

Figs. 1.12 and 1.13: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009,* Barbican Art Gallery, 2009. Photo by Lyndon Douglas.

Although his enthusiastic review of the show as an "interesting and timely one", Indian-British writer Hari Kunzru admits that it presents Nature in its raw, unprocessed forms of living plants and trees. Sometimes, an *expanded* idea of Nature is re-called through the use of much more documentaristic works such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Social Mirror* (1983) and photographs of Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982). Not only Kunzru, but also many other critics argue that this uncapitalised Nature has been suggested to the viewer through the brutal display of a sequence of images with no chronology and no specific argument.

Specifically, Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982) is a work created during a four-month period with the support of the New York Public Art Fund. It consisted of a field of golden wheat which the artist had planted on two acres of a landfill near New York's Financial District (fig. 1.14). As part of *Radical Nature*, photographs of the original intervention by Denes were displayed at the Barbican galleries (fig. 1.15), but the work was also recreated in a smaller version in Dalston (fig. 1.16), an area of London that has been fighting against aggressive property development in the last two decades. This way, *The Dalston Mill* temporarily turned a disused site into "a vibrant summer retreat featuring a windmill in the middle of this highly urban environment".[52] Next to the fully-functioning but temporary 16-metre mill of EXYZTO installation site, there was the 20-metre-long wheat field, intended as a restaging of Agnes Denes' work. One may think that presenting a work like this in the specific context of Dalston, and in a time of climate change and increasing social uncertainty would surely stimulate ecological sensitivity and increase the debate on ecological issues. Nevertheless, I think that in terms of curatorial practice and cultural production in general it is essential to question whether the environmental, social and cultural dimensions of ecology the original work called about have been made available to the people enjoying the "vibrant summer retreat"[53] of this highly urban environment. In addition, what did the vibrant mill, wheat field and exhibition-goers mean to local residents in Dalston, and how was the whole event affecting their life? It is worth remembering that, in the effort of "allowing our descendants to evaluate us not so much by the objects we created, but by the questions we asked and how we responded to them",[54] the original work by Denes was accompanied by a questionnaire of "existential questions concerning human values, the quality of life, and the future of humanity".[55]

52. Ibid.
53. "Dalston Mill – EXYZT," Curating Cities, Database of Eco Public Art, 2009, http://eco-publicart.org/dalston-mill/.
54. From the artist website: http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html.
55. Ibid.

Fig. 1.14: Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield – A Confrontation, The Harvest, Summer 1982,* Battery Park Landfill, New York. Photo credit Agnes Denes.

Fig. 1.15: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009,* Barbican Art Gallery, 2009. Photo by Lyndon Douglas.

As Hari Kunzru points out in his review of *Radical Nature* published in *The Guard-ian*, all the works in the show embody a specific claim by the artists who made them: "that it was no longer good enough to appreciate nature from a safe, aesthetic dis-tance"[56]. However, many exhibitions tackling issues of ecology like *Radical Nature* only display or re-stage, not really re-enact the aesthetic (and political) rupture of works such as Denes' *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*, and there are ethical (and po-litical) considerations to make that also invest the role of art and cultural practi-tioners in society. There are two spaces opened up by Denes' work as presented at the Barbican's exhibition: the one suggested by the photographs of the artist passing through the wheat field ripening in Lower Manhattan against the façades of banks (the one people could see in the Barbican's walls), and the actual field presented in Dalston as part of the exhibition. Are they connected in some way? Can any person experiencing this work elaborate this connection and make it personal? Ultimately, what are the ethical implications of restaging the work in the £45,000 *Dalston Mill,*[57] in a neighbourhood like Dalston that has suffered greatly from aggressive housing development and gentrification processes? It must be said that this work – as many of the Land Art and envi-ronmental artworks created between the '70s and '80s – did actually have a consistent impact on the environment, for its first installation required the usage of diesel trucks bringing in tons of topsoil. As the artist herself states in her website: "Two hundred truckloads of dirt were brought in and 285 furrows were dug by hand and cleared of rocks and garbage. The seeds were sown by hand and the furrows covered with soil. The field was maintained for four months, cleared of wheat smut, weeded, fertilized and sprayed against mildew fungus, and an irrigation system set up. The crop was harvested on August 16 and yielded over 1000 pounds of healthy, golden wheat".[58]

Nevertheless, although not sustainably made, by exposing the unsustainable condi-tions of contemporary living and working, the work did stimulate a sensuous un-derstanding of the paradoxes that nurture the relation between ecological thinking and cultural production. In her website, the artist states: "Planting and harvesting a field of wheat on land worth $4.5 billion created a powerful paradox".[59]

However,

56. Hari Kunzru, "Life on the Edge | Art," review of Radical Nature: *Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969-2009*, by Francesco Manacorda in *The Guardian* (27 June 2009), https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jun/27/radical-nature-exhibition-barbican.
57. "Dalston Mill – EXYZT".
58. "Wheatfield – A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan," Agnes Denes, 1982, https://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html.
59. Curating Cities, Database of Eco Public Art, "Dalston Mill – EXYZT".

Fig. 1.16: *The Dalston Mill,* London, 2009. Photo by Eliot Wyman.

these conditions are flattened and eventually mystified in the images of documenting Denes' original action in downtown Manhattan, rather than made available for the critical engagement of the residents of Dalston to whom that action was presented as leading to a "urban retreat". The paradoxes arising from the simple action of creating a wheat field in the highly urbanised environment of the Wall Street district in New York were made available to the participants of Denes' original work for their further reflection thanks to the questionnaire of existential questions that was accompanying the work, and that was not present in the re-staging of Denes' work in Dalston. Denes' *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* is certainly not a sustainable work, yet it is undeniable that it arises from and stimulates an ecological sensitivity towards the world humans share with others, and all the complex and paradoxical layering of social, political and environmental issues connected with the cultural production of such a sensitivity. However, in Francesco Manacorda's reinterpretation of the work for *Radical Nature*, the critical sensuousness of Denes' *Wheatfield* was also compromised by the fact that the work was presented in two different contexts: presented both as an exhibition of the original, 1982 public work commissioned by the Public Art Fund on a landfill that would eventually become Battery Park City in downtown Manhattan, and re-staged in Dalston in the form of a "vibrant summer retreat" whose entrance was yet "hidden from the street behind a fence".[60] The poetic, yet unsustainable action of the original action in downtown Manhattan and re-staged behind a fence in Dalston was not available for a critical collective reflection on the ecology of contemporary urban landscape, as Denes' work would suggest. To stress my critique further, I will consider what Malcom Miles writes about the work of collective Matthew Cornford and David Cross (Cornford & Cross), who have proposed eleven projects for public and gallery sites whose briefs openly challenge the commissioning body's ideas for the scheme, to such an extent that they are rejected. However, within the accepted proposals, the British duo decided to also exhibit documents of the rejected proposals, "as elements in a dialectic of art's relation to the politics and economics which govern what cultural work is permitted to be presented to an audience and what is not".[61] The lack of this criticality in the curatorial framework of *Radical Nature* is also particularly relevant not only because the exhibition was meant to offer solutions for the world in a period of climate changes, but also because the curator Manacorda describes curatorial knowledge "not as a content (facts, information, skill, experience, and procedural abilities) but as a form: a set of interrogations that allows individuals to carve out enough critical space to find their own balance between the two opposing forces".[62]

60. Ibid.
61. Miles, *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change,* 146.
62. Francesco Manacorda, "Who's Afraid of the Ideal public?" in *Raising Frankenstein. Curatorial Education and its Discontent*, ed. by Kitty Scott (London: Koenig Books, 2011), 40.

Interestingly, in the already mentioned essay, "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology", T.J. Demos references the work of pioneering social and environmental artists Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison, who do not use ecology as a pretext for a politically-correct moment of entertainment but offer a more "pedagogically oriented presentation"[63] of the contemporary ecological crisis. In the 2009 *Greenhouse Britain, 2007-2009*, they addressed the problematic effects of global warming and water rising in Britain, using video, a large-scale topographical map of Britain, photographic documentation, analytical texts and sound elements, but more importantly presented the overall project as arising "from an artist's perspective",[64] whilst each of the four parts the project existed as the result of a collaborative effort.

The analysis of an exhibition such as *Radical Nature* made me realise that ecology in curatorial and art practice can never be considered solely in formal terms for this will inevitably imply a certain unquestioned hierarchy of forms, values and roles within and outside the art system. If cultural producers want to really embed the complexities of ecological thinking into their practice, and not only through specific projects, their critical analysis should also address the ethics of the relations their projects and research stimulate. Whenever the ethical intentions of the practitioners involved are not used as a creative force for new modes of critical engagement with the work and the ecological issues tackled by it, but are merely harmonised with an already established, academic idea of formal quality and relevancy, then there cannot be any new ecological sensitivity and no proposals for a real sustainable development. As Demos noticed, unquestioned definitions of meanings and values of sustainability and ecology dangerously lead to a depoliticisation of art, for its experience gets flattened to a moment of mere entertainment, and its message reduced to propaganda. Understanding ecology in an expanded way – as a quest through the crises of our contemporary unsustainable present – means to use it as a critical source of inspiration and creative force. It is not just a matter of prioritising ethics over aesthetics and vice versa, but how to combine these two and even more dimensions in a collaborative investigation.

1.5

Rethinking ecology in the expanded field

In his 2014 book *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*, Malcolm Miles links ecology with the model of the expanded field intro-

63. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology", 17.
64. Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer, "Greenhouse Britain, 2007-2009", The Harrison Studio, https://theharrisonstudio.net/greenhouse-britain-2007-2009.

duced in 1979 by the art critic Rosalind Krauss that also served as the theoretical basis for the Fowkes' definition of an expanded notion of sustainability mentioned above.

Following Herbert Marcuse's claim that a cultural revolution is necessarily connected to a political or social revolution (1979), both art and ecology as expanded fields have a mission in Miles' view, and this mission consists of addressing the need for a culture which is conducive to more sustainable forms of social organisation. In Marcuse's view, art is political because of its autonomy, its refusal of any pre-established form or function: this means that art is political also when it is *not*-utterly political in its content. In Miles' view "aestheticism remains a form of resistance"[65] and when combined with ecological concerns it manifests itself mainly in political terms and forms: it is a matter of "re-inflecting" a culture in relation to the contemporary climate breakdown. Similarly, ecology is not merely the study of interactions between static and well defined differences, but is an expanded field "overlapping political and social thought".[66] Miles analyses some of the most important scientific theories on ecology arisen within the Western culture throughout the 20th century, including some of the theorists whose work I discuss at the beginning of this chapter, such as Murray Bookchin's social ecology and Arne Naess' deep ecology. His analyses on the various definitions of ecology arisen within the Western civilisation allow Miles to highlight the tension among the different views of nature brought about by these definitions, and particularly between the scientific appeal to a natural order equivalent to Reason and the romantic ideal of a timeless and peaceful state of Nature. He writes: "Inasmuch as nature is an ordered realm, order is read into it, as in the classification of species which is retrospective, the projection of a pattern onto that which evolved without it".[67] This is why, according to Miles, the question of adaptation to a conditioning and conditioned world is first and foremost a political question, for the choice of the contemporary conditions of existence depends on what paradigm has been chosen and which values are exposed. This is what he means by stating that "Gaze is a power relation".[68]

Miles' expanded notion of ecology does not "separate arguments around ecology and environmentalism from those around social justice".[69] Therefore, in his view form is not just a matter of ethical value, as Fowkes' expanded notion of sustainability implies. He writes: "Modern art's autonomy, far from being a disabling denial of the

65. Miles, *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*, 67.
66. Ibid, 3.
67. Ibid, 48.
68. Ibid, 19.
69. Ibid, 12.

political (even though it is often used as that), is a critical dimension in which the aesthetic is a refusal of routine".[70] Stressing the eco-aesthetics' political mission further, the Plymouth based professor states that "If a society emerges in a period of climate change, it will enact, rather than propose or represent, values of caring and well-being. To put this very simply, the means used do not so much lead to the ends produced, but are the ends".[71] I agree with Miles that ecology is first of all a political matter, and aesthetics is a critical dimension where to question and challenge "what relations are affected between values, means and ends".[72] However, in his analysis of eco-aesthetics theories and practices, Miles seems to subsume the ethical into the political without considering how contemporary practices change in relation to this expanded notion of ecology. By following Marcuse, Miles' ecocriticism allows for the overcome of the rigid dualistic structure that still somehow informs Maja and Reuben Fowkes' analysis of the principles of sustainability in contemporary cultural production. Although admitting that "the rigid divide between autonomous art, for which the highest imaginable function is to have no function, and instrumental art, which is accused of sacrificing artistic freedom for the sake of a political message, is a direct legacy of modernism",[73] Maja and Reuben Fowkes keep approaching the sustainability of the arts in dualistic terms: as a discourse around the form and content of specific projects that eventually do not question and challenge the socio-political forces informing their processes of production. For Miles instead, art in a contemporary period of climate emergency should never be separated from the political, economic and social systems and conditions, which are more than a mere context for its production. Even when art pretends to be autonomous, it never escapes the denial of politics, because it opens up a critical dimension in which the aesthetic is a refusal of the ordinary and a questioning of the *status quo*. If these practices and aesthetics take into account simultaneously the social, political and economic contexts of art production, shouldn't we also consider the way this expanded notion of ecology changes established roles, values and modalities of being together within and beyond the art system?

Addressing the aesthetics in terms of refusal of the routine or the ordinary, and ecology in terms of critique certainly opens the way for a deeper understanding of the political implications of eco-aesthetics, but it may also lead to just a superficial exposure of the contradictions of ecology and contemporary art production that forgets to reckon that ecology is also a personal and intimate matter, for it impacts and informs everyday choices and actions. This mental dimension of ecology necessary

70. Ibid.
71. Ibid, 13.
72. Ibid, 43.
73. Fowkes, "Sensuous Resistance: The Legacy of Modernism for Sustainable Art".

to activate the cultural shift from the Western "scientistic" approach to a new, more expanded perspective is given for granted in Miles' writings, whilst it has been the central focus – and main contribution to the field – of French psychotherapist and philosopher Félix Guattari. However, before focusing on Guattari's ecology of mind and on the importance it has had on the development of my practice-based research, I shall discuss an exhibition that took place in Turin, Italy in 2008, and that sheds light on the incongruencies that may arise in curatorial practice if the ecological form is addressed only as a matter of political and antagonistic values, as suggested by Miles' *Eco-Aesthetics*.

1.6

Ecology and the display of political propaganda: the exhibition *Greenwashing*

Titled *Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities*, the exhibition curated by Ilaria Bonacossa and Latitudes collective (Max Andrews and Mariana Cánepa Luna) took place at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, Italy from 29 February through 18 May 2008. Aiming at exploring contemporary artistic critiques of environmental discourses, it featured the works of twenty-five artists and artist groups from all over the world such as, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Lara Almarcegui, The Bruce High Quality Foundation, A Constructed World, Cornelia Parker, RAF / Reduce Art Flights, and Santiago Sierra, among the others. The curators clearly state that the exhibition aims at questioning "What is at stake in today's constant bombardment of ecological guilt"[74] and at critically analysing the phenomena of greenwashing defined as "a disparaging term for the dishonest representation of ecological merits".[75] Furthermore, the catalogue accompanying the exhibition offers a conversation between curators where both Bonacossa and Latitudes claim that they selected the artists for the exhibition because "they embraced environmentally-conscious design with a degree of irony",[76] and they associate themselves "explicitly with 'post-environmentalism', a movement rejecting the 'romantic representation of nature'".[77] Post-environmentalism is defined as "the thought movement of former environmentalists who view the so-called 'ecological crisis' as conceptually and politically inseparable from the human crisis, and who believe that environmentalism is incapable of turning this crisis into an opportunity".[78] Therefore,

74. Ilaria Bonacossa and Latitudes, "Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities", Latitudes, https://www.lttds.org/projects/greenwashing/?lang=en.
75. Ibid
76. Ibid
77. Kagan, *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*, 382.
78. Max Andrews, *LAND, ART: A Cultural Ecology Handbook* (London: Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 2006), 198.

instead of offering a romantic claim about a supposed "harmony" of nature which inevitably implies the idea of humans' being separate from the environment, they prefer to focus on the conflictual realities of the natural realm. Indeed, the curatorial statements offered in the catalogue seem to suggest that "only a rational, scientifically based opinion makes sense, but that such opinion is definitely out of the reach of citizens"[79] for the curators of *Greenwashing*, as Sacha Kagan pointed out: this is why subtle, ironic and politically incorrect works and projects on "the ecological guilt" are needed. For this exhibition, that also travelled to Palazzo Ducale di Laurino, in the National Park of Cilento from 20 July to 20 September 2008, British artist Cornelia Parker presented *Chomskian Abstract* (2007), a video interview with American philosopher Noam Chomsky about the contemporary environmental crisis. Such a conceptually intense video exploring the "unstoppable natural forces" governing human life on the planet shares space with the controversial and puzzling work by Santiago Sierra titled *Two Black Vehicles with the Engine Running Inside an Art Gallery.* Premiered in Caracas in 2008, the work by the Spanish artist consists of three black cars whose engine is running, producing exhaust fumes within the gallery space. In this work, Sierra makes an explicit reference to an unrealised project by German conceptual artist Gustav Metzger developed in 1972 for Documenta 5: four cars were to be placed around a cube, so that the fumes would accumulate inside the cube over the 100-day-period of the Documenta. Another provocative installation is that by Chinese artist Wang Jiangwai, *Spectacle* (2005): hundreds of plastic bags fill one of the museum's galleries and whirls around because of the air blown by the several fans placed chaotically around the space. For the curators, while openly referencing issues of mass consumerism and pollution in China, the work is "hypnotic and provocative" because it refers to "the human desire to have the artificial take the place of what is natural".[80] Along such unsustainably problematic works, *Greenwashing* also includes *Beyond Pastoral (Shroud of Turin)*, an art installation by the Bruce High Quality Foundation consisting of a ⅕ model of the BP petrol station located opposite the gallery and placed above thousands of lemons and limes arranged on the floor in the form of the BP logo. Addressing BP's recent rebranding as an ecologically correct company (from British Petroleum to Beyond Petroleum, a company with a green and yellow sunflower-shaped logo), the New York-based collective offers a very subtle and critically relevant contribution to the investigation of issues of ecology and "greenwashing" in particular. Another work also inspired by the political intention "to honour the attitudes of those residents who question their local geographical and social circumstances [...] and decide to change what has always been"[81] is Maria Theresa

79. Kagan, *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*, 383.
80. Bonacossa and Latitudes, "Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities".
81. Maria T. Alves, "Il Sole", Maria Thereza Alves website, https://www.mariatherezaalves.org.

Alvez *Il Sole* (2006), a film documenting some residents of Viganella, a small village in the Italian Alps, placing a computer-controlled mirror on the top of a mountain to get more sun rays during the winter, and avoiding depressive feeling caused by the lack of light. However, how this specific project in Viganella, as well as other works in the show, help make sense of issues of sustainability and ecologically help "change what has always been" remains questionable.

What a cultural producer can learn from *Greenwashing* is that addressing the form of an expanded notion of ecology in terms of refusal and antagonism may also give way to the spectacularising of issues of ecology, without necessarily leading to a collective reflection on how to challenge the current unsustainable conditions. If such expanded understanding of ecology is not also nurtured by a critical reflection on the conditions of art production and presentation, and on the epistemological approaches generating such conditions, then it does not really address ecology as "an expanded field overlapping politics and social thought".[82] As Sacha Kagan argues, the curators' "critique, the way it is expressed and framed, reveals an incapacity to think the complexity of ecosystems where harmony, conflicts and chaos are not just contradictory but are interrelated".[83]

1.7

Ecology through the lens of Guattari's ecosophy

When I first approached Guattari's notion of ecosophy in 2013, I had just moved from New York to London, after two unpaid apprenticeships at the Italian Cultural Institute and the curatorial hub Independent Curators International. I had just learned that my application to the research degree programme at Chelsea College of Arts had been accepted. A few months earlier, I had been doing research for the project *Moving In / Moving Out,* and while going through the writings of Maja and Reuben Fowkes I was fascinated by the idea of an alternative way to consider ecology and, as the London-based curators state in an interview, "Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* is of continuing relevance, twenty years from its first publication for his insights in bringing out the 'third dimension' of mental ecology".[84] The London-based theorists and curators have been deeply influenced by Guattari's writings in their development of the expanded notion of sustainability examined earlier. What particularly impressed me about Guattari's reading of ecology was his ability to go beyond any traditional dualism or specialised discourse, and to think of ecology as a re-creative intervention

82. Miles, *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*, 67.
83. Kagan, *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*, 384.
84. Aloi and Bennison, "In Conversation with Maja and Reuben Fowkes", 23.

between multiple subjectivities in fluid spatio-temporal dimensions. Furthermore, his alarming words and all his clinical practice against the deteriorating effects of Integrated World Capitalism (IWC) could not go unheard to a young expat escaping from Berlusconi's Italy and wishing to pursue a career as a cultural producer or curator of socially engaged art projects. I had already lived in three cities in the previous three years, and in my first year in London I had lived in four different apartments, all in different neighbourhoods and with people from around the world, while working occasionally in bars and restaurants. Sometimes, I felt like I could read my own life through Guattari's description of the contemporary ecological condition:

> "The Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface. Alongside these upheavals, human modes of life, both individual and collective, are progressively deteriorating. Kinship networks tend to be reduced to a bare minimum; domestic life is being poisoned by the gangrene of mass media consumption; family and married life are frequently 'ossified' by a sort of standardization of behaviour; and neighbourhood relations are generally reduced to their meanest expression... It is the relationship between subjectivity and exteriority – be it social, animal, vegetal or cosmic – that is compromised in this way".[85]

According to Guattari, ecology should be addressed firstly as a *mental* dimension, reachable only if we abandon our traditional scientistic paradigms and return to aesthetic ones, continually reinventing our lives in the way that artists continually reinvent their work according to the different, material and socio-political conditions they operate in. Guattari states: "The traditional dualist oppositions that have guided social thought and geopolitical cartographies are over. The conflicts remain, but they engage with multipolar systems incompatible with recruitments under any ideological, Manicheist flag".[86] His professional activities aimed at developing an institutional psychotherapy that could finally address the subjectivity not as a fixed and stable unit opposed to the fixed, stable unit of the object-environment. Rather, he defines the subjectivity as "the product of individuals, groups and institutions"[87] that keep mixing and modifying the nature of their own products, as his mapping of subjectivity/self in fig. 1.17 shows.

85. Guattari,*The Three Ecologies*, 19.
86. Ibid, 22.
87. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis. An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (1992; Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), 1.

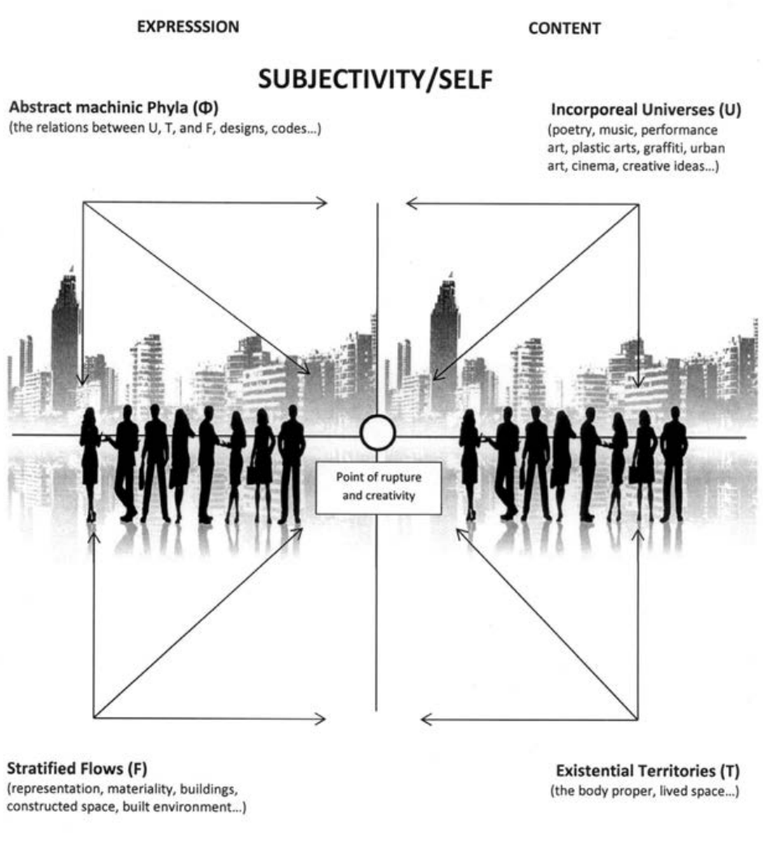


Fig. 1.17: Guattari's mapping of subjectivity published in Stephen L. Vilaseca, "Félix Guattari and Urban Cultural Studies," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 1, 1 (2014).

Since the individuals are constantly captured by their environment, which is not only made of other organisms but also of images, tastes and forms of expressions, he argues that the only way to resist the pollution and deterioration of modes of lives in a period of post-industrial capitalism – which he calls Integrated World Capitalism (IWC)[88] – is to work for a new paradigmatic shift:

88. The analysis of our experience of television is a good example for Guattari to explain the king of enslavement that IWC produced not only in our lives, but in the way we perceive and represent them. As the philosopher remarks:

> "When I watch television, I exist at the intersection: 1) of a perceptual fascination provoked by the screen's luminous animation which borders on the hypnotic; 2) of a captive relation with the narrative content of the programme, associated with a lateral awareness of surroundings events (water boiling on the stove, a child's cry, the telephone…); 3) of a world of phantasms occupying my daydreams, My feeling of personal identity is thus pulled in different directions. How can I maintain a sense of unicity, despite the diversity of components of subjectification that pass through me? It is a question of the refrain that fixes me in front of the screen, henceforth constituted as a projective existential node. My identity has become that of the speaker, the person who speaks in front of the television. Like Bakhtin, I would say that the refrain is not based on elements of form, material or ordinary signification, but on the detachment of an existential 'motif' (or leitmotiv) which installs itself like an 'attractor' within a sensible and significational chaos. The different components conserve their heterogeneity, but are nevertheless captured by a refrain which couples them to the existential Territory of my self."

Guattari, *Chaosmosis. An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,*16-17.
For the influence of the Russian linguist and culturologist on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Fred Evans, "Deleuze, Bakhtin, and the 'Clamour of Voices.'" *Deleuze Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 189.

> "It is as though a scientific superego demands that psychic entities are reified and insists that they are only understood by means of extrinsic coordinates. Under such conditions, it is no surprise that the human and social sciences have condemned themselves to missing the intrinsically progressive, creative and auto-positioning dimensions of processes of subjectification. In this context it appears crucial to me that we rid ourselves of all scientistic references and metaphors in order to forge new paradigms that are instead ethico-aesthetic in inspiration."[89]

According to Guattari, to properly address the ecological dilemma one should look for new paradigms of existence, making pragmatic interventions in one's own life in order to escape the dominant capitalist subjectivity: new ethics of the everyday explored through aesthetic assemblages, in a form of a both sensuous and critical investigation that takes into account "molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire".[90] As Gary Genosko pointed out, "Guattari's concern with the quality of subjectivity is what holds together art and ecology".[91]

Guattari's ecosophy is an ethico-aesthetic articulation of the ecological problem which is understood as overlapping three different dimensions: the social, the mental and the environmental. Such new ecosophy would be capable of articulating the different ecological registers – the environment, society and human subjectivity – all at once, and would help face the equally urgent imperatives of social ecology. The first of these imperatives is the rebuilding of human relations at every level of the socius in front of capitalist power formations. Such threefold understanding of Guattari's ecosophy strikes with the dualistic approaches that seem to characterise the previously mentioned approaches to expanded notions of ecology and sustainability in contemporary art, even those clearly inspired by the French philosopher as the Fowkes'. For Guattari, the question is not whether ecology is mainly a matter of political or ethical values, but to reject totalising perspectives on the matter, identifying instead the need to emancipate human relationships (both within our species and with the environment) from "the double pincer movement"[92] in which is – aesthetically and epistemologically – trapped. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, a publication part of the two-vol-

89. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 25.
90. Ibid, 20.
91. Gary Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's 'Three Ecology'", ed. by Bernd Herzogenrath, in *Deleuze|Guattari & Ecology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 106.
92. Such expression is used in Guattari both in *The Three Ecologies and in A Thousand Plateaus* and is directly linked to Gregory Bateson's definition of "double bind" as the obstructing situation faced by a person who is receiving contradictory messages from another who is perceived more powerful or authoritative. According to Bateson, the root cause of schizophrenia had to be found in this "double bind" and coercitive discursive engagement. However, as we read in the notes of *The Three Ecologies,* in *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari and Deleuze "look at the example of the father-son relationship and regard the 'double bind' as oedipalizing rather than schizophrenizing", going beyond clinical practice and including in their analysis the silent coercitive relations that rule everyday life.
Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 72.

ume book *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* written by Guattari and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in 1979, the philosophers read such "double-pincer movement" in the relation between father and son, or the master and the student, and describe it as follows: "As in school: there is not just one writing lesson, that of the great redundant Signifier for any and all signifieds. There are two distinct formalisations in reciprocal presupposition and constituting a double-pincer: the formalisation of expression in the reading and writing lesson (with its own relative contents), and the formalisation of content in the lesson of things (with their own relative expressions). We are never signifiers or signified. We are stratified".[93]

According to John Tinnel, Arne Naess – whose definition of "deep ecology" is examined in the previous section of this chapter – is the first to coin the term "ecosophy"[94] and, although their ecosophical essays, Naess' *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* and Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*, have both been published in 1989, the two never met and never explicitly refer to each other in their own writings. In Arne Naess' understanding, ecosophy is first and foremost an ethical stance, a practice of the self within "a boundless, dynamic whole".[95] In fact, his Deep Ecology platform[96] presents itself as a series of eight general assertions as axioms "aiming to condition and coordinate the actions of individuals and communities, as well as to structure social organisation and economic activity".[97] On the other hand, Félix Guattari's ecosophy never offers solutions, for it identifies itself more with "a type of revolution of mentalities whereby they cease investing in a certain kind of development, based on productivism that has lost all human finality".[98] Because of Guattari's insistence on struggles of emancipation under IWC, Simon Levesque argued that "Guattari's ecosophy remains essentially anthropocentric (i.e., focused on politics for the benefit of human society), whereas Deep Ecology is characterised by its non-anthropocentric approach to ecology". Instead, I argue that Guattari's main intuition and contribution to the ecological debate is precisely the understanding of the role of subjectivity in the contemporary ecological crisis, of his definition of it as a fluid, yet stratified process occurring between many levels of existential signification, including living and non-living entities.

93. Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Missoumi (1987; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 68.
94. John Tinnel, "Transversalising the Ecological Turn: Four Components of Guattari's Ecosophical Perspective," *The Fibreculture Journal* 18 (2011): 35-64.
95. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 24.
96. Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecology Platform," The Deep Ecology Foundation, http://www.deepecology.org/platform.htm.
97. Levesque, "Two Versions of Ecosophy: Arne Naess, Félix Guattari, and their connection with Semiotics," 526.
98. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,* 119.

Calling for an ethico-political articulation of the ecological problem, or *ecosophy,* the French philosopher claimed that a transversal approach, overcoming traditional dualisms such as culture and nature, sensitivity and rationality,[99] could be the only viable route to fight against the progressive de-politicisation of the public sphere, atomisation of social experiences and homogenisation of individuals of the post-capitalist era. Since nature cannot be separated from culture when ecological degradation is accelerated to the point of collapse, in order to understand the interactions between ecosystems, the social and individual universes of reference, humans must learn to think transversally. In a 1986 publication on institutional psychotherapy and politics, Guattari defines "transversality" as "a dimension that tries to overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality: it tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings".[100] Inspired as it is by the interdependent complexity of its objects, how the human psyche gets polluted by institutional, controlling force, transversal thinking does not seek for definitions that are transcendent or extrinsic to the production of subjectivity, but for creating the conditions conducive to subjectivity's self-transformation. It is a concept deeply embedded in the history of critical psychiatric struggle in Europe, and that is connected with Guattari's critique of Freud's dualistic metapsychology, based on transferential relations such as analyst-patient, mother-child. Further than this, it was a clinical experimental tool, as it served the philosopher and psychoanalyst as an alternative to the transference in the context of the treatment of groups of patients in collective hospital settings. Through his clinical practice, Guattari experiences that whereas hierarchies are restructured and responsibility are cyclically assigned, there is a regenerating space of creativity and collectivity that has deep implications in the treatment of psychosis. As Genosko states: "Guattarian transdisciplinarity does not seek to transcend, it seeks to transform".[101] In Guattari's first essay in the book "On the Production of Subjectivity", he offers a "transversalist"

99. Guattari was certainly not the only philosopher working towards a punctual destructuring of Western ontology and all the oppositions it is made of. From Nietzsche and Heidegger to Deleuze, Levinas and Derrida, many have been the thinkers who, throughout the 21st century, have identified the binary or dualistic paradigm as the main fallacy to overcome when approaching contemporary philosophy. In particular, Jacques Derrida's 1972 collection of essays *Dissemination* is extremely relevant in the context of this research, for it focuses on the function and meaning of writing by exploring the interplay between philosophy, literature and ordinary language. According to Derrida, a critique of Western metaphysics is not only a critique of the Western philosophical traditions, but first and foremost of everyday language and ways of thinking. Derrida states:
> "Western thought has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing. These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc. In other words, the two terms are not simply opposed in their meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term priority, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word."

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (1969; London: The Athlone Press, 1981), VIII.
100. Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolutions. Psychiatry and Politics* (London: Penguin,1984), 18.
101. Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's 'Three Ecology'", 113.

conception of subjectivity that openly rejects the individual-social distinction and that is both collective and auto-producing, hence open to all possibilities of ways of being. Genosko argues that, although a clear explanation of the concept was long overdue, actually mutating over time in Guattari's later writings, what can be confidently said is that "transversality was not a philosophical but a political concept, and one never loses the impression, despite the heavy Freudianism of the early Guattari, that the idea was to use it imaginatively in order to change, perhaps not the entire world, but institutions as we know them, beginning with analytic method".[102]

Indeed, "transversality" is also a tool that allows subjectivities to become aware of the process of "deterritorialization" in which they are brought in by external forces such as IWC, the institutions, the Freudian transference, etc. In *Anti-Oedipus*, the first published volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* written in collaboration with Gilles Deleuze in 1972, deterritorialization is defined as the process by which an ensemble of relationships, also called an existential territory, loses the freedom to change its status or establish its position within a set of forces. As Eugen Holland writes: "For Deleuze and Guattari, 'deterritorialization' in the psychological register designates the freeing of 'schizophrenic' libido from pre-established objects of investment: from the Mother's breast, for instance, or from the family triangle of the Oedipus complex. At the same time, but in the social register, it designates the freeing of labor-power from the seigneurial plot of land, the assembly line, or other means of production".[103] Transversal thinking is a way to challenge the "scientistic" dualist paradigm and processes of subjectification under the contemporary, post-capitalist conditions, but Guattari himself struggles to make explicit the link between this mental revolution and social change:

> "By means of these transversal tools, subjectivity is able to install itself simultaneously in the realms of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual. The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquests in other domains – the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level."[104]

Guattari's approach to ecology became essential to me and the development of this practice-based research because, by recognising that subjectivity is not a fixed term, he also states that the process of reconstruction of the modalities of group-being that mental ecosophy brings about is not given once and for all but must be continually

102. Genosko, "The Life and Work of Guattari: from Transversality to Ecosophy", 47.
103. Eugene W. Holland, "'Deterritorialization': From the 'Anti-Oedipus' to 'A Thousand Plateaus'", *SubStance* 20 no 66, (1991), 57.
104. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 45.

reinvented. "I have stressed these aesthetic paradigms because I want to emphasize that everything, particularly in the field of psychiatry, has to be continually reinvented, started again from scratch, otherwise the processes become trapped in a cycle of deadly repetition".[105] Guattari's ecosophy calls up for new micropolitical and micro-social practices that activate processes of heterogenesis: resembling the manner in which an artist may be led to alter his work after the intrusion of some accidental detail. This is why, moving beyond rationalistic paradigms, this thesis looks at ecology through the lens of Guattari's ecosophy, a practice of living within the given environment that goes well beyond the individual, implying simultaneously the social, political and cultural domains. It is a search for a practice of the everyday, that is:

1) transversal – inscribing itself in all the ecological domains without establishing hierarchies among them;
2) ethico-aesthetic in its articulation, because it aims at reappropriating universes of values and at reconfiguring human confidence in itself in a world characterised by social inequalities, globalisation and environmental exploitation.

As Guattari argues, the reaction to the infantilisation of public opinion, the neutralisation of democracy, the exploitation of the environment and the precariousness of work and existential conditions requires "a reconstruction of the objectives and methods of the whole social movement".[106] Nevertheless, when it comes to the production of socially engaged art projects, transversality may become a very revolutionary idea, in particular when wondering about the implications of such ecosophical articulation in the relations among those involved in socially engaged art projects. In the next paragraph, I will examine further how Guattari's notion of ecosophy has influenced my curatorial activity in a socially engaged residency project realised in Cambridge in 2014.

1.8

Curating as critical, transversal thinking: the making of *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*

One of the first critical contributions on contemporary aesthetics inspired by Guattari's ecosophy was released in 2018 in London. It is titled *Ecosophical Aesthetics. Art, Ethics and Ecology with Guattari*, by cultural theorists Patricia MacCormack and Colin Gardner. In this publication, two critics explore how the contribution of Guattari

105. Ibid, 27.
106. Ibid, 29.

was key in blurring the boundaries between action and research, and in addressing ecology for the first time as an embodied thought.

> "The raw earth of the philosopher (and all subjects) become artist also invokes art as a way to create lines of flight and activist, marked out areas which are emergent through relational and temporal necessity and ready to be dismantled at any moment without scarring the terrain to the point where thought is closed off. Thinking is the aestheticized philosophizing which challenges the 'paradigmatic, projective, hierarchical and referential' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 89) operations that drive religion and are adapted by science and economics to limit territories and modes of expansion by demarcating knowledge as all that can be known and more importantly, how things can be known."[107]

Fighting against those transnational, invisible powers that "limit territories and modes of expansion by demarcating knowledge",[108] in MacCormack and Gardner's investigation, Guattari's transversality is an activist philosophy of the everyday, and as such it is nurtured by the negotiation of meanings and values in complex environments and among multiple subjectivities. Thinking transversally means at once identifying and disassembling the stratified order of things, and in cultural practice it also means to overcome and even refuse the separation between content and mode of expression. As in Miles' and Fowkes' publications on the subject, also in this book by MacCormack and Gardner specific artworks and exhibitions are selected as case studies for their ability to critique capitalism's devastation of current conditions of existence. It is important to stress that once more ecosophical aesthetics are read through specific projects, and not through specific practices as my practice-based research attempts to do. For Guattari's ecosophy is an articulation rather than a list of procedural means, it requires many steps, failures, reflections and new investigations on how to create the best conditions for the emancipation of subjectivity. Furthermore, the only curator MacCormack and Gardner cite is Nicolas Bourriaud for his book *Relational Aesthetics*, that I will discuss in the following chapter. The critics do not examine the impact that this process of redefinition of the aesthetics of the works they analyse has on the ethics and methodologies of the practitioners whose work is their object of study. I think that, especially when it comes to an ecosophical aesthetics which is a "philosophy of relation",[109] the negotiation of meanings is crucial for not only the form and the content of the individual works, but also for how a specific practice thinks of itself in relation to other cultural practices and to other people.

It may be said that the first traces of this transversal, "aestheticised philosophising"

107. Patricia MacCormack and Colin Gardner, *Ecosophical Aesthetics Art, Ethics and Ecology with Guattari* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 22-23.
108. Ibid, 23.
109. Ibid.

in curatorial practice can be found in that pragmatic understanding of the "chaotic network of ideas"[110] that was the art at the end of the 1960s as described by its major critic and curator, Lucy Lippard. Lippard started working as a curator without any knowledge of curatorial studies or any training in exhibition making.[111] In a talk held at the Tate in 2008 as part of the conference *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows Since 1968*, she remarkably said: "My modus operandi contradicted, or simply ignored, the connoisseurship that is conventionally understood to be at the-heart of curating".[112] Nevertheless, her contribution to the field is inestimable, for her efforts to sustain and publicly present that "chaotic network of ideas" that was the art in America and Europe at the end of the 1960s. In her attempt to fight against the confinement of conceptual art into a "yet-another-art movement", she used several devices – including writing – to enable the audience to make up their own mind when confronted with the mass of information the exhibition consisted of. Indeed, rather than in the Land Art movement, Maja and Reuben Fowkes trace the origins of the principles of sustainability of the arts more in approaches to art practice such as Lippard's, and in particular in the feminists' and institutional critique's works of the 1970s: "Dematerialisation, through the disavowal of the art object and shift towards process-based practices, performances, actions, as well as ephemeral works that were created not to last, was an invaluable inheritance for later sustainable art, as of course was the desire of conceptual artists to provoke on the level of idea or concept".[113] As shown by the installation views of one of her famous "Numbers shows", the exhibition *955.000* held at The Vancouver Art Gallery from 13 January to 8 February 1970 (figs. 1.18 and 1.19), Lippard's curating as an extension of critical thinking did not take the form of that inclusive and chaotic network of ideas she was referring to when describing the art practice of her time, and that was expected to challenge established mentalities. Looking at the documentation of these exhibitions, one cannot avoid the impression that they are "curated" in a sense that everything is in its right place, rather than chaotically connected to the place and the other works in it. By privileging accurate information and curatorial pervasiveness, this way of working reproduces

110. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.
111. In 2009, Lippard states:
> "I have never become a proper curator. Most of the fifty or so shows I have curated since 1966 have been small, not terribly 'professional,' and often held in unconventional venues, ranging from store windows, the streets, union halls, demonstrations, an old jail, libraries, community centres, and schools … plus a few in museums. I have no curating methodology nor any training in museology, except for working at the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for a couple of years when I was just out of college. But that experience – the only real job I have ever had – probably prepared me well for the archival, informational aspect of conceptual art."

Lucy Lippard, "Curating by Numbers. Landmark Exhibitions Issue," *Tate Papers*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009),
https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers.
112. Ibid.
113. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, *Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art* (Budapest: Praesens, 2006), 3.

Figs. 1.18 and 1.19: *955.000* organised by Lucy Lippard. Photo courtesy of The Vancouver Art Gallery. Gallery Photography Archives

modernist assumptions about objectivity, and re-establishes the curator-as-expert's hierarchies of values. Nevertheless, her curatorial activity starts from the following statement: "The more expansive, the more inclusive an exhibition could be, the more it seemed coherent with all the other so-called revolutions taking place at that time. I began to see curating as simply a physical extension of criticism".[114]

Doubtlessly, it was difficult for many people to comprehend that "chaotic network of ideas" as art, and this perhaps explains why Lippard's main curatorial strategy has been the meticulous documentation of the process of making all the exhibited works.[115] This documentation was considered so crucial by the curator that in some cases it was exhibited even without any element of the original work. As she wrote in the preface of her ground-breaking book *The Dematerialisation of the Art Object*, "If you respect art, it becomes more important to transmit the information about it accurately than to judge it".[116] Nevertheless, while aiming to address and give form to the blurring of boundaries within traditional art practices, Lippard's work has never allowed any other practitioner (whether curator or artist) to have "space"[117] in the curatorial decisions of these projects and exhibitions, such as the identification of the theme, the selections of artists and artworks, and the editing of any accompanying catalogue.

I began to explore the modalities and possibilities of transversality in practice through curating an exhibition coming as a result of a residency programme in Cambridge

114. Ibid.

115. The cards she created to accompany the images of the works in any of the catalogues she has produced for her shows are quite exemplary of this way of working, as well as of her attitude of considering the curator as an authorial presence rather than as a producer among other producers. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that if she allowed herself to create something as part of the show, she did not give the chance to any artists to ever interfere with her curatorial decisions, being the curator the *only* author of the show (as any artist is the one who makes the individual work, its author).

116. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, 7.

117. In his review of the exhibition, American critic Peter Plagens writes: "There is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and her medium is other artists."
Peter Plagens, Review of *955.000*, *Artforum*, VII (Nov. 1969), 64.ù
Furthermore, in a 2015 interview with Antony Hudek on *Flash Art*, Lippard stated: "Writing and activism were my ideological tools at that point. Curating per se didn't have much to do with all this; although 'open' shows were popular, I was too much a creature of the art world to give up selectivity altogether, for all my bitching about prevailing concepts of 'quality'".
Antony Hudek, 2015. "Number Shows", *Flash Art* (11 November 2015), https://flash---art.com/article/number-shows.
Lippard's approach to independent curation was not the only one to be criticised by the artists of her time. As curator Clair Bishop reports, "Ten artists co-signed a letter to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung complaining about Harald Szeeman's curatorial vision, while two others published heated essays in the catalogue", referencing the letter signed in 1972 by Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry Le Va, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra and Robert Smithson, whose basic thrust is that the artist should be allowed to make his/her own decisions about their works and contributions in an exhibition.
Claire Bishop, "What Is a Curator?" *IDEA*, no. 26 (2007), https://idea.ro/revista/en/article/XOgqVhIAACIAfKxj/what-is-a-curator.

and titled *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures.* The 2014 Cambridge Sustainability Residency (CSres14) is a residency programme open to several, international artists and cultural practitioners, organised every year by artists Marina Velez and Sally Stenton, and recently transformed into the Cambridge Festival.[118] It was organised with the support of Anglia Ruskin University, and consisted of a series of morning seminars with workers from local organisations and academics from Anglia Ruskin University, from 31 March to 13 April 2014. All the afternoons of this two-week residency were dedicated to a collaborative studio practice held at Changing Spaces, a local non-profit art space which was also to be the assigned space for the final presentation of the works to the public (figs. 1.20 and 1.21). I was selected as curator, although at that time I was still questioning what that would mean in relation to my practice. Working on an exhibition with artists I had not selected, and had never met before, I had the opportunity to test, through practice, the theoretical concerns of my research. Dorothea von Hantelmann wrote in her 2011 essay "The Curatorial Paradigm", "What is it that lies at the core of the curator's practice? It is the act of selection. […] Curators produce, communicate, and organize knowledge. But all this takes the starting point in decisions for specific artistic practices or positions".[119] However, a question legitimately arises: is it possible to perform the role of curator, even though, as in Cambridge, I hadn't selected either the artists to work with, nor the artworks to include in the final project?

While the exhibition *Moving In / Moving Out* addressed the link between personal and social sustainability in a specific urban community, in the exhibition coming as a result of the CSres14 programme, I tested an alternative model to deal with the issues connected with the making of a collaborative project. I was working in the context of Cambridge, which I was completely unfamiliar with, and without the necessary funding for a proper production and promotion of the exhibition. Additionally, the residence lasted two weeks, thus my colleagues and I had to work very hard to somehow question sustainability each one with his or her own practice and yet also together. Not surprisingly, the approaches to the ecological dilemma, and the solutions proposed among us were very different. Some of the artists were eager to explore the socio-political impact of the work and the role of art in the community of Cambridge, whilst others seemed more interested in embodying sustainability in the intimacy of a personal investigation, with works recalling familiar contexts, lost memories and private histories. The only incontestable thing was that,

118. Rosanna Greaves and Marina Velez, "Cambridge Festival", University of Cambridge, https://www.festival.cam.ac.uk/?fbclid=IwAR2mvNaXQAoQxYOBhfafSmzQ1le6NlN4SfVFp-PE23AfTRdp8L4FKbvj-SkM

119. Dorothea v. Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011), 8.

Fig. 1.20: Conversation in the studio gallery, Cambridge Sustainability Residency, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.21: *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*, Cambridge, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

whenever we tried to define sustainability, we were negotiating not only its meanings but also the actual possibility of embodying these meanings in the physical gestures that inhabit our practice. Working in this context, I proposed a curatorial strategy that refused the traditional exhibitionary format based on an ordered and rational display of works for the public to read and interpret. I tried to build on a strategy that could make visible "that chaotic networks" of ideas that thinking about ecology and sustainability was generating not only among the artists in residence, but also between them and the residents of the hosting city. The ecosophical sensitivity I was trying to embody in my practice led me to ponder over the possibility to make visible the negotiation of meanings and values on sustainability and ecology well beyond the art space. Instead of an exhibition based on aesthetics of distance (like the one used by Lucy Lippard), I proposed to the group to realise a project and works that could help visualise the movement of thoughts and feelings on ecology between the inside and the outside of the studio.

As suggested by its title, *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*, the exhibition we held at the Changing Spaces Gallery in Cambridge was intended to be an invitation to negotiate, to cross borders and to give something in return for something (this is the meaning of the Latin expression "quid pro quo"). Although each of us – the 2014 residents – had our own take on the matter of ecology, we all wanted to negotiate meanings and experiences regarding the status of life today directly with the people in Cambridge. The curatorial strategy aimed at mirroring this intention, expanding the time and space of the project beyond the gallery's walls. In order to record people's experiences of the sustainability of that social context, I proposed to organise a bartered collection of the materials needed to make the works. By turning the process of making into a bartering, the artists and I invited people living close to the gallery to take part in the project and to exchange everyday objects or organic materials with works of art to be collected at the gallery: the objects and ideas brought in and taken away from the gallery by the residents could make visible the forces that contribute to the project while discussing the exhibition with my colleagues show. This strategy also allowed us to extend the time of the project beyond the official dates of the exhibition, as we could establish conversations about Cambridge and its liveability even before the official opening of the exhibition. I did not want to address ecology as a means of display. Instead, I wanted to make visible and even palpable the negotiation that was going on among us (the cultural practitioners in residence) and with the public of Cambridge, approaching curation, in Guattari's term, as a practice of ethico-aesthetic implications.

Figs. 1.22 and 1.23: Valerie Furnham, Pia Gálvez Lindegaard, Emma James, *Deep Time*, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

I thought to use the exhibition space as the place for the documentation of the possible ways of coexistence between these political subjectivities (the cultural practitioners, the public, the institutions we visited or worked with). Among the artists who agreed to develop their work by bartering ideas and objects with local residents, artist Barbara Boiocchi decided to negotiate meanings of sustainability by directly approaching people on the busy streets around the Grafton Centre and north east Cambridge, asking them to fill in a questionnaire of three simple questions: What do you feel sustainability is? Can you offer three examples of sustainable actions you do in your daily life? What knowledge or traditions on sustainability have been passed onto you from the previous generations and what knowledge will you pass on to the future generations? The completed questionnaires were exhibited and taken away by the people contributing to the making of a bread with the sourdough that was part of the project *Deep Time* (2014) by artists Valerie Furnham, Pia Gálvez Lindegaard and Emma James.

Deep Time consisted of an environmental installation made of yeast, audio, speakers, a projector and papers (recipes and agreements). People walking into this immersive soft-lighted room could listen through headphones to the sound of a bubbling mixture of yeasts and bacteria called leaven, with which it is possible to make bread without the use of commercial yeast (figs.1.22 and 1.23). Whoever wanted to take the sourdough, along with the recipe for a sustainable bread, was also asked to sign an agreement stating they would not waste that yeast.

The days prior to the opening, artist Sabine Bolk and I walked around Cambridge and knocked at people's doors to barter discarded items with the sourdough of the *Deep Time* project or with sketches made by Bolk for the exhibition. With these materials, Bolk realised *Untitled (Corpus Christi)* (2014), a series of sculptures on floors resembling popular icons of sustainability (fig. 1.24). However, the materials making these carpets were not fixed on the floor, therefore people could easily walk over and ruin the carpets, as happened the evening of the public presentation (fig. 1.25).

However, not all the artists agreed with the proposed strategy, forcing me to question that curatorial paradigm that considers the act of selection as its most fundamental element, as von Hantelmann argued, and to eventually rethink curatorial practice as "a contextual, strategic, self-critical and above all *ad hoc* activity".[120] Some of the exhibited works were evidently in contradiction with the proposed strategy and with my own take on ecology as some

120. Teresa Gleadowe, "What Does a Curator Need to Know?" in *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and its Discontent*, ed. by Kitty Scott (London: Koenig Books, 2011), 25.

Fig. 1.24: Sabine Bolk, *Untitled (Corpus Christi)*, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.
Fig. 1.25: Sabine Bolk, *Untitled (Corpus Christi)*, 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Figs. 1.26 and 1.27: *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures,* Cambridge, 2014.
Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

thing not to be addressed as a means of display. One work is particularly exemplary of this. Placed in full view in the gallery's front window, *Suspended Animation* (2014) by Ariana Jordão and Susie Olczak was an installation aiming to expose the crossovers between domestic and scientific enquiries. These two realms – the domestic and the scientific – were linked by the artists through the presentation of different species of wild plants collected in sample bags. Suspended from the ceilings, these bags were just a pretext for having the plants re-labelled by the artists with much more household terms: "eat me", "drink me", "longevity" (fig. 1.26). This work implies a certain aesthetic of detachment, for people not being allowed to directly engage with the work (fig. 1.27).

Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures involved many different sensibilities on ecology, and I also had to learn to negotiate my own role and practice among other practices and sensibilities. Since for me it was more important to understand how to embody ecosophy in the production of socially engaged projects than "to curate" following people's expectations of what a curator is or does, this project and the whole process of conceptual and practical production made me wonder whether the curator is really that "someone who presides over something", as Kate Fowle argues.[121] If I had imposed my own view, the project would not have been more ecosophical, for it would have been less representative of the real "chaotic network of ideas" that are research-driven art projects on ecological issues.

1.9

The mental dimension of ecosophy and critical curatorial practice

In this chapter, I have explained how this research moved its first steps, trying to highlight the connection between my own experiences in life and practice, and the research of some curators and theorists who, like me, were interested in tackling issues of ecology in a time of corporate capitalism and climate breakdown. Although today it is widely accepted that ecology goes well beyond the Western anthropocentric take on the environment, and that encompasses issues of sustainability, social injustice, global citizenship and emotional health, it is still addressed as an issue largely related to the antinomy between nature and culture. It is common to see exhibitions that display ecology, in the form of an idyllic landscape or of an apocalyptic future, and that merely stage rather than activate socially engaged art projects, maintaining the aesthetic detachment that is typical of curated shows held in institutional settings (or typical of what is expected to be a "curated" project). Many iconic works are often

121. Kate Fowle, *Who Cares? Understanding the Role of Curator Today*, in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, ed. by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apexart, 2007), 10.

used as forms of entertainment or for the spectacularising of an urgent issue, with no efforts to actually embody an ecological approach and stimulate a critical ecological awareness.

The work and writings by Maja and Reuben Fowkes have helped me greatly in thinking about my practice in relation to ecology in an expanded way. Speaking about the sustainability of the arts rather than ecological or sustainable art, they were among the first to refuse to talk about a trend and to identify a common sensibility among practitioners working in different fields. Additionally, they have highlighted that working on issues of sustainability for art practitioners implies the need to question both the context of production and of reception of an artwork or a project. However, I also felt it was quite limiting to address the quality of an artwork or a project in relation to ecology and sustainability only on the basis of the impact of its production process on the environment, as the London-based curators do. If we think in ethico-aesthetic terms, expanding the notions of ecology and sustainability should lead to a radical redefinition of how art is produced, by whom and for whom. If ecology is not an already given topic, but a complex system of constantly changing relations, as in Guattari's understanding, then also art practice should think of itself critically, and redefine itself accordingly.

This critical questioning, or "aestheticised philosophising", is also not new in the curatorial field, as I have shown by mentioning the case of Lucy Lippard. However, what happens if cultural practitioners also extend this criticality towards the way they think of their own practice in relation to the other subjects involved in the art experience? If we consider, as Malcolm Miles does, the aesthetic as a refusal of the "ordinary", and ecology as a search for a new definition of an *oἶκος* (home) that has to be negotiated among different communities and even species, then the ethico-aesthetic experience should be addressed not as something to be displayed and enjoyed from a distance, but to be developed with and questioned by the people the project is meant for. As Guattari demonstrated, since ecology also implies a mental dimension, the ecological problem can never be solved if it is not addressed as a cultural issue, a problem arising from our inability to make sense of all the heterogeneous perceptions, presences and understandings crossing their ways and transforming themselves and our sense of reality. Ecosophy allows us to consider ecology not as a set of definitions, but as a practice of the everyday. Furthermore, it is an activist philosophy of the everyday, as correctly outlined by MacCormack and Gardner's investigation on ecosophical aesthetics. I discussed Guattari's theory on transversality and the ethico-aesthetic articulation, the two fundamental pillars of his ecosophical thinking. Nevertheless, because we still lack rigorous definitions of them, it would be implausible to talk about an ecosophical art movement. Rather, I shall insist on the plurality of the ecosophical sensitivity of certain practices, highlighting those processes of heterogenesis that are at the core of Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*. However, what does it mean for a cultural practice to be *ecosophical?* What would be the features of a practice based on the constantly mutating horizon of ecosophy?

The curatorial activities I discussed in this chapter – my collaboration with Silvia Forese and Antonella Ferrari at *Moving In / Moving Out* in London in 2013, and at the Cambridge Sustainability Residency in 2014 – made me realise that ecosophy is not so much related to the forms a project eventually takes. In particular, through the collaborations in Cambridge I started to become aware that, while negotiating the possible meanings of sustainability and ecology, I was also negotiating my own role and practice among other practices: curating without selecting, producing without buying and presenting without exhibiting. Being an embodied thought, the ecosophical might be that approach that keeps questioning established forms and methods of art practice while tackling issues of sustainability and social ecology. Guattari states that "Mental ecology does not presuppose the importing of concepts and practices from a specialised 'psychiatric' domain. It demands instead that we face up the logic of desiring ambivalence wherever it emerges […] in order to re-evaluate the purpose of work and human activities according to different criteria than those of profit and yield".[122] Yet, under the circumstances of an open and never definitive negotiation, does ecosophy also imply the collapse of the traditional idea of the curatorial as an act of selection? Is it possible to talk about curatorial practice while not acting as a curator, as the only one who presides over a socially engaged project that aims at being inclusive and ecologically inspired (and inspiring)? In the next chapter, I will investigate the way contemporary curators approached ecosophy both in their practices and writings, while also analysing my own collaborations in two socially engaged art projects held in London in 2014. Specifically, I will aim to highlight the consequences in my own practice of the deconstructive criticality that ecosophy as an activist philosophy of the everyday implies.

122. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 38.

Chapter 2
Ecosophy in contemporary curatorial theories and practices

In the introduction to this thesis and in Chapter One, I have investigated how my interest in socially engaged practice and ecology took its first steps. While examining selected, recent projects and publications on sustainability and contemporary socially engaged art, I shifted my research focus from a cultural practice addressing issues of ecology to a practice embodying an ecosophical sensitivity which informs and is informed by complex systems of constantly changing relations. This chapter examines the way ecosophy has been interpreted and embodied by contemporary artists and art curators in their theories and practices, and how I have tried to investigate the implications of an ecosophical approach in my own curatorial activities. I will particularly stress the relevance of specific artistic and curatorial practices in relation to Guattari's writings on ecosophy as an "active philosophy of the everyday" in order to show the extent to which these curators have influenced my own approach to socially engaged art production and research.

In 2012, while doing my internship at the Independent Curators International in New York (at that time the previously mentioned Kate Fowle was the director), I also worked as a contributor to the *New York Arts Magazine*. I interviewed emerging artists living in New York, using the intimacy of their own studio to investigate both the ethics and aesthetics of their practice. Particularly, I was interested in investigating artistic practices that address the social and political complexities of contemporary everyday life. On the occasion of an interview for her latest project at Nurture Art space in Brooklyn, New York, sculptor Anne Percoco and I had a very meaningful conversation that was published in *New York Arts* online magazine in June 2012. Anne Percoco makes art without creating something new, using and rearranging what the environment already offers. She approaches the exhibition space – whether public or private – as a place where the multiplicity of stories informing today's social environment (and people's relation with it) becomes visible and even tangible. For the exhibition at Nurture Art, curated by Marco Antonini and titled *Life Instinct* (fig. 2.1), Percoco collected found objects from around the exhibition space and installed them as sculptural shelters within whose walls people could find moments for conversations and new encounters. As part of the exhibition, the artist also organised a series of workshops with the local community exploring practices of collective and creative repair. When I asked Anne Percoco where the title of the exhibition came from, she talked to me about the importance of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969), a proposal for an exhibition titled *Care* in which Ukeles opposes the Death Instinct of the individual with the Life Instinct of the species (fig. 2.2).

MANIFESTO!

MAINTENANCE ART -- Proposal for an Exhibition

"CARE" ©1969 Mierle Laderman Ukeles

I. IDEAS:

A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:

The Death Instinct: separation, individuality, Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one's own path to death--do your own thing, dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification, the eternal return, the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species, survival systems and operations, equilibrium.

B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?
Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress, advance, excitement, flight or fleeing.
Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

show your work--show it again
keep the contemporaryartmuseum groovy
keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.
Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

Fig. 2.1: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969! Proposal for an exhibition: "CARE"*, 1969 written in Philadelphia, PA, October 1969. One of four typewritten pages, each 8 ½ x 11 in.
Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Fig. 2.2: Anne Percoco, *Life Instinct,* Nurture Art, New York, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

This text inspired not only that particular project, but also the way she thinks of herself as an artist: "I think that a lot of people, when they look at these huts, think about our civilization, where it is going to be and so forth [...] In my practice, I want to turn something that has no value for most people into something that has value".[1]

After my conversation with Anne Percoco as with many other artists I had the pleasure to assist and/or interview (such as Peter Fend, Michael Rees and Robert Geero), I was determined to test through curatorial activities and research whether it was possible to develop cultural work not only as a profession, but also as an act of care and commitment towards a more liveable world. Therefore, I started focusing on the work of artists whose practice aimed at involving the public in the production of an expanded sensitivity towards issues of ecology, rather than just using ecological and sustainable issues as a means of display. In particular, I was interested in the works of conceptual and feminist artists of the 1970s, for they have deeply influenced the way I conceived not only my own practice but also the ethics of it in relation to other practices and to issues of social and environmental ecology. The link between Conceptual Art of the 1970s and more contemporary ecological practices is very well known and there is plenty of literature about it in curatorial studies. As stated in Chapter One, Maja and Reuben Fowkes also stressed this continuity by tracing the origins of the principles of sustainability of the arts in the feminist and institutional critique of the 1970s. They write: "The feminist critique of land and environmental art of the 1970s significantly contributed to new approaches in sustainable art practices. In addition to criticising the effects of patriarchal thinking in art and society, the first generation of eco-feminists set out to establish relationships based not on hierarchy and domination, but on caring, respect, and awareness of interconnection".[2] However, such relationships based on hierarchy and domination do not seem to always inform the relations between curators and artists, as shown in the case of Lucy Lippard's *Number Shows*, nor the contemporary theories on what curatorial practice may be after an ecosophical understanding of both art and ecology.

Unlike Maja and Reuben Fowkes, I do not aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of the rise of sustainability in art practice, approaching both art and sustainability as a research topic. Rather, my aim is to approach both ecosophy and socially engaged art practice as the art historian Miwon Kwon did with the concept of identity, community and site-specificity in contemporary art: "Not exclusively as an artistic genre but as a 'problem-idea', as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics".[3] This "problem-idea" allows to advance interpretations on specific contemporary artistic configurations while assessing them within the framework of specific theories of the social and political context they refer to. I will discuss how this problem-idea translates into my practice after clarifying the differences and affinities between ecosophy and socially engaged art practice. In fact in this chapter, I combine the analysis of the paradigmatic shift linked with the idea of ecology understood as ecosophy (examined in Chapter One) with the problematics arising in the production of socially engaged art, particularly examining the role and ethics of the curator.

2.1

Ecosophy and socially engaged art: affinities and differences

Ecosophy and socially engaged art are connected for they both imply the idea of a cultural revolution as the only viable response to the contemporary social, mental and environmental ecological crisis. Furthermore, they both point out the need for such a cultural revolution to be collectively developed and open to material and theoretical challenges that a multiplicity of interconnections implies. Although both are concerned with the rebuilding of human relations with the οἶκος, it could be argued that ecosophy is a way of thinking, an articulation of thought aimed at reappropriating universes of values in a world characterised by social inequalities and environmental exploitation, whilst socially engaged art is a way of making art through social interactions. Nevertheless, the first of their affinities is that both ecosophy and socially engaged art blur the boundaries between a critical understanding of the contemporary socio-political conditions they operate in, and a practical action over such conditions. Unfolding through dialogues, workshops, educational activities, dinners and performances, socially engaged art ultimately challenges, as curator Nato Thompson states, "the contemporary idea that art and politics are distinct fields",[4] pointing out that "much like the meaning of 'freedom' or perhaps even 'justice', the meaning of the word 'art' is mangled by differing interests operating within the system of neoliberal capitalism"[5] (the art gallery, the alternative art space, the dealer, the socially engaged independent practitioner, etc.). In the same ambiguous way, ecosophy is a way of thinking and reflecting that unfolds through "new micropolitical and microsocial practices, new solidarities, a new gentleness, together with new aesthetic and new

1. Vanessa Saraceno, "Art As Instinct: In Conversation With Anne Percoco," *New York Arts Magazine*, 2012, https://nyartsmagazine.net/art-as-instinct-in-conversation-with-anne-percoco/.
2. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, *Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art* (Budapest: Praesens, 2006), 2.
3. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another* (2002; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 2.
4. Nato Thompson, "Socially Engaged Contemporary Art: Tactical and Strategic Manifestations," part of A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change, Animating Democracy, a Program for Americans in the Arts 2011, 2: https://animatingdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/NThompson%20Trend%20Paper.pdf.
5. Ibid, 3.

analytical practices regarding the formation of the unconscious",[6] as Guattari states in *The Three Ecologies*. Even in their differences, it appears that ecosophy and socially engaged art converge in their refusal of the binary split between theory and practice, suggesting instead a model of praxis which integrates the two and which eventually dissolves the distinction between a profession and a mission.

A second similarity between ecosophy and socially engaged art practice is the playful and critical tension they establish between the aesthetics and ethics of this model of praxis. The form of socially engaged art projects, as will become evident throughout this chapter, is fluid and negotiated (although at different intensities) among the participants. Socially engaged art as "a social interaction that proclaims itself as art",[7] borrowing Pablo Helguera's definition, implies a critical reflection on the ethical implications of artistic gestures, and on the impact that the project has on its context. Such critical reflection is often accompanied by ways of working that challenge established mental and practical hierarchies between those who make art and those who participate. Similarly, ecosophy as an ethico-aesthetic articulation implies the efforts to think transversally, that is to undo fixed hierarchy between the ethics and aesthetics of our way of proceeding, and to negotiate between the two, turning what is problematic in production as an opportunity for another investigation.

In his preface to Guattari's and Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus*, philosopher Michel Foucault warns the reader not to approach the text as "*the* new theoretical reference, you know, that much-heralded theory that finally encompasses everything, that finally totalizes and reassures".[8] Rather, Foucault argues that Guattari's and Deleuze's philosophy "can be best read as an 'art'", precisely because it is not just abstract theory: "Informed by the seemingly abstract notions of multiplicities, flows, arrangements, and connections, the analysis of the relationship of desire to reality and to the capitalist machine yields answers to concrete questions. Questions that are less concerned with the *why* this or that than with the *how* to proceed".[9] Ecosophy and socially engaged art practice situate themselves in a both playful and critical understanding of the relations of both ethics and aesthetics: an understanding that does not totalise and reassure, as Foucault points out, as it offers no fixed solutions, but a transversal, fluid and anti-hierarchical way of articulating ethics and aesthetics, theory and practice, and also everyday practice with a revolutionary way of proceeding in each specific situation, or "process" in Guattari's words. In a 1981 conference, the French psychoanalyst states that a new ecosophical approach is not based upon just making either, stressing the importance of a critical reflection on how things are done, by whom and for whom:

> "The outcome of such molecular transformations depends primarily on the ability of explicitly revolutionary fixtures to articulate the political and social struggles of interest. In other words, the outcome of revolt is determined not merely by a revolutionary practice, but also by a revolutionary process. This is the essential question. Without such a folding in of the distinction between theory and practice (process), all that defines a molecular revolution, will never be able to initiate this social and economic change on a large scale."[10]

Nevertheless, the affinities between ecosophy and socially engaged art, both their playful and critical articulation of theory and practice, and of the ethics and aesthetics of cultural projects, do not undermine the importance of their differences. In fact, not all socially engaged art practices are ecosophical. It is indeed possible to make art through social interactions without undergoing a critical reflection on how things have been made, by who and for whom, and what kind of relations have been produced by the project. It is also possible to practice socially engaged art without any desire to expand such critical reflection to one's own practice, as I believe a truly ecosophical –revolutionary, transversal and anti-hierarchical – practice should do. As I have shown in Chapter One of this thesis, ecology has been read through specific projects while I prefer to address the contemporary ecological crisis through the lens of ecosophy: as a critical force that challenges the way people and practices relate and coexist in the shared οἶκος. Many socially engaged art practitioners tackling issues of ecology may reject Guattari's transversal, critical and ethico-aesthetic articulation of praxis, preferring instead clearly structured and fixed definitions of the relations between the social, the mental and environmental domains of ecology. Others, as I will attempt to show in the second section of this chapter, embody an ecosophical sensitivity in a different way than that which I tested in this practical investigation. In this thesis, I aim at investigating the implications of Guattari's ecosophy in the curatorial production of socially engaged art projects tackling issues of ecology. I attempt to do so by critically deconstructing the identity, role and function of the curator in the making of socially engaged art projects. In my practice, I never worked as a curator for an institution; rather, I was an independent curatorial researcher passionately interested in experimenting more ecologically-inspired ways of living

6. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (1989; London: continuum, 2008), 34.
7. Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 1.
8. Michel Foucault, Preface to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), XI.
9. Foucault stresses this point even further by stating: "I would argue that Anti-Oedipus (may its authors forgive me) is a book of ethics, the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time (perhaps that explains why its success was not limited to a particular 'readership': being anti-oedipal has become a life-style, a way of thinking and living)".
Ibid.
10. Félix Guattari, "Integrated World Capitalism and Molecular Revolution," Conference on Information and/as New Spaces of Liberty (CINEL), 1981: 7.
https://www.academia.edu/29510330/Integrated_World_Capitalism_and_Molecular_Revolution.

through socially engaged art. I observed and participated in the making of collaborative projects without ever presiding over the selections of works or people to work with, but trying to do what people expected me to do as a curator to challenge mental hierarchies, negotiate old meanings and let new relations arise.

As Claire Bishop states, socially engaged art strives "to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception",[11] and to put an emphasis on "collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience".[12] However, while the collapse between the so-called art world and its, more or less identified, public can also occur at a superficial level only in socially engaged art projects, on the other hand ecosophy calls out for "new micropolitical and microsocial practices, new solidarities, a new gentleness, together with new aesthetic and new analytical practices".[13] The transformation and cultural revolution that ecosophy brings about should not just be performed in specific projects but also be embedded in everyday practice. Here lies another reason why not all socially engaged practices can be read as ecosophical. As this research attempts to investigate, combining ecosophy with the production of socially engaged art projects should also lead to a model of praxis that aims at "folding in of the distinction between theory and practice (process)", and that commits itself to issues of social responsibility towards the shared οἶκος. Such continuous reflection should also apply to the processes and subjectivities that are part of the cultural production of ecosophy-inspired projects, eventually transforming them into opportunities for more sustainable relations both within and outside the art system. Donna Haraway describes this sense of responsibility as follows: "In passion and action, detachment and attachment, this is what I call cultivating response-ability; that is also collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices. [...] It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories".[14]

Before examining what is commonly defined as socially engaged art practice, and how this has influenced contemporary curatorial theory and practice, this chapter starts with the analysis of the works of three other pioneering environmental and social artists: Lygia Clark, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Adrian Piper. They are meaningful for the purposes of this research for two reasons: the first being critical, and

11. *Documents of Contemporary Art. Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), 10.
12. Ibid.
13. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 34.
14. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with The Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 34.

the second methodological. The works I analyse are exemplary for the creative effort of feminist artistic practices that go beyond pre-established roles, hierarchies and narratives, enacting rather than merely displaying the aesthetic potential of a critical investigation on issues of social and environmental ecology. Secondly, the way these works came to be is evidence of the artistic effort to address social and political engagement as a "problem-idea", borrowing this expression from Miwon Kwon's argument mentioned above. Instead of offering ready-made solutions, they invite people to think with them why a specific problem is so problematic in a given place at a specific time, thus stimulating processes of collective thinking and making. Specifically, these works arose as situated responses to a concrete problem faced by the artist in her everyday life: a situation of conflict in front of which the artist does not simply antagonise herself, but within which she triggers collaborative actions and reflections on the social and political conditions generating that situation. I will then examine whether such articulation can be found in contemporary curatorial theories and practices that are also inspired by the principles of Guattari's ecosophical paradigm and praxis. Finally, I will focus on the curatorial interventions that I realised in London in 2014, and discuss how these led me to a different understanding of what ecosophy means in my own practice.

2.2

On feminist methodology and the problem-idea: Lygia Clark, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Adrian Piper

Founder of the Neo-Concrete movement,[15] Lygia Clark's works are a great source of inspiration for her discourses and experimentations around abstraction, participation and a therapeutic art practice. From the late 1960s through the 1970s she focused on unconventional artworks, conceived in parallel to a lengthy psychoanalytic therapy, leading her to develop a series of therapeutic propositions grounded in art. *Caminhando*, or *The Walking* (1963) is a pivotal performance by Lygia Clark. It consists of a Möbius strip cut out of paper, that is meant to be cut over and over again by each participant, suggesting the dematerialization of the art object and the turn towards an art based on process and participation (fig. 2.3).

15. The Neo-Concrete movement was a Brazilian art movement that emerged in Rio de Janeiro in 1959 and was active until 1961. Founded by Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape among others, it was characterised by a refusal of Constructivism dogmatic rationalism and of an art in pursuit of a pure form, embracing a more phenomenological and less scientific approach to art making. Inspired by Ferreira Gullar's 1959 essay "Theory of the Non-Object", the Neo-concrete Manifesto states that "art should be like living organisms" and express complex human realities.

Fig. 2.3: Lygia Clark, *Caminhando, or The Walking*, 1963. Photo courtesy of O Mundo de Lygia Clark-Associação Cultural, Rio de Janeiro. Photo by Beto Felicio.

As the strip is cut, it gets finer and is unfolded in intertwinings.[16] Eventually, the path becomes so narrow that it can no longer be cut. The line resulting from the collaboration of random participants in *Caminhando* exists as an action rather than as a physical object: it is not drawn but cut out. It refers to an event that is necessarily finite, lasting only until the paper is sliced so thinly that the line cannot continue; unlike a drawn or painted line, the line in *Caminhando* is completely contingent upon an active participant, offering a tangible understanding of the precariousness of a single event, and of life as a whole. Furthermore, such sensuous understanding is developed both in the intimacy of an individual act and as a collective gesture, one for which no specific kind of artisanal or technical expertise is required. In Clark's own words, "the act is what produces *Caminhando*, nothing exists before it and nothing after".[17]

"A most elegant and philosophically timely proposal" that "explains art in a super patriarchal society",[18] the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* by Mierle Laderman Ukeles was written in 1969, not long after Clark's performative investigation *Caminhando*. Initially written as a proposal for an exhibition entitled *Care*, it came about from a very contingent and personal situation: that of becoming a mother. "Through free choice and love, I became pregnant. I had a child by choice. I was in an all-out crisis. People only saw me as a mother. The culture had no place for me. There were no words for my life. I was split into two people: an artist and a mother. I had fallen out of the picture. I was in a fury".[19] As cultural theorist Andrea Liss notes, forced to find an impossible balance between her time as mother and as artist, Ukeles "wisely and outrageously took the matter-of-fact stance that her maternal work was the material from which art and cultural commentary could be made".[20] The problematic tension between art and life allows Ukeles to highlight the tie of necessity of their connection as opposites and to turn this presumed opposition into an opportunity to create a new way of working: "I have the freedom to name *maintenance* as art. I can collide freedom into its supposed opposite and call that art. I name necessity art".[21]

16. The idea of "intertwinings" was one of the key contributions made by Suzi Gablik in *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991) and in *Connective Aesthetics* (1992). While advocating for "a shift away from the myth of the hard-edged, autonomous individualist that has formed the artist's identity", the American artist and art critic states:

> "For many people, it is time to move on and revise the cultural myths that are guiding us, to reassess our relationship to the present social framework and its practices [...] In the post-Cartesian, ecological world view that is now emerging, the self is no longer isolated and self-contained but relational and interdependent. [...] Art that is grounded in the realisation of our interconnectedness and intersubjectivity – the intertwining of self and others – has a quality of relatedness that cannot be fully realised through monologue [...] It can also be understood as a shift from self-assertion to integration".

Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics," *American Art* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 4.

17. "Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988," MoMA, https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/181/2419.

18. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 220.

19. Andrea Liss, *The Feminist and The Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 52.

20. Ibid, 53.

21. Hafthor Yngvason, *Conservation and Maintenance of Contemporary Public Art* (London: Ar-

But what is *maintenance* for Ukeles, and how do these acts of care influence the form and ethics of her practice? In a series of fifteen performances entitled *Maintenance Art Performance Series* (1973-74), Ukeles turns the ambitions of everyday life into a fruitful, critical source to investigate issues of social and environmental ecology. Four of these performances took place at Wadsworth Atheneum as part of the traveling exhibition *c. 7.500* curated by Lippard and featuring works by twenty-six women conceptual artists. They consisted in a series of everyday actions, such as cleaning the museum's galleries and entrance stairs, or securing certain doors on behalf of the museum's guards. As Miwon Kwon points out, such actions "revealed the extent to which the museum's pristine self-presentation, its perfectly immaculate white spaces as emblematic of its 'neutrality', is structurally dependent on the hidden and devalued labor of daily maintenance and upkeep",[22] and by exposing the hierarchical system of labour relations within the art system, Ukeles "complicated the social and gendered division between the notion of the public and the private".[23] Surely her most iconic work and one of the pivotal works of performance art, *Touch Sanitation,* took place in New York between 1979 and 1980. After becoming the unsalaried, self-appointed artist-in-residence at the New York Department of Sanitation, Ukeles spent a year visiting each of the districts and shaking the hands of every one of the 8,500 workers who would accept the gesture (fig. 2.4). In Ukeles' practice, there is no distinction between life and art, practice or artwork: "the discord between Ukeles's life at home and as a sculptor in the New York City art world had spurred her to rethink what art could and should be".[24] Care as practice is a process of awareness towards the thousands of unnoticed gestures that make life on this planet still *liveable* and meaningful (such as sanitation work, and the contact and warmth of another human being)[25]. As Lippard notes: "Mrs Ukeles is implying that avant-gardism amounts to running around in tighter and tighter circles, doing the same thing over and over again but trying to make it look and sound different; it seems that the mythic drive behind high art has run its course. The sudden transference of some avant-garde artists to politics stems from a desire to find a viable revolution, one providing the needed psychological surrogate". [26]

chetype, 2002), 9.
22. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 19.
23. Ibid.
24. Laura Bliss, "The Artist Who Made Sanitation Workers Worthy of a Museum," Bloomberg CityLab, 29 November 2016, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-29/the-maintenance-art-of-mierle-laderman-ukeles.
25. On the occasion of the artist's public art initiative at the Queens Museum, New York in 2020, Mierle Laderman Ukeles published a statement on the museum's website highlighting once again the role that such silent, bodily gestures play in the process of shaping the shared οἶκος. Especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and the consequent, global lockdown measures to contain it, it became even more urgent for Ukeles to make a new work to thank those who keep the city alive, and this work, as the artist writes, "has to be handwritten — as if I'm talking to you face to face, as if I'm offering my hand in gratitude. Handwritten is the closest I could come up with. Personal. The feel of the hand reaching out, shaping each word. It must be by hand, since touch between hand to hand itself had become banished, dangerous". The artist's public message, which is displayed on long-term view on the façade of the Queens Museum, reads: "Dear Service Worker, 'Thank you for keeping NYC alive!' For — forever…", singing out that "this service work will never go away. The pandemic — please Heaven — will go away or be severely contained. But this work, if we want to be here living in a city, will be here forever".
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Artist Statement." Queens Museum (7 September 2020). Accessed on 2 January 2022, https://queensmuseum.org/2020/09/mierle-laderman-ukeles.

From 1982 to 1984, after completing her PhD in philosophy at Harvard, American artist Adrian Piper staged a series of collaborative performances and lectures titled *Funk Lessons*. She invited people from different cultural and social backgrounds to "get down and party together", and to experience dance and funk music as cognitive activities. Obviously, many racial issues arose by the very simple exchange of information about the history of funk and soul music which constituted the first, dialogical part of the performance. However, all the differences seemed to vanish as soon as the lesson format became clearly a pretext for debate and collaboration. As the participants moved into the second part of the performance, the actual dance of popular black music, the horizontal, processual nature of the project became even more evident, for its exposure of actual socio-political imbalances through the pretext of a dance. As Piper writes in her scholarly article of four essays titled "Notes on Funk" (1983-1985): "We were all engaged in the pleasurable process of self-transcendence and creative expression within a highly structured and controlled cultural idiom, in a way that attempted to overcome cultural and racial barriers. […] What I purported to 'teach' my audience was revealed to be a kind of fundamental sensory 'knowledge' that everyone has and can use".[27] I think that "sensory knowledge" is one of the most important things to bear in mind in order to properly curate all kinds of socially engaged art projects, but even more so if the aim is to investigate the consequences of an ethico-aesthetic approach in cultural practice. In Guattari's theory, ecology is not a topic to be addressed or a list of conditions to satisfy, but an ethico-aesthetic articulation for theoretical and pragmatic interventions to be undertaken in everyday life. Being ethico-aesthetic, such interventions do not follow the logic of rational knowledge, which prioritises the detached and purposely objective analysis of the environment over the one based on the subjective intentions and perceptions of it. In this regard, Guattari states: "While the logic of discursive sets endeavours to completely delimit its objects, the logic of intensities, or eco-logic, is concerned only with the movement and intensity of evolutive processes".[28] For such movement of thought engenders an unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable quality of being, in his

26. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, 221.
27. Adrian Piper, "Notes on Funk, I-II // 1985/83," in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop, 130-134 (London: Whitechapel and the MIT Press 2006), 130. Originally in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, vol I, 195-216 (Cambridge, The MIT Press: 1996): 196.
28. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 30.

later publication *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,* Guattari admits that "the aesthetic power of feeling, although equal in principle with the other powers of thinking philosophically, knowing scientifically, acting politically, seems on the verge of occupying a privileged position within the collective assemblage of enunciation of our era".[29] Piper's "sensory knowledge" and her practical interventions to stimulate its collective production might be a very relevant tool to develop a practice that ecosophically addresses the "a-signifying rupture"[30] that is at the heart of Guattari's idea of ecological praxes.[31] Reflecting on *Notes of Funk*, Piper states: "At the same time, the piece enables me to affirm and utilise the conventions and idioms of communications I've learned in the process of my acculturation into white culture: the analytical mode, the formal and structural analysis, the process of considered and constructive rational dialogue, [...]. It also reinforces my sense of optimism that eventually the twain *shall* meet!"[32]

These artists and these three works in particular helped me to identify my own approach to both socially engaged art and ecosophy. Crossing material and mental boundaries to engage with participants in a direct conversation or shared action, these artists combine the feminist methodology of a "privileged partial perspective", as Donna Haraway defined it, with an activist investigation of the cultural revolution linked with an expanded notion of both art and ecology. Linking art and life, and approaching any problematic opposition as an opportunity for new forms of connection and coexistence, their dematerialised approach to art practice makes it easier to visualise Guattari's transversal approach to issues of mental, environmental and social ecology, that are experienced by these artists as both collective and personal issues at the same time. When this research began, I was trying to develop a practice made of everyday, revolutionary gestures that could stimulate a collective reformulation of values, identities and modalities of group-beings, and an "authentic political, social and cultural revolution".[33] Through the production of *Quid Pro Quo: Negoti-*

29. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,* trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Prefanis (1992; Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), 101.
30. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 30.
31. It must be said that not all art historians and critics reckon this attention to the sensory knowledge as a positive achievement in contemporary art practices. In a 2009 essay, the professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Columbia University, Alexander Alberro writes:
> "The shift from the cognitive to the affective negates some of the most productive intellectual achievements of twentieth century critical theory, which had attempted to reveal the social construction of subjectivity, even if it was understood as always provisionally configured. It also throws hermeneutically based disciplines such as art history into crises. This is in no way to suggest that aesthetic experience is purely mythical. Rather I mean to argue that we have aesthetic experiences, not because of some ontological postulate, but because we have been constructed as spectators in traditions that put those values and those experiences at the center of cultural life."

Alexander Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 60.
32. Piper, "Notes on Funk, I-II // 1985/83", 134.
33. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 20.

Fig. 2.4: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979-80. 24 July 1979 - 26 June 1980. Citywide performance with 8,500 Sanitation workers across all fifty-nine New York City Sanitation districts, 15 May, 1980. Sweep 10, Queens District 14. Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York. Photo by Vincent Russo.

Fig. 2.5: Adrian Piper, *Funk Lessons*, 1983-84. Group performance, University of California at Berkeley, 1983. Photograph documenting the performance. Photo courtesy of the University of California at Berkeley. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive (APRA) Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

ating Futures after the 2014 Cambridge Sustainability Residency, I tried to question how to perform the role of curator without selecting either the artists to work with, or the artworks to include in the final project. Eventually, I ended up proposing a strategy for the production and communication of the overall exhibition that could mirror the nature of the residency and of the conversations that nurtured it. Not all the artists accepted this way to work, and of course I respected their choices. Nevertheless, the co-existence in the exhibition space of so many different approaches – some closer to an ecosophical sensitivity than others – made me wonder whether it is possible to maintain a sense of identity for your own practice and that of others in the fluid and undefined context of an ecosophical articulation. In the next section, I will focus on what is generally identified as socially engaged art and I will reflect on the influence of Guattari's ecosophical paradigm in curatorial theories and practices of professionals working in the field.

2.3

Public, connective and dialogic: theories of socially engaged art

There has been plenty of literature in the last three decades on socially engaged art practices: how to define and curate socially engaged art projects, and what the criteria to judge them are or should be. From Suzi Gablik's 1992 *Connective Aesthetics* to Peter Weibel's 1995 *Kontextkunst,* Suzanne Lacy's 1995 *New Genre Public Art,* Christian Kravagna's 1998 *Modelle Partezipatorischer Praxis,* Lars Bang Larsen's 1999 *Social Aesthetics*, Grant Kester's 2004 *Dialogical Art*, Mick Wilson's 2007 *Discursive Turns,* Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen's 2011 *Community Art* and Chris Kraus' 2018 *Social Practices*: all these approaches aim at shedding light on contemporary cultural strategies for collaboration and social engagements, seeing these strategies as opportunities to overcome the traditional mental boundaries between a so-called author of the project and the so-called audience, and to democratise knowledge production and distribution.

"This expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art. These practices are less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity",[34] writes Claire Bishop while coining herself another term to describe these activities "all linked by a belief in the empowering creativity of collective

34. Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006): 179.

action and shared ideas",[35] the *Social Turn*. Although various, all these new forms of artistic engagement use "participation" to establish collaboration between the artists and the once called spectator. However, she thinks of this participation as a removal of the aesthetic agenda as an essential element of their practice. Therefore, critics find it hard to assess such projects as "artworks", for their political correctness always takes over and marks them as meaningful a long as they are participatory in their form: "There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond".[36] Like many other critics and practitioners of our time, Bishop urges to find certain criteria that may help discuss, analyse and compare such works as art, lamenting in particular the fact that "a social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism",[37] while instead it seems crucial to also discuss them critically as artworks. Social effect, ethical intentions and artistic quality are quite different things in her view. When reflecting on the work by Turkish artists' collective Oda Projesi, who since 1997 have run a platform for projects to be developed in direct collaboration with their neighbours in a three-bed apartment of the Galata district in Istanbul (fig. 2.6), Bishop states: "Even when transposed to Sweden, Germany and the other countries where Oda Projesi have exhibited, there is little to distinguish their projects from other socially engaged art practices that revolve around the predictable formulas of workshops, discussions, meals, film screenings and walks. Perhaps this is because the question of aesthetic value is not valid for Oda Projesi".[38]

Interestingly, Bishop moves her analysis of the social turn in contemporary art further by focusing on the critical and curatorial work of Nicolas Bourriaud and Maria Lind, that I will discuss in the last section of this chapter, and that in her opinion are "dominated by *ethical* judgements on working procedure and intentionality". Whilst Bourriaud and Lind develop their assessments on the political and ethical value of the forms that these projects create, Bishop urges curators to rethink collaborative art projects critically as art: "Today, political, moral, and ethical judgements have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgement in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago".[39] In her point of view, the boundaries between art and life should never be blurred: art needs its autonomy to be detached from reality and hence to be able to expose the unresolved political antinomies running through it. To stress her argument, she gives as examples the works of artists Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn that are both political and social effective because of their ability to expose today's

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid, 180.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 77.

Fig. 2.6: Picnic in the courtyard in front of the Oda Projesi space in Galata, 2003.
Photo courtesy of the collective.

political relations through a "disruptive approach".[40] Bishop addresses the aesthetics as the place where "distancing our thoughts from the predominant and pre-existing social consensus",[41] and the art experience in her view is the realm where antagonistic relations must meet while remaining antagonistic. In her analysis of socially engaged art projects, aesthetics and ethics are treated as two fixed lines in a Cartesian system from which the efficacy of specific projects can be measured. Similarly, curator James Voorhies argues that, while trying to unite art and everyday life, social practice "sacrifices art's potential to change the appearance, or aesthetics, of things, and therefore its spectator's perspectives [...]. If it looks like everyday life, then how is one to discern its critical attitude?"[42] I argue that aesthetics is never about appearances only, and that, as a form of judgement and knowledge, it has the potential to change not only how things are perceived, but also how they are understood and critically elaborated. To practice an ecosophical revolution, socially engaged practitioners should bring to the fore not only the appearance of things, but also reflect on how things are perceived and how to challenge pre-established assumptions. Positioning myself in a critical stance towards Bishop and Voorhies, I argue: why not negotiate the meaning of the terms, "art", "beauty" and "success" while negotiating more sustainable forms of art production?

Although Bishop's understanding of aesthetics does not seem to approach the dualism between ethics and aesthetics through a transversal, ecosophical approach, I share Claire Bishop's and Pablo Helguera's concern to define such social engagements as *art*, rather than as "social practice". As Helguera argues, precisely by positing the discipline and discursive field it has emerged from, this peculiar form of art making "denotes the critical detachment from other forms of art-making (primarily centered and built on the personality of the artist) that is inherent to socially engaged art, which, almost by definition, is dependent on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork".[43] For Helguera it is not a matter of establishing hierarchical positions to allow the critical assessment of a work of art. Rather, the artist strives to highlight the fruitful reflections that may arise by presenting such interactions as art and cultural projects. He argues: "Many artists look for ways to renounce not only object-making but authorship altogether, in the kind of 'stealth' art practice that philosopher Stephen Wright argues for, in which the artist is a secret agent in the real world, with an artistic agenda. Yet the uncomfortable position of socially engaged art, identified as art located between more conventional art forms and the related disci-

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid, 78.
42. James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (Cambridge, The MIT Press: 2017), 103.
43. Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 3-4.

plines of sociology, politics, and the like, is exactly the position it should inhabit".[44] This understanding of socially engaged art practice leads Helguera to draw parallels between art and education, both seen as tools to generate vitality and processes of co-construction of knowledge.[45]

A similar position is that of artist and educator Suzanne Lacy, pioneering figure in the field of socially engaged and performance art. Already by 1995, Lacy defines as "new genre public art" the ways of working by some contemporary artists that "resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility".[46] Whilst Bishop thinks that aesthetics of socially engaged art is founded on a "relational antagonism" capable of providing "a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other",[47] Lacy favours a more open-ended and transversal approach, following which it is precisely a certain conception of art and aesthetics that starts being questioned, and this is why this genre is "new". She states: "Unlike much of what has heretofore been called public art, new genre public art – visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on engagement".[48] The problem here is how to define the "social" and the "engaged" of socially engaged art, and how to relate the social to the engagement. For Bishop, this engagement is a participatory activity that questions established forms of political assemblages. Therefore, Bishop uses the term "collaboration" to better identify the participation generated by certain projects, whereas American arts promoter and museum director Tom Finkelpearl prefers the term "cooperation". As Dr Amy McDonnell states: "Finkelpearl considers Bishop's 'collaboration' as too constraining for the group practices he writes about as the word denotes working together right through a project in a co-authored manner. Whereas, 'cooperation', on the other hand, simply implies that people worked together on a project",[49] Finkelpearl emphasises that there are different levels and intensities of engagement in socially engaged art projects, that do not necessarily imply the equal participation of all those who participate for the entire duration of these projects. I agree that people

44. Ibid.
45. Helguera specifically links his methodology to the approach developed shortly after the end of World War II, in the Northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia by a group of parents led by an educator named Loris Malaguzzi. They started a school for early childhood education that incorporated the pedagogical thought of John Dewey, Jean Piaget and others, that was based on the understanding of the child not as an empty container to be filled with knowledge, but "as an individual with rights, great potential, and diversity (what Malaguzzi described as 'the hundred languages of children')". Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, xi.
46. Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (1995; Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 19.
47. Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 79.
48. Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art,* 19.
49. Amy McDonnell, "Artists' Collectives and Collectivities: A Curatorial Investigation into Assembling the Social" (PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2016), 110.

participate and engage differently and at different intensities, but the most important aspect of socially engaged art, at least in my opinion, is that it brings such issues of co-authorship to the fore, forcing us to question not only what is art, but also for whom art is made and what is life as cultural producers under today's historical conditions. Lacy's definition of "engagement" makes it clear that what is at stake in socially engaged art is exactly a certain conception of art and aesthetics, and eventually a certain conception of the world. Lacy argues that "The distance placed between artists and the rest of society is part of their social critique"[50] and that the aesthetics of new genre public artists takes the form of the ability to formulate a response, that is a responsibility – or response-ability, as Haraway suggests – towards a specific fact, event or place. Quoting Allan Kaprow's famous line, "I see the enemy, and it is I", Lacy suggests that there is a different philosophical positioning of the self in these projects, which often goes unnoticed by critics but that yet is crucial to understand the cultural revolution socially engaged art attempts to inspire. Co-authorship and interaction are not "undertaken simply as an exercise in political correctness",[51] but are needed to actualise the change of these artists' focus, which is no longer what is art, but what is the meaning of life, and what is the meaning of life as "artists" in a shared, hyper-globalised world: "They talk about their habitation of the earth as a relationship with it and all beings that live there. These essentially ethical and religious assertions are founded on a sense of service and a need to overcome the dualism of a separate self. That dilemma is played out not only between self and other but between perceived public and private components of the artist's self". I have already examined how such private components affected the way of working and aesthetic resemblance of practices of artists such as Clack, Ukeles and Piper. However, Lacy's understanding of socially engaged art as new genre public art considers both art and the social linked in a process of cultural revolution that for her is a humanistic more than critical statement: instead of questioning the meaning and function of the social and of culture, she establishes new hierarchies by positing humans and their values at the centre of the envisioned paradigmatic shift. Furthermore, she links this revolution to "ethical and religious assertion" which in my opinion implies the dangerous argument that ethical equals religious, and that both are uncontestedly good.

I agree with art historian Miwon Kwon who states that, because of the naïvety of believing to change the world through temporary interventions and to be based on presumably universal values, community-based art such as Lucy's can easily be "characterised as dangerously radical and oppressively dogmatic, either too sentimental

50. Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art,* 33.
51. Ibid, 36.

and idealistic, thus irrational, or too corrupt and unreliable to offer any satisfactory solutions to deal with many of today's problems".[52] Lacy argues: "If new genre public artists are envisioning a new form of society – a shared project with others who are not artists, working in different manners and places – then the artwork must be seen with respect to that vision and assessed in part by its relationship to the collective social proposition to which it subscribes. That is, art becomes a statement of values as well as a reflection of a mode of seeing".[53] The dangerous lack of criticality of this position is proven by the use of expressions such as "creating a participant, even a collaborator", inasmuch as no artists and no curators can ever create a participant but make and communicate something more or less meaningful to potential participants, and to inspire people to engage and contribute. Also, the artists' and the curators' ethos and assumptions of the arts are never challenged by Lacy's reading of socially engaged art as a statement of values and forms of togetherness. In my understanding of an ecosophical articulation of socially engaged art practice, who decides what are the relevant issues to be discussed and what gets prioritised in the process of production and communication of the project should be questioned and openly challenged, in order to actualise the cultural revolution that Guattari's ecosophy should catalyse. Because ecosophy also implies a critical understanding of one's own practice in relation to other practices, it goes beyond socially engaged art practice as a way of making art through social interactions or statements of values through collective social propositions, as Lacy argued. Although it is uncomfortable in its position between art and other disciplines, socially engaged art is in fact still art, a way of making and thinking about the process of making. On the other hand, ecosophy is about how to proceed while making and thinking through the ambivalences that the process of making unveils, exposing the social hierarchies and mental preconceptions that still inform the minds of those who make art and those who participate in the art project.

Less inclined to dogmatic assertions than Lucy's new genre public art, still heavily structured upon ethical values is the definition of "Connective Aesthetics" given by theorist Suzi Gablik. To develop her understanding of socially engaged art practice, the American artist and art critic starts from the notion of the "inoperative community" of French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy, who argues that pre-stablished forms of "ethical goodnesses" leads to societal forms of violence and political terror, as it was the case with fascist societies arising in Europe between the 1920s and the 1930s.[54] The peculiarity of socially engaged art is to use the engagement as a platform to collectively question traditional modes of thinking both art and the social: "The dominant modes of thinking in our society have conditioned us to characterise art primarily as specialised objects, crated not for moral or practical or social reasons, but rather to be contemplated and enjoyed. [...] Autonomy, we now see, has condemned art to social impotence by turning it into just another class of objects between marketing and consumption".[55] Being art not simply an ancillary phenomenon nor only an antagonistic reaction to the ideology of mass production and competitive self-assertion, art experience backs back on reflecting and critically engaging with the problematics of its role in the world, in a methodological twist similar to those of Ukeles or Piper discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Instead of still "longing for a centralised position", as the socially engaged artists described by Lacy do, in Gablik's connective aesthetics artists refuse to understand artistic or cultural practices as an individual phenomenon and seek to decentralise the artist's ego in the process of artistic production. Specifically, she argues: "There is a distinct shift in the locus of creativity from the autonomous self-contained individual to a new kind of dialogical structure that frequently is not the product of a single individual but is the result of a collaborative and interdependent process".[56] The cultural shift that Gablik sees at the core of socially engaged art has to do with one's personal identity in relation to a particular and culturally conditioned view of life, exactly as in Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* was at the core of the ecological crisis, and such redefinition has to invest inherited, romantic or 'modernist' notions of art and aesthetics. As Gablik writes: "We cannot judge new art by the old standards [...]. But if modernism, and the art that emerged with it, developed around the notion of a unique and separate self, the art generated by what I have called 'connective aesthetics' is very different [...]. For one thing, the boundary between Self and Other is fluid rather than fixed: the Other is included within the boundary of selfhood".[57]

In Gablik's view, art and aesthetics are no longer tied to the "objectifying consciousness of the scientific world-view",[58] and instead of encouraging a distancing or polemical relation with the other, finally play with "the beneficial and healing role of social interaction".[59] This healing role is better explained by Gablik through the notion of "enlightened listening". Borrowed by philosopher David Michael Levin, it denotes "a listening that is oriented toward the achievement of shared understandings".[60] She continues, describing this methodological move prompted by socially engaged art

52. Ibid, 114.
53. Ibid, 46.
54. Jean L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor (1986; Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
55. Suzi Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism," in *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, ed. by Suzanne Lacy (1995; Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 74.
56. Ibid, 76.
57. Ibid, 83-84.
58. Ibid, 77.
59. Ibid, 80.
60. Ibid.

practices as follows: "Empathic listening makes room for the other and decentralises the ego-self. Giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium of expression, an empathic way of seeing through another's eyes".[61] As I have discussed in relation to my curatorial collaboration at *Quid Pro Quo*, my personal understanding of ecosophy as a fluid, transversal and anti-hierarchical articulation of the process of making made me experience the urgency to be open to other artists' and professionals' meanings of ecology and methods of working. Negotiating not only meanings of ecology and sustainability with and for the public, but also my own role and ethics in relation to a complex net of thoughts and practices, I developed a concrete awareness of how central the act of listening is in relation to socially engaged art, and even more so in the context of an ecosophical articulation of practice, where a full engagement (or free play, to use a Kantian expression) of all the senses and faculties is needed along with a transversal and critical approach. However, Gablik's idea of "listening" is more of a spiritual act rather than of a concrete process of negotiation. She brilliantly points out that "the listening orientation challenges the dominant ocularcentric tradition, which suggests that art is an experience available primarily to the eye, and represents a real shift in paradigms",[62] for "the world healing begins with the individual who welcomes the Other".[63] Furthermore, she is among the first to stress that such interconnectedness of art and life, ethics and aesthetics is the result of the "feminine perspective that has been missing not only in our scientific thinking and policy making, but in our aesthetic philosophy as well".[64] Nevertheless, Gablik's "Connective Aesthetics" imply that consensus is always reached through the act of listening, which it has never to be neglected, as I will show in the second section of this chapter while examining the curatorial interventions I organised in London with artist Sabine Bolk. As Gablik rightly notes, "within a listener-centred paradigm, the old specializations of artist and audience, creative and uncreative, professional and unprofessional – distinction between who is and who is not an artist – begin to blur",[65] and such blurring concerns not only the artist and the public, but also the curator and all those involved in the making of the project.

If carefully examined, the idea of an "enlightened" listening reinstates a presumed hierarchy in as much as it implies that those who are not willing to listen are therefore not enlightened, and that the artist or curator who activates this process of enlightenment should be celebrated as an enlightening genius. Contrary to this, Grant Kester's

61. Ibid, 82.
62. Ibid, 83.
63. Ibid, 86.
64. Ibid, 84.
65. Ibid, 86.

approach to socially engaged art favours those projects that facilitate the dialogue among diverse, and politically subaltern communities. More than merely connective, Kester's reading of socially engaged art leads to the identification of "dialogical aesthetics" to define and describe that "body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaborative, potentially emancipatory forms of dialogue and conversation"[66] and that permeates other fields such as architecture, social work, activism and ethnography. Such practices are indeed diverse and can take various forms, yet what specifically unites them are "a series of provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the kind of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing".[67] Although it is true that these projects require a paradigm shift in our understanding of the work of art, as both Lacy and Gablik suggested in 1995, in Kester's view such a shift does not lead to identification of the aesthetics with an idealised form of communication. Rather than using the "social" as an already given content to engage with, Kester defines such artists as "context providers",[68] for, as Dr McDonnell argues, "A methodology that this type of practice shares is to use their work to provide a context, drawing in collaborators to create content which they hope will lead to action".[69] Kester stresses the need for dialogical aesthetic engagements to be durational and cumulative, rather than immediate and provocatively shocking, and to approach the "social" of socially engaged art not as a fixed entity that has to be created or activated by the artists. Kester denounces that such a presumed purist ethicality tends merely to expand the artist's or curator's visibility, rather than art's role and social function, eventually commodifying both the communities the project is meant for and the reputability of the socially engaged art practices involved. Instead, the dialogical forms of interaction the critics focus on do not rely on the compelling force of a superior argument, and as such do not aim at resulting in universally binding decisions. They are intended to "simply create a provisional understanding (the necessary precondition for decision-making) among the members of a given community when normal social or political consensus breaks down".[70] Drawing on Jürgen Habermas' concept of discourse as an egalitarian interaction among discursive co-participants who are "intimately linked in an inter-subjectively shared form of life",[71] Kester elaborates on dialogical aesthetics as a theory that refuses any claims of universality, positing instead the idea

66. Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art," in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. by Zoya Kucor and Simon Leung (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 76.
67. Ibid, 77.
68. Ibid, 76.
69. McDonnell, "Artists' Collectives and Collectivities: A Curatorial Investigation into Assembling the Social," 86.
70. Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art," 79.
71. Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and solidarity: On the discussion concerning stage 6," *Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989-1990), 47.

of a provisional consensual knowledge "that is grounded precisely at the level of collective interaction".[72] Similarly, my ecosophical understanding of socially engaged art practice makes me reject the constraining absoluteness of universal claims, insofar as ecosophy implies a constant renegotiation of values and meanings. In an ecosophical approach, values and meanings can never be immutable, but will be changing in relation to the changed social and historical conditions that generate them, and to the participants involved in the process of negotiation.

Another point of affinity with ecosophy is that Kester's dialogical aesthetic replaces the fixed identity of the enlightenment model of aesthetic with a subjectivity that does not exist as an immutable *a priori*, but that "is formed through discourse and inter-subjective exchange itself".[73] Kester's understanding of listening and discursive interaction in terms of empathetic identification helps to visualise Guattari's ecosophical articulation for it relies upon, as my practice does, a feminist model of epistemology that identifies the ethico-aesthetic potentiality of a connected or situated knowledge: a form of epistemology which is not based on counterpoised arguments but "on a conversational mode in which each interlocutor works to identify with the perspective of the others".[74] Complaining that recent art theories define the audience-members only by their epistemological lack, Kester disagrees with Bishop's use of "aesthetic quality" to structure a judgement of socially engaged art, and instead proposes an idea of the socially engaged art practice "in terms of open-ness, of listening and willingness to accept dependence and intersubjective vulnerability".[75] The idea is to cross boundaries of expertise and engage in sustained, durational and emancipatory discursive interactions with communities that are seen as "the product of contingent processes of identification".[76] However, as Miwon Kwon states, "when he categorises two different types of community and two corresponding collaborative results, one good and one bad, he argues in effect against the 'authenticity' (thus legitimacy or effectiveness) of a community that might be activated as a result of a collaborative art process",[77] dismissing this way a renegotiation of the very concept of a community as such.

I agree with Kwon that Kester's dialogical aesthetics reduces difference "to the idea of multiplicity of uniquenesses, indicating simply the acknowledgement of the existence

72. Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art," 80.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid, 81.
75. Ibid.
76. Grant Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage*, (January 1995): 6.
77. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 147.

of diverse particularities within contemporary society",[78] therefore without stimulating actual change within the social. As political theorist Chantal Mouffe has shown, difference can also be thought of not as a series of categories that occasionally keep together a unifying ideal but as a complex relational process. As I will discuss later, in my practice I have tried to engage with participants in the actual production of the work, not only through physically situated conversations and exchange, but also via sharing experiences, feelings and other non-verbal interactions. Thinking both the social and the aesthetics of socially engaged art in ecosophical terms would probably mean to think both the social and the aesthetic transversally: as fluid categories that overlap and hybridise each other. In the ethico-aesthetic paradigm proposed by Guattari, all pre-established notions and apparent problematics should be re-negotiated, respecting them in their differences while making fruitful what is problematic about their differences, learning from feminist artists how a problem can be exploited and turned into a problem-idea. However, since "transversality is never given as 'already there', but it has to be always conquered through a pragmatics of existence",[79] it is not an easy task to define an *ecosophical* socially engaged art practice or the aesthetic paradigm of Guattari's theory. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud, whose reading of socially engaged art practice as relational aesthetics I discuss in the next chapter, attempts to do so, elaborating on Guattari's ecosophical paradigm to shed light on certain misunderstandings surrounding 1990s art practices.

2.4

The ethico-aesthetic paradigm in Nicolas Bourriaud's curatorial practice

Among the different examples they provide while investigating the relation between issues of ecosophy and contemporary aesthetics, Malcolm Miles, Patricia MacCormack and Colin Gardner refer to the work of one curator only, the former co-founder and co-director at Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and currently general director at MoCo Montpellier, Nicolas Bourriaud. In his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics,* Bourriaud coined the term *relational art* to identify "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space".[80] Specifically, he refers to the works of artists he usually works with such as Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Jorge Pardo, Carsten Höller, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija (fig. 2.7) among others.

78. Ibid.
79. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,* 125.
80. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland (1998; Paris: les presses du réel, 2002), 14.

Fig. 2.7: Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Free)*, 1992, Installation view at 303 Gallery. Photo credit: Rirkrit Tiravanija. Photo courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York.

Fig. 2.8: Surasi Kusolwong, *Golden Ghost (Reality Called, So I Woke Up)*, 2014. Twelve gold necklaces hidden in industrial thread, dimensions variable. Installation view at the 9th Taipei Biennial, *The Great Acceleration* curated by Nicolas Bourriaud. Photo courtesy of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

In Bourriaud's writing, artistic activity is described as a *game* whose rules and symbolic references evolve according to historical periods and social contexts. As such, the art experience has always been *relational*, characterised by its being a factor of sociability: "One of the virtual properties of the image is its power of *linkage* (in French: *reliance*) [...]. Art (practices stemming from painting and sculpture which come across in the form of an exhibition) turns out to be particularly suitable when it comes to expressing this hands-on civilisation, because it tightens the space of relations".[81] In today's overall Integrated World Capitalism, the work of art represents a social interstice, a term that Bourriaud borrows from Karl Marx's description of trading communities that elude capitalist systems of exchanges and structures of power. The work of art is the place where multiple sensitivities and subjectivities get together: it is political only for the fact that it creates new relations. As any other human activity based on exchange, art keeps together different moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences. Being "at once the object and subject of an ethic [...] Art is a state of encounter",[82] and the exhibition is an arena of exchange, for it creates "free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring daily life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us"[83]. References to Guattari's Integrated World Capitalism and its power "to determining the limits within which we think, feel and live"[84] are evident, as well as to Marcel Duchamp's theory of the "coefficient of art". This theory puts forth the idea of the creative act as not performed solely by the artist, but also by the spectator who brings the work in contact with the external world by interpreting it. Thus, the artist's creative act "cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane",[85] as the French artist explains. Specifically, in the chain of highly subjective reactions that accompany the production of the work, Duchamp identifies the "coefficient of art" as follows: "This gap which represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention; this difference between what he intended to realise and did realise, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work".[86]

Not only the work of art, according to Bourriaud, the exhibition as form has to be considered an arena of exchange and, as such, it "must be judged on the basis of aesthetic criteria, in other words, by analysing the coherence of its form and then the symbolic value of the 'world' it suggests to us, and of the image of human relations

81. Ibid, 15.
82. Ibid, 18.
83. Ibid, 16.
84. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 6.
85. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 139.
86. Ibid.

affected by it".[87] The aesthetics is here addressed in Guattari's terms rather than in Bishop's: "as a form of living matter rather than a category of thought". In Bourriaud's view, relational artists have relieved conviviality and community-based work of the matter of the definition of art, getting more closer to those hands-on strategies that Guattari was advocating already in the mid-80s:[88] "Social utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies"[89] through which artists promote new possibilities of togetherness, or new modalities of group-being. Critic Bishop argues that "relational art works insist upon use over-contemplation",[90] favouring open-endedness over aesthetic resolution "ultimately to enhance the status of the curator".[91] However, Bourriaud never states the preference for use over contemplation, favouring instead a balanced approach to these two polarities, in a methodological move that he calls "operative realism": a "weavering between contemplation and use",[92] between the utilitarian function of the objects the artists use to create a temporary community and the aesthetic function of the work. Furthermore, in this context, the exhibition as an arena of emotional and material exchanges "construct models of sociability suitable for producing human relations",[93] democratising (at least, in its intentions) the art production process by rendering forms and information fluid and accessible, open and even malleable (fig. 2.8). Unlike conceptual and feminist artists of the 1970s and 1980s whose work I have analysed in the first section of this chapter, the French curator states that "in our post-industrial societies, the most-pressing thing is no longer the emancipation of individuals, but the freeing-up of inter-human communications, the dimensional emancipation of existence".[94] In his analysis of the art historical and aesthetic implications of Guattari's ecosophy, Bourriaud is well aware that "the ecosophic fact consists in an ethical-cum-political articulation between the environment, the social, and the subjectivity. It is a question of re-forming a lost political territory".[95] However, I disagree with his understanding of curatorial practice because in his approach the role that a curator seems to play is that of the institutional *caretaker* that knows little of what is really going on beyond the museum's walls and neglects the link between social, mental and environmental justice.

87. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 17-18.
88. Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1984): "Just as I think it is illusory to aim at a step-by-step transformation of society, so I think that microscopic attempts, of the community and neighbourhood committee type, the organisation of day-nurseries in the faculty, and the like, play an absolutely crucial role".
89. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 31.
90. Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 55.
91. Ibid, 52.
92. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 35.
93. Ibid, 70.
94. Ibid, 60.
95. Ibid, 101.

One of the first critiques moved against relational art pointed to the fact that it appears to be dangerously restricted to the institutional realm of galleries and art centres. British critic Claire Bishop stresses this argument further by writing that although relational art arises as a reaction to today's dominant economic model of globalised capitalism, "it does not reflexively question this logic, but merely reproduces it".[96] It does not call the quality of the relationships into question but maintains pre-established roles and boundaries between who does what. Even if the involvement of the audience is the main focus, it favours an elitist modelling of forms of sociability, creating the illusion of an experience that is created collectively, whilst only allowing temporary access to an already formed (and quite hierarchical) community: that of the art institution. If "aesthetics must above all go hand in hand with societal change, and inflect them",[97] it might be worth questioning who are the subjects involved in this process, and whether a change in hierarchies and roles may lead to a change in rules of the (artistic) game. I agree with critic Bishop that "we must judge the relations that are produced by relational artwork",[98] as long as we do this after a complete re-negotiation of the aesthetical references that have guided art's productions and interpretations until now, following Lacy's and Gablik's arguments for a new paradigmatic shift. I agree with Bishop that Bourriaud's relational art is predicated upon a falsely harmonious sense of community, since "they [relational art works] are addressed to a community of viewing subjects with *something in common*".[99]

Surely, the highly institutionalised settings, production processes and distribution strategies of the projects Bourriaud focuses on do not really prompt the *new modalities of group-being* that were at the core of Guattari's ecosophical investigation. Although the use and influence of Guattari's terminology and concepts are clear, it is not clear why an ecosophy-driven reflection on the political value of forms should not also lead to the reformulation of all the relations that operate inside the arena of exchange: such as the ones the curator has with the management of the institutions, the artists, the participants, the producers and the sponsors. However, unlike Bishop, I do not think that there is a need to establish new hierarchies between ethics and aesthetics and list new criteria to judge these projects (and their supposed "authors"), for the tension between ethics and aesthetics should always be kept tight in order for ecosophy to work as a social force. This is also why I believe that ecosophy in practice should take the form of a questioning open-endedness that inevitably leads to a reformulation of all the relationships informing the art experience, as well as to

96. Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 58.
97. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 104.
98. Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 64.
99. Ibid, 65.

a radical reformulation of the role of the curator. Bourriaud's relational approach to the exhibition seems to respond to Guattari's ecosophical assumptions only partially, inasmuch as it forgets to consider that Guattari calls for an ethico-aesthetic approach to offset the hegemony of the rationalist approach and of the scientific superego, not only in psychotherapy and in society, but also in cultural practice. In the sixth chapter of *Chaosmosis*, titled "The New Aesthetic Paradigm", Guattari writes:

> "The new aesthetic paradigm has ethico-political implications because to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created, inflection of the state of things, bifurcation beyond pre-established schemas, once again taking into account the fate of alterity in its extreme modalities. But this ethical choice no longer emanates from a transcendental enunciation, a code of law or a unique and all-powerful god."[100]

Indeed, connecting itself to a range of expressive and practical ethical registers connected with social life and the environment in general, Bourriaud's relational art "is modelled on the difference that forms it itself, on the principle of otherness".[101] However, it fails in investigating *who these others are*. Revolving around itself, my ecosophical articulation of socially engaged practice renegotiates roles, functions and meanings not only between an "ideal" public and the work of the artists as shown by the curator, but also within the institution itself and among all the subjects involved in the process of making. I experienced in my own practice the need for an ecosophical approach to be more self-critical than simply reflective,[102] more commu-

100. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm,* 98.
101. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 91.
102. Combining reflexivity with struggles of social emancipation is the essential feature of the Critical Theory. This is a term that is usually defined institutionally, linked to the denotation of a group of theorists that are connected to the Institute of Social Research and/or the Philosophy Department in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, widely known as the "Frankfurt School". Key figures of this school are Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse (the so-called first generation), Jürgen Habermas and Richard Bernstein (the second generation), and more recently Axel Honneth and Raymond Geuss (the third generation). Although there are fundamental substantive and methodological differences among members of Frankfurt School, differences that run deeper among these theorists than with other thinkers directly not connected to the Frankfurt School, such as Michel Foucault, it is still possible to identify Critical Theory, following Professor Fabian Freyenhagen, as "an umbrella term to denote those theorists that take up the task described by Marx as the self-clarification of the age struggles and wishes of age. As such, two elements are crucial for it: 1) a connection to social and political struggles of emancipation; and 2) self-reflexivity". See Fabian Freyenhagen, *Critical Theory: Self-reflexive Theorising and Struggles for Emancipation*, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics,* Sept. 2008: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.195. Nevertheless, as it will become much clearer in the next chapter, my idea of criticality is different from that proposed by the Critical Theory model, inasmuch I do not question something that already exists but that which continuously changes, adapting to new existential territories, and this is why I prefer "self-criticality" to "self-reflexivity". As Bruno Latour has pointed out, the problem with Critical Theory is that it has dangerously limited itself by replacing the object of study of traditional sociology, the social, by another matter made of social relations, this way failing to trace new connections or to redesign new assemblages: "In situations where innovations proliferate, where group boundaries are uncertain, when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates, [...] it is no longer enough to limit the actors to the role of informers offering cases of some well-known types. You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of", as well as of what a socially engaged practice inspired by issues of ecology is or should be. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 11.

nity-based rather than service-based, because such an approach does not consider the art experience as a moment of personal entertainment, but as a multi-authored investigation of today's world. Weaving a relational project through the fabrics of always different social and institutional contexts influences not only the way a work is perceived and lived by the participants but also by the dynamics that occur between all the people involved in its production. For Bourriaud, the "artist/curator pairing, which is an intrinsic part of the institution, is just the literal aspect of inter-human relations likely to define an artistic production".[103] Such an irredeemable dualism still informs Bourriaud's understanding of the term ecology. In his introduction to his latest publication, titled *Inclusions. Aesthetics of the Capitalocene*, Bourriaud talks about humans as separated from nature: the latter does not produce either garbage or artworks, only humans do. A Guattarian vision of the world would talk about both artworks and garbage as part of what humans keep differentiating from them as "nature". Furthermore, for the French curator, the climate crisis that is typical of our contemporary geological epoch called Anthropocene "goes hand in hand"[104] with a planetary cultural crisis: an ecosophical articulation of the problem will address the two crises as part of a more complex network of relations that also involve a critical reflection on the mental conditions that generated contemporary social structures and environmental crises.

2.5

Curating in the context of dynamic, unbalanced relations: the making of *Practices of Sustainability*

While I was digging into Nicolas Bourriaud's publications and curatorial projects, Dutch artist Sabine Bolk and I decided to re-create the same kind of site-specific works she had realised in Cambridge during the 2014 Cambridge Sustainability Residency and re-stage the same bartered collection of material, this time in the crowded urban environment of London. The collaborative project that we eventually organised was titled *Practices of Sustainability* and took place on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 July 2014. *Practices of Sustainability* consisted of two different performances: *Étude #1* and *Étude #2*. For the first performance we decided to realise a series of sculptures out of discarded materials occupying one of the pedestrian areas of the Blackfriars Bridge. Conceived more as an invitation to non-human species to re-claim a corner of Victoria Park in east London, for *Étude #2* we decided to realise organic sculptures that were meant to be eaten by the birds, dogs and other animals passing by. Both

103. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* 87.
104. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Inclusions: Aesthetics of the Capitalocene*, trans. by Denyse Beaulieu (London: Sternberg Press, 2021), 7.

projects were realised through the staging of a conversation by the artist and myself with the residents of the selected areas of intervention, as we bartered for the materials needed to make Bolk's performative sculptures and invited the contributors to share their point of views and feelings on the liveability of their neighbourhood. We used this moment of interested negotiation with the disinterested invitation to show up on the day of the performance, from 10am to 4pm and participate in the public discussion and presentation of the works. As we had in Cambridge a few months earlier, the artist and I worked together in order to establish a genuine relationship with the community our project was meant for, involving them directly in the production and trying to collect as many stories and as much information as possible from them. Sabine Bolk's works were made from both various man-made and organic materials (such as bottle cups, plastic forks, bean seeds and chickpeas) that are usually considered to be of little or no value at all, but that were reassembled by the artist to stimulate a sensuous understanding of different relations with these objects and with the environment in general. The idea was to create an experience that could allow both conscious and unconscious participants to experience through the simple action of walking the impact human moves have on others and on the world, and to take that experience as a fruitful opportunity for a collective discussion upon the shared οἶκος. This is why I define Bolk's sculptures as "performative": because they were meant to involve casual participants into a reflection on what an ordinary gesture such as walking might cause on others. Furthermore, the destruction of the sculptures for poor attention or indifference from the participants could easily recall humans' perennial assault on nature.

Practices of Sustainability was really important for the development of this thesis because it allowed me to investigate the extent to which different environments influence people's reactions to the request of materials for an art project (the project was, in fact, taking place in a touristic, chaotic and highly privatised central space of the City of London, and in a residential, slow paced corner of east London). Moreover, I was interested in exploring what my role as a curator was in relation to the person actually making the sculptures, the people involved in the process as well as those who simply happened to be there. My curatorial activity, both in the conception and in the development of the project, aimed at exploring how this open-ended process of production realised through a bartered collection of materials and of people's understanding of sustainability could eventually lead to a redefinition of the public-artist-curator relationship and to a redefinition of curatorial practice itself. Since it was mainly focused on highlighting people's relation with the environment (conceived as social environment in *Étude #1,* and as natural environment in *Étude #2),*

Figs. 2.9 and 2.10: Sabine Bolk bartering materials and stories for *Practices of Sustainability,* London, 2014. Photos by Vanessa Saraceno.

in the title Sabine and I decided to make it clear that the project was an investigation into everyday practices of sustainability, although from my perspective the project I aimed at developing a sensuous, situated understanding of how to produce a socially engaged art project through an ecosophical articulation.

All materials and promotional activities related to *Practices of Sustainability* have been conceived and realised following environmentally-friendly methods of production. Flyers and invitations had been printed using FSC-certified paper, that is not merely recycled paper but paper sourced in an environmentally-friendly, socially responsible and economically viable manner. The works were made with objects destined to become garbage (like beer cups or plastic knives) or to be consumed (like rice or beans). To get to London from Amsterdam, Sabine preferred the train to the plane, and for our own wanderings through the city to make the performance happen, we used buses and bicycles. Starting one week before the scheduled days for the performances, Sabine and I wandered through both of the selected neighbourhoods of London, knocking at people's doors (figs. 2.9 and 2.10), walking in pubs and restaurants and even stopping passers-by in the streets, in order to establish a dialogue on the *use* they make of their own environment, how they felt living in that particular corner of a giant city as London and whether they had ever experienced a sense of community with their neighbours. Of course, we made it clear that our questions were part of an art project: we were literally asking for their help to create the project, both through the donation of any discarded, artificial or organic material, and by sharing personal opinions and feelings to strangers. Since it was presented as an art research project, many people were willing to participate and give a contribution to it. Not many of them wanted to discuss the research in itself, what we mean by *sustainability* and so forth, but many questioned why we were making it, and felt neither offended nor frightened in front of this invasive process of production.

This curatorial strategy also allowed us to extend the time of the project beyond the official dates of the exhibition, as we could establish conversations about London and its liveability even before the official opening of the exhibition, eventually keeping these conversations going for the entire week of production. Nevertheless, in my point of view this was eventually not enough to make *Practices of Sustainability* an "ecosophical" project. The curatorial undertaking of this project is certainly *ecosophical*, inasmuch as it is based on a radical criticality that invests not only the form and content of the proposed project, but also the ethical quality of the relations the project creates, including the one between the artist and the curator or whoever is involved in the theoretical and practical production of the project. Sustainability was

not treated as an already given topic to be displayed: the project was built with the poor or rejected material inhabiting the everyday routine of the people living in that neighbourhood.

The same applies for the social, which was addressed slightly differently from Kester's notion of it as "the product of contingent processes of identification".[105] More than a product, it unfolded as the temporary manifestation of multiple environments (the touristic, the residential, the privatised public space and the anthropomorphised garden) and of processes of identification prompted in two ways: through the bartered collection of materials and experiences, and through the actual assemblage of Bolk's works. We questioned through art production whether a new community could arise by exploring collectively possible practices of sustainability for that specific neighbourhood. Nevertheless, while assembling the sculptures in the selected places, I soon realised that there was still a very different understanding of our roles in this collaboration between Bolk and myself, and that the ethical and aesthetical investigation of the relations people have with their everyday environment also had to be critically directed towards our own. Although Sabine Bolk's sculptures were meant to invade one of the two pedestrian sides of the bridge and a selected area of Victoria Park, to oblige people to alter or interrupt their route and to pay attention to what they do to their environment with their (unconscious) daily moves, the final installation covered the selected space only partially because of the lack of sufficient materials. I proposed Bolk to slightly change the intended installation: my idea was that we needed to offer participants as many opportunities to step over or stop in front of the works as possible, creating simpler and more numerous sculptures. On the other hand, Bolk wanted to keep her sculptures as detailed as possible, even if this meant realising fewer sculptures than expected. She thought that a few sculptures could be enough to stop passers-by and force them to pay attention to what was going on along their daily route. The temporary state and precariousness of this project – that was conceived and produced too quickly – did not allow the expected reaction from the participants to take place, for the sculptures were too small and placed in too crowded environments. With these projects, we had hoped to stimulate that "sensory knowledge" Piper was talking about in her 1983-1985 "Notes on Funk" through a discussion of the ecology of people's every day lives: an open and informal conversation arising organically among the participants of Bolk's performance, as well as among those who have helped us in collecting the needed materials.

105. Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," 6.

Figs. 2.11 and 2.12: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #1*, Blackfriars Bridge, London, 2014. Photos by Vanessa Saraceno.

Figs. 2.13 and 2.14: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #2*, Victoria Park, London, 2014. Photos by Vanessa Saraceno.

As expected, the quietness of the natural environment and the calmness of leisure time as opposed to the productive/business time allowed for more insightful encounters to occur in Victoria Park than at Blackfriars Bridge. Nevertheless, very few people who participated in the production process attended the performances, supporting my idea that living in the same neighbourhood is certainly not enough to constitute "a community". The production processes and the ill-timed duration of the project, as well as the arguments between Sabine Bolk and myself about how to decide the best way to present the work made me realise how unsustainable the whole process of project making can be, no matter the intentions. In fact, it is not enough to share an interest in a particular *form* of art, because this may leave room for misunderstandings, unbalanced decisions and confused situations. Although I share Helguera's argument which reinforces the need for socially engaged art to still inhabit the "uncomfortable position" between art and other disciplines and realms, the aesthetical tension that we wanted to provoke in people's daily routine was not particularly effective, as only few people who donated materials for the project actually showed up the day of the presentation, and only few of the passers-by stopped and engaged in conversations with the rest of the group. Rethinking this project now, I regret not having thought and performed a transversal approach in my own collaboration with Sabine Bolk, and not only towards the ideal public we were trying to reach with this project. Following Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, I should have rejected the idea that there is already a hierarchy and system of rule following whereby the artist does certain things, while the curator does others. Instead, I wanted to promote a different sensitivity by thinking and practicing a collaboration as a moment of the negotiation of roles and reformulation of the modalities of being and doing together: starting from *us*, the cultural and artistic practitioners. At the time I finished my project with Sabine Bolk, I started investigating how more contemporary approaches to curatorship in the expanded field of socially engaged art could nurture my own understanding of ecosophy in curatorial practice. In particular, I examined the curatorial work of Mary Jane Jacob in *Culture in Action* (1993), Paul O'Neill in *Coalesce* (2006), Nato Thompson in *Living as Form* (2011), and the critical writings of Maria Lind, for all these curators and curatorial researches have helped me define how to approach curatorial practice from an ecosophical sensitivity, especially in the light of the issues arisen during my collaboration on *Practices of Sustainability.*

2.6

Ecosophical principles in contemporary curatorial practices: Mary Jane Jacobs, Paul O'Neill and Nato Thompson

Five years before Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* was published, curator Mary Jane Jacob worked on a project called *Culture in Action*, a scattered-site exhibition event which took place in Chicago over a period of approximately one hundred days between May and September 1993. For this project which could be too simplistically described as a public art programme, the curator worked with eight artist-led groups to create an urban platform where "to research, develop and implement innovative projects that reimagined art as an instrument for new modes of social participation and community engagement".[106] Originally conceived in 1991 for the Spoleto Festival USA, also curated by Jacob, the exhibition cost around $800.000 and was mainly sponsored by the non-profit organisation Sculpture Chicago (in turn financially supported by the US National Endowment for the Arts). At a time when "social art practice wasn't even a term",[107] Jacob decided to question, in the role of museum curator, the selection panel format which characterised the public commission of new works of art, as well as the lack of "real public-ness": a public defined by location and demographics, more than by needs, aspirations and desires. This is why she started to think and practice something different by asking "what else could art be if it was about the public *as well as* about art".[108] Decentralising the production of artistic projects and cultural knowledge, Jacob invited only artists whose practice and works proposed new ways for others to participate that did not mean merely executing a part according to a plan made by someone else, somewhere else. The eight projects it consisted of were dispersed throughout the cities at various locations and all structured as community collaborations developed by the invited artist with the help of the Sculpture Chicago's staff. Suzanne Lacy developed a project with the Coalition of Chicago Women, realising the first-ever public monuments dedicated to women in Chicago and organising an all-women ceremonial dinner, staged and filmed at the Hull-House; Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, the Westtown Vecinos Video and Street-Level Video realised a video installation and block party with the teenagers of the neighbourhood; Haha (Richard House, Wendy Jacob, Laurie Palmer and John Ploof) and the network of healthcare activists Flood built a hydroponic garden to grow food specifically for HIV/AIDS patients (fig. 2.15); Robert Peters and the "Mushroom Pickers, Ghosts, Frogs and other Others" realised a survey project via

106. Joshua Decter, "Culture in Action: Exhibition as Social Redistribution," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention: 'Culture in Action' 1993* (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 14.
107. Mary J. Jacob, "Chicago Is Culture in Action," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention: 'Culture in Action' 1993* (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 174.
108. Ibid, 175.

Fig. 2.15: Haha, *Flood*, 1993, storefront garden in which the surrounding community grew hydroponic vegetables for consumption by people with AIDS. Part of *Culture in Action*, curated by Mary Jane Jacob. Photo courtesy of Haha.

telephone; Mark Dion and the Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group made an urban ecological station with twelve local students; Simon Grennan, Christopher Sperandio and the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers' International Union of America Local No. 552114 presented a new candy bar, designed and produced with members of the candy-making union; Kate Ericson, Mel Ziegler and a group of residents of Ogden Courts Apartments produced and distributed paint charts with reflections on the lives of public housing residents throughout the city; finally, Daniel J. Martinez, VinZula Kara and the West Side Three-Point Marchers organised a multi-ethnic parade which began in a predominantly Mexican neighbourhood around Harrison Park and finished in a predominantly black neighbourhood near Garfield Park.

Although it might be argued that even in the more decentralised and open-ended projects there is always a plan and someone who set the rule of the game, it is important to note that, already in 1993, Jacob took many ethical and aesthetic risks to strategically re-embed art production into specific, urban communities. In my view, this represents a major change, inasmuch as it shows that curating socially engaged art projects inevitably leads to a redefinition of the practice itself: "When you work with other people, the end result cannot be predetermined. You can't have a set plan and just implement it. You don't know what will emerge that can be an opportunity and direct the next move. [...] You have to be open".[109] The promotional rhetoric of *Culture in Action* is the first example of a curatorial activity that, following people's demand for multiculturalism, openness and a new ecological sensitivity, ends up disrupting the boundaries between thinking and making, and between those who think and those who make: "Organic process is the process of life. I continually felt informed by the life of the city and it moved in and out of the foreground of the projects and the programme. [...] The long process that constituted *Culture in Action* was a lived experience led by ideas and intuitions, and guided by listening".[110] Listening here seems to be addressed as an enlightening process that was developed by a group of art professionals to specific, subaltern communities in Chicago. In Jacob's words: "Culture" referred to people, while action meant "being alive and having the right to participate in what affects your life".[111] As Kwon argues, the complex set of relations and negotiations set out by these projects and the curatorial framework did not challenge established stereotypes on minorities and politically subordinate groups in Chicago, and how these stereotypes still dangerously inform art production: "How does a group of people become identified as a community in an exhibition program, as a potential partner in a collaborative art project? Who identifies them

109. Ibid, 179.
110. Ibid, 180.
111. Ibid, 176.

as such?"[112] What is more: who sets the rules of the game? According to Jacob, "*Culture in Action* was something different from what that organisation [the non-profit Sculpture Chicago] had ever done, it meant creating new systems of working, bending the institution for the programme and the artists' needs. And because I raised nearly all the cash, the artists and I had a good deal of autonomy to use this as a laboratory".[113] However, such a freedom does not seem to be shared by the curator with the artists and communities involved. *Culture in Action*'s curatorial framework required the artists to work under rigid rules, one of these being the impossibility to work with any design professionals, "eliminating the role of architects and design professionals altogether from the public art process"[114] and dismissing the creative potential highlighted by Kester's artist-listener who does "accept dependence and intersubjective vulnerability"[115] as a necessary moment of situated collaborations. Furthermore, some statements released by the participating artists in the years following the project made clear that, as Kwon states, "the overall procedure, and goals of the projects, including their conceptualisation, most often precede the engagement with any such community".[116] Artist duo Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio, for example, said that the curator and the sponsoring organisation (here, Sculpture Chicago) gave them a list of six possible partners to work with and that eventually the final selection was made by Jacob. The curator states: "I came to understand how the process unfolds, and how curating can be a mindful practice of caring for process. This means keeping the aim of the programme in mind, and clarifying that aim as you go along".[117] Nevertheless, as Kwon reports, even in the case of Ericson and Ziegler's project the goals of the community collaboration "were established long before the engagement with any specific community group".[118] The mindfulness and freedom claimed by the curator in practice forced artists and people into specific ways of working, for "they directed, even insisted on, certain types of collaborations as an important means to establish the exhibition's identity".[119] Unlike Jacob's, my methodology in the making of *Practices of Sustainability* was meant to question who were the people we wanted to interact with, making this reflection part of the project through the bartered collection of materials and narratives. The open-ness of the project, the fact that it did not have any formal, pre-established identity eventually led me to a transversal understanding of the artist/curator relation, where "being open" may also mean being open "to accept dependence and vulnerability", as Kester's dialogical aesthetics points out, exposing your practice to the ethico-aesthetic perspectives of others, and even ending in manifestations that you did not want to occur the way they eventually did. In her critique of *Culture in Action*, Kwon asks: "If the identity of the community is produced through the making of the art work, does the artist's identity also depend on the same process?"[120] I would also ask the question: what about the curator's identity? Does it not depend on the same process?

112. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 117.
113. Jacob, "Chicago Is Culture in Action," 177.
114. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 104.
115. Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art," 80.
116. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 123.
117. Jacob, "Chicago Is Culture in Action," 180.
118. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 122.
119. Ibid, 124.

In the years that followed *Culture in Action*, the blooming of socially engaged practices and the resonance of relational aesthetics led many curators to reflect on what curating could mean in such an anti-hierarchical and heterogenic realm. For some, such as curator and Professor of Art and Society at Bard College in Berlin, Dorothea von Hantelmann, socially engaged art practices shed light on the fact that curatorial practice is in itself an authorial, creative practice, as much as an artistic one, because it cannot be thought or performed if not in terms of selection.[121] Nevertheless, what I had experienced in my curatorial activities in Wembley, Cambridge and London showed that the hybridity of socially engaged projects is first and foremost an opportunity to creatively re-think cultural practices in general, including curatorial practice which goes well beyond the act of *selection*: you can still curate whilst not selecting the final form the socially engaged project is going to have, as I did in *Practices of Sustainability*, or the artists to work with, as in the case of *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*. Some would argue that mine is not curatorial practice, and they may be right. This thesis arises from the attempts to understand how my ecosophical articulation challenges traditional notions and roles in contemporary curatorial production. Indeed, many contemporary curators have tried to oppose Hantelmann's academic way to address contemporary curating. The former director-at-large at Independent Curators International in New York and current director at MoMA PS1, Kate Fowle states:

> "By echoing Krauss we can readily establish that contemporary exhibitions are now not only dealing with the presentation of an expanded notion of art, but also extending their own spatial parameters into conceptual and virtual realms, as well as experimenting with the role of the public in the completion of a project. Furthermore, actively engaging with art and artists is central to practice which is an aspect of the role for which there are no guarantees of immediate or quantifiable outcomes. This requires a kind of creative 'maintenance' as opposed to Foucault's 'care', as it involves supporting the seeds of ideas, sustaining dialogues and forming and reforming opinions and continuously updating research."[122]

120. Ibid, 117.
121. D. von Hantelmann, *The Curatorial Paradigm,* in *The Exhibitionist N. 4* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 8.
122. Kate Fowle, "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of Curators Today," in *Cautionary Tales. Critical Curating,* ed. by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apexart, 2007), 17.

Between Hantelmann's idea of curating as an act of selection and Fowkes' idea of curating as a continuously updating research, I advocate for the latter. However, I argue that such continuously updating research should also inform and transform pre-established roles and relations with the process of production. My approach could be seen as similar to Action Research, a model of artistic and curatorial enquiry that teachers and educators undertake as researchers of their own practice and that consists of a critical commitment towards each aspect of practice in order to highlight those values and assumptions that are often overlooked in their normal academic or institutional activities. However, my understanding of ecosophical curation as an activist philosophy of the everyday is not as systematic and iterative as the Action Research method of inquiry, that often translates into a cyclical series of actions. The way I address Guattari's ecosophy in my practice proceeds as unorderly as the couch grass mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari to help the reader visualise the way rhizomatic thinking moves. It proceeds through ephemeral and improvised strategies of production and communication of the project, and through gestures that may unveil the mental barriers between the participants. Furthermore, it is strictly linked to the existential precarity of my own personal conditions of moving between different European cities in a few years just to make a living with socially engaged art projects. This is why I disagree with Claire Bishop's apparently neutral, but eventually more extremist definition of curating. She writes: "Although both curating and installation are concerned with selection, they function within different discursive spheres: curatorial selection is always an ethical negotiation of pre-existing authorships, rather than the artistic creation of meaning sui generis".[123] I do not believe that curatorial practice is only an ethical negotiation or that an ethical negotiation cannot eventually lead to the artistic creation of new meanings. Guattari's ecosophy as an ethico-aesthetic articulation of practice shows that ethical negotiations, presupposing a politically and contextually situated encounter between two differences, always lead to the creative opening of new ways of seeing and perceiving the world these differences share. The aesthetic potential of an investigative practice inspired by ecosophy is that it works with the material conditions of its existential life and critically turns a problem into a problem-idea, embracing the uncertainties of moving into an unknown territory, encountering new othernesses and transforming its own Self.

Among those curators who approached curating primarily as a critical, creative practice, Paul O'Neill's work is particularly relevant in the context of this ecosophy-driven research. Currently Artistic Director of Publics, a curatorial agency based in Helsinki, Paul O'Neill is not only a curator, but is also an artist and educator. His practice involves the making of collaborative projects, both in alternative and institutional settings, but also talks, conferences, lectures, educational projects and scholarly publications. Moved by the need to find "more heterogeneous approaches both to the issue around curating and the format these discussions take",[124] the Irish curator and educator decided to dig into the past of curatorial practice in order to identify the many different ways in which art works or art projects have been displayed, mediated and discussed as part of our contemporary curatorial histories. It is undeniable that curatorial practice is transforming itself, but for Paul O'Neill this transformation is a sign of an evolution which needs an historical analysis to be fully understood and moved forward. He argues: "As Curatorial practice continues to evolve, we need publications that respond critically to such an evolution".[125] To stress the criticality of contemporary cultural production (and curation), the curator moves away from first-person narratives, instead inviting a broad range of collaborators to offer their own approach to curating, as well as their point of view on the curatorial endeavours of others. Going from Lucy Lippard's anti-exclusive aesthetic to Jens Hoffman's curatorship as directing or Hans Ulrich Obrist's practice as catalyst, Paul O'Neill's research highlights that the idea of the curator as author implies that the curatorial act is the equivalent to artistic practice that can take the form of an exhibition, a collaborative project or a written reflection. In his point of view, today's curatorship might be conceived as a far-reaching category, encompassing various organisational forms, cooperative models, collaborative structures within contemporary cultural practice at large. Being first of all a *critical* research, it is a durational, transformative, speculative and always dialogical activity. The project that shows such an approach at its best is *Coalesce*, an "evolutionary exhibition project" initiated by O'Neill in 2003. Its final act was the exhibition *Coalesce: Happenstance,* held at SMART Project Space in Amsterdam from 10 January to 22 February 2009. *Coalesce: Happenstance* represented "the culmination of six years of research and development into the possibility of an exhibition as a form of co-production between multiple agencies".[126] The exhibition gathered all the artists Paul O'Neill has worked with in the previous editions of the project held in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Spain, such as Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson, Freee, General Idea, Clare Goodwin, Isabel Nolan and Mick Wilson among others. It is an exemplary case study for contemporary curating as it posited for the first time "exhibition-making as a form of artistic practice where thac-

123. Claire Bishop, "What Is a Curator?" *IDEA*, no. 26 (2007), https://idea.ro/revista/en/article/XOgqVhIAACIAfKxj/what-is-a-curator.

124. Paul O'Neill, "Paul O'Neill Interviewed by Annie Fletcher," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. by Paul O'Neill (2007; London: Open Editions/de Appel, 2011), 12.
125. Ibid, 12.
126. Paul O'Neill, "Coalesce: Happenstance," http://www.pauloneill.org.uk/curatorial/projects/coalesce-happenstance.

cumulation of actors and actions co-produce a single cohabited exhibition form".[127]

Artists were invited as co-producers of the project, producing new works in response to other artists' works and to the gallery space. With all the works overlapping with one another in the exhibition space and with the exhibition space used by the artists as their production space, *Coalesce* forced all the agents involved in the art experience to develop a sort of critical responsiveness and cooperative attitude. In fact, while the artists were assembling their works on site, they were also making sure to open spaces of dialogue with the public among the exhibited projects (fig. 2.16). Connection and negotiation – two key concepts in Guattari's ecosophical paradigm – are embedded both in the formal and conceptual frame of the project, for works of art, the art space and the public's ideas and sensitivity are called upon to inter-mingle at different spatio-temporalities. As the curator states in his renowned book *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*:

> "The curatorial is always dialogical, with the resultant exhibition form being a condensed moment of presentation exposing to varying degree the processes of cooperation, exchange, and agonistic co-production that have made it possible. At the heart of this project is a call for a re-think of the concept of aesthetic autonomy apparent in artistic praxis of recent years, one that moves away from autonomous material production as a notion of separation and/or subjective exceptionality and toward an understanding of autonomy as a sensibility toward the continued production of exchanges, commonalities, and collective transformations, beyond any prefixed idea of profession, field of specialization, or skill set."[128]

O'Neill's approach to curatorial practice refuses the "artist-curator-spectator triumvirate", opening up for more self-determined and interactive aesthetic experiences that, through discursive forms of practice, continuously overlap and intersect, hybridising each other indefinitely. Nevertheless, not all socially engaged artistic practices easily adapt to such a hybrid and open-ended curatorial structure, as my own experience in *Practices of Sustainability* shows. Going against the curator/artist division also means refusing the romantic idea that artistic activity has greater value than the curatorial. Yet, many artists find this way of working extremely intruding, for the curator –who is not an artist – still pretends to act as one, eventually celebrating himself as the ultimate, romantic genius. Simultaneous and very similar to Paul O'Neill's curatorial experiment with the Coalesce exhibition is Gavin Wade's curatorial project at Eastside Projects in Birmingham. Eastside Projects is an artist-run, free public space with galleries and studios hosting a high-profile programme of exhibitions and events.

127. Ibid.
128. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)* (2012; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 95.

Fig. 2.16: *Coalesce: Happenstance* (installation detail), curated by Paul O'Neill, SMART Project Space, Amsterdam, 2009. Photo by Paul O'Neill.

Founded in 2008 and since then led by artist-curator Gavin Wade, the space is staffed entirely by practicing artists and designers, such as Simon Bloor, Tom Bloor, Céline Condorelli, Ruth Claxton and James Langdon who conceived the project along with Wade. It commissions, produces and presents innovative and experimental art projects while investigating ways in which art may be useful as part of society. Its mission reads: "Eastside Projects is an evolving process. We believe in working collaboratively towards change and do so to support the cultural growth of Birmingham. Our programming aims to build active communities of interest who contribute and co-produce, rather than simply consume culture. [...] We do not make art for the public, we are the public that makes art".[129] Although I have admired Wade's work at Eastside Projects, the theoretical and practical manifestations of this project leaves the difference between the so-called art world and the public outside of it untouched: only art experts may run this space, actively contributing to the decision-making processes related to the space's organisation and overall identity. The "we" that is defined as "the public that makes art" is given for granted, and not questioned in ethico-aesthetic terms: as a problem concerning relations and the mental subjectivation of such relations. Socially engaged art practice is made *of* and *by* different forms of interactions, and curating socially engaged art projects inevitably implies constant negotiations of forms, meanings, functions and roles.[130] The curatorial cannot be limited to the organisational in such a context. However, if it is neither artistic nor organisational, then what makes curating different from other creative practices? Surely, defining the curator as a creative agent as O'Neill does helps make sense of the disorderliness of socially engaged art practice, inasmuch as this definition also implies an understanding of the art experience in general (being it an exhibition, a conference or a performance) as a search for a critical response to the contemporary world, rather than the final outcome of an already exhausted research.[131] He rightfully favours an "understanding of autonomy as a sensibility toward the continued production of exchanges, commonalities, and collective transformations, beyond any prefixed idea of profession", but eventually expand the possibilities of the curators to such an extent that these are the only ones allowed to literally be everywhere in the production process: from the conceptualisation to the production and communication, supervising day-to-day management and maintenance as well as producing books and liaising with media, press and funding bodies. I would argue that this approach underestimates the creative potential of an ethical reflection on the roles and expectations that run through the production process of socially engaged art projects addressing ecology through the lens of Guattari's ecosophy.

A very different approach to socially engaged art practice is that of the American curator Nato Thompson. According to Thompson, socially engaged art is not a movement; rather, the term refers to a variety of cultural practices that indicate a new social order. Furthermore, socially engaged art practice is not limited to the contemporary art world but includes all those cultural phenomena that nurture the social fabric of a specific urban context. Instead of looking for interstitial spaces of temporary encounters, as does Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics,* Thompson's practice and research invites reflection on social ecosystems of affinities going well beyond the institutionalised realm of contemporary art.[132] In my practice, I too prefer ephemeral and micro-interventions in non-institutional spaces, accepting Guattari's invitation to confront capitalism's effects in the domain of mental ecology in everyday life, by organising new microsocial practices and new solidarities "for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level".[133] Most of the curatorial activities I co-organised as part of this research have been held in public spaces, such as parks or streets, or abandoned buildings managed by local associations. The artists and I preferred such locations because our projects were not meant to display issues of ecology, but to expand the negotiation of the social,

129. Gavin Wade, "Mission," Eastside Projects, www.eastsideprojects.org/about.

130. In a previously mentioned paper titled *Socially Engaged Contemporary Art: Tactical and Strategical Manifestations*, curator Nato Thompson distinguishes socially engaged projects that promote sustained place-based work or engaged institutions such as Wade's *Eastside Projects* from those that "do not participate in long-term civic endeavors nor do their projects necessarily provide metrics for success", prompting instead actions, projects and performances that are ephemeral, contingent and short-term. In Thompson's view, constituting small, open-ended intersections in the larger circuit of dialogue and media, such tactical manifestations of socially engaged art "encourage(s) conversation and ultimately confuse(s) the narrative surrounding a certain political issue". He writes: "Often, I believe social justice organisations neither respect nor quite understand this important element at work in contemporary political art. They instead want to adhere to an agreed-upon political language. Raising questions and confusing audiences tends to go against the means/ends logic that is the *modus operandi* of much activism". I agree with Thompson, and always preferred micro-interventions, to highly-structured organisational projects, believing that an ecosophical – ethico-aesthetical, critical, anti-hierarchical and anti-capitalist approach- best works in projects that challenge institutional roles, structures and systems of relations, tactically promoting, as Guattari proposes "a very different relationship to power". Furthermore, the micro-interventions I organised as part of this thesis are certainly more sustainable and less controlled by market-friendly logics and sponsors' expectations.
Thompson, "Socially Engaged Contemporary Art: Tactical and Strategic Manifestations", 10: https://animatingdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/NThompson%20Trend%20Paper.pdf.

131. Paul O'Neill argues that this issue has to do with a terminological deficiency and with our inability to think both art and curating differently from the past:
> "How can we even begin to establish different models and standards of curating – and just as importantly the historical and cultural terms of reference that have produced them – when we are still reliant on a reductive vocabulary surrounding the work of art and the changing roles of artist/curator? [...] As long as the discussion around contemporary art curating is constrained by its focus on the exhibition format as the main work of the curator, talk of differentiating artist/curator roles will continue to dominate the narrow field of critical inquiry from the inside".

Paul O'Neill, "I Am a Curator," *Art Monthly*, no. 275 (April 2004): 10.

132. In an interview with critic Claire Bishop, Thompson states: "I often found much of what constituted relational art to be lacking any political teeth. In my mind, it could easily be described as social versions of minimalist sculpture – aesthetically tight, art historically referential, poetic, politically conservative, and market friendly".
Nato Thompson, "Experimental Activism. Claire Bishop interviews Nato Thompson," interview by Claire Bishop, in *Manifesta Journal – The Author as Producer* no. 10 (2010): 43.

133. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 45.

mental and environmental lenses through which ecology can be addressed well beyond the contemporary art audience of institutional spaces. Furthermore, although institutional support can bring stable finance, I have demonstrated while analysing Jacob's curatorial strategy for *Culture in Action*, that the fact the curator nearly raised all the $800.000 for the eight projects of *Culture in Action* implied, as Miwon Kwon observed, that the curator granted herself and the sponsoring organisation (Sculpture Chicago) the right to "function as middlemen in facilitating the partnership (between artists and local communities). The artists can either find themselves assigned to a certain community group by the sponsoring agency or be given a list of groups to choose from".[134] On the other hand, in my ecosophical articulation of socially engaged practice, I always tried to bypass such logic of control and to favour instead more sustainable and organic ways of producing the project, such as bartering or recycling, and to come up with strategies that would also address the financial sustainability of the project as a shared responsibility. In a similar way, Nato Thompson's curatorial approach to socially engaged art practices highlights the role that affects play in people's relation with the (social, mental and environmental) world. He states: "As art enters life, one must consider the powerful role that affect plays in the production of meaning. The concept of affect derives from the understanding that how things make one feel is substantively different from how things make one think".[135]

Thompson's curatorial strategy favours the opening up of sites of transversality, constituted through alliance and exchange: sites that require and produce affective, political or intellectual change. In particular, Nato Thompson's *Living as a Form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* is an international project focusing on the abundance of art forms that have emerged recently and that use aesthetics to effect social dynamics. It is a project that takes multiple forms: it is an on-going digital archive of over 350 projects, a series of conferences and a book which grew out of an exhibition of the same name organised by Creative Time and Independent Curators International in the historic Essex Street Market in New York from 24 September to 16 October 2011. At the core of this multifaceted project there is the firm intention of Nato Thompson and all the staff at Creative Time not to offer a singular critical language for evaluating socially engaged art. Instead, they offer as many examples as possible of socially engaged art projects, inviting also external collaborators to present what is happening in order to raise compelling questions about the contemporary living and contemporary art forms. The *Living as Form* exhibition was organised by more than twenty-five curators, working under Creative Time's chief Thompson, and included documents

134. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 122-123.
135. Nato Thompson, "Living as Form," in *Living as a Form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (2012; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017), 32.

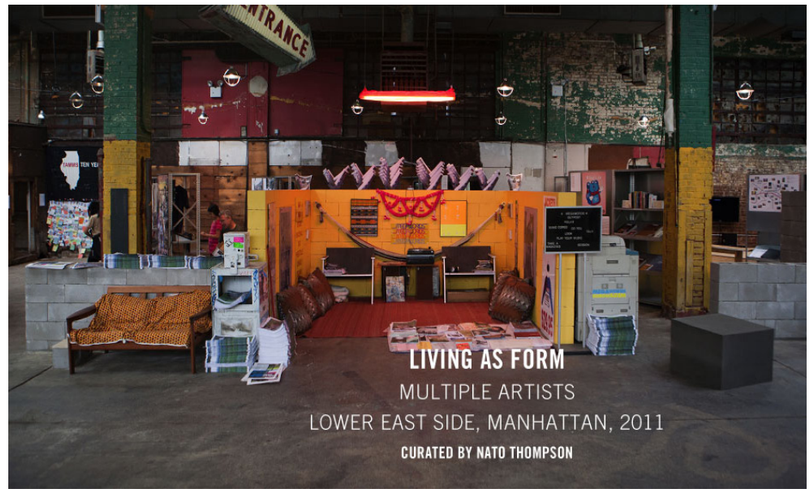


Fig. 2.17: *Living as Form*, e-flyer published on Creative Time website: https://creativetime.org/projects/living-as-form/.

of more than 100 artists' projects and nine site-specific, newly commissioned projects located throughout the area of Essex Street Market in New York.

The exhibition space, designed by architecture collective Common Room and portrayed in the exhibition's official flyer (fig. 2.17), was divided into different sections and mostly housed documentation of past projects of socially engaged organisations or endeavours around the globe. It overlooked most of Nicolas Bourriaud's projects to favour less familiar, geographically diverse instances of socially engaged art practices. In fact, according to its "mastermind"[136] Thompson, *Living as Form* is an anti-representational format, featuring both activist and non-artistic initiatives (such as Alternate Roots, Minerva Cuevas and WikiLeaks), and well-known artists (such as Francis Alÿs, Tania Bruguera and Jeremy Deller). As Nato Thompson states, "these are projects that are deeply rooted in community relations and motivated by a commitment to political change. They also gain community traction by committing to an idea over time".[137] *Living as Form* mobilised art, theory, media and politics, to pose a number of questions. At the heart of *Living as Form* was the desire to transform the conditions of everyday life, and this desire for the curator was more important than to make aesthetically complex or perfect artworks. This is why Nato Thompson's curatorial activity favours projects that allow a prolonged engagement with the physical world. Thompson's goal is "to do things that matter to people, relevant things [...]. That's exactly what many art projects try to do: to find a way into that overly filled head by coming up with strategies that don't fit another category. And this, I guess, is the technique for radical subjectivity. What is radical subjectivity? It's renegotiating one's condition or relationship to power in a myriad of forms, not just class or capital, but gender, race, and space".[138] Nevertheless, in his review of the exhibition published on Frieze in 2012, curator Jens Hoffmann complained that, with most of this documentation being displayed on shelves, the exhibition was "giving the audience the impression of being in a library rather than an exhibition space. As a result, *Living as Form* seemed rather distant from the artists' original intentions, which put a huge emphasis on site-specificity and temporality as well as on direct relationships with communities, participants and audiences. There was not as much 'living' in *Living as*

136. Jens Hoffmann, "Living as Form," review of *Living as Form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011,* by Nato Thomspon in Frieze no. 144 (January 2012), https://www.frieze.com/article/living-form.
This is the expression used by Jens Hoffmann in his review of *Living as Form*. I decided to keep it because I think the use of such a patriarchal and authoritative term in the context of a socially engaged practice inspired by Guattari's ecosophic paradigm is particularly relevant and meaningful.
137. Thompson, "Living as Form," 32.
138. Sylvie Fortin, "Space, Political Action, and the Production of Radicalized Subjectivity: A Conversation with Nato Thompson", in *Artists Reclaim the Commons: New Works / New Territories / New Publics*, ed. by Glenn Harper and Twylene Moyer (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), 211.

Form as one would have hoped; documents felt like ghosts of their former selves".[139] Additionally, and more importantly in the context of this research, according to Hoffman the open-ended, transversal nature of the overall *Living as Form* project did not allow a proper communication of what socially engaged art does or is, presenting too many and diverse approaches to practice and eventually resulting in a chaotic and disorientating experience. "Its intentionally and inherently open-ended nature, resisting traditional norms and forms of art-making, ironically becomes its weakness when its practitioners try to reach out to those they most want to be talking to. The dilemma, therefore, was the one of form – or, rather, the absence of form, since the impossibility of applying aesthetic criteria to social practice often makes it difficult to fully assess a project or coherently communicate it to a larger audience, beyond that of specialists."[140]

What Hoffmann forgets to consider in his analysis of *Living as Form* is his own approach to curating, which is very different from that of Thomspon. "The dilemma of form – or, rather, the absence of form" of socially engaged art practice is of no interest for the curator of *Living as Form*, for in his opinion "socially engaged art may, in fact, be a misnomer. Defying discursive boundaries, its very flexible nature reflects an interest in producing effects and affects in the world rather than focusing on the form itself".[141] Positioning aesthetics *within*, rather than *upon* the material conditions in which projects are produced, Nato Thompson's curatorial strategy goes beyond the "problematic dichotomies of the Enlightenment"[142] which seeks for a formulation of rules for an ideal form in works of art. In an interview published on *Manifesta Journal no. 10 – The Author as Producer* and titled *Experimental Activism,* Nato Thompson states:

> "We have to be careful about what categories we set up in gauging the success or quality of a project. And we must also be aware of how conservative the desire for art can be when confined to the discourse itself. To assess what values we place on any aesthetic gesture. [...] This political and aesthetic desire, to make work that reaches a larger audience and participates on the terrain of the body politic, continues to interest me more than the desire to make beautiful art projects."[143]

139. Hoffmann, https://www.frieze.com/article/living-form.
140. Ibid.
141. Thompson, "Living as Form," 32.
142. See Sylvie Fortin, *Space, Political Action, and the Production of Radicalized Subjectivity: A Conversation with Nato Thompson*, 2013, p. 209: https://www.academia.edu/33308072/Space_Political_Action_and_the_Production_of_Radicalized_Subjectivity_A_Conversation_with_Nato_Thompson.
143. Thompson, "Experimental Activism. Claire Bishop interviews Nato Thompson", 39-40.

Using curatorial practice and research as a trigger to social activism while prompting new forms of social interaction, Nato Thompson develops a conscious, alternative approach to socially engaged art practice. It is not only a matter of supporting and preserving the heterogeneity of artistic, participatory practices (as it was for Mary Jane Jacob), or of digging through the heterogeneity of artistic and curatorial approaches to socially engaged art projects (that is the focus of Paul O'Neill's research). Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm informs Thompson's practice inasmuch as this critically challenges itself to think beyond the limited terrain of already established definitions and institutional roles,[144] as well as beyond the aesthetic/political dichotomy. Thompson states: "As much as I am suspicious of the poetic (because often it is in cahoots with capitalism and thus not truly poetic at all), I am also suspicious of the conveniently political (if it doesn't leave room for desire, seduction and confounding open-endedness)".[145] His approach to curating inspired me because it resists dominant conditions of the spectacle by embedding into practice the performativity of politics and knowledge. To judge the success of their own project, curators should question what kind and how many different interactions with the audience their pro-ject provoked (even via diverse forms of communication, such as website, magazines, etc); whether it shaped a specific, targeted community; and whether it made possible "a transformation in a viewer for understanding their world in a manner removed from the overarching subjugation of power".[146] Yet, a socially engaged project such as *Living as Form* is still communicated and given to public memory as a game whose rules have been established solely by the artists working under the creative direction of the au-thor-curator Thompson. Such a way of working which allows the curator to expand the reach of their activity indefinitely has specific influences on the relations among those involved in the process of production and may end up affecting the overall project. Artist Anton Vidokle asserts: "I felt that whereas artists' engagement with a range of social forms and practices not normally considered part of the vocabulary of art serves to open up the space of art and grant it increased agency, curatorial and institutional attempts to recontextualize their own activities as artistic – or generalize art into a form of cultural production – has the opposite effect: they shrink the space of art and reduce the agency of artists".[147] Although I do not think that linking art to

144. Thompson shares the same mistrust expressed by O'Neill towards the term "curator": "This term curator is really a mess of a term. So much of the arts language is borrowed from its museological history that it might be better to borrow different ones instead. I think of myself as a facilitator at times, an organiser in others and a director in others. it really depends on the project, the artists and the direction".
Gretchen Coombs, "Interview with Nato Thompson," *Art & The Public Sphere* 4 no. 1-2 (2015): 64.
145. Thompson, "Experimental Activism. Claire Bishop interviews Nato Thompson", 46.
146. Ibid, 48.
147. Anton Vidokle, "Art Without Artists?" *E-flux Journal* 16 (May 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/.

a form of cultural production might mean generalising it but only challenging new meanings the word "art" can have today, I share Vidokle's concern that such an invasive approach by curators might affect the "situated" negotiations at the core of an ecosophical articulation of socially engaged art practice.

2.7

Curating as thinking in terms of interconnections: the practice of Maria Lind

In its quest to open up sites of transversality and to produce effective, political and intellectual change, Nato Thompson's curatorial approach refuses to think aesthetics as opposed to ethics instead expanding the realm of the former through practice to include all the sensuous conditions of everyday life. *Ways of working* in cultural practices and *ways of doing* in everyday life converge and coalesce within a specific context. A point of reference in contemporary aesthetic theory, French philosopher Jacques Rancière has highlighted the inevitable convergence of ethics and aesthetics, since the sensuous has proven to be a political and ethical matter in itself. Rancière describes aesthetics in a way that includes both all that can be perceived through the senses, and all the relations "distributed" along with such perceptions: "If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetic can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Faucoult – as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience".[148] He identifies with the distribution of the sensible that "system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common".[149] Furthermore, he ties aesthetics with politics through the production and distribution of such sensibility that is simultaneously the same for all humans, and radically different in each human being.

> "The aesthetics regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations. The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself."[150]

148. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (2000; London: continuum, 2011), 13.
149. Ibid, 12.
150. Ibid, 23.

The influence of both Rancière and Guattari's thinking in contemporary curatorial practice and knowledge is as prominent as well known.[151] An approach to curating that is inspired by ecosophical principles and that also attempts to overcome "the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making" is Maria Lind. A leading figure in socially engaged art practice and theory, Lind reconsiders curating through the lens of the political and ethical agency that socially engaged art practice brings forth. The desire to work long-term and "do something significant in the moment, in palpable and/or symbolic ways"[152] leads her to think curating "as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, location, histories, and discourses in physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns and tensions".[153] Rather than being the product of a single agent, it is the result of a network of agents' labour. Going well beyond the technical modalities of curating, she identifies "in the curatorial" the way to embed into cultural practice the political aspects of contemporary life in specific, urban contexts. She defines her own as a more "context-sensitive rather than site-specific" approach: "In order to avoid placing too much emphasis on a physical location and a certain intellectual discourse, I try to be more context-sensitive than site-specific. This is less about an anxious adaptation of post-modern architecture to its surroundings, and more about a sensitivity to situations and a challenge to the status quo – being context-sensitive with a twist".[154]

With the term "curatorial", Lind identifies in practice "a more viral presence (than technical tasks of curating) consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, a presence that strives to create fiction and push new ideas".[155] Such differentiation allows the curator, writer and educator to develop a "constructive institutional critique" of socially engaged art practice that is based upon the "diagram" or model defined by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as follows: "The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. Thus when it constitutes points of creation or potentiality it does not stand outside history but is instead always 'prior to' history".[156] Becoming a typical *modus operandi* of art in the last two decades, the idea of a diagram or model explains the socially engaged art projects work ecosophically, "contextually remodelling a sensibility rather than adopting a critique as a readymade form".[157] Balancing curating with "highly practical" roles and focusing more on the effects of practice, the curatorial activity of Maria Lind unfolds through projects that aim at altering both social and mental spaces, producing hybrid forms of criticality meant to improve contemporary everyday life. While producing a thoughtful analysis of modes and meanings of collaboration in her writings and research,[158] Lind tries to embody an idea of the curator as an agent among others into practice. Nevertheless, this kind of approach, although expanding the possibilities of curatorial practice well beyond the selective paradigms of the past, still promotes an institutionalised and quite authorialised vision of the curator, that turns from being a guardian into being an enabler,[159] as if certain projects could not happen without the "viral presence" of the curator.

151. Claire Bishop states: "Guattari's *Chaosmosis* (1992) and Ranciere's *Malaise dans l'Esthetique* (2004) both offer a tripartite history of art's development, and both argue for a culminating phase in which art has an integral relation to other spheres: for Guattari the ethical, for Ranciere the political". Bishop, *Documents of Contemporary Art. Participation*, 13.
152. Maria Lind, "Returning on Bikes: Notes on Social Practice", in *Living as a Form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, 52.
153. Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 63.
154. Maria Lind, "Selected Nodes in a Network of Thoughts on Curating." in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 30.
155. Lind, "The Curatorial," 63.

156. Maria Lind, "Models of Criticality," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 95.
157. Ibid, 95-96.
158. She sheds light on contemporary art categories such as "collaboration", "cooperation" and "participation" by differentiating them as follows:
> "Collaboration becomes an umbrella term for diverse working methods that require more than one participants. 'Cooperation', on the other hand, emphasizes the notion of working together towards mutual benefit. Though its stress on solidarity, the word 'collective' offers an echo of working forms within a socialist system. 'Collective action' refers precisely to acting collectively, while 'interaction' can mean that several interact with each other, just as a single individual might interact with an apparatus by pressing a button, for example. 'Participation' is more associated with the creation of a context in which participants can take part in something that someone else has created, but where there are nevertheless opportunities to have an impact".

Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn", in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 185.
159. Specifically, Maria Lind writes: "I am keen to be an enabler, to create the best possible circumstances for the artists (in this context, artists' fees are something of a question of honor)." Lind, "Selected Nodes in a Network of Thoughts on Curating," 29.

2.8

Negotiating new mentalities, identities and roles: the experience of the e-collective

As I had experienced in my own practice, curators such as Jacob, O'Neill, Thompson and Lind are remarkable in their research for alternative, more ecosophy-inspired models of curating socially engaged art. Nevertheless, they rarely move outside the institutional realm of the white cube, even when directly involving activists, collectives and social organisations. The risk of negotiating a practice that knows no disciplinary boundaries and that refuses any hierarchy and division of labour can rarely occur when working within internationally-established art institutions, their structures and procedures. The curator still inevitably works on behalf of the institution, for she is the one who allows other practitioners to work in that specific project, with that commission (often dangerously sponsored by big corporations) and the

right amount of visibility. This is not what I was nor what I was doing: I was not the curator or representative of any institution, and I was neither the artistic director of a game with pre-established rules. The projects I have worked on were all made with discarded, donated ephemera, mainly self-produced and communicated via direct conversation with the neighbourhood residents rather than mediated through institutional channels. Undeniably, it is extremely different to embody an ethico-aesthetic approach to curating when working with artists you have not selected over a two-week residency programme and who have a very different understanding of the contemporary ecological crisis, as I found in Cambridge when I collaborated on the exhibition *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures.* Furthermore, when approached as a creative practice, curating is perceived as an intruding, and even authoritarian activity, with little room for constructive discussion on how the project could be presented and communicated, as I experienced in my collaboration with Sabine Bolk in *Practices of Sustainability.* As Professor Christensen-Scheel writes, "ecosophy can be considered based on the balance and mutuality between the different relations to the self, and the human community, as well as the larger environment, nature and animals".[160] Yet, is it really possible to balance curatorial practice with ethico-aesthetic negotiations between different subjects (myself, the artists, the public, the institutions) and on multiple levels (environmental, social and mental)? Guattari writes that "Transversality is a dimension that tries to overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality: it tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings".[161] However, it seemed almost impossible to keep following such an idea of transversality while performing the role of curator.

In addition, while I was researching ecosophy and the contemporary curatorial approaches discussed above, my own personal and professional life was split in two. In September 2014, I started working as Assistant to the Directors at T293, an art gallery located in Naples and Rome. Although a commercial enterprise, T293 is well-renowned for supporting emerging as well as established artists and collectives with a highly experimental approach to visual culture and exhibition making, such as Claire Fontaine, David Maljković, Martin Soto Climent and Tris Vonna-Michell among others. Working closely with directors Marco Altavilla and Paola Guadagnino in their curatorial research and communication activities, I had the opportunity to assist with the production of major solo and group exhibitions, not only in the gallery's spaces but also in more institutionalised and non-commercial settings such as

160. Boel Christensen-Scheel, "The Ethic-aesthetic Way of Wonders," *The Nordic Journal of Art and Research 1* no. 1 (2012): 23.
161. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 18.

Simon Denny's *Secret Power* for the New Zealand Pavilion at the 56th edition of La Biennale di Venezia, or Turner Prize winner Helen Marten installation at Tate Britain in 2016. Nevertheless, it soon became evident to me that an ecosophical inquiry through cultural practice cannot find any room in such "institutional" and inevitably market-friendly space as a commercial, privately-owned gallery. Furthermore, in order to move my PhD research further I was forced to travel from Rome to London, and time and money constraints made low-cost flights the only viable solution. The idealistic intentions of an ecosophical practice were leading me to a very unsustainable everyday life and cultural practice.

Refusing to choose between the professional possibilities of a challenging and instructive environment as T293, and the desire to move my research on an ethico-aesthetic approach to cultural practice further, in March 2015, along with a group of artists, writers and designers, I co-founded the e-collective. The collective consisted of fourteen practitioners from different parts of Europe and all eager to explore the ecological ambivalences and contradictions of today's social and political environment. Many of the e-collective artists and designers were the same practitioners I had worked with at the Cambridge Sustainability Residency in 2014. In the months following the residency we embarked together on a collective publication titled *MILK*. pictured in the following page (fig. 2.18), edited by Marina Velez and Sally Stenton and published by Anglia Ruskin University in conjunction with Cambridge Sustainability Residency. Each of the residents produced a written reflection on the residency programme, and how the specific context of Cambridge influenced their own research. Titled *Negotiating a Negotiation,* my contribution was meant to highlight the difficulties I had faced in the specific context of the residency, using ecology as a cultural force to produce new forms of sociality and a new approach to curatorial practice. We enjoyed collaborating on such a publication and wanted to extend the possibilities of our collaboration well beyond the frame of the residency programme, founding a collective whose research was unfolding both as an online and offline open collaboration. For instance, artist Marga Dijks created a leaf-shaped stamp that was meant to be shipped to each of the members of the collective to use in their own city in any way they liked (as a stamp or to create other temporary installations). However, the stamp eventually was lost and only some of the e-collective members could use it in their own city.

For almost a year, members of the e-collective met monthly on Skype, sharing ideas, artworks and projects on ecology. We also worked collectively on a website,

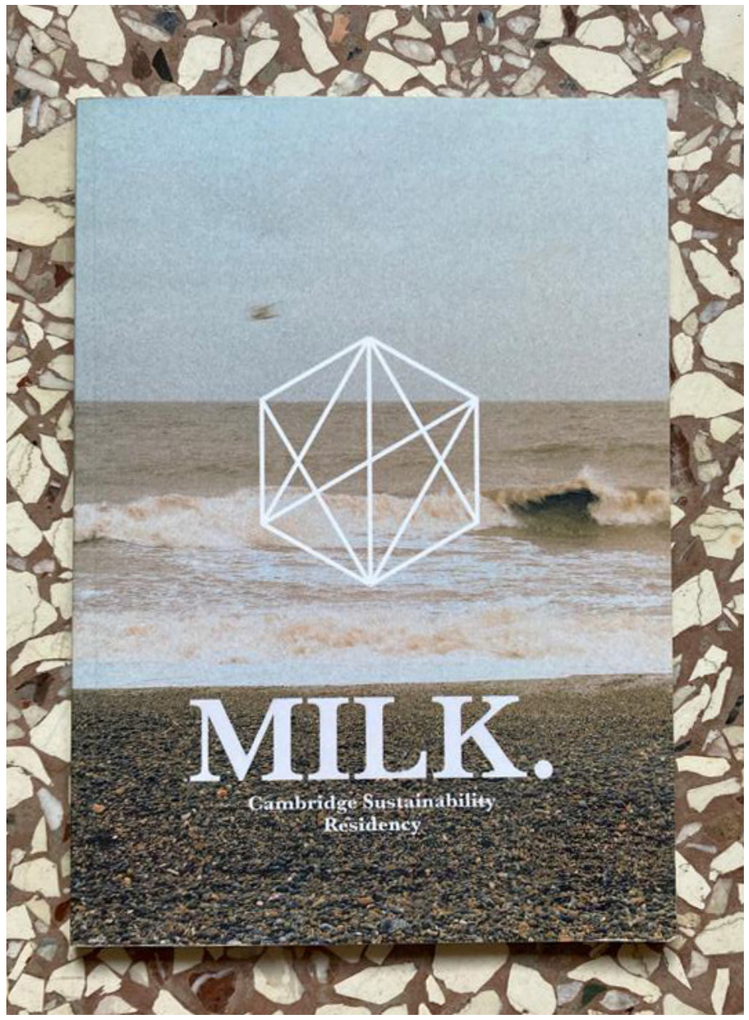


Fig. 2.18: *MILK.*, edited by Marina Velez and Sally Stenton. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

www-e-collective.eu to share publicly the reports of our monthly discussions (the eco-bulletins, as we called them), and where each of the participants could publish his or her own work. The idea of having both a communal and personal page on the website was my personal way to "curate" the project in an ecosophical way: as a"fine balance between many parts"[162] that is yet never achieved and keeps swinging between radical alterities. Nevertheless, working in the gallery five days a week, the sustained engagement with an open, ecosophical research I hoped the project could lead me to eventually crashed under the constraints of real life. The time I could offer to the project was not enough to ensure the constant maintenance of most of the pages of the website, and the funding proposals we worked on did not succeed in granting the collective the money needed to develop new projects. Despite my intentions and research assumptions, the e-collective turned out to be a very un-sustainable project, for me and for many other members. After almost one year of monthly meetings and several eco-bulletins produced, the e-collective meetings were progressively forgotten and the website fell into a state of neglect and abandonment.

After my experience in projects such as *Principles of Sustainability* and the e-collective, it became clear to me that embedding principles of ecosophy in practice inevitably leads to challenging the traditional division of labour within the process of making, pushing towards long-term, durational critical endeavours that, nevertheless, can hardly be sustained in real-life. How to make a living from a research project such as the e-collective that was inherently experimental, open-ended, fluid and informal? How to sustain the project, sustaining yourself and your practice without stalling before roles, functions and expectations? In June 2017, while reflecting on such questions and the possibilities to reconcile my professional life with my research interests as a cultural practitioner, I embarked on another professional venture as communication coordinator for the European itinerant biennial Manifesta. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this activity in a highly-structured foundation, producing an international, temporary biennial with long-term aspirations for the local context it inhabited, allowed me to complicate and move my research on the implications of ecosophy in socially engaged practice even further.

162. Boel Christensen-Scheel, "The Ethic-aesthetic Way of Wonders," 23.

Chapter 3
Ecosophy, cultural production and the impossible public

3.1
About Manifesta 12 Palermo

Manifesta is an international art foundation located in Amsterdam, which moves to a different European city every two years, investigating the relation between art and society through a wide range of activities, including publications, exhibitions, conferences, workshops and films. As outlined on the official website of the foundation, "Inherent to Manifesta's nomadic character is the desire to explore the psychological and geographical territory of Europe".[1] This is why the board of Manifesta and its director select the host candidate, both through a bidding process open to all European cities and through an evaluation of the social, political and geographical aspects of the proposed city. The 12th edition of the Manifesta biennial was held in Palermo from 16 June to 1 November 2018. Located at the crossroads of three continents, the Sicilian capital represented an ideal place to reflect on the contemporary environmental and migratory crises, and on the impact these have had on the construction of the European socio-political identity. Throughout its eleven editions, Manifesta has always presented itself as both a biennial of contemporary art and culture, and an instrument of social change, but its "parachute approach" – as defined by curator Paul O'Neill[2] – inherent to its nomadic nature makes it difficult for the project to leave a long-lasting legacy in the local context. This issue became particularly urgent in the context of Palermo, given the complex and multi-layered history of the city's social and physical environment. Palermo is the city of contradictions: it is a truly multicultural city, with Tamil and Nigerian communities living next to the long-time residents of historical neighbourhoods such as Ballarò and Kalsa; yet it is also sadly known as the location of some of the worst Mafia's massacres during the 1980s in Italy. The treasures hidden in its abandoned palazzos are still more astonishing when visualised alongside the mountain of rubbish left in the corners of the wrecked, ancient walls of the city centre, yet it is fiercely passionate about defending its cultural identity as well as all the cultures that converge in this corner of the Mediterranean. Its citizens protested loudly against the populist decision of Matteo Salvini, Italy's interior minister in 2018 and leader of the far-right League party, to close the country's ports to NGO rescue boats operating in the Mediterranean to save migrants at sea. In fact, the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando offered to open the city's port to all rescuers during Manifesta 12's official opening week. Since the beginning of Manifesta 12, the complexity of working in a contradictory and complex environment like Palermo prompted the director Hedwig Fijen to re-invent the biennial's working method. In order to fight

1. "About the biennial", Manifesta Foundation, https://manifesta.org/biennials/about-the-biennial/.
2. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)* (2012; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 80.

against what has been defined as a "parachute approach" inherent to the biennial model, a small team in the Production, Communication, Education and Business departments of the foundation started work in Palermo in 2016, two years before the official opening. Furthermore, an urban study was commissioned by Manifesta 12 from OMA, an international architecture firm based in Rotterdam, to analyse the threads of Palermo's multi-layered history and contemporary social reality and to offer a framework to the curatorial and artistic research of the biennial. The resulting book, *Palermo Atlas,* published by Humboldt Books, attempted to investigate the evolving character of the city from an interdisciplinary perspective, covering architecture, archaeology, anthropology and archival research as well as personal histories and media. For its realisation a small team of architects and designers spent months working in Palermo with local professionals, social workers, teachers, librarians and private citizens.

Along with the programme of exhibitions, performances and events by the four creative mediators that I will discuss in the next paragraph, the biennial consisted of four other cultural programmes: the already mentioned public programme of talks and workshops organised by the curatorial coordinator Chiara Cartuccia, and the film programme organised by the curatorial coordinator Maria Chiara Di Trapani; a collateral events programme, with more than eighty projects realised autonomously between international organisations and institutions and local associations and professionals; finally, the education and mediation programme, devised by Manifesta Head of Education and Learning, Yana Klichuk and her team, which unfolded through more than twenty projects developed with local schools, universities and social organisations of Palermo. One of these projects was the Manifesta 12 Education Hub, realised in collaboration with the Madrid-based architecture firm ENORME studio and students of the Academy of Fine Arts and of the University of Palermo. The Education Hub was developed after a disused city-bus, which was redesigned by the architects and students, and functioned as a travelling education platform during the biennial, reaching out to different communities and neighbourhoods of the city (fig. 3.1).

My role as communication coordinator in the making of this biennial allowed me to observe and directly collaborate in the development and execution of all these programmes, and to highlight how a communication role can be functional for the development of an ecosophical research, following my considerations in Chapter Two on Kester's dialogical art, Gablic's empathetic listening and Lacy's new genre public

Fig. 3.1: *Manifesta 12 Palermo Education Hub* in Piazza Magione, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

art as "communication and the articulation of specific audiences".[3] Through an analysis of two particular projects commissioned by Manifesta 12, this role allowed me to engage with creative practices that address ecology in a transverse way, encompassing issues of social, mental and environmental ecology, and requestioning art functions and roles in relation to a non-artistic, contingent community. As I will discuss in this chapter, although in my practice I favoured ephemeral interventions in non-institutional spaces over long-term, larger scale projects, this activity at Manifesta helped me to develop a different understanding of what the word "engaged" means in the context of my socially engaged curatorial practice inspired by principles of ecosophy. Specifically, coordination between all the different departments (the curatorial, the production, the education and the director) and the so-called "public" favoured a truly situated, and highly interconnected reflection on the way these projects (and the producers behind them) engaged with and have been received by the residents and the territory.

3.2

The Planetary Garden: curatorial concept and socially engaged projects

Along with the launch of the urban study as pre-biennial research, a new curatorial model was introduced in Manifesta 12 Palermo. Instead of traditional art curators, a group of four professionals, with different cultural backgrounds, were invited to work on the project as *creative mediators:* architect and co-founder at OMA, the Sicilian-born Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli; the Spanish architect and founder of the Office for Political Innovation, Andrés Jaque; the Dutch filmmaker and journalist Bregtje van der Haak; and the Swiss curator Mirjam Varadinis.

Taking inspiration from a conversation with the professor of arboreal crops at the University of Palermo, Giuseppe Barbera, and from his findings inside an ancient painting by Francesco Lojacono (fig. 3.2), the creative mediators and Manifesta 12 team decided to approach the city as it had always been in its history: a hub for cultural and non-cultural cross-pollination and a laboratory for the coexistence of multiple species. Many of the plants that we see in Lojacono's painting are not autochthonous but have been imported to Europe through Sicily from the Middle-East

3. Lacy states: "It is safe to say, however, that working during the same decade and within earshot of each other, these artists (conceptual artists such as Judy Chicago, Martha Rosler, Miriam Shapiro, Lucy Lippard, etc.) reached similar conclusions from different vantage points, and these conclusions about the nature of art as communication and the articulation of specific audiences form the basis for new genre public art".
Suzanne Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys," in *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (1995; Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 28.

Fig. 3.2: Francesco Lojacono, Veduta di Palermo, 1875. Digitally reworked by OMA researchers to highlight the migration of species of plants arriving in Palermo from all over the world.
Photo courtesy of OMA.

Fig. 3.3: Orto Botanico di Palermo. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

and North Africa in particular (fig. 3.3). Such conversations with experts of Palermo's natural and cultural heritage along with the readings offered by OMA's urban study, revealed the city of Palermo to be a "node in an expanded geography of movements – of people, capital, goods, data, seeds and germs – that are often invisible, untouchable and beyond our control".[4] Palermo's Botanical Gardens portrayed in figure 3.2 perfectly crystalises such "geography of movements", and in fact was selected as one of the main venues of the artistic programme of the biennial, hosting the works by Alberto Baraya, Zheng Bo, Leone Contini, Malin Franzén, Lungiswa Gqunta, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Khalil Rabah and Michael Wang. Naming the biennial after the publication by French biologist and professor at the École Nationale Supérieure du Paysage de Versailles, Gilles Clément, *The Planetary Garden – Cultivating Coexistence* aimed at using Palermo's histories of cross-pollination and co-adaptation as prototype for the world to be. In Clément's perspective, the world can be seen as a garden where different forms of life mix and adapt to co-exist: the role of the human is that of the gardener who has the ethical imperative to preserve life in the garden. What Clément proposes is not a naïve view of a harmonious relationship between a sensitive human being and an uncontaminated nature. As a champion of humanist ecology, he believes that a partnership between the two worlds is still possible, if we, as humans, understand the role we have within the natural world. The creative mediators' and artists' research and projects did not completely follow Clément's view of the planetary garden. Rather, as explained in the curatorial concept by the creative mediators "collaborating closely with Palermitan partners, Manifesta 12 co-inhabited Palermo as a laboratory for the challenges of our time, looking for traces of possible futures. In the context of globalisation, Manifesta 12 chose to be radically local in engaging with the city in all of its diverse components".[5] The programme curated by the four creative mediators unfolded through three sections, each touching on key topics of the *The Planetary Garden*, as intended by the curatorial team:

1) Garden of Flows: explored toxicity, plant life and the culture of gardening in relation to the global commons;

2) Out of Control Room: investigated power in today's regime of global and digital flows;

3) City on Stage: built on existing opportunities on the outskirts of Palermo to execute or further develop plans that had not yet been realised.

Over more than 140 days, twenty venues across Palermo hosted exhibitions, installations, film screenings, excursions, performances, workshops and community projects by more than fifty professionals from all over the world, and who accepted the creative mediators' invitation to work closely with Palermitan organisations and professionals, both for the development and the execution of their projects. Lagos-based artist Jelili Atiku organised *Festival of the Earth (Alaraagbo XIII),* a processional performance with people living in Palermo to investigate issues of migration, ritually carrying plants, soil and sacred sculptural objects through the city (fig. 3.4). A similar physical engagement brought together more than twenty different associations from all over Sicily to enact Marinella Senatore's *Palermo Procession*, a parade aimed at investigating ideas of narration of a territory through experiences of non-hierarchical learning and self-training, dance and parade. The procession took place the day after Atiku's performance, on 16 June, and progressed through the historical centre of the city (fig. 3.5), following a route similar to that of the procession of Palermo's patron Saint Rosalia. To produce this work, the artist organised and ran several workshops in collaboration with the choreographer Maria Fonzino. Objects from the performance, along with portraits of the participants, a video of the training sessions, puppets and silk banners made by local apprentices were exhibited in an old, deconsecrated church in the La Kalsa neighbourhood, where Manifesta 12 had its headquarters.

Issues of active citizenship were also explored by *Becoming Garden*, a project realised by botanist Gilles Clément, Paris-based Atelier Coloco and local associations Zen Insieme and Ground Action. The group held a series of workshops in the troubled neighbourhood of Zen to turn an abandoned area into a public garden by actively involving its residents (fig. 3.6). The garden was eventually used throughout Manifesta 12 to host other community-projects as well as some of the screenings part of Manifesta 12 film programme. The garden is still in use today thanks to the maintenance and care of the local residents, and hosts projects and events promoted by Zen Insieme, Ground Action and the NGO Save the Children (fig. 3.7).

Some of the artistic collaborations of Manifesta 12 took the form of investigative research, with artists collaborating with Palermo's researchers and academics to present site-specific works that could raise awareness of various topics, such as freedom of expression, political dominance and contemporary systems of control. Documentarist Laura Poitras, her team of peer-journalists and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Palermo produced *Signal Flow*, a narrative journey focusing on the United States military presence in Sicily, which is a linchpin for both their military communications and drone operations worldwide. The project consisted of a site-specific immersive installation, a film clinic with local filmmakers and reporting by Poitras and her long-time collaborator Henrik Moltke along with Sicilian activists and

4. "Manifesta 12 Curatorial Concept," Manifesta 12 Palermo, https://www.manifesta12.org/planetary-garden/index.html.
5. Ibid.

Fig. 3.4: Jelili Atiku, *Festino della Terra (Alaraagbo XIII)*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Francesco Bellina.

Fig. 3.5: Marinella Senatore, *Palermo Procession,* 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Francesco Bellina.

Fig. 3.6: Coloco, Gilles Clément, ZEN Insieme, Ground Action and residents of ZEN, *Becoming Garden*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Atelier Coloco.

Fig. 3.7: Residents of ZEN taking care of the garden with members of Zen Insieme and Ground Action, 2021. Photo by Sergio Sanna.

researchers. Another "grounded" investigation was that promoted by anthropologist Leone Contini, who spent a year in Palermo investigating issues of transnational agriculture and reporting on the movement of seeds that pass through Palermo. Working with several native and newly arrived farmers, Contini developed an experimental vegetable garden in the Botanical Gardens of Palermo, and a performance where some of the vegetables cultivated in the garden were released into the sea, allowing the waves to decide how to determine the next migratory move of the plants (fig. 3.8). Another very significant project was *Black-Med* by the Italian duo Invernomuto. Developed from the concept of "Black Mediterranean" by Palermitan researcher Alessandra Di Maio, the project aimed to explore the trajectories of sounds passing through the Mediterranean. It consisted of an online platform featuring several soundtracks and video loops created by the duo during and after the biennial. The project also unfolded through a series of live sessions, part of the Manifesta 12 Public Programme (fig. 3.9). Finally, *Liquid Violence* by Forensic Oceanography (Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani) brought together investigations conducted in the Mediterranean since 2011 and aimed to investigate the spatial and aesthetic conditions that have turned this area of the world into a militarised border zone. The above mentioned projects help visualise what the creative mediators and the director meant when they said they wanted Manifesta 12 to be a "radically local" event. Indeed, all these projects were conceptualised and executed with the direct involvement of civic and social associations, in a way that reminded me of Mary Jane Jacob's curatorial strategy for *Culture in Action*, described in chapter two of this thesis: they were not simply art works, but more specifically they were projects in which "the public participation becomes a negotiated space of co-production within multiple networked flows of social encounters".[6] However, while in *Culture in Action* all decisions on the content and form of the projects were made exclusively by the curator, who quite often anticipated in her decisions the actual engagement between the artists and any of the "selected" communities, in Manifesta 12 Palermo the invited artists, designers and performers were asked to make several research trips to Palermo, and to choose how to develop the very same formalisation of the project themselves. As Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli stated, being "radically local" in the context of a city seen and addressed as a planetary garden actually meant "bringing the biennial across the entire city and its population, instead of expecting everyone to visit an exhibition. With Manifesta 12 we have also worked on the idea of the biennial as a research platform. This is true for the *Atlas* and for many of the projects of the artistic programme, but we also went fur-

6. David Morris and Paul O'Neill, "Introduction: Exhibition as Social Intervention," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention. 'Culture in Action' 1993* (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 8.

Fig. 3.8: Leone Contini, *Foreign Farmers,* 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.9: Invernomuto performing *Black Med* at Manifesta 12 Palermo Public Programme, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

ther by setting up a collaboration between four international schools of architecture including the University of Palermo".[7]

3.3

Two case studies: Rotor's *Da Quassù è Tutta Un'Altra Cosa* and Cooking Sections' *What Is Above Is What Is Below*

Among the projects commissioned by Manifesta 12 Palermo, two are, to me, particularly exemplary of a much more open, deeply grounded but also aesthetically hybrid approach to the ecology of the everyday – and the continuous negotiation of meanings that it implies – *Da Quassù è Tutta Un'Altra Cosa (From Above Up Here It's a Whole Other Story)* by Rotor, and *What Is Above Is What Is Below* (2018) by Cooking Sections.

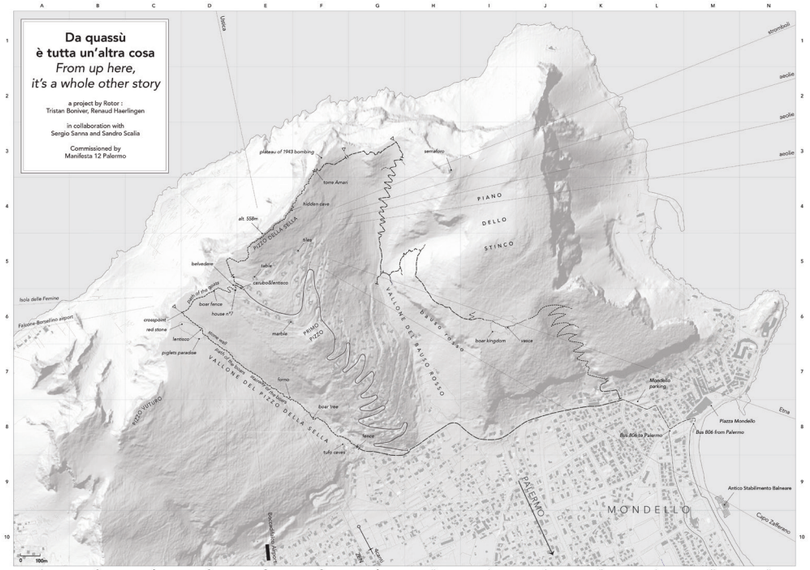
The project *Da Quassù è Tutta Un'Altra Cosa* by Rotor consisted of a series of workshops and an intervention on the hill of Pizzo Sella, in the outskirts of the Sicilian capital. Originally a natural reserve perched atop a promontory facing the whole of Palermo and the Mediterranean Sea, the area is now known as "the hill of shame", being one of the worst examples of illegal construction in Italy. As part of a development process that started over forty years ago, 170 villas were illegally built in the area, a large number of which are still unfinished. As stated in the description of the project: "After hastily facilitated approvals of building permits, concrete pours, sales, aborted construction and endless lawsuits, the colonised hill of Pizzo Sella has now become a poster child of real estate corruption, and a frustrating blind spot in the Palermitan landscape. Under the towering presence of the concrete skeletons, denial is the necessary alternative to resignation. Yet hidden behind the housing complex traces of bygone paths lead to the ridge and the top of the hill, reconnecting the nature reserve".[8] The hill is still colonised by the concrete skeletons of the villas left unfinished by real estate companies which often colluded with the Mafia. In such a context, Rotor decided not to impose anything on the already wounded hill of Pizzo Sella but studied the traces of the local fauna towards the nature reserve, and with the help of local associations, architects and hikers alike tried to make the area accessible

7. Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli and Hedwig Fijen, "Manifesta 12: Hedwig Fijen and Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli," *Mousse Magazine* (21 July 2018), https://moussemagazine.it/manifesta-12-palermo-2018.
These schools were the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, UK; the Royal College of Art, London, UK; Tu Delft, Delft, The Netherlands; Università degli Studi di Palermo, Italia. More information at "Manifesta 12 Studios," Manifesta 12 Palermo, www.manifesta12.org/m12studios.
8. "*Da quassù è tutta un'altra cosa / From up here, it's a whole other story*," Rotor (2018), https://rotordb.org/en/projects/da-quassu-e-tutta-unaltra-cosa-here-its-whole-other-story.

also for humans (figs. 3.10 and 3.11). Through workshops held in the months preceding the preview of the biennial and open – literally – to anyone who could pay for their trip to Palermo, the architects transformed one of the abandoned, unfinished buildings from a precarious concrete skeleton into a refuge point and public belvedere from which people could collectively enjoy a breath-taking panorama of Palermo and its landscape. One of the most acclaimed projects of the biennial, both from the public and the press, Rotor's environmental intervention in Pizzo Sella implied an arduous process of negotiation with public authorities and local associations. The status of the buildings, their precariousness and inaccessibility represented a problem for those authorities and professionals who had to take over the responsibility to make the project available for the public of the biennial.

On the other hand, the concrete skeletons of Pizzo Sella are living proof of a complex and unpleasant past for the people living in the area, thus the residents' lack of enthusiasm towards the project was to be expected. Furthermore, as the local politicians and residents feared, the project eventually exposed the area and its troubled history to the attention of an international public. The guided tours of Pizzo Sella were always fully booked and mainly attended by international visitors. Additionally, Rotor's project received extensive media coverage and images of Pizzo Sella and its shameful buildings appeared in both national and international newspapers. Understandably, some of the residents suffered from such exposure and criticised the project. This project also created tensions not only with the residents but also among the members of the Manifesta team. Six months before the official opening, Rotor wanted to make a public announcement on the Manifesta 12 analogue and digital channels to promote the need of volunteers from Palermo for the realisation of the project. However, the director did not want to communicate (understandably) the official artists' list until all the artists' proposals were accepted and the contracts secured. There were discussions within the team, and we eventually reached, together with the director and the creative mediators, the compromise to change the communication strategy, and publicly announce some of the artists' projects, including Rotor's, in advance. People who work in communication offices know what this change of plan can mean in terms of a suddenly increased workload. In an ecosophical approach to socially engaged art practice, practitioners should critically reflect on the consequences of their choices on the people involved in process of production, because defending artistic autonomy cannot mean exploiting other people's work, uncritically following the assumption that production and artistic needs must always be prioritised and never questioned, as some of my colleagues argued. Nevertheless, for their ability to creatively combine the social, environmental and political subjects connected with the realisation of a highly collaborative project, Rotor's

Figs. 3.10 and 3.11: Rotor, *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photos by CAVE Studio.



Da quassù
è tutta un'altra cosa
From up here,
it's a whole other story

a project by Rotor :
Tristan Boniver, Renaud Haerlingen

in collaboration with
Sergio Sanna and Sandro Scalia

Commissioned by
Manifesta 12 Palermo

Forty years ago, a housing development project colonised Pizzo Sella, the central hill of Monte Gallo, north of Palermo. After hastily facilitated approvals of building permits, concrete pours, sales, aborted construction and endless lawsuits, the colonised hill of Pizzo Sella has now become a poster child of real estate corruption, and a haunting blind spot in the Palermitan landscape.

As part of Manifesta's 12 City on Stage section, the Brussels-based design practice Rotor has been invited to reflect on this controversial area and to explore scenarios of interventions and resignification.

Starting with traces left by hikers, herders, pilgrims, goats and boars, Rotor's intervention explores the possibility to stitch back the hill of Pizzo Sella through the reconnection of hidden paths running along the cliff of Monte Gallo, above and behind the housing complex. Nearby the cliff, a belvedere is turned into an observatory for some of the breathtaking panoramas, doubling as an place to meet, rest and find cover.

Rotor proposes a mountain-sized exercise of perspective reversal. From above, the hill of Pizzo Sella offers emancipating vantage points on the mountain, the city, the country and the sea surrounding it, overlooking a century of dialogue between man and landscape. From above, the scarred hill turns into a healing device, offering relief from its prolonged gridlock.

Developed as a collaborative effort between Manifesta 12, Rotor and a network of local and non-local collaborators, "Da quassù e' tutta un'altra cosa" testimonies Manifesta 12's intention to develop long term strategies aimed at shifting perspectives and unlocking existing potential in the city.

Brussels, may 2018

Hi Sergio, Hi Sandro,

Here are some gathered notes for your preparation of the movie and photographs of the project. As you know, the nature reserve of Monte Gallo is temporarily closed to the public, therefore your contributions work will allow to share the experience with everyone else in the meantime. Thank you for your help.

Before anything : this is not a "fanaeu" walk. At some points you will be using narrow paths made by animals : boars, goats, foxes, horses... You will be following traces on the stones, broken leaves, bushes, etc.
As a general note regarding the species living in the natural reserve: don't frighten them. Announce yourself by occasionally making sounds (clapping hands etc.), so that they have enough time to take distance from you. Don't try to interact with the wild boars or their piglets.
There are also ticks on the hill, so wear long socks with long pants tucked inside them. Check yourself for ticks regularly when you go through vegetation (wearing bright clothes makes it easy), as well as when you come back home. Bring sturdy shoes.

It's best to go early in the day ; the air is fresher and the light is softer. There might also be a cloud above Monte Gallo : it is a unique microclimate, and the views are always changing

If you have a car, there is a big parking in the center of Mondello (L8). If not, you can take the bus 806 from the center of Palermo (from Politeama to Piazza Mondello (M8). It runs every 15 minutes from 5:45. Count 35 minutes of bus. There is a 15 minute walk from Mondello to the fence at the start of the path (G8). I will show you the geolocation.
From there, it is then possible to use the right-wall to go beyond the animal fence.

The path goes on the right of a small open area. On your left, you will see amazing remains of a 'tufa' quarry (F8), with caves dug in this yellow stone seen everywhere in the city. Once out of that wooden area, the open valley begins.
The path passes on the right of a big rock, then slides to the left. Now make some noises : the path will reach a low tree where animals find shadow (F8).
The path continues straight after the tree. At one point you will meet a man-made circular structure : it was a ceramic oven (E7 "forno"). Follow the path left above the structure.

Don't always go straight, and keep looking for brown traces of wear on the stones ; the path sometimes makes small zig-zags that seem counterintuitive but facilitate the climbing.
The path should soon feel like a stairway (E7). You will also start encountering stacks of stones to mark the path.
If you look up, you'll soon see the concrete houses for the first time on the right side of the valley.
The path then gets close to a red scar of erosion on the right, then goes back to the left, following a trail of red soil left by the boars (D7). You'll follow it upwards for a bit, then you can cut right in the bushes to follow the rocky riverbed up a plateau (D6). Make some sounds before entering this little paradise for animals : we once saw a female boar running away from this area, climbing towards Pizzo Vuturo (C8) with her seven piglets. From this plateau, the view towards Monte Pellegrino is amazing.
On the right of the plateau, you'll see a big bush, a 'Lentisco' tree (C8). The path turns right around it, and runs parallel to a stone wall. You can go towards the cliff ; at one point will notice a passage through the wall (C6). Don't go there (leave that area for the animals), but come back to this crosspoint after going to the ridge: this is where the climb towards the top begins.

The views from the cliff speak for themselves. The coral blue sea of capo gallo, the Isola delle Femine, the horizons, the cliffs, the birds. Take your time.

The house n°7 is now close (D6). To get there, go back to the crosspoint. From there, the brown traces on stones make the path uphill very visible. At one point, the path passes through a kind of fence (D6) closer from the cliff. It zig-zags up two plateaus, then points towards the bottom of the house, and goes straight through a bush between rocks. It goes back up left, ending at the belvedere (D5).

Enjoy the views and the fresher climate around the belvedere and the house. You can see the two peaks of Pizzo Vuturo (C7,8) embracing each other. You will also notice that from this point only, the two airports of the city are in sight. The ZEN (G10), the airport landing strip (E10), and aligned as if it was on purpose, the axis of the city leading to Quattro Canti (G10).

As you must have heard, we worked for days with volunteers to improve the conditions there. We cleared the bushes and filled the holes along the hundreds of meters of road (E6) leading up to the belvedere.
We removed the decaying scaffolding of the house n°7, and we used the tubes to surround spaces. The floors had been covered with fallen concrete blocks, we used them to create walls protecting from the wind and provide some seating surfaces. We found soft marble plates in another house (E6), transported them and cut them to cover the rough concrete of the walls. We also used them to build the bench along the belvedere. Beautiful tiles were found in another house (F5), we used them to protect fragile surfaces from the strong rains. We found a wooden table in another building (E5), we gave it some care and a new home.

Along the road from the belvedere, you'll notice on your left a little bench under two fragile trees : a carubo and a lentisco (E5). You should definitely take a moment to have a seat there, this is another magic place.

Once you are rested, the path towards the top of the hill restarts a bit further, behind the technical building on the first turn up the road. Look for visible animal traces at the beginning, upwards towards the cliff, then back towards the right (D,E5). The path then zigzags along different plateaus ; most of the path is marked with stacked stones, but you can also easily chose your own way between the rocks.

After 15 minutes of climbing you'll be approaching the ridge of Pizzo della Sella (E5). On your left, the cliff of 500 meters, and on your right the gulf of Palermo. In front of you, right below the horizon, the Semaforo (H3). If the view is clear, you will be able to see the island of Ustica (D1), the Etna (N8), the Aeolian islands 140 km away (N2,3). All Sicily is now under your eyes. If the Monte Gallo is surrounded by clouds, you will instead experience a cloudy choreography full of surprises.

Do you know where the name "Pizzo Sella" comes from ? It was called "Pizzo della Sella, which translates to "the peak of the saddle", the saddle being the curved shape between the peak of the hill ("pizzo") and Primo Pizzo (F6). It is being said that the "saddle" was filled with construction rubble and crossed by two access roads, making it almost disappear. thirty years, "Pizzo Sella" is now synonymous with a controversial situation.
But the name Pizzo della Sella actually this exact place at the top, outside and above the housing development. The inverted perspective from this exact location triggered this entire project...
Our entire path continues along the ridge towards the torre Amari (F3), along the hill of the Semaforo, above the climbing rock of Bauso Rossa (H6), the old vasca (I6), the descent to Mondello (J6-K7). Most of the paths of that area are part of the trails of the Nature Reserve, but given the absence of visitors, they have been taken over by trees, animals and bushes... they would require heavy maintenance. The views there are fantastic, but this will be for another session. We will describe it in detail soon.

It will take you 1:30 h. from the bottom to the top of the hill by walking alone. The summer is very warm ; bring a large bottle of water with you.
In comparison, the climate around the house n°7 is unique : the wind from the sea going through the large shadows under the incomplete concrete structure makes it a tempered, welcoming place.

We are eager to be back in Palermo, See you soon !

for Rotor,
Tristan, Renaud

Start of the video

House n°7

Pizzo della Sella
(end of video)

A project by Rotor :
Tristan Bonivier and Renaud Haerlingen,

with support from Elena Dell'Oro, Cédric Gautier, Alisson Lopes, Benjamin Lasserre, Amélie Tripoz, Giulia Caterina Verga

In collaboration with :
Sergio Sanna, Sandro Scalia

Joined by the volunteer effort of :
George Allen, Astrid V. Arsenio, Valentina Brunetti, Gloria Ceiderone, Emanuela Camarata, Federica Cacciro, Federica Debiarbo, Flavio Falcone, Camille Florent, Gaetano Giordano, Solene Graterau, Juliette Laurence, Louis Leroy, Sophie Michel, Caterina Spadoni, Amélia Tripoz, Sofie Vandenbroucke, Ilaria Vanni, Alessia Totoro, Giulio Renda, Ruggero Veneziano, Cecilia Pinelli and Ruggero Cipolla from UniPa

With the input of the expertise, conversations and walks with :
Antonino Alaja, Giacomo Anadreo, Luca Basilone, Alessandro Basso, Marco Bonamini and Fortunata Printicelli, Giulia Cantalupo, Ruggero Cipolla, Roberto Collova, Isabella Fera, Vito Priolo, Francesco Cucchiara, Gabriella D'Agostino, Vincenzo Di Dio, Francesco Galioto, Giuseppe Manulla, Marco Mondino, Ippolito Pestellini and his students, Pietro Rizzo, Antonio Sciortino, Tullio Simonnda, Giorgio Vasta, Giuseppe Venturella and his students, Pippo Lo Cascio and Francesca Mercandante

Thanks to :
The inhabitants and gatekeepers of the housing development on Pizzo Sella,
the Guardia Costiera Ausiliare in Mondello,
Guido Sanna, Elena Violante, Lola Tarandina, Giuseppe Violante

Very special thanks to Pietro Airoldi, Ippolito Pestellini and the entire team of Manifesta12 for their continuous trust and enthusiasm for this project.

Figs. 3.12 and 3.13: Rotor, Map for *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Image courtesy of Rotor.

Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa was a perfect example of what Guattari's transversality could be in cultural practice. Interestingly, Rotor applied this criticality to their own practice, defining themselves not as a collective of architects, but as a "cooperative design practice that investigates the organisation of the material environment".[9] Also, it is important to note, that in the final promotion items of the projects, Rotor meticulously listed the names of all the collaborators and the different levels of their engagement, as shown in the map given to the visitor on their way to Pizzo Sella (fig. 3.12 and fig. 3.13).

The second project I would like to focus on is Cooking Section's *What Is Above Is What Is Below* (2018). The project unfolded as a performance and site-specific installation in three different locations: the garden of the abandoned roofless Chiesa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo (fig. 3.14); a small square in the ancient Arab neighbourhood Kalsa; and the scout base Volpe Astuta, in land that was once owned by a Mafia family (fig. 3.15). Studying the ancient Arab watering systems of qanāt, as well as the contemporary ad hoc pipes that bypass the city's infrastructure, the London-based duo of Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe explored the way in which water and politics have developed together, and whether a form of emancipation from the control of water may also lead to a form of emancipation from the weather. Specifically, Cooking Sections were inspired by the dry stone walls, typical of the island of Pantelleria, and used to protect gardens from the wind. In particular, for the installation at Volpe Astuta, the duo decided to recycle huge concrete tubes that they found at the scout base. This type of structure, known as *Jardinu Pantescu*, eventually creates a microclimate, where the stone absorbs humidity from the air moisture and, due to the temperature difference between the outer and inner sides of the structure, condenses into water droplets, providing moisture for the soil. The installations commissioned by Manifesta 12 set stages around different trees of Palermo, offering places to sit and visualise ways "to water with stones", and thus "to flourish on dry waters".[10] During the biennial, it was also possible for visitors to collect a lunch box from some selected local restaurants and shops. The *Secco al Sacco* meal used drought-resistant ingredients and was intended to be eaten sitting among the trees. Furthermore, a TV screen located at Manifesta 12 headquarters, the historical Teatro Garibaldi in Piazza Magione, showed in real time the health performance of the trees part of *What Is Above Is What Is Below*, and all the data collected were eventually handed to a group of researchers at the University of Palermo. Although it was not immediately recognisable as an artwork by most of the visitors, the project explored poetically

9. https://rotordb.org/en.
10. Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe, "What Is Above Is What Is Below," Cooking Sections (2018), https://www.cooking-sections.com/What-Is-Above-Is-What-Is-Below.

Fig. 3.14: Cooking Sections, *What Is Above Is What Is Below,* installation at Chiesa di S. Maria dello Spasimo, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Wolfgang Traeger.
Fig. 3.15_ Cooking Sections, *What Is Above Is What Is Below*, installation at Volpe Astuta, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

the concrete possibility of living in a world *without nature*, as philosopher Timothy Morton would say: without nature "as an independent, definable object 'over there' somewhere".[11] Like many Manifesta 12 Palermo projects, Cooking Section's *What Is Above Is What Is Below* (2018) shed light on the awful truth that nature may be exactly what we have already destroyed and contaminated, and that ecological thinking and practice is a collaborative action "shot through with desire" to enclose the world that is dying in front of us.

3.4

The "public" of a socially engaged, international art project

In spite of the institutional and critical focus on socially engaged art practices in the last decades, the relationship between the so-called public and the so-called cultural producers (artists, curators, organisers and communicators) has not been considered in critical depth, using the term "public" as an already given, unifying entity. The social of the socially engaged, radically local project that was Manifesta 12 was addressed in a way that reminded me of Bourriaud's description of the public in his *Relational Aesthetics*: "The artists look for interlocutors. Because the public is always a somewhat 'unreal entity', artists will include this interlocutor in the production process itself".[12] Although from a very different position, even Grant Kester seems to share Bourriaud's ideal of the community as a fixed entity, although unlike the French curator, the British-Mauritian theorist considers forms of collective identity an anathema to the avant-garde traditions. His dialogical aesthetics refuses stereotypes of the public in order to "challenge or unsettle the viewer's reliance on precisely such forms of identification".[13] To stress this argument further, he quotes Suzanne Lacy who, after gathering 200 students on a roof-top parking garage in Oakland to enact "unscripted dialogues on the problems faced by young people of colour in California",[14] describes the meetings with the community that led to her work *The Roof Is On Fire* (1994) as follows: "the changes in body language of the ten officers and fifteen youths who meet weekly over two months marked a transition from stereotypes to dimensional personalities".[15] My argument is that such a shift towards a more empathetic understanding of the complex identities or "dimensional personalities" should also consider that such identities continue to mutate throughout the duration

11. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature,* 170.
12. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland (1998; Paris: les presses du réel, 2002), 81.
13. Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art," in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, ed. by Zoya Kucor and Simon Leung (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 83.
14. Ibid, 76.
15. Ibid, 82.

of the project and even independently from it: they are not given as a fixed product or dimensional personality once and for all. Throughout this thesis, and in my practice in general, I advocate for the argument by Associate Director at the University of Queensland Art Museum, Dr Holly Arden who states: "The singular term "public" belies the fact that the public is always plural, that there are always multiple publics".[16] As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Marcel Duchamp's theory of the "art coefficient" as a very subjective mechanism made of identifications and reactions to the materiality of the work of art, allows us to consider the creative act, both for the artist and the public, as a "phenomenon of transmutation: through the change from inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place, and the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the aesthetic sphere".[17] Such processes of transmutations are amplified in the contexts of socially engaged art projects, which exist as temporal, situated interactions. Furthermore, the people participating in such processes of transmutation are not isolated, while participating in the projects affects the way other people may participate in the project. To complicate things even further, I suggest that these people also tackle the contested notion of ecology in extremely personal ways and propose very different approaches to the art experience.

In my role as communication coordinator at Manifesta 12 Palermo, I was working with the most diverse audiences: the many communities inhabiting Palermo, the media and art professionals we wanted to reach, and also the networks of people we were working with, such as the suppliers and art handlers, the mediators and social workers collaborating with the Education team, Manifesta's sponsors and founding partners, the Board of Trustees and Manifesta's website users and social media followers. I literally saw the same information taking so many diverse forms that I immediately felt my communication activities were also inevitably curatorial, in the sense given to this term by Maria Lind as "the result of a network of agents' labor".[18] When I joined the Manifesta 12 team, I wanted to see whether an investigation into ecosophy and the curatorial production could also unfold through the dynamics and fluidity of a role that may be understood as too business-oriented to be truly cultural and even curatorial. Nevertheless, such a role as mine at Manifesta 12 forces one to creatively engage with the most ambiguous yet essential concept of any socially engaged art project: the public. To me, this job represented the opportunity to develop a direct understanding of the virtues and perils of an international art project such as

16. Holly Arden, "Participatory Art and the Impossible Public," *Art & the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (2014): 104.
17. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 140.
18. Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in Selected Maria Lind Writing, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 65.

Manifesta 12 in the complex and contradictory territory of Palermo. Furthermore, on a personal level, this job gave me the possibility to feel the incredible enthusiasm of returning to Sicily, the island I grew up on, to make what I have learnt in Milan, New York, London, Cambridge and Rome blossom at home and to investigate the differences brought about by the different contexts and people involved.

What is the "public" that socially engaged art projects or "radically local" international projects such as Manifesta try to address in their ecological investigations? Does it exist as something "over there", already *available* that waits to be "called up" to participate by artists and curators, in the same way as Nature was called up in ecological debates of last century? Cultural communication is not about selling a product, rather it is about the collective imagining of what a specific creative experience could do and mean. Within the context of Manifesta 12, the team had only two years to develop intentionally long-term projects through the direct engagement of the city's social operators and citizens. Yet, one question arises: are two years enough to conceptualise, process and properly communicate a cultural project as something relevant for the present and future liveability of a city facing enormous ecological issues, such as water pollution, aggressive real estate speculation and destruction of its coasts and greenbelt? The nomadic nature of Manifesta described above made it really difficult for the team not to be perceived as "intruders" by the hosting population, imposing on the residents a certain idea of art and of cultural *coolness* that has nothing to do with Palermo's cultural history and contemporary social problems. Biennials always play on the troubling balance between the international and the local context (or, as I argue, between a certain idea of the international and of the local), but working as communication coordinator at Manifesta 12, I tried to make not only how the project could be perceived by Palermo's public problematic, but also what we meant by saying that we wanted to embed "it into the tissues of local civic society".[19] As a Sicilian who has lived abroad for years, I was perfectly aware of the harsh stereotypes that non-Sicilian people may have about the island's recent troubled history and its population. What does it mean for Manifesta to be "socially engaged" in Palermo, and who is part of these *publics* that seem so hostile and hard to identify, and that yet are so essential to the project development and realisation? These were the questions that moved my practical investigation forwards, respecting my role of communication coordinator in relation to my colleagues, the creative mediators, the institutions and the artists, doing all that they expected me to do, yet trying to embody – ecosophically – such questions in all my contributions to the projects, from the execution of minor tasks to the making of serious decisions.

19. Manifesta 12 Palermo, *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Booklet 1 – Review and Reflections* (Amsterdam: International Foundation Manifesta, 2020), 10.

3.5

Engaging the plurality of public-s: an ANT perspective

As Bruno Latour once said: "Organisations do not have to be placed into a 'wider social frame' since they themselves give a very practical meaning to what it means to be nested into a 'wider' set of affairs".[20] This proved to be particularly true in the specific context of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Despite its nomadic itinerant nature with a permanent headquarters in Amsterdam, Manifesta 12 was mainly funded by the Municipality of Palermo – which guaranteed almost €4,500,000 to the project- and the International Foundation Manifesta, whose team privately fundraised the other € 2,000,000 needed for the five programmes which comprised the biennial. As main sponsor of the biennial, the board of Manifesta 12 selected Sisal Entertainment SPA, a private company providing gaming and betting services, which was inherently problematic for a project that aimed to have a sustainable long-term impact on the hosting city. How can cultural producers aim to co-inhabit "Palermo as a laboratory for the challenges of our time"[21] while promoting in a country like Italy, where adult gambling is incredibly problematic, with a company like Sisal whose business is based exclusively on gambling activities? The mental dimension of ecology that was key for Bateson and Guattari has not informed the curatorial framework of Manifesta 12. Furthermore, many in the city were criticising the huge amount of public money invested by the municipality of Palermo in a cultural project that was perceived as *foreign*. The mayor of Palermo desperately wanted Manifesta in his city: both as part of his political commitment to maintain the status of Palermo as a highly tolerant and openly welcoming Mediterranean capital (in spite of the openly racist politics of the Italian far-right party); and as a way to change the narrative about the city, that was for too long only associated with the Mafia and urban decline, leaving the city's socio-cultural and environmental richness unnoticed. To complicate things even further for my own role, although my colleagues and I succeeded in getting a lot of attention from the international press, Manifesta was soon accused of leading a process of gentrification of the city centre, since the number of people it was able to attract to the city was considered to have had inflationary effects on the rental market, while many small apartments were turning into short-stay B&Bs which local citizens and Sicilians in general could no longer afford. Of course, I did not experience the same with the projects I co-produced in Wembley, Cambridge and London. Although widely recognised as a major issue, I argue that the relation between contemporary art and gentrification does not only depend on the nature of the project it refers to,

20. Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (2005; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.
21. *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Booklet 1 – Review and Reflections*, 10.

but also more generally on capitalism's commodification of art as a form of social value. A major biennial such as Manifesta is capable of gathering a huge number of people in one place only and for a very limited amount of time, while independent projects such as the ones I discuss in this thesis have all been conceived for and by specific neighbourhoods and communities, and did not imply the influx of newcomers from all around the world. Furthermore, I never meant to address any of these contexts as the "prototype for the world to be" as Manifesta 12 creative mediators did with Palermo. Instead, I attempted to investigate the peculiarities of the contexts I found myself working in through the people inhabiting them, and I made such collective, situated investigations mark the core of the whole project. Finally, issues of gentrification were strictly connected to Manifesta's nomadic nature, insofar as it promised to be able to attract fluxes of tourists and newcomers to the hosting city as a "return in investment" for the funds given by each municipality to start off every new edition of the biennial. The socially engaged projects I co-produced and that are part of this research have all been self-sustained and have been done using already existing works or temporary, ephemeral installations.

While questioning with my colleagues on the possible ways to address "the public" more deeply, I started reflecting on Holly Arden's notion of the impossible public, used by the curator "to describe the public that surely exists outside of the political and institutional attempts to instrumentalise and order it into compliant non-existence".[22] She developed this notion after Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's statement that "the conception of a society as a closed entity is 'impossible'". Considering that many of the projects the team and the artists were developing were deeply collaborative, and that our directors did not want to officially announce the artists' and collaborators' list before the opening of the biennial, the communication strategy unfolded through the creation of relational, informal and even dialogical networks that were not meant to address the public of Palermo as a closed entity, but to question residents' relations to the projects we were developing. I tried to translate what I learned through my ecosophical investigation into contemporary cultural production in the context of a community-based communication strategy, using what was intended to be the object of my work as a critical source for a collective investigation. As stated in the final report: "The overall Communication and Marketing Strategy, focused on acting as an incubator for co-creation and co-facilitation with local producers. In order to move beyond human-centred perspectives on art and culture and to encompass ecological concerns in line with the curatorial model and concept, the Manifesta 12 Communication and Marketing team worked with three ideas: discovery, community and engagement": discovery of abandoned old churches, privately owned palazzos or properties belonging to organised crime families that have been seized by the police; involvement of the different communities living in Palermo to evaluate the formation of new constituencies among and across the same communities; finally, the active engagement of these communities to identify the best and most relevant stories to tell about both the city and its citizens.

Our goal was to engage with a diversity of audiences not only through the creation of accessible content, but also through the engagement with a community *for* and *around* Manifesta 12 projects and events. Some colleagues and I organised a pre-biennial programme of talks and events to both open the door of Manifesta 12 headquarters and to engage with local residents. Manifesta 12 headquarters was the beautiful Teatro Garibaldi, an historical theatre located at the heart of Palermo, in the troubled neighbourhood of Kalsa, that had been abandoned, destroyed, squatted, used as a playhouse by an Italian director and finally renovated by the municipality for public use. Nevertheless, these events were to me the occasion to make the project more accessible and truly collaborative, and to finally get to know in person some members of the *community* for which we wanted to be relevant. The Manifesta 12 pre-biennial programme consisted of many events, some organised by the Manifesta 12 team, others organised by external, local associations that were using the theatre for free. Among the events organised by the Manifesta 12 team, I collaborated more directly in the ideation, production and final execution of two series of projects, called Manifesta 12 Meet Up and Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk.

The Manifesta 12 Meet Up was a series of twelve informal talks held in the Teatro Garibaldi. Free to everybody, the talks were conceived as an opportunity for Palermo's wider public to engage with the Manifesta 12 research process and to stimulate the direct collaborations of local citizens in the production process of the biennial projects. All the artists, designers and professionals invited by the creative mediators to carry out their research in Palermo were also invited by the Manifesta 12 team to discuss their practice and their reasons, interests and expectations of being in Palermo in public (fig. 3.16).

Also held at the Teatro Garibaldi di Palermo, the Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk series of events consisted of four public dinners open to all the people who were willing to help with the cooking while talking with strangers and the Manifesta 12 team on various topics. These were not convivial projects such as Jacob's *Culture in Action* meals,

22. Arden, "Participatory Art and the Impossible Public": 105.

Fig. 3.16: Manifesta 12 Meet Up with Roberto Collovà, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE studio.

Tiravanija's suppers or Matta Clark's *Food*, inasmuch as people were not simply invited to walk in and consume with an already existing art community, but to bring and share food and stories with strangers (figs. 3.17 and 3.18). Although nothing could be officially announced through the official communications channels since only a few contracts were signed and few venues secured, we decided to be transparent in the research process and to use our research process as a pretext for moving towards the "impossible public" of Palermo, that was not particularly interested, but not wholly against what we were doing. All events were also live-streamed on the Manifesta 12 official Facebook channels, and comments and messages shared with the participants in the theatre. The Manifesta 12 Meet Up and Cook and Talk dialogical format proved to be quite successful: artists, curators and the Manifesta team engaged in informal conversations with students, professionals, art amateurs and different groups in the city, making the wider public aware of the fact that Manifesta was not only an international foundation but that there were real people working behind the walls of the institution.

These two series of community events made me even more aware of the fact that the *public* might be "impossible", as argued by Dr Arden, for art projects do not really have the power to call the idealised, fixed entity they call public into existence. Art projects certainly engage with different publics, but the public as a singular entity does not exist. Similarly, in his attempts to classify the formation of public opinions, Jürgen Habermas, another leading figure of the Frankfurt School, defined the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed".[23] Far from being a group of individuals or a crowd, Habermas' public sphere is a unifying sphere where private people gather to regulate against the public authority. In fact, according to Habermas, "citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest".[24] I doubt that such an unrestricted freedom could ever be experienced in contemporary art spaces or projects, since these are still "constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church"[25] as critic Brian O'Doherty pointed out already at the end of the 1970s. Furthermore, Habermas' notion of the public space "as a space of reasoned debate about politics or the intermediary space between the state and private interests of the members of the bourgeoisie

23. Jürgen Habermas, 1974. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* 3 (Autumn 1974): 49.
24. Ibid.
25. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

Figs. 3.17 and 3.18: Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photos by Gabriele Modica.

class"[26] does not include women along with other subjects that have been historically excluded by the bourgeoisie class, as pointed out by Nancy Fraser, and "thus it ignores the possibilities of the plurality of the public sphere".[27] More recently, French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour argued that the word "social" can designate both a trail of associations between different elements and a type of connection. Therefore, he refuses to call "social" a homogenous thing, designating instead the movements of associations between heterogeneous elements that keep connecting and reassembling among each other with this term. For their openness, informality and unruliness, those events made clear to me that to be social "is a movement that may fail to trace any new connection and may fail to redesign any *well-formed* assemblage".[28] The public as an entity is an impossible ideal, but people's and communities' constant movements of associations do exist, and each of them resists being categorised as the unified public of an art project, as it turned out in the making of these community-based events held at Teatro Garibaldi in Palermo.

Through the production and communication of such events, I developed an embodied understanding of Latour's intuition that "the social is not a special dimensional domain or a product of situated conversation, but 'a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling' that goes well beyond the spatio-temporal framework of any art project".[29] Of course, my role as Communications Coordinator did not allow me to extend my ecosophical investigation to the curatorial programme, but the pre-biennial series of events and the communication strategy that I designed and executed with my colleagues did allow me to test the problematic of an ecosophical approach to cultural practice in relation to the so-called *social*. Specifically, through my activity at Manifesta 12 Palermo, I could investigate the relevance of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT: also known as "actant-rhyzome ontology") for my cultural practice inspired by Guattari's ecosophy. Following Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory, the sociality of a project is never merely addressed or reproduced; rather, it is produced. An ANT approach, as defined by Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social*, differs from traditional sociology because it does not take its object of study, society, for granted, rather it identifies this with a "movement" of associations and reassembling. As such, it involves both humans and non-humans whose function is that of *actors*. However, as social actors, their role is no longer limited to that of the informers. Latour writes:

26. Mayengbam Nandakishwor Singh, "Jürgen Habermas's Notion of the Public Sphere: a Perspective on the Conceptual Transformations in His Thought," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 4 (October-December 2012): 634.
27. Ibid, 638.
28. Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 8.
29. Ibid, 7.

> "You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of. Your task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are, or to add some reflexivity to their blind practice. Using a slogan from ANT, you have 'to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new association that they have been forced to establish."[30]

I do not agree with the use of the verb "to grant", for I believe that actors are also able to grant themselves the possibility to participate in the making of theories on the "social". Nevertheless, as with ecosophy, which is an articulation of thought and actions rather than a new theory on ecology, ANT does not propose answers nor categories to help define our "blind practices", to use Latour's expression. ANT is a method that "depends entirely on what you yourself allow your actor to do. Being connected, being interconnected or being heterogeneous is not enough. It all depends on the sort of action that is flowing from one to the other, hence the words 'net' and 'work'".[31] Highlighting the mechanisms that stabilise matters of concern (what does "social" mean?) as matters of fact (there is one thing called society that awaits to be defined), ANT is not just a method, but a dynamic and negative method which does not describe things, letting instead the actors express themselves and negotiate what they are *not*.[32] This is why another very well-known ANT slogan reads: "There is no in-formation, only trans-formation".[33]

Trying to balance my duties as Manifesta 12 employee and my personal interest in an ecosophical approach to cultural practice, the Manifesta 12 Meet Up and the Cook and Talk events represented for me a way to develop a tactile understanding of the fact that any cultural project is not made for a public. Rather, it creates the conditions for different publics to emerge from a set of already established, yet constantly mutating relations. I noticed that some people were showing up to talk and hear about the research projects taking place in their neighbourhoods; others were coming exclusively to complain about the amount of money Manifesta had received from the municipality. All these movements of people, ideas, complaints, feelings and opinions helped to expand my notion of the social. By sustaining conversations with so many different *publics* and opening the "art space" of Teatro Garibaldi to their enthusiasm, interests, worries or hostility towards Manifesta, it became clear to me that my colleagues and I were not actually identifying our public, but were part of a movement of assemblages that eventually made us more aware of our own stereotypes and dogmas, both on the public of Palermo and on the production of our socially engaged art projects. I share Dr Marsha Bradfield's statement that reads: "The claim that ANT makes – that the world is composed of networks – is radical for two reasons. On the one hand, it denaturalises the cohesion of cultural artifacts by insisting on them as effects of relations that extend well beyond the artifact itself. [...] But the idea of the world-as-networks is also radical because it says that networks are composed not only of *materials* but also *people*".[34] What makes an ANT approach particularly significant for my ecosophy-driven research as well as for any dialogic and participatory practice is that such an approach "explores social effects, regardless of their material form, by concentrating on the question of *how*",[35] as Bradfield pointed out. Questioning "how things are addressed" allows us to make all the actors accountable for the movements they produce in such a collective investigation: or to cultivate their response-ability, borrowing Donna Haraway's methodological proposition mentioned in Chapter two of this thesis and that informs the ethics of my ecosophical articulation of practice. The fact that all these events were recorded and live streamed meant that all the people working at Manifesta, from the international artists to the members of the team, were exposing their own body and all their artistic uncertainties for a project they wanted to undertake but that was not yet done. However, this allowed us to understand our own responsibility towards the several *types* of associations that were constituting Palermo's "social-s". On the other hand, it made those who attended the events or participated in them via digital channels, from the haters to the most caring supporters, *publicly* responsible for the critiques, opinions, objections and contributions made. Participants and collaborators used the event page of Manifesta 12 Meet Up on Facebook to ask for direct contributions and engage with direct collaborations with people in Palermo, expanding the role and reach of the project Manifesta 12 well beyond our intentions, expectations and control. Of course, we also faced the perils and limits of this way of working. Many of the professionals we invited were not from Italy, therefore many events were in English and could not be translated live due to budget constraints. Furthermore, these projects were not conceived as curatorial projects, having not been realised under the curatorial eye of anyone in particular, but

30. Ibid, 11-12.
31. Ibid, 143.
32. Scripting a dialogue with an hypothetical student, Latour writes:
> "P: IT (ANT) is a theory, and a strong one I think, but about *how* to study things, or rather how *not* to study them – or, rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves. - S: Do you mean that other social theories don't allow that? – P: In a way, yes, and because of their very strength: they are good at saying *substantive* things about what the social world is made of. in most cases, that's fine; the ingredients are known; their repertoire should be kept short. But that doesn't work when things are changing fast. Nor is it good for organisation studies or information studies, marketing, science and technology studies or management studies, where boundaries are so terribly fuzzy. *New* topics, that's what you need ANT for".

Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory,* 142.
33. Ibid, 194.
34. Marsha Bradfield, "Utterance and Authorship in Dialogic Art", (PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2013), 419.
35. Ibid, 441.

produced by a selected group of Manifesta 12 team members only. Surely, they were not dialogical art projects either, in the sense given to the expression by Dr Marsha Bradfield as "a set of social relations mediated by a myriad of complexities. It is a range of disparate dialogues bundled together in an iterative process that attends to the reconfiguration of an artwork-as-network through time and space as its sociality is reassembled and discursively produced".[36] Such a reconfiguration through time and space was missing, as all these events had been conceived by the team not as ends in themselves, but as propaedeutic to the Manifesta 12 curatorial and education programmes, and as a response to the expectations that institutions and investors had towards the biennial. As a result, the relationship with the local residents of Piazza Magione was not always peaceful. The team and I all engaged in more or less good personal relationships with long-term residents of the neighbourhood; nevertheless, on more than five occasions we had computers and other office supplies stolen. Also, biennial visitors could see humorous stickers reading *moneyfesta* on the walls and all around Manifesta 12 venues, and a Banksy-style *Tourists Go Home!* graffiti next to the HQ entrance.

All these events, conflicts and contradictions greatly helped me to expand my own conception of the transversality of the *social* of socially engaged art projects, even if by means of a cultural practice that uses communication tools, strategies and channels.

3.6

Curating as a shared response-ability

From a quantitative point of view, Manifesta 12 met the goal of attracting at least 250,000 visitors to the whole biennial including 175,000 local, regional and national visitors and 75,000 international visitors. In particular, the Manifesta 12 Communication and Marketing strategy and activities reached a 20% increase in brand awareness (measured in web and search traffic, followers and coverage); 65,000 Facebook followers (up from c. 53,000); 32,000 Instagram followers (from c. 10,000); 24,000 monthly website visits; minimum 2,000 published articles and an attendance of 2,000 people to the professional and press preview of the opening week.

Through my role in the communication department at Manifesta 12 and through my activity in the making of the Manifesta 12 community-based, pre-biennial events, I developed a close understanding of the need some contemporary cultural producers

36. Ibid, 443.

feel "to redeem an idea (or an ideal) of the public for art, an ideal that reaches beyond simply 'audiences', 'viewers' or 'participants' and engages the unknowable potential that 'the public' suggests",[37] as Dr Holly Arden suggests. The Sicilian-born creative mediator of Manifesta 12, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli once stated: "The process of making this biennial – from *Palermo Atlas* to the implementation of each work – has been developed as a partnership between the city and Manifesta. By creating this network of collaborations, Manifesta sets the basis of its long term legacy and communicates with the locals".[38] Stressing this attitude further, my activity at Manifesta 12 helped me to reject the understanding of cultural practice as a practice of enlightened experts teaching the actors what to do and how to read and contribute to a project: this would simply mean projecting the idealised, unreal public into the art space rather than investigating by the means of art practice the current historical conditions that have made life on the shared οἶκος unsustainable. The idea to develop the biennial projects and themes by not only collaborating *with* Palermo's citizens, but also bringing the research activities and production process *across* the city and its people, inevitably led the whole team to deconstruct the ideal of the harmonised garden by Gilles Clément that yet had inspired our initial reflections. One of the essays that inspired the curatorial and overall research approach of Manifesta 12 is Bruno Latour's 2011 *From Multiculturalism to Multinaturalism: What Rules of Method for the New Socio-Scientific Experiments?*[39] Moving from the critique of the "laboratory" as a confined centre of rational enlightenment where knowledge is produced by a bunch of experts and then diffused out to the rest of society, which passively absorb it, Latour declares: "Nature has disappeared, and so have the 'experts' mediating between the production of science and society's wishes and desires, 'The Great Pan is dead'. By nature I mean this unified cosmos that could shortcut political due process by defining once and for all which world we have to live in".[40] Like some definitions of ecology and sustainability outlined in Chapter One, such understanding of nature has serious political implications for the French philosopher who argues: "Nature, contrary to appearances, is a political animal: it is what is used to define the world we have in common, the obvious existence we share, the sphere to which we all pertain equally; it is what connects us. But then there is what divides us. [...] Nature unifies in advance and without any discussion or negations; culture divides".[41] In the

37. Arden, "Participatory Art and the Impossible Public": 114.
38. Fijen and Pestellini Laparelli, interview, http://moussemagazine.it/manifesta-12-palermo-2018.
39. Bruno Latour, "From Multiculturalism to Multinaturalism: What Rules of Method for the New Socio-Scientific Experiments?" Nature and Culture 6, no. 1 (Spring 2011). This essay was also included in the Manifesta 12 Reader, published by International Foundation Manifesta, Amsterdam in 2018.
40. Ibid, 126.
41. Ibid.

contemporary, globalised world, the social has been dispersed everywhere thanks to science and technological developments, and humans and non-humans are all part of the same collective experiments on possible ways of coexistence. In such a context, where it is not possible anymore to talk about *a* society as a unified entity existing *over there*, Latour urges us to acknowledge that *this* Nature that was unifying us, fighting against humans', divisive cultural differences, has disappeared, and so have "the experts". In order to renew the contemporary political project and envision how we can live together, Nature has to be understood as *Natures*: the *mono*-naturalism of Clément's *Planetary Garden* – which imposes unity on the disrupting movements of the heterogeneous elements of the garden – should rather embrace "the many worries of multinaturalism".[42] Latour rightfully links the idea of "the expert" as "a remnant from the trickle-down model of scientific production: he or she is a person in charge of mediating between knowledge producers, on the one hand, and the rest of society in charge of values and goals on the other".[43] As seen in the previous chapter, curating has also been identified with this kind of in-between activity, and curators have been granted the privilege to mediate every relation occurring in the art space: as if this space could mirror a social realm addressed as unified and brutally divided into those who produce knowledge and those who don't. Nevertheless, Latour also argues: "In the collective experiments in which we are engaged, it is this very division of labour that has disappeared".[44] Since in socially engaged experiments, all actors contribute – the way they can and want – in "trans-forming" knowledge, any distinction between the experts of the art world and the non-experts of the public should fade away. Socially engaged art projects should not be about executing plans developed elsewhere (as it was in the case of *Culture in Action*); rather, as Claire Bishop argues, socially engaged art projects differs from other artistic endeavours because they purposely strive "to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception. Their emphasis is on collaboration, and on the collective dimension of social experience".[45] Similarly, Guattari's transversal methodology and Latour's ANT approach point to an understanding of any critical investigation not as the realisation of a plan but as a "testing action", an exploration of unintended consequences of a provisional and revisable version of a project.

Because of the participatory nature of the project, my activity at Manifesta 12 made me reflect on my practice in relation to the practices of those curators who have been inspired by Guattari's writings on ecosophy, and yet whose work is so distant from

42. Ibid, 127.
43. Ibid, 130.
44. Ibid.
45. Claire Bishop, "Introduction: Viewers as Producers," in *Documents of Contemporary Art. Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), 10.

mine. I do not approach my practice as an enlightened expert whose role is that of "mediating between the knowledge producers". I agree with critic, curator and art historian Cuauhtémoc Medina who argues: "The development of the contemporary notion of the curator involves a certain process of de-professionalization […]. Functions that seemed, from the viewpoint of the modernist paradigm of the development of professions, a result of the trend towards specialization, accompanying an increasing sophistication of knowledge with a growing division of labour, appear to collapse in an even more idiosyncratic manner in the condition of the curator".[46] I would argue that this could not apply to curating only, but to all cultural practices involved in socially engaged art projects, for they inevitably end up being affected and "trans-formed" by the people and the contexts in which they unfold. Furthermore, ecosophically deconstructing your practice, without being able to guarantee a sustained engagement to the project leads to failure, as happened with the e-collective project mentioned in chapter two. Within the institutional context of Manifesta 12 Palermo, it was simpler to move my research further as part of a network of similar, yet different research interests. While examining this curatorial in-betweenness, British curator and Tate Britain Director Alex Farquharson states: "It seems that the new curators aspire to create the conditions for Deleuze and Guattari's now classic notion of the "Rhizome", whose intermeshed, multi-directional patterns of growth contrast with the unitary, dialectic and hierarchical tree-like structure of the Western Archive".[47] Nevertheless, through my practice-based research I became aware that such rhizomatic movements do not imply that *only* the curatorial must be understood as in-betweenness, but also the other subjects involved in the process of making. Indeed, the possibility of such rhizomatic or tentacular movement should be granted to all the actors taking part in the project in a truly ecosophical approach to cultural production. As already stated, the rhizome as described by Deleuze and Guattari is not merely a connecting hyphen, but it informs the nature of the things it connects, also transforming itself in relation to the new encounters it makes. Interestingly, one of the possible uses of the word "mediation", as outlined by Raymond Williams in his 1976 publication *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, resembles the way I envisioned a rhizomatic or ecosophical approach to socially engaged curation. According to Williams, mediation can be either the central point between two opposites, their actual interaction or – and to me this is the most ecosophical way of understanding it – "an active process in which the form of mediation alters the things mediated",[48] altering also itself as a consequence of such mediation.

46. Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Raising Frankenstein," in *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents* (London: Koenig Books, 2011), 30.
47. Alex Farquharson, "I Curate, You Curate, We Curate," *Art Monthly* 269 (September 2003): 10.
48. Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 204-205

As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, if such in-betweenness is granted to the curator only, then she eventually would be the only actor in the process of making who is allowed to participate in all kinds of decisions (from the artistic and the managerial to the financial and communicational), while the other collaborators would be treated as static poles defining the range of her in-betweenness. The curator becomes a sort of "primus inter pares" (a Latin sentence meaning first among equals, and used to describe some members of the Senate, respected because of their seniority in office), and this move re-establishes the primacy of the curatorial over other roles and functions. Seeing yourself as accountable for your obligations to the network is different from considering yourself as working between poles. The curator does not glue everything together in the cultural production of socially engaged art projects, thus allowing herself to be simultaneously everywhere and at the centre of a convergence of interconnections. At least, it became clear to me that my ecosophical understanding of my practice as a cultural producer was bringing me beyond such a limited idea of in-betweenness. Another leading curator of socially engaged art practice, Hans Ulrich Obrist often discusses his practice as permeable, interdisciplinary, heterogenous, discursive and disseminative: all terms coming from an ecosophical horizon of meaning. And yet, this "working between poles" that he also defines as in-betweenness, albeit trying to give form to a rhizomatic understanding of the contemporary environment, tends to forget that the curator is also part of that which he wants to bring together: curators cannot set their practice on top of the other practices involved. This is the concern of Alex Farquharson who argues that this way of working in-between "risks using art and artists as so many constituent fibres or pieces of syntax subsumed by the identity of the whole. Aren't we more likely to remember who curated *Utopia Station* than which artists took part?"[49] This experience as communication coordinator of Manifesta 12 and all the reflections that followed on my practice as a networker among and across social relations allowed me to set both the theoretical and practical basis for the conception and production of the last cultural activity that I shall discuss in the context of this ecosophical investigation.

3.7

Some figures and reflections

Before moving onto the next and last research project that nurtured this investigation, I would like to invite the reader to reflect upon the official Manifesta 12 Palermo attendance figures. Working as communication coordinator, I had the opportunity to work very closely with the curatorial and the education team, trying to embody

49. Ibid.

my ecosophical approach to the cultural production of socially engaged art projects through the dynamics of a role that has to always take into account and unfold different subjectivities through the sensitivities and needs of many: the artists, the team, the directors, the sponsors, the promoters, the journalists and so forth. More importantly, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, this role led me to creatively engage with the most ambiguous yet essential concept of any socially engaged art project: the public. In order to assess the cultural impact of Manifesta 12 Palermo on the host city, Manifesta commissioned a sociological and analytical study into the visitor experience to Fondazione Fitzcarraldo – a Turin-based independent centre for planning, research, training and documentation on cultural, arts and media management, economics and policies. In the index below (fig. 3.19), some of the key findings of the Public Survey compiled by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, and published in the Manifesta 12 Palermo Final Report, a publication released in Amsterdam in 2020 and on which I worked in my final months at the Manifesta Foundation.

Key findings in short were:

- The general audience was young: the average visitor age was 32 years old;
- Almost half (48,2%) of Manifesta 12 visitors were not professionally connected with contemporary art;
- Manifesta 12 received extremely positive feedback: the average overall satisfaction rating was 8 on a scale from 1 to 10;
- 64% of the visitors assigned a score of 7 or higher (on a scale from 1 to 10) to a guided tour;
- Manifesta is a well-known brand in the artistic community: 40% of the audience already knew the biennial before they came to Palermo for the 12th edition and one person out of three heard about Manifesta 12 by word of mouth;
- 67% of Manifesta 12 visitors came from Italy, 19% from European countries and 14% from other countries;
- 42,5% of non-local visitors travelled to Palermo with the specific aim of visiting Manifesta 12 Palermo only;
- The general audience — especially the segments familiar with the arts — favourably welcomed the interdisciplinary nature of the biennial;
- Manifesta 12 had an impact on the promotion of Palermo's cultural heritage: most of the interviewees visited historical venues and sites around the city and were enthusiastic about visiting historical buildings usually not open to the public;
- 58% of visitors coming from Palermo changed their opinion about the arts, culture and history of their hometown;
- Tourists spent an average of four days in Palermo, more than the average days spent in other Manifesta host cities;
- The total gross direct economic impact of non-resident visitors who travelled to Palermo with the aim of visiting Manifesta 12 was € 11.183.712, with the exclusion of two years paid salaries of the local Manifesta 12 team and excluding the value of the contracts with local entrepreneurs.

Fig. 3.19: Manifesta 12 Public Survey (excerpt). Image courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo.

The survey results show that Manifesta 12 Palermo's "impossible public" consisted also of very young (the average age was thirty-two years old) visitors, who were also not professionally connected with the contemporary art world (48% of total visitors declared to work in sectors other than the cultural). This result is particularly important in the context of this research, inasmuch as it makes clear the team's efforts to create a project not merely for contemporary art experts and professionals, but for all Palermitans. We wanted to embed the biennial programmes and projects "into the tissues of local civic society"[50] in order to collaboratively envision "traces of possible futures",[51] and the fact that 67% of total visitors were from Italy, and only 19% from other European countries demonstrates that Manifesta 12 successfully achieved this goal, despite its being a temporary, international biennial and of having been criticised for its "parachute" approach.

It could be said that the biennial's real goal was to engage with Palermo's local audiences, not just to invite visitors from other parts of Italy to visit the biennial and the Sicilian capital. Indeed, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, most Manifesta 12 projects and programmes had been conceptualised and realised with the collaboration with Palermo's citizens, some of whom eventually rediscovered themselves as performers, dancer-like protesters, agronomists, investigative journalists, gardeners and so forth. Furthermore, through the informal and relaxed conversations at the Manifesta 12 Meet Up and Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk, people became aware that art is not necessarily for enlightened experts only, and that their opinions, stories or information had a real, concrete impact not only on the project, but also the relations nurturing it. As a result of such a direct engagement, the survey developed by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo showed that 58% of the biennial visitors from Palermo changed their minds about their city heritage and contemporary cultural production, that turned from being perceived as an elitist activity for qualified specialists into a collaborative action undertaken to investigate future possibilities of their living environment, their οἶκος. If, as Guattari argues, "ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists", questioning instead "the whole subjectivity and capitalistic power formations",[52] so should cultural projects focusing on the social ecology of a specific territory. Nevertheless, although the curatorial intentions and the team working methods seemed to reflect an ecosophical sensitivity, Manifesta 12 Palermo cannot be considered an ecosophical cultural project. In fact, the making of most of the projects of the biennial required constant travel of both people and works of art, from all over the world to Palermo and vice versa. Furthermore, because of the delayed transfer of funds from the Italian government to the municipality of Palermo, two years after the closing of the biennial, Manifesta 12 foundation still owed more €500,000 in fees and taxes, including half of former employees' severance pay and final bills from collaborators, handlers and suppliers. I argue that, if they work on enormous production budgets in order to meet sponsors' expectations and return-on-investment objectives, it is simply impossible for cultural producers to question those "capitalistic power formations" that prevent humans from having a sustainable and ecologically-conscious relation with the environment, as a practice nurtured by an ecosophical sensitivity should do. Here lies the reason why, after Manifesta 12 Palermo, I decided to embark on the cultural production of an independent project in Palermo, that was totally self-sustained and realised exclusively with the support of the residents living in the neighbourhood where Manifesta 12 headquarters was located and where I worked for almost two years of my life: the Kalsa.

50. *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Booklet 1 – Review and Reflections*, 10.
51. "Curatorial concept", Manifesta 12.
52. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 35.

Chapter 4
Riflessioni sull'Abitare

Throughout this practice-based research I have been seeking to embed principles of ecosophy in the curatorial production of socially engaged projects, following Guattari's understanding of it as an "ethico-political articulation between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)".[1] As outlined in Chapter One, since "the only true response to the ecological crisis is on a global scale, provided that it brings about an authentic socio-political and cultural revolution",[2] Guattari's ecosophy implies first and foremost getting rid of old paradigms of cultural and scientific production that establish transcendental or anthropocentric ways of thinking that make sense of the reality of things only by understanding their relation with the human species. For this research advocates that the socio-political and cultural revolution that ecosophy consists of a multitude of actions inter-relating in complex ways; there cannot be only one "true" response to the ecological crises. However, following Bateson and Guattari and addressing the οἶκος as a network of interlaying relations means also moving from a binary logic into a logic of complexity. Following Guattari, this logic is both ethical and aesthetic, founded not on efforts to seek a resolution of opposites but to creatively turn a dialectical opposition into a more connected, inclusive and self-critical investigation. This is possible because ecosophy is not a list of tasks, but an articulation of thought and actions, or sensitivity about *how to proceed* that is based upon the acceptance of the world or οἶκος as a net of multiple dimensions that we share with multitudes of different, constantly mutating subjectivities. Such acceptance does not lead to passive resignation, but to an active resistance towards the conditions that drive towards unsustainable ways of living and understanding. As Guattari states, "the subject is not a straightforward matter; it is not sufficient to think in order to be, as Descartes declares, since all sorts of other ways of existing have already established themselves outside consciousness".[3] In-stead, ecosophy urges us to forge a new ethico-aesthetic articulation of the movement of thinking in order to open the way to new pragmatic interventions in everyday life, surfing the precariousness and uncertainties neoliberal capitalism forces us into.

The diagram by Dr Steffen Lehmann pictured in fig. 4.1 helps us to visualise the kind of perspective or vision of the world linked with a particular notion of ecology as well as with the modes and possibilities of humans' epistemology. The figure on the left depicts a human being as superior to the other species: he can control them and ex-plain what they are and how they should inhabit the collective οἶκος. At the top of the diagram, there is specifically a man, with a woman on the second line, and in order to stress even further the relations between an aesthetic perception of the world and

1. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (1989; London: continuum, 2008), 20.
2. Ibid, 20.
3. Ibid, 24.

its ethico-political ways of organising itself, I think of this human being as borrowing Haraway's expression of the "Man and White, one of the many and nasty tones of the word 'objectivity' to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarised, racist and male-dominant societies".[4] Although there is no explicit relation to patriarchy and to whiteness in Dr Lehmann's theory, I find it meaningful that in this diagram the human is portrayed first as a man, and that the woman comes after, as it denotes a certain mentality that is perfectly depicted by Haraway's earlier statement, and which connects patriarchy and militarised societies to a certain scientistic mentality.

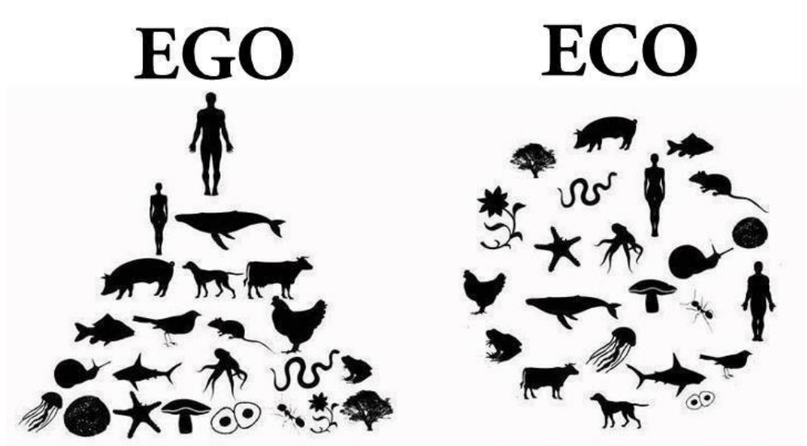


Fig. 4.1: Diagram "Ego-Eco" published on *Reconnecting with nature: Developing urban spaces in the age of climate change* by Steffen Lehmann, 2010: https://bit.ly/2YxaRWV.

On the other hand, Dr Lehmann's diagram also offers an insight of the change of perspective that sociological, humanist, psychiatric and ecological debates have stimulated by the end of the 20th century. The figure on the right might be seen as personifying Arne Naess' conception of "deep ecology", which opposes a radical horizontality to the transcendental model of traditional scientific paradigms that "distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power".[5] Naess develops a concept of ecosophy as an articulation, a mode of thinking that is based on the biocentric equality of all living species, and the primacy of self-realisation. Nevertheless, Naess' ecosophy proposes a vision of the οἶκος as a form of togetherness with nature envisioned "not at the individual level, but at the 'bigger Self' level: transindividual, interspecific and ecosystemic".[6]

4. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Feminist Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (1988), 581.
5. Ibid.
6. Simon Levesque, "Two Versions of Ecosophy: Arne Naess, Félix Guattari, and their connection with Semiotics," *Sign Systems Studies* 44, no. 4 (December 2016): 527.

Anthropologist and cyberneticist Gregory Bateson opposes to Naess' idealistic view of the οἶκος an idea of ecology that begins with a revision of epistemological paradigms based on purposive rationality and consciousness. These paradigms are thought to erase differences in the name of a greater similarity, and thus are considered unable to grasp "the complex layering of consciousness and unconsciousness".[7] Félix Guattari develops Bateson's concept of an "ecology of mind" further, returning aesthetics to the core of the new epistemological paradigm that contemporary societies need and that both theorists consider essential to solve the ecological crisis.

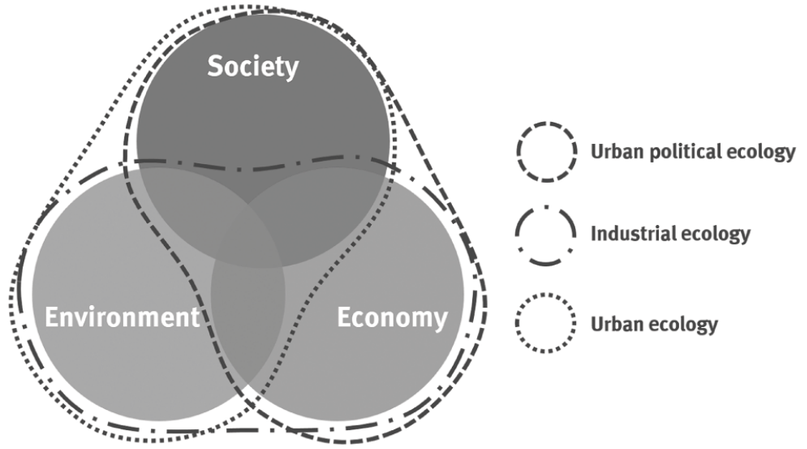


Fig. 4.2: Diagram published in Meirelles, João, Anna Pagani, Aristide Athanassiadis, and Claudia R. Binder, "Sustainability Issues in Urban Systems from a Metabolic Perspective." Chapter. In *Sustainability Assessment of Urban Systems*, edited by Claudia R. Binder, Romano Wyss, and Emanuele Massaro, 261–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

The diagram in fig. 4.2, published in the 2020 *Sustainability Assessment of Urban Systems* by João Meirelles, Anna Pagani, Aristide Athanassiadis and Claudia R. Binder, helps us understand why aesthetics becomes so central for an ecology of mind. It shows how the three different dimensions of ecosophy as circles do not only merge, as in any traditional Venn diagram, but also transform each other and the movements of associations texturing humans' perception of reality, overcoming in this way both the transcendentality of the Ego and the idealism of the Eco worldviews. However, while Bateson's ecology of mind still thinks the different realms constituting the vision of the world as separated but interconnected, Guattari perceives these networks not simply as adjacent, but as intermingling dimensions, that, while crossing over each other, form hybrids and transform themselves and the relations structuring them.

As Guattari pointed out, these new paradigms can arise only if humans stop "mak-

7. Noel G. Charlton, *Understanding Gregory Bateson: Mind, Beauty and the Sacred Earth* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2008), 105.

ing a distinction between action on the psyche, the socius and the environment"[8] and accept to change and continuously negotiate their mental habits, pre-established values and definitions. Unlike Bateson, Guattari's ecology of mind aimed to expose and explore not only the connections between different directions but also within them. Thanks to the profound and long-lasting collaboration with philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and to his life-long commitment to develop an alternative to institutional psychiatric practice, Guattari develops a much more fluid and un-defined understanding of the subjects involved in this process of constant transmutations of different networks of relations: "as a situational constellation in a particular room at a particular time".[9] Professor Stephen Luis Vilaseca comments:

> "These ecosophic dimensions are the same components of schizoanalytic cartography. In fact, Guattari, uses 'ecosophic' cartography and 'schizoanalytic' cartography interchangeably. The links referenced in both mappings of subjectivity emphasize that changes in thought will only temporarily make the body act in new ways in the city if modifications in the built environment do not simultaneously reinforce those variations in mentalities. In the same way that I am the built and natural environment I inhabit, the built and natural environment is made up of parts of my subjectivity."[10]

As a consequence, the possibility of the dialectical movement of thought is compromised, because such thought has no ground to place the vessel of a new affirmation of its identity. Guattari writes: "Unlike Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, eco-logic no longer imposes a 'resolution' of opposites. [...] This new ecosophical logic – and I want to emphasize this point – resembles the manner in which an artist may be led to alter his work after the intrusion of some accidental detail".[11] In fact, Guattari's mental dimension of ecology "does not presuppose the importing of concepts and practices from a specialised 'psychiatric' domain. It demands instead that we face up to the logic of desiring ambivalence wherever it emerges",[12] which means refusing to fixate subjects and modes of subjectivation into universal, immutable truths and ways of thinking, working and living.

Dr Gary Genosko defines Guattari's transdisciplinary knowledge as "a somewhat rebellious and always critical kind of ecology of knowledge",[13] because it is a process of constant reflection to envision new ways of thinking and inhabiting the shared

8. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 28.
9. Boel Christensen-Scheel, "The Ethic-aesthetic Way of Wonders," *The Nordic Journal of Art and Research 1,* no. 1 (2012): 24.
10. Stephen L. Vilaseca, "Félix Guattari and Urban Cultural Studies", in *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* vol 1, no. 1 (2014): pp. 137-143.
11. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 34.
12. Ibid, 38.
13. Gary Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's The Three Ecologies," in *Deleuze | Guattari & Ecology*, ed. by Bernd Herzogenrath (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 102.

οἶκος.[14] Being an articulation aiming at exposing the powerful creative potential of differences and oppositions, Guattari's ecosophy implies the shift from a logic based on binary sets to a "logic of ambivalences", which refuses to identify the movements of thought and negotiation of meanings as a triangle whose peak is the dialectical reconciliation of differences and oppositions. To help visualise this logic of ambivalences or of complexity, in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus,* the second volume of their main publication *Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Guattari and his long-life companion Gilles Deleuze oppose Descartes' famous image of knowledge as a tree, the image of the potato and the couch grass: "Many people have a tree growing in their head, but the brain itself is much more a grass than a tree. [...] The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centred or segmented higher unity".[15] In alignment with the principles of expanded connections, heterogeneity and multiplicity, the rhizome works as a method to stimulate an ecosophical sensitivity "only by decentering it (language) onto other dimensions and registers".[16] An example of such a decentring may be found in a 2014 documentary by Gianfranco Rosi titled *Sacro Gra*. In this film, along with the daily life of the people living near the ring-road at the outskirts of Rome, an expert trying to save local palm trees from extinction patiently studies and collects the sound interactions of the larvae living there which are suspected of causing a previously unknown illness in these trees, and then combining his findings with both a critical and poetic reflection on what he previously knew about his area of expertise.

4.1

Embedding ecosophical principles into socially engaged curatorial practice

As stated in the last chapter, ecosophy in my practice does not aim to find a safe place in-between two conflicting opposites, but to dig into the multi-dimensional experience that is living under the historical conditions set by the Integrated World Capitalism. I argue that there can be no centre in a dynamic, multi-dimensional and rhizomatic approach to the world, hence there can be no static in-between position, placed in the middle of two statically opposed poles. This is why I rejected the idea

14. Guattari is not interested in presenting his ecosophical articulation as a theory, and states:
> "I don't, however, consider my 'schizoanalytic cartographies' to be scientific theories. Just as an artist borrows from his precursors and contemporaries the traits which suit him, I invite those who read me to take or reject my concepts freely. The important thing is not the final result but the fact that the multi componential cartographic method can coexist with the process of subjectivation, and that a reappropriation, an autopoiesis, of the means of production of subjectivity can be made possible."

Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis. An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (1992; Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), 13.
15. Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Missoumi (1987; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 7.
16. Ibid, 8.

of a curatorial in-betweenness that allows the curator to be everywhere and at the centre of all operations. In my understanding, Guattari's ecosophy implies the effort to keep wandering around a multitude of perspectives, some more incompatible with ecosophical principles than others, but all constituting parts of the shared οἶκος. Nevertheless, in many theories on sustainability and ecology in contemporary art, such a multitude of perspectives was not used to discuss what ecology means or should mean in cultural practice, but to investigate the features that an ecological art project or exhibition should have, as I discussed in chapters one and two. The implications of embedding such a critical and open approach in a fluid and "negotiated" socially engaged practice led me to deconstruct the idea of curating that I was developing from my own and other contemporary curatorial theories and practices.

Guattari argues that the "aesthetic rupture of discursivity is never passively experienced", rather leading to "heterogeneous levels which must be related to a heterogenesis".[17] Therefore, in the understanding that I have developed through my practice, Guattari's logic of desiring ambivalences takes the form of cracks in the walls of self-consciousness and epistemological safeness. To visualise such cracks, I propose an image of one of Ukeles' *Maintenance Art Performance* series, and portraying the artist in the process of practicing her role as artist while washing the entrance of Wadsworth Atheneum (fig. 4.3).

In fact, Guattari's logic of ambivalences led me to question the curator's role and practice, and even to reformulate the curatorial as "a way of thinking in terms of interconnections"[18] that should be addressed and embedded in contemporary socially engaged projects. Nevertheless, it must also be said that, while using ecology as a searching criticism to find out how to divert the cultural production process and socially engaged art experience from the ecological imbalances of everyday life, I ended up wrapped in contradictions, both in my professional and personal life. I was working in the communications department of the international nomadic biennial Manifesta, trying to embed Guattari's ethico-political articulation as antidotes to environmental anthropomorphism, social standardisation and cultural conformism into the cultural production of a socially engaged project made by a team of more than fifty people (all with different understandings of both cultural practice and ecology), and sponsored, among the others, by a private gaming and betting company. Without performing the role of curator, I could still see traces of *the curatorial* even in what I was doing at Manifesta 12, although the practical and ethical ambivalences

17. Ibid.
18. Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 63.

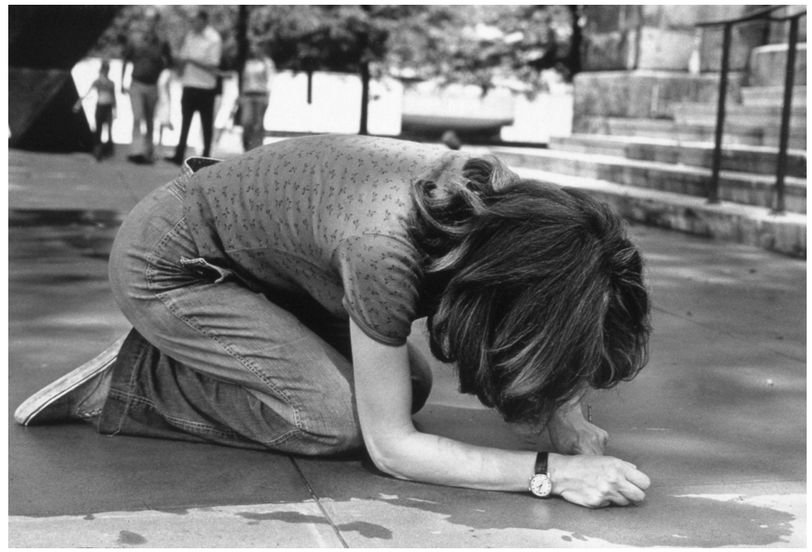


Fig. 4.3: Mierle Laderman *Ukeles, Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside*, 1973. Part of Maintenance Art performance series, 1973-1974. Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

that I was facing in the making of Manifesta 12 brought me to understand such "curatorial" not as an overarching in-betweenness (or "viral presence" in the words of curator Maria Lind), but more in terms of a physically present, networked series of negotiated activities made by different people at the same time. Not only can curators inhabit that in-betweenness, for an ecosophy implies for me the understanding of this in-betweenness not as a fixed position, but as a negotiated movement among many subjects and subjectivities.

If one of the implications of embedding ecosophy into socially engaged practice is to consider the curatorial as a physically present, networked series of negotiated activities whose responsibility is shared, at different intensities, by different people, then how to identify my own practice, my role and function anew? I was neither an artist, nor a professionally-trained curator, but a researcher and cultural worker using the curatorial as a tool for an ecosophical investigation and ephemeral, *impromptu* interventions. In spite of the ordered, (an)aestheticised world of both the rational paradigm and of deep ecocentrism, where authorial positions diffuse unquestioned definitions of the natural object and of the aesthetic subject, Guattari's ecosophical paradigm led me to a chaotically multi-authored and highly contradictory practice creating new ways of engaging with the traditional oppositions of art theory and practice (artist/viewer, curator/artist) and ecology (nature/culture, life/art).

4.2

Weakening the role of the expert: the curator as engaged citizen

For in my view the problem of the ecological crisis is firstly a problem of perception of the movement of negotiations between multiple networks, I share Dr Genosko's argument when he says that cultural producers tackling issues of ecology and sustainability through an ecosophical articulation "have an ethico-political responsibility to bring about transformations in mental and social ecology",[19] and thus should embed such transformations in their practice. As Guattari stated in a 1987 essay titled "Cracks in the Streets": "Existence is not to be taken for granted, it is not an acquired benefit. It is rather a contingent and repeatedly challenged production. It is a rupture of equilibrium, a flight ahead developing in a defensive mode or in a regime of proliferation in reaction to the cracks, the gaps and breaks".[20] This research investigates the forms and reflection arising from addressing ecosophy as a restless questioning movement that also invests the identity and ethics of my practice. Such a questioning

19. Gary Genosko, "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's The Three Ecologies," in *Deleuze | Guattari & Ecology*, ed. by Bernd Herzogenrath (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121.
20. Félix Guattari, "Cracks in the Street," *Flash Art* 135 (Summer 1987): 83.

movement or sensitivity eventually led me to challenge the idea of socially engaged art practitioners, whether artists or curators, as enlightened experts who set out the rules of the game for a collective investigation of the mental and social ecology of a given environment. In order to explain what I mean by the expression "enlightened expert", I would like to refer to the idea of the Ignorant Schoolmaster as developed by Rancière, and explain how it is strictly linked, in the context of my practice, to a certain notion of ecology.

In his now classic work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière illustrates how knowledge and authority are deeply connected, and thus that the institution of pedagogy is a spectre for systems of powers, pressures and expectations that govern the pedagogical system in a society in a certain period. Specifically, Rancière discusses the life and work of nineteenth century French pedagogist Jean-Joseph Jacotot who argued that ignorant people can teach themselves without the help of any teacher, and that teachers can only truly explain that which they don't know. Suppressing the imaginary distance of what Rancière calls "the principle of pedagogical stultification" – that is, that there is a superior intelligence that explains and an inferior intelligence that learns – Jacotot realised that the learning process is led by will rather than by intelligence, and that this will eventually make students "discover this thing that he had discovered with them: that all sentences, and consequently all the intelligences that produce them, are of the same nature".[21] I argue that, even when thought and practiced as in-betweenness, the artist/curator as director or enabler of networks resembles the enlightened master that Jacotot was trying to challenge. As Dr Sophie Hope notices in her research into cultural democracy and the commissioning of art to effect social change, "the path towards increased professionalism in art may improve the working conditions of the artist but leave power relations unchanged",[22] while at the heart of an ecosophical articulation of socially engaged art practice there should be resistance towards those power relations. Recognising there in socially engaged art projects that are always many intelligences, desires, wills and constraints, and that all have a right to participate in a collective investigation of what the οἶκος is, is pivotal in an ethico-aesthetic, transversal research as mine.

Another guiding light in my investigation of how to embed ecosophy into socially engaged practice, Timothy Morton pointed out that the οἶκος that is at the core of ecology, and that we call "nature", has never been a harmonious "one", and even when

21. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 9.
22. Charlotte Sophie Hope, "Participating in the 'Wrong' Way? Practice Based Research into Cultural Democracy and the Commissioning of Art to Effect Social Change"(PhD diss., Birkbeck, University of London, 2011), 12.

considered as a diffused "everywhere", it still remains a fictitious ideal that can hardly match (natural and non-natural) actors' needs, ethics and expectations in real life. Following Latour's formulation of the world as "networks inside networks that overlap with other networks",[23] Morton argues: "All kinds of beings, from toxic waste to sea snails, are clamoring for our scientific, political, and artistic attention, and have become part of a political life - to the detriment of monolithic conceptions of Nature. To write about ecology is to write about society, and not simply in the weak sense that our ideas of ecology are social constructions".[24] Nature – or the *oἶκος* – is both *that thing over there*, at the same time the background upon which actors perform their role and *inform* us about their existence; and all the things together, including us, moving to the foreground as the actor among actors.[25] And yet, there is no sense to go in-between these polarities or polarised ideas of nature because there is literally *nothing* in between. Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* or dark ecology urges us to acknowledge that there is no way out from the subject/object, culture/nature paradoxes that make our relationships with the environment and with the "impossible other" that inhabits it so problematic. If there is no such a unifying and always identical thing called society,[26] as Latour pointed out, then Morton argues, it does not make sense to search for a balance between two polarities, because there is simply nothing in between the foreground (nature or the oἶκος as this thing over here) and the background (nature as that thing over there). Environmental thinking and practice must acknowledge the irreducible otherness[27] moving from dualism to monism but in a way that allows us to realise that humans are not in the centre. The idea of a balanced in-between is in itself illusory, for it is nature itself, at once one and many, that reminds us of our ambivalent position. In fact, as Morton writes, "Even as it (Ecology without Nature) establishes a middle ground 'in between' terms such as subject and object, or inside and outside, nature without fail excludes certain terms, thus reproducing the difference between inside and outside in other ways. Just when it brings us back into proximity with the nonhuman 'other', nature re-establishes a comfortable distance between 'us' and 'them'".[28]

I share Morton's argument that ecology is both about rediscovering proximity and about collapsing distances, and it is precisely when the boundary between proximity and distance starts blurring that the potential of aesthetic detachment is better understood. In an ecosophical – that is both ethic and aesthetic – art practice, such blurring should also affect the way one practitioner considers her practice in relation to other practices and "impossible" agents gravitating around the context of reference. Aesthetics means to keep things at a distance while getting close to them, to keep questioning what is that thing that has an effect on me and that yet it is not me. This is what Morton finds problematic about our problem with nature (and with society as networks of overlapping networks): precisely, that is impossible to fixate that "irreducible otherness" that inhabit the oἶκος into an ideological, already-given matter of fact. Morton states:

> "'Ecology without Nature' could mean 'ecology without a concept of the natural'. Thinking, when it becomes ideological, tends to fixate on concepts rather than doing what is 'natural' to thought, namely dissolving whatever has taken form. Ecological thinking that was not fixated, that did not stop at a particular concretization of its object, would thus be 'without nature.'"[29]

Hence, if it is true that Nature is a highly politicised, historical concept, and that "different images of the environment suit different kinds of society",[30] then a critical and transversal *ecology without nature* as that devised by Morton should also lead to different reconfiguration of the cultural production system, of its ethics and "structuring structures",[31] borrowing the expression from cultural practitioner Dr Bradfield. By stating this, I do not intend to say that while nature is a politicised historical concept, deconstruction and criticality can be addressed as universally valid and a-historical tools. Rather, in my research, deconstruction and criticality are identified as ecosophical tools only because, as Guattari

23. Bradfield, "Utterance and Authorship in Dialogic Art" (PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2013), 419.
24. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 17.
25. To further explain this bipolar idea of Nature, Morton recalls Martin Heidegger's meditation on the work of art as a special place, rather than a "thing":
> "Heidegger tries to de-reify the idea of the thing. The work of art tells us something about the nature of the thing. It is an opening, a 'place' where phenomena become available to us; a sense of the 'thingliness' of things covered over or denied in the notion of the thing as formed matter [...]. Heidegger's reading of the peasant shoes poetically renders the way in which these humble things gather together the entire environment, the social and natural place, of the peasant woman. Heidegger's description opens the shoes to the 'earth' (the things that are not worked on by or with human hands), and to the 'world' (the historical/cultural dimension in which the shoes are used and gain significance)."

Ibid, 171-172.
26. Specifically, to introduce his method known as Actor-Network-Theory discussed in the previous chapter, Latour writes:
> "Since in both cases (traditional sociology and critical sociology) the word retains the same origin – from the Latin word 'socius' – it is possible to remain faithful to the original intuitions of social sciences by redefining sociology not as the 'science of the social', but as the 'tracing of associations'. In this meaning of the adjective, social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a 'type of connection' between things that are not themselves social."

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.
27. This expression is taken from the Western phenomenological tradition which uses to distinguish the (natural) entity of all things from the (constructed) identity of all things, but was significantly developed in particular from the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in a series of essays, later collected in *Alterity and Transcendence* (1995). As Vassilios Paipais points out:
> "For Levinas, the main objective of Western metaphysics has always been to reduce, absorb, or appropriate what is taken to be the other to the primacy of ontology as the discourse uniquely able to discover and describe the ultimate structure of reality. In the process of finding criteria for human action that are universally intelligible and valid for everyone, the philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger attempted to reduce all forms of otherness to what Levinas, following Plato, calls the same (*la même*; *to auton*). [...] This 'imperialistic gesture, a gesture to conquer, master and colonise the 'Other', reveals the violence committed against the other's singularity or, as Levinas calls it, the other's absolute exteriority (*l'altrui)* that is not reducible to any reciprocal relationship with the same."

Vassilios Paipais, "Self and Other in Critical International Theory: Assimilation, Incommensurability and the Paradox of Critique," in *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2011): 127.
28. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature,* 19.
29. Ibid, 24.
30. Ibid, 17.
31. Bradfield, "Utterance and Authorship in Dialogic Art", 415.

pointed out, we still interpret and assess our relations with the world using the scientistic and objectifying paradigm that has caused the unsustainability of our contemporary conditions, and such paradigm needs to be collectively deconstructed and transformed.

Instead of thinking of my practice as a movement around an unquestioned centre, that harmonises the chaos of the artworks-as-people-networks, I started thinking of it in terms of a questioning attitude that understands that the boundaries between cultural practices are not to be overcomed exclusively by the curators who too often grant themselves the role of working in-between all subjects, of setting the rules of the game and of *facilitating* projects and works into existence. In my ecosophy-inspired practice, such processes should be distributed as much as possible among all the subjects involved in the process of making. Additionally, there is no ready-made public waiting to be called into action by the socially engaged projects presented by cultural producers, as well as there is no nature "as a thing over there", ready to be subsumed into new cultural systems. Rather, there is only the need for new ways to think, live and work without establishing new hierarchies and epistemological privileges in the given, materialistic historical circumstances. My situated and negotiated ecosophical practice always seeks for that "rupture of equilibrium" suggested by Guattari in his 1987 essay "Cracks in the Streets", for a way of thinking and working that identifies itself with a contingent and repeatedly challenged production. It is both critical and self-critical in the sense of "critique" as defined by Morton as a "dialectical form of criticism that bends back upon itself".[32] It differs from the curatorial practices inspired by Guattari's rhizomatic, three-ecological theory because it moves back upon itself while moving across actors and contexts, and considers these actors and contexts as also part of the curatorial. My practice questions, adapts, criticises and re-questions in order to produce other networked possibilities to re-negotiate once again the space within the shared *οἶκος*, and makes itself and its role part of this negotiation. Curators and cultural practitioners working ecosophically through socially engaged art should not proceed by the means of a methodological "enforced stultification" as the one described by Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmasters*, and tell the participants what to think or how to visualise and respond to the current ecological breakdown. In fact, as Rancière points out, "Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies".[33] Furthermore, I share Dr Hope's argument that a such "modernist avant-garde notion of the artist as problem solver, critic, outside observer and free agent, underpins recent developments of the socially engaged art commission in which artists are employed to perform this particular role", and "to use their skills

32. Morton, *Ecology without Nature,* 13.
33. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, 18.

in facilitation and creativity to entertain, consult and critique within capitalist conditions of wage labour".[34] However, as Dr Hope highlights, the service-industry style contract can be both a "form of participation and of manipulation which perhaps benefits a practice able to identify and work towards specific goals, but it is perhaps more difficult to apply to an open brief or way of working which does not have a set of predefined aims and objectives".[35] Instead of offering an already-formed, unquestionable understanding of ecological issues and adapting to unecological, neoliberal systems of art sponsoring and commissioning, an ecosophical articulation of practice should seek for a collective rethinking of the contemporary capitalist conditions of wage labour and personal existence, leading the curatorial or artistic practitioner to act as a problem poser rather than a problem solver.

Although from a very different theoretical horizon than that of Rancière, philosopher Jürgen Habermas also seeks to differentiate the role of the expert or academic teacher from that of the public intellectual, building on Michel Foucault's distinction between "the general intellectual" – who speaks in the name of the universal – and the "specific intellectual" – who provides instruments of analysis of reality. As P.J. Verovšek notices that: "whereas experts are called upon to provide technical details on specific problems, public intellectuals are called upon to take stands on important moral issues".[36] Cultural producers inspired by Guattari's ecosophical paradigm address the ecological problem not only as a concern for a minority of experts, but also as the sign of the need for a cultural revolution that should be both situated at the micropolitical level, and on a global scale. Therefore, as Habermas' public intellectuals, ecosophical socially engaged practitioners should be open to hybridise themselves and their practices, to cultivate other subjects' response-abilities and to accept other points of view that might sound incompatible with the inner logics of their particular area of research. Verovšek writes that Habermas' public intellectuals "appear in social and political debate primarily as critics. [...] They are not called to propose policies but to defend the feedback loop between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society, between opinion and will formation [...] ensuring that the public opinions generated within this anarchic communicative realm has benefited from information, thoughtfulness, and the exchange of ideas".[37] Following Habermas' idea of a public intellectual as an engaged citizen offering questions to her community, I developed the project that marks the last stop of this investigative journey on socially engaged art and Guattari's principles of ecosophy, and that I discuss in the second section of this chapter.

34. Hope, "Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?", 41.
35. Ibid.
36. P.J. Verovšek, "The philosopher as engaged citizen: Habermas on the role of the public intellectual in the modern democratic public sphere," *European Journal of Social Theory*, (24 March 2021):
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/172849/1/Verovsek%20EJST%20Accepted.pdf.
37. Ibid.

4.3

The making of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*

Manifesta 12 Palermo closed its doors to the public on 4 November 2018. Five months later, in April 2019, I was in Marseille working on the Manifesta 12 Final Report and training the new, local communication team. However, the need and desire to look back on what had already been done and to play with all the contradictions that had arisen while making the biennial pushed me towards the re-assembling of another network of cultural actors to work with them on an hybrid event that could keep nurturing the collective research started the year before during Manifesta 12 Palermo with local residents and professionals, and in particular with the residents of the neighbourhood where Teatro Garibaldi, Manifesta 12 HQ was located, the Kalsa. As we read in the Manifesta 12 Social Impact report, "In an effort to have a social impact, Manifesta opened its Headquarters in the abandoned Teatro Garibaldi in Piazza Magione (pictured in fig. 4.4) two years prior to the opening of the biennial in 2018. This venue functioned as a meeting space for local audiences for the pre-biennial programme titled *Aspettando Manifesta 12* and for the Manifesta team. The Teatro was utilised as an alternative model for co-working and mediation space together with some local associations and professionals in order for them to keep revitalising the neighbourhood even after Manifesta 12."[38] Many of the projects commissioned by Manifesta 12 were intended to have a long-lasting impact on the city and its citizens, and some of them are in fact still alive, such as *Becoming Garden* in the ZEN district, initially commissioned to Atelier Coloco & Gilles Clément, but now exclusively sustained by the local associations ZEN Insieme and Ground Action that will also collaborate with NGO Save the Children on a programme of public events to be held in the garden. Curator Paul O'Neill argued that: "Biennials have continued to embrace cultural pluralism as their standard, while producing a fragmented experience of the world through trans-cultural, nonlinear, ahistorical group exhibitions. As Martha Rosler pointed out, while curatorial themes may change from one exhibition to the next, the question of inclusion does not".[39] Nevertheless, while the Manifesta team and I had already moved to another city, many of the contradictions about the urban ecology of Palermo, such as the exploitation of its landscape and coasts, and the living conditions of its different communities, were still open for fruitful investigation. Furthermore, what was the real impact of the collaborative production processes of

38. Manifesta 12 Palermo, *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Booklet 1 – Review and Reflections*, (Amsterdam: International Foundation Manifesta, 2020), 33.
39. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s),* (2012; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 70.

Fig. 4.4: Piazza Magione, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Manifesta 12 projects on the residents of La Kalsa, and how did the biennial affect, if it did, the liveability of that neighbourhood? These were the questions that prompted my activity in the last of the projects that made this research, in an ecosophical twist that made me start from the reflections arisen while making Manifesta's events and end up creating a space to share and elaborate such reflections with the people who were living and working in La Kalsa during and after Manifesta.

For what I have learned through practice, in an ecosophically-driven move, a socially engaged cultural practice should deconstruct itself in the effort to "grant them (actors) back the ability to make their own theories of what the social is made of".[40] From March to September 2019, I tried to maintain a sustained engagement with the problematics of the research even while living abroad, discussing with some of the people I worked with in Palermo whether to realise together a project that could re-enact the questions on urban living that were the core of *The Planetary Garden* projects and activities, this time in a less institutional, hierarchical and dualistic (creative world/the impossible public) way. In addition, and more importantly in the context of this research, I felt the need to investigate through practice whether it was possible to realise a socially engaged project inspired by ecological concerns in its modalities of production, but also sensitive to the ethics of working with, among and across different networks. In 2019, I started collaborating with architect and cultural producer Federica Vita on a project titled *Riflessioni sull'Abitare* (*Reflections on Living In)*, inviting other cultural producers to participate in an already existing work that could shed light and nurture conversations and collective reflections on what it means to live in Palermo today. Vita and I did not select any works: rather, the invited professionals were asked to propose a recent work that, while responding to the exhibition concept, could also nurture a conversation on the topic to be held in the midst of all the exhibited work. We accepted all the proposed works and curated the space collaboratively with the invited professionals. We did not really select the people we worked with but rather moved across the already existing networks of collaborations realised during Manifesta. I thought that, overlapping these networks would inevitably lead to the re-assemblage of new networks of ideas around and across the actual space-time frame of the network-project itself. The only two criteria we followed to invite people to participate in the first stages of the project were that they had to be practitioners who currently lived in Sicily or who had recently worked in Palermo, and whose practice openly questions the archetypes of living in contemporary urban environments.

40. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 11.

For the making of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, Vita and I decided to play with ideas of *proximity* and *distance*, two traditional aesthetic categories that are usually thought of and practiced as specular of each other, often obliging practitioners to search for an impossible in-between. The overall exhibition design was ideated and produced after the ecosophical "logic of desiring ambivalences", of moving between contradictions, and turned into practice in an interplay between the elements and moments of proximity and elements and moments of distance. I drew these ideas of "proximity" and "distance" after the two analytical categories of the "discursive" and the "exhibitionary" as defined by Professor Helmut Draxler. According to the Austrian art historian and curator, the discursive is "concerned with a way of speaking: language in the social arena, indicating the performative aspect of language itself"; while the *Exhibitionary* goes beyond the "white-cube" exhibition space and its ideology, referring more broadly to "the production and distribution of specific public values in an ongoing exchange between the institution and its audience".[41] To address a complexity of the liveability of a Mediterranean capital such as Palermo, Vita and I thought of the project as a truly critical, collaborative action that forces itself to be "both up close, and distant, at the same time".[42] Federica Vita was born and grew up in Sicily, but unlike me she decided to stay and work there. She invited From Outer Space, a transdisciplinary design and research practice led by the Sicilian-born Anna Paola Buonanno and Piergiorgio Italiano. Vita and From Outer Space collaborated on a new installation inspired by an existing project by the duo but specifically redesigned and reproduced for this project. She also invited Sicilian architect Davide Basile, while I proposed to contribute to this reflection to Francesca Gattello and Zeno Franchini, two spatial practitioners from Verona who decided to live and work in Palermo. Also, to ensure a sustained engagement with the contradictions of the living which arose during Manifesta 12, I also invited Rome-based video artist Elena Bellantoni to collaborate, since she had spent more than six months in Palermo in 2018 working with Ecomuseo Mare Memoria Viva as part of the Manifesta 12 Collateral Events programme.

Both in the selection of the theme and of the people to work with, "proximity" and "distance" also guided us in scouting the venue. I hoped that for *Riflessioni sull'Abitare* we could use again Manifesta 12 HQ, Teatro Garibaldi, and test whether other people (their networks and *structuring structures*) could lead to new perspectives on the issues and contradictions that had arisen during the community-based events of the biennial, and because of the "intruding" presence of the biennial. Throughout 2019,

41. Helmut Draxler, "The Turn of Turns: An Avant-Garde Moving Out of the Centre (1986-93)," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention: 'Culture in Action' 1993* (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 49.
42. Morton, Ecology Without Nature, 28.

Teatro Garibaldi had been kept accessible to the public and hosted several projects, talks, performances and exhibitions organised by local associations and citizens of Palermo. Nevertheless, our request to use the former Manifesta 12 HQ was denied, along with the request for funding of the project. We discussed whether to drop our intention to keep *practicing* our questions on the liveability of Palermo, but decided to keep trying realising the project, without creating unsustainable conditions for the practitioners involved, yet without letting too much time pass in order to apply for other grants or for the theatre to be available again. I proposed to Federica that we use the Chiesa dei Santi Euno e Giuliano (fig. 4.5) a small, deconsecrated church also located in Piazza Magione and which served as Manifesta 12 office space in 2017, and then as a venue of *The Planetary Garden*, hosting the video, drawings, ensigns and flags from Marinella Senatore's performance *Palermo Procession* (2018). Since the church is smaller and less contested than the now famous Teatro Garibaldi, we were granted permission to use the church for free from 10 to 23 December 2019. To work not only in Piazza Magione, but also in such a special place was ideal for a sustained investigation into the criticality of ecosophy in cultural practice.

On the other hand, the financial constraints could also lead to the end of our collaborative work. Nevertheless, Vita and I decided to try and find ways to keep the project going. We did not ask for more work from the people willing to collaborate but agreed with them to use already existing works that could be re-performed or re-adapted in a discursive environment. Also, we worked with leftover materials from Manifesta's pre-biennial projects, such as the benches, stools and electric cables, using what was already there, in situ and eventually asking friends and cultural producers living in Palermo to lend us what we were still in need of. This networked series of actions allowed us to create a project with a ridiculous budget of €385. We also bought ten wooden bars from the local hardware store in Piazza Magione that we used to exhibit Davide Basile's prints, and that we left at Teatro Garibaldi for other people to use when the exhibition was over. The process of making unfolded both through digital applications for voice and text messages such as WhatsApp and Skype, and several in situ conversations, and everything, from exhibition design to the communication process, was discussed and decided collectively. Tasks and responsibilities were also fluidly distributed among the participants, with no distinctions between concept creators, communicators and hands-on producers. Everybody offered only what they were willing to offer in terms of time and work. Vita and I simply took care that the overall network could sustain itself, practically and theoretically, despite eventual arguments, constraints and conflicts, and even because of them. Furthermore, although we wanted to engage in exchange of views and personal relations with the residents of

Fig. 4.5: Chiesa dei Santi Euno e Giuliano, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Piazza Magione, neither of us were living permanently in Palermo during the making of this project. In particular, I was working on a project on the liveability of contemporary Palermo after I moved from Palermo to Marseille, and from Marseille to Amsterdam between 2018 and 2019. I managed to finally move back to Palermo only in October 2019. All the other people involved were also living the same kind of existential precariousness that characterised both my work and research: some of them had recently moved to other cities, while others were working from Palermo with people and institutions based in different countries. The community I found when I finally moved back to Palermo helped me realise that ecosophy can also manifest itself as a collective sensibility that allows to experience the need for new modalities of group-being as deeply linked with the precariousness of contemporary working conditions and the unsustainability of homogenised art spaces and large-scale art interventions.

4.4

The projects part of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*

Riflessioni sull'Abitare was an exhibition held at Chiesa dei Santi Euno e Giuliano in Palermo, from 12 to 20 December 2019. It also consisted of a talk and a sound-based performance on the evening of the exhibition opening. Presented this way, it looks like a very traditional art project, but it really was not, for the final exhibition and collective discussion responded to the question of the impact of an international project that aimed at being socially engaged in a specific locality. Vita and I designed and built wooden structures to support some bi-dimensional work, without damaging the walls of the ancient church, now finally renovated and reclaimed by Palermo's citizens. The benches and stools needed for the talk and the performance were taken from Teatro Garibaldi, where furniture had been stored after Manifesta 12, this way also allowing a material, as well as a conceptual continuity and sustained engagement with the topics and questions that had arisen during the Manifesta 12. Vita, the participants and I assembled the works which made up the project. These works were mainly about Palermo, but also from around it.

In the nave, Davide Basile's *Habito Ergo Sum* (2019) was an on-going series of digital prints highlighting the way Mediterranean landscapes and architecture both mirror and influence a network of relations at play with human and non-human presences. Lying on the floor and occupying most of the walkable space of the church nave, *Bonus Track* (2019) emerged from a collaboration between From Outer Space and Federica Vita. It consisted of a walkable fabric portraying elements typical of

Fig. 4.6: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, digital invitation. Design by Federica Vita.

Palermo's historical architecture (such as a cupola, a veranda and baroque pillars) and a recording of the everyday soundscape of the Kalsa. This track was audible all around the exhibition space for the entire duration of the project, even when conversations were taking place so that the noises of the city could somehow have a part in that specific discursive engagement. One of the peculiarities of Palermo's historical neighbourhood is that people tend to leave their doors open and often have verandas that directly connect the private, domestic area to the street or the piazza, welcoming all the noises and voices from outside and blurring the boundaries between the public and the private space. To realise this work, Vita and I walked around the Kalsa district for several weeks before the installation, interviewing random passers-by and long-time residents as well as capturing sounds and noises coming from the neighbourhood. Such stories and environmental noises were recorded and reworked by Federica Vita into a non-verbal narration of the daily life of the Kalsa neighbourhood, and incorporated in the fabric realised by From Outer Space. Vita wanted to contribute to the project also as sound designer, both collaborating with From Outer Space and performing on the day of the opening. For me, the making of this work represented the opportunity to enact a direct engagement with the space and with the public whose issues of ecology my work wanted to focus on, exactly as I did years earlier in *Practices of Sustainability* with Sabine Bolk in London.

The Palermo-based studio Marginal, run by Zeno Franchini and Francesca Gattello, focuses on the impact that communities' ways of living have on each other. As part of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, Marginal decided to present *Migropoli. Effarouchement or The Act of Frightening*, a video produced in 2016 and originally commissioned by MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain La Panacée. *Effarouchement* is the term used to indicate the set of strategies that are used at airports to scare flocks of birds from the runways. In the video, *Effarouchement* strategies are compared through a series of overlapping scenes with the methods and techniques used at the borders of some Western countries (including Italy) to keep migrants away. Finally, in the crypt of the church which still contains the original, elaborate niche that used to contain the bodies of the brothers of Confraternita dei Seggettieri, visual artist Elena Bellantoni presented the video *Ho Annegato Il Mare*. Co-produced by Ecomuseo Mare Memoria Viva and selected as part of Manifesta 12 Palermo Collateral Events programme, the film was realised in 2018 after a three-month residency of the Rome-based artist in Palermo. It investigates the relationship between the citizens of Palermo (and particularly those who live in the Kalsa and nearby coast of the city) and the sea. The artist walks through an area of the Sicilian capital that was brutally exploited by the construction boom of the 60s and 70s, trying to find a way to get to the now inaccessible coast, while collecting along the way memories and stories of the neighbourhood from those who have witnessed and suffered its recent transformation.

All around these networks of meanings and feelings that was the exhibition of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, three big benches were placed in the nave, next to the work by From Outer Space and between the structures displaying Davide Basile's prints and their metaphysical landscapes. Fifteen stools were placed at random all around the exhibition space or left by the entrance of the church for people walking in to take and place wherever they liked, this way allowing for the discursive side of the project not only during the talk we were organising on the day of the opening, but for the duration of the exhibition, without our control or planning. A small notebook was also placed on top of the benches for people to record their thoughts, complaints or sketches. Some have used it as a guestbook; others have left private messages to me and the other people working on the project. One girl living in the neighbourhood left a message thanking us for giving her the possibility to walk in and stay in the space "even if there was some art in it". I found that message particularly revelatory of how she and her friends, who grew up in Piazza Magione, must have felt at not being allowed to enter the abandoned palazzos, churches or theatres that, for years, they had used as playgrounds and that Manifesta 12 had turned into locations for an international, contemporary art exhibition.

On Thursday 12 December at 6 p.m., the church hosted a free public debate, open to everybody and intended to address the recent changes that occurred in the Kalsa neighbourhood because of and after Manifesta 12. Along with the artists, designers and curators of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, the speakers were Andrea Kantos, artistic director of Kalsa-based non-profit space Kaoz and artist of DimoraOz; Alessandra Perrone of the anti-racket association Addio Pizzo that for a long time had done an outstanding work in Palermo and in the Kalsa district in particular. The talk was not well attended, with only twenty people showing up to discuss whether and how cultural projects affect the liveability of neighbourhoods such as the Kalsa. The conversation mainly focused on cultural projects that had already taken place, and on the experiences that social workers such as Alessandra Perrone had while mediating between Kalsa families and cultural institutions. Yet the discussion was too cold and definitely too culture-centred, and eventually failed to create new networks outside those already formed by us. Nevertheless, following the debate, a performance by Bluemarina (Federica Vita) turned the exhibition space into a party, and the debate blended into more relaxed exchanges. Such exchanges were nurtured not on hyper specialised knowledge on art projects and ecology, but by that "kind of fundamental

Fig. 4.7: *Riflessione sull'Abitare*, 2019, installation view. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.8: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.9: Davide Basile, *Habito Ergo Sum*, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.10: Studio Marginal, *Migropoli. Effarouchement or The Act of Frightening* (still), 2016. Photo courtesy of Studio Marginal.

Figs. 4.11 and 4.12: Elena Bellantoni, *Ho Annegato il Mare*, 2018. Photo courtesy of the artist. Photos by Simone Sapienza.

sensory 'knowledge' that everyone has and can use",[43] as Adrian Piper put it. When we started playing music and acting more freely within the exhibition space, the same residents who had been so opposed to Manifesta 12's presence in the neighbourhood and whose kids had been forbidden to use Teatro Garibaldi as their personal playground because of Manifesta and post-Manifesta cultural productions, started to come to the church and finally engaged in more authentic and sustained relations with us, the impossible cultural workers. In the days following the opening, many of them returned, spent time on the benches, talking with Federica and myself about the most diverse topics, and expressing the joy they felt in finally being able to re-use the space again. Some of the people who walked in the following days used the benches to sit and talk about the work displayed, but they rarely agreed to record their conversations in the notebook. I did not want to document their thoughts and identities in a fixed form, but I hoped they could somehow offer us a glimpse into their feelings and desires by spontaneously writing, sketching or scribbling into the notebook. A group of children – who had kept entering Teatro Garibaldi in the first months of Manifesta pre-biennial programme to climb on the theatre's balconies and tease the Manifesta team – passed by the exhibition space almost every day, recognised some of the voices in the sound work by Federica Vita and From Outer Space and developed a first-hand experience that culture is not all about the exclusionary logic of traditional, large-scale art projects.

4.5

Thinking and working in-between unfixed roles and identities

Throughout the eight days of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare,* 100 people visited the space, engaged with the works and/or reclaimed that public space and the narratives of the social ecology of their city. If I could work on it again, I would make sure to record the public debate and exhibit it in a way that does not oblige people to passively listen to others talking, but that can work as an invitation to directly contact those who were part of the talk and to keep the conversation going well beyond the project itself. Real moments of engagement with the residents of La Kalsa happened only in the days following the "official" debate. Nevertheless, the balance between the social, environmental and mental registers of ecology was maintained both in the imagining and in the execution of the project. With *Riflessioni sull'Abitare,* the problematic dualism between the aesthetic efficacy and ethical intentions of socially engaged cultural production was fruitful, leading to a hybrid practice that also unfolded through the curatorial, without necessarily identifying itself with curatorial

43. Adrian Piper, "Notes on Funk, I-II // 1985/83," in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel and the MIT Press 2006), 130-134.

practice. Unfolding as "a way of thinking in terms of interconnections"[44] occurring among different actors, the curatorial informed the making of this project for the heterogenesis of the practices and sensitivities involved. The transversal approach to cultural production we all shared allowed us to work beyond pre-established roles and hierarchies. There was no curator as an overarching in-betweenness or "viral presence consisting of signification processes".[45] *Riflessioni sull'Abitare* was the result of collaborative efforts made by cultural workers whose research-driven practice focused on the mental and social ecology of living in a contemporary Mediterranean metropolis such as Palermo. The whole process of production and communication was negotiated among us to such an extent that it could be said that we were all *curating* the project. Tasks and responsibilities were fluidly distributed, and the final exhibition design and public talk were conceptualised after conversations we had in the exhibition space. The ethics of our relationships were not at all altered by the aesthetic negotiations of each participant's work, and not because of an *impossible* balance found by the enlightened in-betweenness of the expert-curator. We all understood our socially engaged practice as a practice of negotiation. It was through the making of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare* that my ecosophical articulation of practice made me identify "the curatorial" not – as Maria Lind does – as a qualitative term belonging to a specific subject, but as a negotiated, critical approach shared by many actors. Furthermore, I became more conscious of the importance of identifying my practice as the result of many encounters and processes of hybridisation: in Guattari's words, a restless process of interpreting and assessing. Although the press release of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare* stated that we co-curated the project, it would be more accurate to say that "the project was made by" inserting our names among those of the people who were exhibiting their work, and finally to get rid of that "mess of a term"[46] as curator Nato Thompson suggested. In 2015, curator Nato Thompson also stated:

> "On a different note about authorship, I am care to keep the authorship in the artist's court. At least when it comes to single artist commissions. It isn't simply about the 'artist genius' but also about streamlining vision. Having an individual responsible for the vision of a project is absolutely critical. This is the role of the artist. I do not co-author. I may help out and massage certain things, but generally these projects are visioned by the artists we work with."[47]

Nevertheless, through my ecosophy-driven investigation into the cultural production of socially engaged art projects, I have developed a keen awareness of the responsibility of the creative act, and an understanding of this as a negotiated, critical

44. Lind, "The Curatorial," 63.
45. Ibid, 64.
46. Nato Thompson, *Interview with Nato Thompson*, interview by Gretchen Coombs, in *Art & The Public Sphere*, vol. 4 Numbers 1 & 2 (2015), 64.
47. Ibid, 67.

Figs. 4.13 and 4.14: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, public debate, 2019. Photos by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.15: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, public debate, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

activity. I have never limited myself to "a streamlining vision", "to help out and massage certain things",[48] leaving the responsibility of the project on the artist. Instead, I embraced different kinds of risks to think and practice new forms of collaborations that could – ecosophically – combine the social, environmental and mental aspects connected with the realisation of the projects, sharing glories, failures, uncertainties and excitement with all the people involved in the process of making. To stress this responsibility even further, I also ideated and co-executed ways of producing and communicating the project that could eventually help the people involved *enact*, not merely *display* the negotiation of meanings and values that occurred when addressing ecological issues in everyday life.

4.6

Ecosophy and the curatorial: a weak, critical practice

Following the considerations arising from my activity at *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, I would like to discuss why, in the last years of this research, I started thinking my practice within the horizon of the "weak resistance", a concept developed by Polish philosopher and author Ewa Majewska during her research work at the Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin (ICI), and first publicly outlined in the homonymous conference organised by Rosa Barotsi and Walid El-Houri and Majewska in 2015 in the same Institute. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's concept of "weak messianism", identified in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* as the non-linear connection between past and present generations who must redeem the failed revolutions of their ancestors. Majewska's "weak resistance" also draws from the notion of "weak thought" developed by Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who defines his philosophy as an attempt to reconfigure our relationship with reality in new ethical-inspired ways, using interpretations and past failures to try to bridge the profound separation between language and reality. In a similar theoretical move, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari tell the story of the child-artist who can orientate himself while walking in an unknown territory only through his singing:

> "A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment."[49]

48. Ibid.
49. Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 311.

This image of the child orientating himself in the dark solely with his song, "adapting it (his song) to the cracks in the sidewalk",[1] can help the reader to visualise the high level of uncertainty that characterises a transversally weak way of thinking that Deleuze and Guattari describe at follows: "We can never be sure we will be strong enough, for we have no system, only lines and movements".[2] Combining such theoretical suggestions with Haraway's invitation to "stay with the trouble"[3] and to refuse easy-fix strategies, Majewska defines her weak resistance as "as an alternative to the predominantly straight and masculine notions of heroic activism dominating our political imaginary".[4]Focusing on ordinary forms of resistance rooted in the embodied, situated experiences of heterogeneous communities and societies, weak resistance is a way to shift the perspective and turn on collective engagements to shed light on the conditions of women's and other minorities' exclusion from various sectors of contemporary life. In particular, my practice-based research addresses Majewska's weak resistance to inform a collective investigation of the exclusion of non-experts and minorities perspectives and narratives from mainstream socially engaged art production systems. I agree with Majewska that dismantling heroic models of identity and offering instead weak, but deeply grounded counteractions is the best way to oppose the recent, worrying resurgence of fascism throughout Europe (particularly in Poland, in the author's analysis, but also in France and in Italy, I would argue, where extreme right parties start to dangerously use the rhetoric of the heroic mother as leader, such as Marine Le Pen or Giorgia Meloni). Indeed, such "unheroic and common forms of protest and persistence"[5] allow to redefine the general notion of political agency, and – I would argue – of ecology as an investigation of the shared οἶκος. Since genuine social change cannot happen instantaneously, but inevitably unfolds through a critically engaged and physically situated negotiation among dynamic assemblages of heterogenesis, Majewska is convinced, as much as I am, that "ignoring ordinary, daily forms of resistance and focusing on the most spectacular is one of the ways that the patriarchal, white, privileged and heteronormative perspective survives",[6] and keeps nurturing those neoliberal conditions that are at the core of the contemporary ecological crisis.

1. Ibid, 299.
2. Ibid, 372.
3. Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
4. Ewa A. Majewska, *Feminist Antifascism: Counterpublics of the Common* (London: Verso, 2021), 22.
5. Ibid, 21.
6. Ewa Majewska, "The Weak Internationalism? Women's Protests in Poland and internationally, Art and Law," *L'Internationale* (9 May 2018), https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/98_the_weak_internationalism_womens_protests_in_poland_and_internationally_art_and_law/.

Nevertheless, such an approach has also raised criticism, particularly if it is used to investigate issues of social ecology and environmental sustainability. Anna Kornbluh criticises the very core of this "weak" approach. According to her, when it comes to discussing the on-going environmental crisis, such open-endedness and the urge to embrace heterogenetic processes of negotiation with the environment risks justifying the contemporary political idleness towards concrete actions to fight against the present climate crisis. In recent years, fossil fuel corporations systematically exaggerated the doubts inherent in the scientific method in order to present a misleading impression that scientists do not agree about climate breakdown. To counter this dangerous tendency, she argues that critique must be affirmative and lead to a new composition. She states: "Dialectical critique is affirmative, so here are my norms. Do critique: assess the environments for thought, and build necessary alternative environments. Commit to strengthening our institutions for critique and reflection and immediacy precisely now when they have been decimated. Do the feminised service labour of making the place where the work *work*".[7] I disagree with this reading of weak practice and theory because it forgets that critique is not a specific, static moment in the process of thinking – that of the synthesis, the reconciliation of opposites – but precisely the movement created by the tension generated by an encounter between differences. Such tension can be mitigated by a temporary reconciliation, but only in order to re-discover itself through a new opposition of differences. As I have made clear when discussing the influence of Morton's Dark ecology for my ecosophical approach to socially engaged curatorial practice, in my view, critique is not affirmative, as in Kornbluh's statement, but it is about practicing doubt and expanding the investigation to always include new perspectives. How to assess the environment, how to build alternatives if not through the enactment of a new way of thinking and acting in the shared οἶκος? What is more, how can we call for changes in society and in our own way of thinking if we, the cultural producers and thinkers, do not first ask ourselves why is making the place for the collective work still considered a "feminised service labour", as Kornbluh does, and the consequences, in life and art practice, for such an understanding?

It follows that my ecosophical articulation of practice can be considered "weak" in the sense given to the term by Ewa Majewska for it practices and stimulates doubts and conversations through socially engaged art projects that destabilise a certain individualistic and scientistic mentality, and that also imply the blurring of boundaries between different creative languages and disciplines. My ecosophical practice starts

7. Anna Kornbluh, "Extinct Critique," in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 119, no. 4 (October 2020): 775.

from the awareness that ecology is too often still addressed as a topic for spectacularised, large-scale projects that eventually only enhance the visibility of the ones who have directed the networks of relations these projects consist of, while running in-between pre-established boundaries that should actually be challenged to stimulate a more ecological sensitivity towards the οἶκος. In the production of socially engaged art projects, the transversal – that is anti-hierarchical – critical and self-critical articulation of practice entails accepting the risk to overcome such boundaries and to try to hybridise your practice in order to enact, not merely to display the revolution that cultural producers tackling issues of ecology aim to stimulate. In order not to celebrate a false sense of individual agency through my practice but to cultivate response-abilities towards the ecology of practices sustaining a socially engaged art project, I have come to favour a model of production in which the curatorial is shared as much as possible among the people involved in the production. The weakness of my practice lies in the view that an activist philosophy of the everyday is hardly compatible with the individualistic model of the institutionalised curator. My practice favours co-authoriality, and political and financial co-agency in order to stimulate a cultural revolution that thinks and acts in terms of interconnectedness, following an ethico-aesthetic sensitivity towards the world, or οἶκος we share with others.

Fig.4.16: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, opening, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Conclusions

I

When this research took its first steps, I was aiming for a practice that could investigate the ecological crisis of contemporary Europe without "reproducing the very objectification of nature that has got us into trouble in the first place".[8] I ended up trying to expand the notion of ecology to include Guattari's three registers of mental, environmental and social ecology, investigating the consequences of embedding an ethico-aesthetic paradigm and a transversal way of thinking and making socially engaged art projects through curatorial practice. I have learned from feminist theorists and artists that a practice can be "a place where our ideas about things drop away",[9] borrowing Timothy Morton's definition of the aesthetics in his *Ecology without Nature*. Feminist art practice taught me that socially engaged art practice is not a set of things to do, but a way to think of oneself and of the problems faced in everyday life beyond pre-established categories, roles, hierarchies and narratives. Furthermore, I learned from feminist methodology that a process of mental emancipation from dogmatic paradigms of thought is essential for a true change in society and in our relation to the shared οἶκος. Taking advantage of "the privilege of partial perspective", to use Donna Haraway's sound expression, I have designed strategies of production and co-executed socially engaged art projects to ensure that the meanings of ecology and sustainability could be negotiated through situated exchanges and conversations by temporary communities researching on the social and mental conditions of the shared, networked everyday. The making of such projects was also informed by a continuous, critical investigation of the implications that such an ecosophical articulation was having on my own life and practice.

Indeed, while trying to embed Guattari's ecosophical paradigm in the curatorial production of socially engaged art projects, my practice got tangled in internal contradictions to such an extent that eventually I felt that I was not acting as a curator as I felt I was not enabler, or facilitator or artistic director of any of the socially engaged curated interventions that I discuss in this thesis. In fact, in a truly ecosophical articulation of socially engaged art projects, there should be no boundaries and no hierarchies between practices and practitioners, because responsibilities should be shared as much as possible and everybody should act as one of the multi-dimensional rhizomes of Guattari's and Deleuze's revolutionary form of epistemology, overcrossing and hybridising other dimensional subjectivities while also being transformed by this interaction. Borrowing Donna Haraway's methodological invitation, my way to

8. T.J. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology", in *Radical Nature: art and architecture for a changing planet, 1969-2009*, ed. by Francesco Manacorda and Ariella Yedger (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009), 20.
9. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 24.

embed ecosophy was precisely to "stay with the trouble" and to seek for "embodied accounts of the truth",[10] inviting people not simply to contribute to an art project but to work on a collaborative research on the social and mental ecology of their environments. The strategies of working that I have used to practice ecosophy, and that I abridge in the second section of this conclusion, were meant to create the conditions for people's contributions to inherently trans-form, not merely the visual formalisation, but the inherent nature of the project. More importantly, I "stayed with the trouble" as ecosophy in practice implies by also letting these processes of production and the relations it produced change my understanding of my own practice in relation to others.

In an ecosophical movement that swings between interpretation and re-assessment of experiences, in this research, I highlighted the process of hybridisation that takes place when rejecting relational and professional hierarchies, and embodying in practice the ecosophical principle of transversality. In particular, the making of the interventions this thesis consists of made me realise the effects of such an ecosophical articulation for the understanding of my own practice, that is certainly not that of a curator, although implying a certain idea of the curatorial. This was my way to address Guattari's ecosophical proposals for "the incessant clash of the movement of art against established boundaries",[11] always moving between thinking and making, using theory to practice critique, doubts and forms of resistance to the contemporary historical conditions. Throughout this thesis I became aware that one of the implications of ecosophy in socially engaged practice is to expand the critical negotiation on the shared οἶκος not only beyond the traditional institutional settings of the art experience, but also across mental habits and pre-established hierarchies that inform the processes of productions of socially engaged art projects.

Unlike the curators whose ecosophy-inspired practices I discuss in this thesis, my curatorial activities always happened in public or independent art spaces, and have been made by using existing works or recycling whatever material could be found in the environment, combining the moment of negotiation of ecological sensitivities with the moment of production of the socially engaged project, and contradicting the assumption that exhibiting is only about displaying and that producing always entails consumption. Furthermore, the curatorial strategy and the overall visual presentation of the projects I discuss in this thesis have been designed as a response to the actions

10. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Feminist Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 578.
11. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Prefanis (1992; Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), 106.

and sensitivities of the people involved in the processes of production, and always proposed, never imposed on the participants. Throughout this thesis, I argue that in order to really embed ecosophy in socially engaged art practice, the curatorial should not be thought of as an in-betweenness spinning from an unquestioned centre and across an already established idea of the social. Rather, the curatorial as "the result of a network of agents' labour",[12] as Maria Lind defined it, should also consider the plurality of the agents involved and how these transform the relations between those involved and the perception that we, cultural producers, have of ourselves in relation to all those involved. I advocate for Lind's notion of the curatorial as multidimensional, O'Neill's curating as in-betweenness and Thompson's practice as platform, but my practice combines these with Latour's understandings of the social as movements of associations, and of the subjectivities participating in these movements as situated actors, and not as receivers, informants or agents moving in alignment to an already established set of rules.

II

To properly assess the implications that ecosophy had on my curatorial practice, I would like to briefly walk the reader through the curatorial projects discussed in this thesis, focusing in particular on the strategies I have used to embed ecosophical principles and on what I have learned about combining ecosophy and socially engaged practice. With *Moving In / Moving Out,* Antonella Ferrari, Silvia Forese and I realised a project on the social ecology of a specific urban environment by letting residents literally "impress" their stories and bodies, and using almost exclusively objects and remnants found in the surroundings. In the making of this project, expanding the notion of ecology meant taking the risk and letting the project take forms that went beyond our control, in ways that may even belie their intentions and that may affect one's our understanding of their own practice.

Taking part in the Cambridge Sustainability Residency 2014, I found myself negotiating the meaning and function of my own curatorial practice while negotiating meanings of ecology. The bartered collection of the materials needed by the artists allowed the group to engage in much more authentic relations with the residents of Cambridge. Yet not all the participants agreed with my proposed conversational and bartered strategy. The resulting exhibition was an assemblage of many different ways to address ecology, some more ecosophical than others. Through my curatorial activity in this project, I learned that the coexistence of heterogeneous approaches

12. Lind, "The Curatorial," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian K. Wood (Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010), 65.

to issues of ecology within the same art project is exactly what makes ecosophy so fruitful. In such a blurred landscape of creative practices, our differences allowed us to approach ecology not as a topic, but as a critical force that was leading us to think and practice different ways of group-beings, not only with the public, but also among us, the cultural producers.

In the context of *Practices of Sustainability*, ecosophy became a way to critically investigate how to re-negotiate the identity of your own practice in relation to the other subjects involved in the socially engaged project. Sabine Bolk and I particularly focused on the narratives about the sustainability of crowded, transitory public spaces in London, but ended up reflecting on the mental barriers that inform the artist/curator relation, and how these barriers inform all the relations between those involved. In particular, I learned that these are the boundaries that cultural producers need to challenge in order to actualise the cultural revolution needed to develop an ecosophical praxis.

Working in Palermo as communication coordinator for an international art biennial, I tried to investigate whether traces of an ecosophical praxis, as a way of thinking and acting in ethico-aesthetic terms, could be found in the foreign terrain of a professional and institutionalised, non-curatorial role. Coordinating among different departments, agencies and that public of socially engaged art that Holly Arden describes as "impossible", I attempted to address whatever I was doing (from day-to-day office tasks to the communication strategy and production of community projects such as the Manifesta 12 Meet Up and Cook and Talk) embodying Guattari's notion of transversality as a dimension that "tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings".[13] I realised that I could practise an ecosophical articulation of my role, using the curatorial as a network of actors' labours, as Bruno Latour's ANT methodology advocates. My activity with Manifesta 12 also turned out to be a fruitful opportunity to reflect on the importance of the conditions of engagement in socially engaged art projects tackling issues of ecology, and on the relevance that a proper understanding of the "impossible" public has for an ecosophical approach to socially engaged curating. After Manifesta, I started to understand the "social" of my socially engaged practice not as an entity but as fluid and mutable trails of associations which include and "trans-form" the ecology of practices nurturing the production of the projects.

13. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (1989; London: continuum, 2008), 18.

Finally, *Rilfessioni sull'Abitare* allowed me to work in a more equal and less institutional context, outside rigid definitions and pre-established roles. In an ecosophical move of practice, enacting critique and self-critique, and reflecting on the doubts and considerations arisen during the biennial to create a new, collaborative project, Federica Vita and I co-designed with other cultural producers a self-sustained research project to both investigate issues of social ecology in contemporary Palermo – the city where I had just spent two years of my life – and the impact that projects such as Manifesta 12 had on its residents. Playing with the traditionally opposed, aesthetic categories of "proximity" and "distance" and mixing an exhibitionary format with more discursive and informal settings and moments, the project ecosophically allowed me to identify "the curatorial" not as a subjective quality, as Maria Lind does, but as a network of possibilities of expression shared by and negotiated among many actors.

To round off this conclusion, I return to the initial question: what are the consequences in curatorial practice if ecosophy were embedded in socially engaged art projects, addressing ecology not as a topic but as a quest for a different sensitivity, to collectively think and formulate new ways to experience the shared οἶκος? Through the production of the socially engaged art projects described in this thesis, my ecosophy-driven socially engaged curatorial practice became a critical, situated, transversal, heterogeneous, activist and weak philosophy of the everyday. It is a critical and situated practice that is primarily cynically suspicious of itself, taking the form of a "relentless questioning of essence, rather than some special new thing",[14] borrowing Morton's ecocritical expression. My practice surfs the uncertainties and ethical ambivalences of neoliberal working structures and precarious life conditions, to practice through socially engaged art projects new ways of thinking and acting in terms of interconnectedness towards the shared οἶκος. It unfolds through relational strategies of production that embody Guattari's tools of transversality and heterogeneity. Instead of addressing the poles of any relation (culture/nature, human/οἶκος, art producers/art participants) as oppositions of a binary set, it engages and tries to identify with both poles transversally, in an anti-hierarchical and in an inclusive a way as possible, using the production of socially engaged art projects as the moment where to challenge pre-established, unsustainable mentalities and perceptions of the world, and where to visualise the logic of complexity outlined by contemporary ecological theorists such as Bateson and Guattari. It could also be said that it is sustainable, because it follows Guattari's ecosophical vision and considers the environment as one of the multiple dimensions informing our understanding of ecology, along with the social and the mental. Although I acknowledge that one can hardly aspire to

14. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 21.

live a totally sustainable life within the contemporary, neoliberal society, I have always tried to deliver projects that had minimum impact on the environment. Taking my own response-abilities towards the environment every time I could, I favoured borrowing, repairing and recycling over buying, and the production of sustainably made promotional items, such as flyers and invitations. Occasionally I left to the local community to reuse objects or furniture that were temporarily created for the projects I co-organised. These material exchanges were ways to visualise the connections and movements my practice was part of. I came to the understanding that my practice moves rhizomatically, or through tentacles – as Donna Haraway would say – because it always seeks for new connections and new processes of heterogenesis, differences, doubts and ambivalences, instead of displaying already formed solutions to the contemporary ecological crisis. In doing so, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, ecosophy turned my curatorial research into an activist practice that takes the curatorial as a networked series of activities shared by all the agents nurturing the production of socially engaged art projects, and that prefers to resist pre-established definitions, functions and old terminologies, thinking of itself as a weak philosophy of the everyday. It certainly uses the curatorial as a network of interconnections, but it does not translate into considering curating as an in-betweenness spreading everywhere from an unquestioned centre, as other curators inspired by principles of ecosophy do. In fact, such a sustained, critical engagement towards the context of its intervention, establishing itself as inherently anti-hierarchical and weak, it is certainly hardly compatible[15] with European neoliberal institutions, their conditions of labour and hierarchical working structures. While not identifying itself with the hierarchical and individualistic agency of the "curator" as caretaker, enabler and eventually director of such interconnectedness, my ecosophical articulation of practice helped me

15. Interestingly, the 2021 list of nominees for one of the most renowned contemporary art prizes in the world, the Turner Prize, consists entirely of socially engaged art collectives: Array Collective from Belfast, the London-Based studio practices Black Obsidian Sound System (B.O.S.S.) and Cooking Sections, the artist-run project Gentle/Radical in Cardiff, and Project Art Works, a collective of neurodiverse artists and activists from Hastings. Director of Tate Britain and chair of the Turner Prize, Alex Farquharson commented: "One of the great joys of the Turner Prize is the way it captures and reflects the mood of the moment in contemporary British art. After a year of lockdowns due to the spread of Covid-19, when very few artists have been able to exhibit publicly, the jury has selected five outstanding collectives whose work has not only continued through the pandemic but become even more relevant as a result."
Mark Brown, "Five art collectives shortlisted for Turner prize," *The Guardian* (5 May 2021), https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/may/07/five-art-collectives-shortlisted-for-turner-prize.
Nevertheless, this kind of approach – of finally rediscovering such practices because they have been the few to be able to keep working during the Covid-19 crisis – does not give justice to the complex considerations that such practices arise, both in contemporary aesthetics and for the ethico-political implications of their projects. Furthermore, there is the risk of reducing the possibilities of expression of the ecosophical approach that some of these collectives seem to embody in their ways of working, for the modes of production, politics of funding and political expectations that are typical of an institutional context such as the Tate may limit the critical transversality of such practices, as I have shown while discussing my collaboration at Manifesta 12 Palermo in Chapter Three.

consider failures, doubts and uncertainties as opportunities to change and challenge my own understanding of the ecology of practices inhabiting the shared process of production of socially engaged art projects. Ecosophy helped me to understand the strength and passion it takes to be transversal, and to practice "weak" forms of resistance towards the scientistic, heroic and, eventually, individualistic notion of the curator as an enlightened expert of social engagements in times of complexity and ecological crisis. In fact, I argue that ecosophy in socially engaged curatorial practice also implies the fact that the same identity of your own practice should be addressed not as an individual matter for, as Guattari states, "everything depends on its articulation within collective assemblages of enunciation".[16] Weakness should be reclaimed as a quality, as much as ambivalence and transversality, for my ecosophical practice shares Ewa Majewska's argument that "it is in our weakness, not in our strength that we all meet as oppressed groups",[17] and can really challenge neoliberal social and mental structures.

Instead of offering a new theory of art and ecology, my practice based investigation attempted to shed light not only on the implications that ecosophy has for traditional roles and systems of labour in the context of contemporary socially engaged art production, but also on the way it helped me identify my own practice anew: not as a curator, but as a cultural producer that thinks of herself as an engaged citizen. The achievements as well as the failures that unfold through these pages do not offer a list of skills or things to do to embody ecosophy in practice. Nevertheless, this research aims at being an inspiration for further critical considerations and engaged negotiations, offering a new insight into the implications for socially engaged curatorial practice of a deconstructive and weak approach such as the ecosophical.

16. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, 5.
17. Ibid.

List of Images

Chapter 1

Fig. 1.1: Diagram 'Ego-Eco'-Humankind is part of the ecosystem, not apart from or above it (see: Dr S. Lehmann, *Reconnecting with Nature: Developing urban spaces in the age of climate change*, 2010). Available at: https://bit.ly/2YxaRWV.

Fig. 1.2: *The Expanded Field*, diagram by Rosalind Krauss. Reprinted from R. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979), 37.

Fig. 1.3: *Loophole to Happiness*, curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, installation view at Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz, 2011.

Fig. 1.4: *Like a Bird. Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art*, curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, installation view. Trafo Gallery Budapest , 2014. Photo by Surányi Miklós.

Fig. 1.5: Invitation to *Moving In / Moving Out*, curated by Vanessa Saraceno, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Design by Silvia Forese.

Figs. 1.6 and 1.7: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Photos by Silvia Forese.

Figs. 1.8 and 1.9: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Photos by Silvia Forese.

Fig. 1.10: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Photo by Silvia Forese.

Fig. 1.11: *Moving In / Moving Out*, The Coming Soon Club, London, 2013. Photo by Silvia Forese.

Fig. 1.12: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009*, Barbican Art Gallery, 2009. Photo by Lyndon Douglas.

Fig. 1.13: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009*, Barbican Art Gallery, 2009. Photo by Lyndon Douglas.

Fig. 1.14: Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield – A Confrontation, The Harvest*, Summer 1982, Battery Park Landfill, New York. Photo by Agnes Denes.

Fig. 1.15: *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009*, Barbican Art Gallery, 2009. Photo by Lyndon Douglas.

Fig. 1.16: *The Dalston Mill*, London, 2009. Photo by Eliot Wyman.

Fig. 1.17: Guattari's mapping of subjectivity published in Stephen L. Vilaseca, "Félix Guattari and Urban Cultural Studies," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 1, 1 March (2014).

Fig. 1.18: *955.000* organised by Lucy Lippard. Photo courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery Photography Archives.

Fig. 1.19: *955.000* organised by Lucy Lippard. Photo courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery Photography Archives.

Fig. 1.20: Conversation in the studio gallery, Cambridge Sustainability Residency, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.21: *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*, Cambridge, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.22: Valerie Furnham, Pia Gálvez Lindegaard, Emma James, *Deep Time*, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.23: Valerie Furnham, Pia Gálvez Lindegaard, Emma James, *Deep Time*, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.24: Sabine Bolk, *Untitled (Corpus Christi),* 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.25: Sabine Bolk, *Untitled (Corpus Christi),* 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 1.26: *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*, Cambridge, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Fig. 1.27: *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures*, Cambridge, 2014. Photo by Krisztian Hofstadter.

Chapter 2

Fig. 2.1: Mierle Laderman Ukeles *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969! Proposal for an exhibition: "CARE"*, 1969 written in Philadelphia, PA, October 1969. One of four typewritten pages, each 8 ½ x 11 in. Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Fig. 2.2: Anne Percoco, *Life Instinct,* Nurture Art, New York, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2.3: Lygia Clark, *Caminhando, or The Walking*, 1963. Photo courtesy of O Mundo de Lygia Clark-Associação Cultural, Rio de Janeiro. Photo by Beto Felicio.

Fig. 2.4: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation Performance*, 1979-80. 24 July 1979 - 26 June 1980. Citywide performance with 8,500 Sanitation workers across all fifty-nine New York City Sanitation districts, 15 May, 1980. Sweep 10, Queens District 14. Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York. Photo by Vincent Russo.

Fig. 2.5: Adrian Piper, *Funk Lessons*, 1983-84. Group performance, University of California at Berkeley, 1983. Photo credit: Courtesy of the University of California at Berkeley. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive (APRA) Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

Fig. 2.6: Picnic in the courtyard in front of the Oda Projesi space in Galata, 2003. Photo courtesy of the collective.

Fig. 2.7: Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Free)*, 1992, Installation view at 303 Gallery. Photo credit: Rirkrit Tiravanija. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York.

Fig. 2.8: Surasi Kusolwong, *Golden Ghost (Reality Called, So I Woke Up)*, 2014. Twelve gold necklaces hidden in industrial thread, dimensions variable. Installation view at the 9th Taipei Biennial, *The Great Acceleration* curated by Nicolas Bourriaud. Photo courtesy of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

Figs. 2.9 and 2.10: Sabine Bolk bartering materials and stories for *Practices of Sustainability*, London, 2014. Photos by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 2.11: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #1*, Blackfriars Bridge, London, 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 2.12: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #1*, Blackfriars Bridge, London, 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 2.13: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #2*, Victoria Park, London, 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 2.14: Sabine Bolk, *Practices of Sustainability – Étude #2*, Victoria Park, London, 2014. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Fig. 2.15: Haha, *Flood*, 1993, storefront garden in which the surrounding community grew hydroponic vegetables for consumption by by people with AIDS. Part of *Culture in Action*, curated by Mary Jane Jacob. Photo courtesy of Haha.

Fig. 2.16*: Coalesce: Happenstance* (installation detail), curated by Paul O'Neill, Smart Projects Space, Amsterdam, 2009. Photo by Paul O'Neill.

Fig. 2.17: *Living as Form*, e-flyer published on Creative Time website: https://creativetime.org/projects/living-as-form/.

Fig. 2.18: *MILK.*, edited by Marina Velez and Sally Stenton. Photo by Vanessa Saraceno.

Chapter 3

Fig. 3.1: *Manifesta 12 Palermo Education Hub* in Piazza Magione, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.2: Francesco Lojacono*, Veduta di Palermo*, 1875. Digitally reworked by OMA researchers to highlight the migration of species of plants arriving in Palermo from all over the world. Photo courtesy of OMA.

Fig. 3.3: Orto Botanico di Palermo. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.4: Jelili Atiku, *Festino della Terra (Alaraagbo XIII)*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Francesco Bellina.

Fig. 3.5: Marinella Senatore, *Palermo Procession*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Francesco Bellina.

Fig. 3.6: Coloco, Gilles Clément, ZEN Insieme, Ground Action and residents of ZEN, *Becoming Garden*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Atelier Coloco.

Fig. 3.7: Residents of ZEN taking care of the garden with members of Zen Insieme and Ground Action, 2021. Photo by Sergio Sanna.

Fig. 3.8: Leone Contini, *Foreign Farmers*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.9: Invernomuto performing *Black Med* at Manifesta 12 Public Programme, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.10: Rotor, *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.11: Rotor, *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 3.12: Tristan Boniver, Map for *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Image courtesy of Rotor.

Fig. 3.13: Tristan Boniver, Map for *Da Quassù È Tutta Un'Altra Cosa*, 2018. Image courtesy of Rotor.

Fig. 3.14: Cooking Sections, *What Is Above Is What Is Below*, installation at Chiesa di S. Maria dello Spasimo, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Wolfgang Traeger.

Fig. 3.15: Cooking Sections, *What Is Above Is What Is Below*, installation at Volpe Astuta, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 3.16: Manifesta 12 Meet Up with Roberto Collovà, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE studio.

Fig. 3.17: Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Gabriele Modica.

Fig. 3.18: Manifesta 12 Cook and Talk, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by Gabriele Modica.

Fig. 3.19: Manifesta 12 Public Survey (excerpt). Image courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo.

Chapter 4

Fig. 4.1: Diagram 'Ego-Eco' published on *Reconnecting with nature: Developing urban spaces in the age of climate change* by S. Lehmann, 2010: https://bit.ly/2YxaRWV.

Fig. 4.2: Diagram published in Meirelles, João, Anna Pagani, Aristide Athanassiadis, and Claudia R. Binder, "Sustainability Issues in Urban Systems from a Metabolic Perspective." Chapter. In *Sustainability Assessment of Urban Systems*, edited by Claudia R. Binder, Romano Wyss, and Emanuele Massaro, 261–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Fig. 4.3: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside*, 1973
Part of *Maintenance Art performance series*, 1973-1974
Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.
Photo courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

Fig. 4.4: Piazza Magione, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 4.5: Chiesa dei Santi Euno e Giuliano, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manifesta 12 Palermo. Photo by CAVE Studio.

Fig. 4.6: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, digital invitation. Design by Federica Vita.

Fig. 4.7: *Riflessione sull'Abitare*, 2019, installation view. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.8: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.9: Davide Basile, *Habito Ergo Sum*, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.10: Studio Marginal, *Migropoli. Effarouchement or The Act of Frightening* (still), 2016. Photo courtesy of Studio Marginal.

Fig. 4.11: Elena Bellantoni, *Ho Annegato il Mare*, 2018. Photo courtesy of the artist. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.12: Elena Bellantoni, *Ho Annegato il Mare*, 2018. Photo courtesy of the artist. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.13: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, public debate, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.14: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, public debate, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig. 4.15: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, public debate, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Fig.4.16: *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*, opening, 2019. Photo by Simone Sapienza.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory.* Edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1970] 1997.

Aloi, Giovanni and Rod Bennison, eds. "In Conversation with Maja and Reuben Fowkes." *Antennae*, no. 10 (Summer 2009): 21-24.

Alves, Maria T. "Il Sole." Maria Thereza Alves website (2006): https://www.mariatherezaalves.org.

Amundsen, Heide Bale and Gerd Elise Mørland. "Request for a Radical Redefinition. Curatorial Politics after Institutional Critique." In *Curating Beyond the Curators: Initial Reflections,* edited by Heide Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland, 16-28. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015.

András, Edit. "Transgressing Boundaries (Even Those Marked Out by the Predecessors) in New Genre Conceptual Art." In *Art After Conceptual Art,* edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 163-177. Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006.

Andrews, Max, ed. LAND, ART: A Cultural Ecology Handbook. London: Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 2006.

Antonioli, Manola. "What is Ecosophy?" *European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes* (1 October 2018): https://cpcl.unibo.it/article/view/8587/8334.

Arden, Holly. "Participatory Art and the Impossible Public." *Art & the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (2014): 103-117.

Baglietto, Francesca "Curating Across Interfaces. an Account of a (Hybrid) Expanding Exhibition." PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2016.

Barbican Art Gallery. "Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009." (2009): https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2009/event/radical-nature-art-and-architecture-for-a-changing-planet.

Basbaum, Ricardo. "Within the Organic Line and After," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 87-99. Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York: Ballantine, 1972.

Bateson, Gregory. *Mind and Nature*. A Necessary Unity. New York: Hampton Press, [1979] 2002.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacri and Simulation.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Beck, Martin. "The Exhibition and the Display," in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Exhibition,* edited by Lucy Steeds, 27-33. London: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings 1931-1934,* edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, 768-782. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.* Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Berardi, Franco Bifo. *The Uprising. On Poetry and Finance*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012.

Berardi, Franco Bifo. "Economic Dogmatism and Poetical Thought in the Coming European Insurrection." *Art as a Thinking Process. Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, edited by Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese, 54-61. London: Sternberg Press, 2013.

Birnbaum, Daniel. "When Attitude Becomes Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann." *Artforum* 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005): 55.

Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." October 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

Bishop, Claire, ed. *Documents of Contemporary Art. Participation.* London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006.

Bishop, Claire. "Introduction: Viewers as Producers." In Documents of Contemporary Art. *Participation*, edited by Claire Bishop, 10-17. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006.

Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents." *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006): 178-183.

Bishop, Claire. "What Is a Curator?" *IDEA* 26 (2007): https://idea.ro/revista/en/article/XOgqVhIAACIAfKxj/what-is-a-curator

Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* New York: Verso, 2012.

Bishop, Claire and Dan Perjovschi. *Radical Museology: Or What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books, 2013.

Blandy, Doug. "Sustainability, Participatory Culture, and the Performance of Democracy." *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 243-255.

Bliss, Laura. 2016. "The Artist Who Made Sanitation Workers Worthy of a Museum." *Bloomberg CityLab* (29 November 2016): https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-29/the-maintenance-art-of-mierle -laderman-ukeles.

Bodei, Remo. *Geometria delle Passioni. Paura, Speranza, Felicità: Filosofia e Uso Politico*. Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2003.

Bonacossa, Ilaria and Latitudes. "Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities." Latitudes (2008): https://www.lttds.org/projects/greenwashing/?lang=en.

Bookchin, Murray. *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathieu Copeland. Paris: les presses du réel, [1998] 2002.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction. Culture as a Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, [2002] 2010.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. "Revisiting the Educational Turn (How I Tried to Renovate an Art School)." *Art Review* (26 November 2015): https://artreview.com/november-2015-feature-nicolas-bourriaud-educational-turn/.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Inclusions: Aesthetics of the Capitalocene*. Translated by Denyse Beaulieu. London: Sternberg Press, 2021.

Bradfield, Marsha. *Utterance and Authorship in Dialogic Art*. London: PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2013.

Brown, Andrew. *Art & Ecology Now*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Brundtland, Gro Harlem. "The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future." United Nations Documents (1987): http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm.

Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 27-51. Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006.

Burgin, Victor. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. London: Palgrave MD, 1986.

Butler, David and Vivienne Reiss. *The Art of Negotiation*. London: Arts Council of England, 2007.

Charlton, Noel G. *Understanding Gregory Bateson: Mind, Beauty and the Sacred Earth.* Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2008.

Chisholm, Dianne. "The Art of Ecological Thinking: Literary Ecology." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 569-593.

Christensen-Scheel, Boel. "The Ethic-aesthetic Way of Wonders." *The Nordic Journal of Art and Research* 1 (1) (2012): 19-38.

Coccia, Emanuele. *La vita delle piante. Metafisica della mescolanza*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018.

Coles, Alex. "Curating: Then and Now." *Art Monthly* 275 (April 2004): 1-4.

Curating Cities. Database of Eco Public Art. "Dalston Mill – EXYZT." (2009): https://eco-publicart.org/dalston-mill/.

Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Davis, Heather and Etienne Turpin, ed. *Art in the Anthropocene. Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2015.

Davis, Tom. "Towards a Relational Understanding of the Performance Ecosystem." *Organised Sound* 16, no. 2 (2011): 120-124.

De Baere, Bart. "Addressing Pregressive Social Values." *Apexart Conference 3: "Inside Out: Reassessing International Cultural Influence"* (9-15 July 2014): https://apexart.org/conference/debaere.htm.

De Bruyne, Paul. "From Community Art to Communal Art." In C*ommunity Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, edited by Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen, 239-249. Amsterdam: Valiz, [2011] 2013.

Decter, Joshua. "Culture in Action: Exhibition as Social Redistribution." In *Exhibition as Social Intervention: 'Culture in Action' 1993*, 14-43. London: Afterall Books, 2014.

Deleuze, Gilles, *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus_Capitalism_and_Schizophrenia,* trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1972] 2000.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Missoumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1987] 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." In 'Community' in *Question: Conversations on Art, Activism, and Community*, 3-25. Vol. IV. n.p.: The Think Tank that has yet to be named. (2008): http://www.wearethethinktank.org/readers/reader-vol4.pdf.

Demos, T.J. "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology." In *Radical Nature: art and architecture for a changing planet, 1969-2009,* edited by Francesco Manacorda and Ariella Yedger, 16-30. London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009.

Demos, T.J. "Gardens Beyond Eden: Bio-aesthetics, Eco-Futurism and Dystopia at dOCUMENTA (13)." *The Brooklyn Rail* (October 2012): https://brooklynrail.org/2012/10/art/gardens-beyond-eden-bio-aesthetics-eco-futurism-and-dystopia-at-documenta-13.

Demos, T.J. "Art After Nature. On the Post-natural Condition." *Artforum* 50, no. 8 (April 2012): 191-198.

Demos, T.J. "Curating Against the Apocalypse. Documenta 13, 2012." In *Curating Beyond the Curators: Initial Reflections*, edited by Heide Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland, 72-88. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015.

Agnes Denes. "Wheatfield – A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan." (1982):

https://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: The Athlone Press, [1969] 1981.

Revolution I Love You: 1968 in Art, Politics and Philosophy, catalogue of the homonymous exhibition curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes. Manchester: MIRIAD Manchester Metropolitan University with CACT Thessaloniki and Trafó House of Contemporary Arts Budapest, 2008.

Downey, Anthony. *Art and Politics Now*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Draxler, Helmut. "Letting Loos(e): Institutional Critique and Design," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 151-160. Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006.

Duchamp, Marcel. "The Creative Act." In *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, 138-140. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975.

Du Bois, Barbara. "Passionate Scholarship: Notes on Values, Knowing and Method in Feminist Social Science." In *Theories of Women's Studies*, edited by Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein, 105-116. London: Routledge, 1983.

Enigbokan, Adeola. "Work Ethics: On Fair Labour Practices in a Socially Engaged Art World." *Art & the Public Sphere* 4, no. 1&2 (2015): 11-22.

Enwezor, Okwui. "Mega-exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form." *Manifesta Journal – Winter 2003/Spring 2004 Biennials*, no. 2 (2008): 7-31.

Evans, Fred. "Deleuze, Bakhtin, and the 'Clamour of Voices.'" *Deleuze Studies*, 2 (2) (2008): 178-200.

Farquharson, Alex. "Bureaux de Change." *Frieze* 101 (2 September 2006): https://www.frieze.com/article/bureaux-de-change.

Farquharson, Alex. "I Curate, You Curate, We Curate." *Art Monthly* 269 (September 2003): 7-10.

Farquharson, Alex. "Curator and Artist." *Art Monthly* 270 (October 2003): 13-16.

Fedorov, Nikolai. "The Museum, Its Meaning and Mission." Originally published in 1906. Translated from the Russian by Stephen P. Van Trees. *E-flux Journal 56th Venice Biennale* (16 July 2015): http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/the-museum-its-meaning-and-mission/.

Fernández Pascual, Daniel and Alon Schwabe. "What Is Above Is What Is Below." Cooking Sections. (2018): https://www.cooking-sections.com/What-Is-Above-Is-What-Is-Below.

Fischer, Barbara. "Museums and Radicals: A Histories of Emergencies." *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, edited by Kitty Scott, 69-92. London: Koenig Books, 2011.

Fitzgerald, Cathy. *The Ecological Turn: Living Well with Forests To Articulate Eco-Social Art Practices Using a Guattari Ecosophy and Action Research Framework*. PhD diss.: School of Visual Culture, The National College of Art and Design, A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland, 2018.

Fontaine, Claire. *Human Strike and the Art of Creating Freedom*. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2020.

Fontaine, Claire. "Our Common Critical Condition." *E-flux* 73 (May 2016): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/73/60452/our-common-critical-condition/.

Foster, Hal. "The Artist as Ethnographer." In *The Return of the Real*, 171-204. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.

Foster, Hal, ed. "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'." *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 3–124.

Foucault, Michel. "Preface." In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, X-XIII. 1972; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben. *Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art*. Budapest: Praesens, 2006.

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben. "Sensuous Resistance: The Legacy of Modernism for Sustainable Art," in *Dokumenta 12 Magazine* (2007): http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=en&page=3&id=352

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben. "Rational, Responsible and Free." In *Revolution is Not a Garden Party*, edited by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 78-83. Manchester: MIRIAD, 2007.

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben. "The Ecology of Post-Socialism and The Implications of Sustainability for Contemporary Art." In *Art and Theory After Socialism,* edited by Mel Jordan and Malcolm Miles, 101-112. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008.

Fowkes, Maya and Reuben. "Loophole to Happiness." Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art (2011): https://translocal.org/page47.html.

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben. "Renewing the Curatorial Refrain: Sustainable Research in Contemporary Art." In *Curating Research*, edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. London: Open Editions, 2014.

Fowkes, Maya and Reuben. "Like a Bird. Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art." Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art (2014): http://translocal.org/page17.html.

Fowle, Kate. "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of Curator Today." In *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating,* edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, 26-35. New York: Apexart, 2007.

Fowle, Kate. "An Education." *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 61-64.

Fox, Warwick. "The Meanings of 'Deep Ecology.'" *The Trumpeter* 7 (1) 1990: http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/download/519/882?inline=1.

Fraser, Andrea. "What do I, as an artist, provide?" Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. Accessed 15 December 2021: https://www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/files/AndreaFraser.pdf

Freeman, Jo. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." In *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-1973): 151-164.

Freyenhagen, Fabian. "Critical Theory: Self-reflexive Theorising and Struggles for Emancipation."*Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (September 2008): https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328065735_Critical_Theory_Self-Reflexive_Theorizing_and_Struggles_for_Emancipation.

Furlong, William. "Marcel Duchamp." In *Speaking of Art. Four Decades of Art in Conversation*, interview by George Heard Hamilton, Richard Hamilton and Charles Mitchell, 16-25. New York: Phaidon Press, 2010.

Furlong, William. "Joseph Boys." In *Speaking of Art. Four Decades of Art in Conversation*, interview by William Furlong, 77-83. New York: Phaidon Press, 2010.

Furlong, William. "Hans Ulrich Obrist." In *Speaking of Art. Four Decades of Art in Conversation*, interview by William Furlong, 248-252. New York: Phaidon Press, 2010.

Gablik, Suzi. *The Reenchantment of Art.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

Gablik, Suzi. "Connective Aesthetics." *American Art* Vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 2-7.

Gablik, Suzi. "Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism." In *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy, 74-87. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

Gabrielsson, Catherina. "Squatting My Mind – Towards an Architectural Ecosophy." *Field-journal.org* 4, no. 1 (11 July 2016): http://field-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/11-Squatting-my-Mind.pdf.

Genosko, Gary. *Félix Guattari. An Aberrant Introduction.* London: continuum, 2002.

Genosko, Gary. "The Life and Work of Guattari: from Transversality to Ecosophy." *The Three Ecologies*, translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, 46-78. London: continuum, 2008.

Genosko, Gary. "Subjectivity and Art in Guattari's 'Three Ecology.'" *Deleuze|Guattari & Ecology*, edited by Bernd Herzogenrath, 102-128. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Gielen, Pascal. "Mapping Community Art." In *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing,* edited by Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen, 15-33. Amsterdam: Valiz, [2011] 2013.

Gielen, Pascal and Sonja Lavaert. "Art and Common: A Conversation with Antonio Negri." In *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, edited by Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen, 165-192. Amsterdam: Valiz, [2011] 2013.

Gleadowe, Teresa. "What Does a Curator Need to Know?" In *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and its Discontent,* edited by Kitty Scott, 17-27. London: Koenig Books, 2011.

Grace, Claire. "Group Material: AIDS Timeline." *The Artist as Curator, Mousse* 25, no. 4 (August 2015): https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/taac4-a/.

Graham, Beryl and Sarah Cook. *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015.

Groys, Boris. "Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility." *E-flux,* Issue 07, June 2019: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61386/self-design-and-aesthetic-responsibility/.

Groys, Boris. "On Art Activism." *E-flux,* Issue 56 (June 2014): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/.

Groys, Boris. "The Curator as Iconoclast." In Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating, edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, 46-55. New York: Apexart, 2007.

Guattari, Félix. "Preface: Millions and Millions of Potential Alices." In "Radio Alice, radio libera." Bologna: colletif *a/traverso*, 1977.

Guattari, Félix. "Integrated World Capitalism and Molecular Revolution." Conference on Information and/as New Spaces of Liberty (CINEL), 1-10. 1981: https://www.academia.edu/29510330/Integrated_World_Capitalism_and_Molecular_Revolution.

Guattari, Félix. *Molecular Revolutions. Psychiatry and Politics*. London: Penguin, 1984.

Guattari, Félix. "Cracks in the Street," *Flash Art* 135 (Summer 1987).

Guattari, Félix. "Pour une Refondation des Pratiques Sociales." In *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Octobre 1992): 26-27.

Guattari, Félix. "Popular Free Radio." In *Radiotext(e),* edited by Neill Strauss, Dave Mandl, translated by David Sweet. New York: Autonomedia Press, 1993.

Guattari, Félix. *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*. Translated by Paul Bains and Julian Prefanis. Sydney: Power Publications, [1992] 1995.

Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London: continuum, [1989] 2008.

Habermas, Jürgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article." *New German Critique* 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Justice and solidarity: On the discussion concerning stage 6." *Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989-1990): 32-52.

Haeckel, Ernst. *General Morphology of Organisms*. I-II vols. Berlin: Reimer, 1866.

Haeckel, Ernst. *The Natural History of Creation*. New York: Appleton, 1914.

Halsall, Francis. "Aesthetics and Human Flourishing in the Good Society: Perspectives from Applied Social Science and Critical Theory on the Value of Aesthetic Practices." *Art & the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (2014): 131-149.

Hammersley, Martyn. "On Feminist Methodology." *Sociology* 26, no. 2 (May 1992): 187-206.

Hantelmann, Dorothea v. "The Curatorial Paradigm." *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 6-12.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." In *Feminist Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with The Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London: Duke University Press, 2016.

Haraway, Donna. "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene." *E-flux* 75 (September 2016): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/.

Haraway, Donna, "Making Oddkin: Story Telling for Earthly Survival," 26 October 2017, Yale University, New Haven, Yale University Youtube Official Account, 1:34:04: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-iEnSztKu8

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. "Globalization and Democracy." In *Democracy Unrealized : Documenta 11 Platform 1*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya, 232-336. Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Cantz, 2002.

Harrison, Newton and Helen Mayer. "Shifting Positions Towards the Earth: Art and Environmental Awareness." In *Women, Art and Technology*, edited by Judy Malloy, 160-179. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003.

Harrison, Newton, and Helen Mayer. "Greenhouse Britain, 2007-2009." The Harrison Studio (2009): https://theharrisonstudio.net/greenhouse-britain-2007-2009.

Helguera, Pablo. *Education for Socially Engaged Art*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011.

Hoffmann, Jens. 2012. "Living as Form." *Frieze no. 144*, 1 1 (2012): https://www.frieze.com/article/living-form.

Hoffmann, Jens. "A Plea for Exhibitions," in *Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine*, 24, Summer Issue (2010): http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=569.

Hoffmann, Jens and Joan Jonas. *ArtWorks: Perform*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

Hoffmann, Jens and Maria Lind. "To Show or Not to Show." *Mousse Magazine* 31 (December 2011–January 2012): https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/jens-hoffmann-maria-lind-2011/.

Hoffmann, Jens and Tara McDowell. "Reflection." *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 2-4.

Holland, Eugene W. "'Deterritorialization': From the 'Anti-Oedipus' to 'A Thousand Plateaus.'" *SubStance* 20 (66) (1991): 55-65.

Hope, Charlotte Sophie. “Participating in the ‘Wrong’ Way? Practice Based Research into Cultural Democracy and the Commissioning of Art to Effect Social Change”. n.p.: PhD diss., Birkbeck, University of London, 2011.

Hour, Lunch. “Art, Community, Administered Space, and Unproductive Activity.” In *What We Want Is Free*, edited by Ted Purves and Shane Aslan Selzer, 39-48. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

Hudek, Antony. “Number Shows.” *Flash Art* (November 11, 2015): https://flash---art.com/article/number-shows/.

Hutchinson, Mark. “Everybody Lies: The Ethics of Social Practice.” *Art & The Public Sphere* 4, no. 1 & 2 (2015): 53-62.

Jacob, Mary J. “Chicago Is Culture in Action.” In *Exhibition as Social Intervention: ‘Culture in Action’ 1993*, 172-181. London: Afterall Books, 2014.

Jareunpoon-Phillips, Jerlyn Marie, Vlad Morariu, Rachel Pafe and Francesco Sciasciamacchia, ed. *Giant Step. Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique*. Bari: Vessel Art Projects, 2013.

Jordan, Mel. “People as Producers.” *Art & The Public Sphere* 3, no. 1 (2014): 5-7.

Kagan, Sacha. *Art and Sustainability. Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*. Bielefelg: Transcript Verlag, 2013.

Kagan, Sacha. “Aesthetics of Sustainability: A Transdisciplinary Sensibility for Transformative Practices.” *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering & Science* 2 (2011): 65-73.

Kent, Rachel. *In the Balance: Art for a Changing Planet*. Sydney : Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.

Kenning, Dean, “Eco Art.” *Art Monthly*, no. 313 (February 2008): 1-4.

Kester, Grant. “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art.” *Afterimage* (January 1995): 5-11.

Kester, Grant. “Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art.” In *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, edited by Zoya Kucor and Simon Leung, 76-85. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Kliger, Gili. “Art and Emancipation: Habermas’s ‘Die Modern– ein unvollendetes Projekt’ Reconsidered.” *New German Critique* 124, Vol. 42, no. 1 (February 2015): 203-221.

Kornbluh, Anna. “Extinct Critique,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 119, no. 4 (October 2020): http://annakornbluh.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Kornbluh-3.pdf.

Kraus, Chris. *Social Practices.* South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018.

Krauss, Rosalind. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30-44.

Krauss, Rosalind. “Who Comes After the Subject?” In *The Life and the Work: Art and Biography,* edited by Charles Salas, 257-263. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007.

Kunzru, Hari. “Life on the edge | Art.” *The Guardian* (26 June 2009): https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jun/27/radical-nature-exhibition-barbican.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, [2002] 2004.

Lacy, Suzanne. “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” In *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy, 19-46. Seattle: Bay Press, [1995] 1996.

Larsen, Lars Bang. “The Paradox of Art and Work. An Irritating Note.” In *Work Work Work. A Reader on Art and Labour,* edited by Jonatan Habib Engqvist, Annika Enqvist, Michele Masucci, Lisa Rosendahl, Cecilia Widenheim, 17-27. London: Sternberg Press, 2012.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2007.

Latour, Bruno. “From Multiculturalism to Multinaturalism: What Rules of Method for the New Socio-Scientific Experiments?” In *Manifesta 12 Palermo Reader*, 118-134. Amsterdam: Manifesta Foundation, 2018.

Lazzarato, Maurizio. “Art and Work”. In *Parachute* 122 (4 May 2006): http://thenewobjectivity.com/pdf/artandwork.pdf.

Levesque, Simon. “Two Versions of Ecosophy: Arne Naess, Félix Guattari, and their connection with Semiotics.” *Sign Systems Studies* 44, no. 4 (December 2016): 511-541.

Levi Strauss, David. “The Bias of the World: Curating After Szeeman and Hopps.” In *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating,* edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, 15–25. New York: Apexart, 2007.

Levin, Kim. "Helen and Newton Harrison: New Grounds for Art." *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 6 (February 1978): 126-129.

Light, Andrew, ed. *Sociology After Bookhin*. New York: Guildford Press, 1998.

Lind, Maria. "Models of Criticality." In *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, edited by Brian K. Wood, 85-96. Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010.

Lind, Maria. "Selected Nodes in a Network of Thoughts on Curating." In *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, edited by Brian K. Wood, 29-31. Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010.

Lind, Maria. "The Collaborative Turn." In *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, edited by Brian K. Wood, 181-204. Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010.

Lind, Maria. "The Curatorial." In *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, edited by Brian K. Wood, 63-66. Berlin: Steinberg Press, 2010.

Lind, Maria, ed. *Performing the Curatorial. Within and Beyond Ar*t. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.

Lind, Maria. "Talking About Abstraction…A Conversation with Maria Lind." Interview by Silvia Simoncelli. *On-curating.org* 20 (October 2013): https://www.on-curating.org/issue-20-reader/interview-maria-lind.html#.YbnJon3MIb0.

Lind, Maria. "Operating as a Curator. An Interview with Maria Lind." Interview by Ksenia Kaverina. *CuMMA Papers* 21, Department of Art, Aalto University, Helsinki (2016): https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/maria_lind.pdf.

Lind, Maria. "Returning on Bikes: Notes on Social Practice." In *Living as a form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011,* edited by Nato Thompson, 46-55. Cambridge: The MIT Press, [2012] 2017.

Lippard, Lucy. "Projecting a Feminist Criticism." *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer, 1976): 337-339.

Lippard, Lucy. *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change.* New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984.

Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley: University of California Press, [1973] 2001.

Lippard, Lucy. "Curating by Numbers. Landmark Exhibitions Issue." *Tate Papers*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009): https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers.

Lippard, Lucy. "c. 7500: An Exhibition, 1973." In *Documents of Contemporary Art: Exhibition*, edited by Lucy Steeds, 127-128. London: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014.

Liss, Andrea. *The Feminist and The Maternal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

López, Miguel A. "Beyond Participation." *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 84.

MacCormack, Patricia and Colin Gardner. *Ecosophical Aesthetics Art, Ethics and Ecology with Guattari.* London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Macdonald, Sharon. *The Politics of Display.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Majewska, Ewa. *Feminist Antifascism: Counterpublics of the Common*. London: Verso, 2021.

Majewska, Ewa. "The Weak Internationalism? Women's Protests in Poland and internationally, Art and Law." *L'Internationale* (9 May 2018): https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/98_the_weak_internationalism_womens_protests_in_poland_and_internationally_art_and_law/.

Manacorda, Francesco. "Who's Afraid of the Ideal public." In *Raising Frankenstein. Curatorial Education and its Discontent*, edited by Kitty Scott, 38-47. London: Koenig Books, 2011.

Manifesta 12 Palermo. "Manifesta 12 Curatorial Concept." (2018): https://www.manifesta12.org/planetary-garden/index.html.

Manifesta 12 Palermo (n.d.). "Manifesta 12 Studios." Accessed 15 December 2021: www.manifesta12.org/m12studios.

Manifesta 12 Palermo. *The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Booklet 1 – Review and Reflections*. Amsterdam: International Foundation Manifesta, 2020.

Manifesta Foundation (n.d.). "About the biennial." Accessed 15 December 2021: https://manifesta.org/biennials/about-the-biennial/.

Marincola, Paula and Robert Storr, eds. *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice-Public Responsibility*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001.

Martin, Jean-Hubert. "Independent Curatorship." In *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, 36-45. New York: Apexart, 2007.

McClure, Bruce David. "Between the Seen and the Said. Deleuze-Guaftari's Pragmatics of the Order-Word." PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2001.

McDonnell, Amy. "Artists' Collectives and Collectivities: A Curatorial Investigation into Assembling the Social." PhD diss., University of the Arts of London, 2016.

McIlveen, Francis. "Exchange – The 'Other' Social Sculpture." In *What We Want Is Free*, edited by Ted Purves and Shane Aslan Selzer, 27-37. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

Meadows, A.B. "Jochen Gerz: Creative Stimulator of Participatory Art." *Art in Society* no. 10 (13 February 2010): http://www.art-in-society.de/AS10/Gerz/ABM%282%29OnJGerz.html.

Medina, Cuauhtémoc. "Raising Frankenstein." In *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, edited by Kitty Scott, 28-36. London: Koenig Books, 2011.

Meirelles, João, Anna Pagani, Aristide Athanassiadis, and Claudia R. Binder. "Sustainability Issues in Urban Systems from a Metabolic Perspective." In *Sustainability Assessment of Urban Systems*, edited by Claudia R. Binder, Romano Wyss, and Emanuele Massaro, 261-289. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Message, Kylie. *New Museums and the Making of Culture*. New York: Berg Publishers, 2006.

Meta Bauer, Ute and Hou Hanru, eds. *Shifting Gravity. World Biennial Forum N. 1*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013.

Miles, Malcom. *Eco-Aesthetics. Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Miles, Malcolm and Mel Jordan. *Art and Theory After Socialism*. Plymouth: Plymouth Press, 2008.

MoMA (n.d.)"Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988." Accessed on 15 December 2021: https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/181/2419.

Molesworth, Helen. "House Work and Art Work." In *Art After Conceptual Art,* edited by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 67-84. Cambridge/Vienna: The MIT Press/Generali Foundation, 2006.

Morris, Catherine and Vincent Bonin, eds. *Materializing 'Six Years.' Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012.

Morris, David and Paul O'Neill. "Introduction: Exhibition as Social Intervention." In *Exhibition as Social Intervention. 'Culture in Action' 1993*, 8-13. London: Afterall Books, 2014.

Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Morton, Timothy. "What If Art Were a Kind of Magic?" *Art Review* (November 2015): https://artreview.com/november-2015-feature-timothy-morton-charisma-causality/.

Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political. Thinking in Action*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Mouffe, Chantal. "For an Agonistic Public Sphere." In *Democracy Unrealized : Documenta 11 Platform 1*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya, 87-96. Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Cantz, 2002.

Naess, Arne. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Naess, Arne. "The Deep Ecology Platform." The Deep Ecology Foundation (n.d.): http://www.deepecology.org/platform.htm.

Naess, Arne and Per I. Haukeland. *Life's Philosophy: Reason and Feeling in a Deeper World*. Translated by Roland Huntford. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Nancy, Jean L. 1991. *The Inoperative Community*, edited by Peter Connor. Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich. "Curating in the Twenty-First Century." In *Art as a Thinking Process. Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, edited by Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese, 182-192. London: Sternberg Press, 2013.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich. *Sharp Tongues, Loose Lips, Open Eyes, Ears to the Ground*. London: Sternberg Press, 2014.

O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Berkeley: University of California Press, [1976] 1999.

O'Neill, Paul. "I Am a Curator." *Art Monthly*, no. 275 (April 2004): 7-10.

O'Neill, Paul, ed. *Curating Subjects*. London: Open Editions/de Appel, 2007.

O'Neill, Paul, ed. *Curating and The Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010.

O'Neill, Paul. *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, [2012] 2016.

O'Neill, Paul. "Coalesce: Happenstance." (n.d.): http://www.pauloneill.org.uk/curatorial/projects/coalesce-happenstance/.

OMA, and Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, eds. *Palermo Atlas*. Milano: Humboldt Books, 2018.

Osborne, Peter. *From an Aesthetic Point of View. Philosophy, Art, and the Senses*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2000.

Osborne, Peter. *Anywhere or Not at All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London: Verso, 2013.

Paddison, Max. "Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory.'" Music Analysis 6, no. 3 (October 1987): 355-377.

Paipais, Vassilios. "Self and Other in Critical International Theory: Assimilation, Incommensurability and The Paradox of Critique." In *Review of International Studies* 37 (21 May 2010): 121-140.

Paul, Christiane. "Sustainable Art Practices. Producing Art in the 21st Century." *Artpulse Magazine*. Accessed 15 December 2021: http://artpulsemagazine.com/sustainable-art-practices-producing-art-in-the-21st-century.

Pavicic, Jurica. "The Mediterranean: Room without a View." *Eurozine*, 6 November 2012: https://www.eurozine.com/the-mediterranean-room-without-a-view/.

Pestellini Laparelli, Ippolito and Hedwig Fijen. "Manifesta 12: Hedwig Fijen and Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli." *Mousse Magazine* (July 21, 2018): https://moussemagazine.it/manifesta-12-palermo-2018/.

Piper, Adrian. *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, vol I, 195-216. Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1996.

Piper, Adrian. "Notes on Funk, I-II // 1985/83." In *Participation*, edited by Claire Bishop, 130-134. London: Whitechapel and The MIT Press, 2006.

Purves, Ted and Shane Aslan Selzer. "No Longer Normal: Critical Exchanges in the Landscape of Art." In *What We Want Is Free*, edited by Ted Purves and Shane Aslan Selzer, 7-18. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy,* translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: continuum, 2000.

Raqs Media Collective. "On Curatorial Responsibility." In *Documents of Contemporary Art: Exhibition*, edited by Lucy Steeds, 100-105. London: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014.

Read, Herbert. *To Hell with Culture: Democratic Values Are New Values.* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1941.

Ribas, João. "What to Do with the Contemporary?" In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, edited by Jens Hoffmann, 67-94. Milan: Mousse Publishing and Fiorucci Art Trust, 2013.

Richter, Dorothee. "Propositions on Curating or How Much Curating Is Involved in Social Change." (2018): https://www.academia.edu/36195454/PROPOSITIONS_ON_CURATING_or_How_Much_Curating_Is_Involved_in_Social_Change.

Richter, Dorothee, Silvia Simoncelli and Michael Birchall, eds. *OnCurating Issue 18: Social Curating and its Public: Curators from Eastern Europe Report on their Practises*, 2013.

Rinder, Lawrence. "Curatorial Control." *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 84-86.

Roberts, John. "The Curator as Producer: Aesthetic Reason, Nonaesthetic Reason, and Infinite Ideation." *Manifesta Journal – The Author as Producer*, no. 10 (2010): 51-57.

Roelstraete, Dieter. "The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art." *E-flux* Issue 4 (March 2009): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/04/68582/the-way-of-the-shovel-on-the-archeological-imaginary-in-art/.

Roelstraete, Dieter. "We, the Subjects of Art." The Exhibitionist 4 (June 2011): 13-16.

Rogers, Richard A. "Overcoming the Objectification of Nature in Constitutive Theories: Toward a Transhuman, Materialist Theory of Communication." *Western Journal of Communication* 62, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 244-272.

Rogoff, Irit. "Turning." In *Curating and the Educational Turn*, edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, 32-46. London: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010.

Rosi, Gianfranco, dir. *Sacro Gra*. 19 settembre 2013; Roma: DocLab, La Femme Endormie, Rai Cinema, 2014. DVD.

Rotor. "About" (n.d.): https://rotordb.org/en/.

Rotor. "Da quassù è tutta un'altra cosa / From up here, it's a whole other story." n.d.: https://rotordb.org/en/projects/da-quassu-e-tutta-unaltra-cosa-here-its-whole-other-story.

Saraceno, Vanessa. "Art As Instinct: In Conversation With Anne Percoco." *NY Arts Magazine* (2012): https://nyartsmagazine.net/art-as-instinct-in-conversation-with-anne-percoco/.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Of Ourselves and of Our Origins: Subjects of Art." *Frieze* 137 (1 March 2011): https://www.frieze.com/article/ourselves-and-our-origins-subjects-art.

Schuster, Aaron. "You Can't Ask Everyone to Behave Ethically Just Like That." *E-flux* Issue 65 (May 2015): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/65/336438/you-can-t-ask-everyone-to-behave-ethically-just-like-that/.

Scotini, Marco. "L'Ecologia e le Cose come Lotta Politica. Una conversazione di Marco Scotini con Marko Pogačnik." *Operaviva Magazine* (15 March 2017): https://operavivamagazine.org/lecologia-e-le-cose-come-lotta-politica/.

Sennet, Richard. *The Craftsman.* London: Penguin Books, [2008] 2009.

Sheikh, Simon. "Revolution in the Head, or, Free Your Mind and Your Ass Will Follow." In *Revolution is Not a Garden Party*, edited by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 52-55. Manchester: MIRIAD, 2007.

Sheikh, Simon. "Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research." *Art & Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009): http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html.

Shirazi, Sadia. "On Exhibitions Without Objects – Flatness, File Size, and Hard Drives." Published 30 September 2013 on Independent Curators International Research. Accessed 15 December 2021: https://curatorsintl.org/research/on-exhibition-without-objects-flatness-file-size-and-hard-drives.

Shiva, Vandana. "Soil Not Oil. Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis." *Alternatives Journal* 35, no. 3 (2009): 19-23.

Siegelaub, Seth. "On Exhibitions and the World at large: In Conversation with Charles Harrison." In *Documents of Contemporary Art: Exhibition*, edited by Lucy Steeds, 36-40. London: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014.

Simon, Nina. "The Social in Practice. Practice: A Conversation with Nina Simon." Interview by Ceci Moss. *Art in America* (14 October 2016): https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/the-social-in-practice-a-conversation-with-nina-simon-56460/.

Simmons, Ian G. *Interpreting Nature: Cultural Constructions of the Environment.* London: Routledge, 1993.

Singh, Mayengbam Nandakishwor. "Jürgen Habermas's Notion of the Public Sphere: a Perspective on the Conceptual Transformations in His Thought." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 4 (October-December 2012): 633-642.

Smith, Stephanie, curator, *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, traveling exhibition, USA: 2006.

Smith, Terry. *Thinking Contemporary Curating.* New York: Independent Curators International (ICI), 2012.

Smithson, Robert. "Cultural Confinement." In *The Collected Writings,* edited by Jack Flam, 154-156. London: University of California Press, 1996.

Spaid, Sue. *Ecovention. Current Art to Transform Ecologies.* Cincinnati: Greenmuseum.org and Contemporary Arts Center, 2002.

Staal, Jonas. "About the Political Potential of Contemporary Art." In *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing*, edited by Paul De Bruyne and Pascal Gielen, 275-285. Amsterdam: Valiz, [2011] 2013.

Steeds, Lucy. "Contemporary Exhibitions: Art at Large in the World," in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Exhibition*, edited by Lucy Steeds, 27-33. London: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2014.

Steiner, Barbara. "Working within Contradictions." In *SUPERFLEX TOOLS*, edited by Barbara Steiner ad Superdesign, 154-163. Cologne: Walther Koenig, 2002.

Steyerl, Hito. "On Defense of the Poor Image." *E-flux* Issue 10 (November 2009): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/.

Steyerl, Hito. "Art as Occupation: What Happens to Knowledge?" *Art as a Thinking Process. Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, edited by Mara Ambrožič and Angela Vettese, 224-229. London: Sternberg Press, 2013.

Steyerl, Hito. "International Disco Latin." *E-flux* Issue 45 (May 2013): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60100/international-disco-latin/.

Terranova, Fabrizio, dir. *Donna Haraway: Story Telling For Earthly Survival* (2016). Bruxelles: Icarus Films, 7 febbraio 2019. DVD.

Thompson, Nato. "Experimental Activism. Claire Bishop interviews Nato Thompson." Interview by Claire Bishop. *Manifesta Journal – The Author as Producer*, no. 10 (2010): 39-50.

Thompson, Nato. "Socially Engaged Contemporary Art: Tactical and Strategic Manifestations." *A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change* Animating Democracy, a Program for Americans in the Arts (2011): https://animatingdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/NThompson%20Trend%20Paper.pdf.

Thompson, Nato. "Space, Political Action, and the Production of Radicalized Subjectivity: A Conversation with Nato Thompson." Interview by Sylvie Fortin. *Artists Reclaim the Commons: New Works / New Territories / New Publics*, edited by Glenn Harper and Twylene Moyer, 206-212. Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013.

Thompson, Nato. "Interview with Nato Thompson." Interview by Gretchen Coombs. *Art & The Public Sphere* 4, no. 1-2 (2015): 63-68.

Thompson, Nato. "Living As Form." *Living as a form. Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, edited by Nato Thompson, 16-33. Cambridge: The MIT Press, [2017] 2012.

Time out. Art and Sustainability, catalogue of the homonymous exhibition curated by Friedemann Malsch. Liechtenstein: Verlag für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2007.

Tinnel, John. "Transversalising the Ecological Turn: Four Components of Guattari's Ecosophical Perspective." *The Fibreculture Journal* 18 (2011): 35-64.

Ukeles, Mierle Laderman. "Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Artist Statement." Queens Museum (7 September 2020). Accessed on 2 January 2022. https://queensmuseum.org/2020/09/mierle-laderman-ukeles.

Valero, Ignacio. "How Free Is Free? Property, Markets, and the Aesthetic(s) of the Common(s)." In *What We Want Is Free*, edited by Ted Purves and Shane Aslan Selzer, 85-103. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

Velez, Marina and Rossana Greaves. "Cambridge Festival." University of Cambridge (n.d.): https://www.festival.cam.ac.uk/?fbclid=IwAR2mvNaXQAoQxYOBhfafSmzQ1le6NlN4SfVFpPE23AfTRdp8L4FKbvj-SkM.

Verovšek, P.J. "The Philosopher as Engaged Citizen : Habermas on the Role of the Public Intellectual in the Modern Democratic Public Sphere." *European Journal of Social Theory* (March 2021): https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/172849/1/Verovsek%20EJST%20Accepted.pdf.

Vidokle, Anton. "Art Without Artists?" *E-flux Journal* 16 (May2010): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/.

Vilaseca, Stephen L. "Félix Guattari and Urban Cultural Studies." *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 1 (1) (March 2014): 137-144.

Virilio, Paul. *Art and Fear.* London: continuum, 2003.

von Hantelmann, Dorothea. *How to Do Things with Art*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2010.

Voorhies, James. *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017.

Wade, Gavin, ed. *Curating in the 21st Century*. Walsall: New Art Gallery Walsall, 2001.

Wade, Gavin. "Artist-curator Gavin Wade on Authorship, Curating at Eastside Projects and the Post-industrial City." Interview by Michael Birchall and Nkule Mabaso. *On Curating* 19 (June 2013): https://www.on-curating.org/issue-19-reader/artist-curator-gavin-wade-on-authorship-curating-at-eastside-projects-and-the-post-industrial-city.html#.Ybn2iH3MIb0.

Wade, Gavin. "Mission." Eastside Projects (n.d.): www.eastsideprojects.org/about.

Walker, Caryn Faure and Sthephen Foster. *Elsewhere... : an exhibition exploring change in open spaces brought about by art, technology and the need for a sustainable environment*. Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 1996.

Wiley, Stephen B. Crofts and J. Macgregor Wise. "Guattari, Deleuze, and *Cultural Studies.*" *Cultural Studies* 33, no. 1 (2019): 75-97.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1976] 1983.

Wright, Stephen. "A Dis-operative Turn in Contemporary Art." *Apexart Conference 2: "Inside Out: Reassessing International Cultural Influence,"* (3-9 July 2001): https://apexart.org/conference/wright.htm.

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art "Mierle Laderman Ukeles / Matrix 137." Accessed 15 December 2021: https://www.thewadsworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Matrix-137.pdf.

Yngvason, Hafthor. *Conservation and Maintenance of Contemporary Public Art*. London: Archetype, 2002.

Zdebik, Jakub. *Deleuze and the Diagram. Aesthetic Threads in Visual Organization.* London: continuum, 2012.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses." Lacan.com. Accessed 15 December 2021: https://www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking my supervisory team: David Cross and Dr Marsha Bradfield. If I have not given up and eventually completed the PhD, it is only because of their continuous support, patience and encouragement. I will always be grateful and indebted to them for this achievement. David encouraged me to embark on the journey of a PhD in the first place and his pragmatic approach to pursuing rigorous research has been a constant source of inspiration. Marsha's critical and reflective approach helped me develop my practice as an integral part of this research. Despite their different views and opinions – or perhaps, because s to them – they provided a sound and grounded support network that eventually has allowed me to experiment with the direction of my practice without ever forgetting the research path I was on.

This practice-based research would not have completed without the ideas, passion and determination of the artists, researchers and producers I worked with. I am extremely pleased and honoured to have worked with Antonella Ferrari and Silvia Forese in the making of *Moving In / Moving Out* and with all the amazing practitioners I met during of the Cambridge Sustainability Residency 2014: Andrea Bandoni, Barbara Boiocchi, Sabine Bolk, Sergio Fava, Valerie Furnham, Pia Galvez, Emma James, Ariana Jordao, Bridget Harvey, Krisztian Hofstadter, Farah Mulla, Susie Olczak, Kelly Soper, Sally Stenton, Marika Troili, Marina Velez, Mark Vennegoor, Hiroki Yamamoto and James Murray White among others. I am particularly grateful to Sabine Bolk for working with me on *Practices of Sustainability*, and for all the reflections that the realisation of that project and our friendship provoked.

I wish to thank all the artists, designers and theorists participating in Manifesta 12 Palermo and all the Manifesta Biennial team for their perspectives on my work and on this practice-based research. Particularly, I would like to express gratitude to the director of Manifesta, Hedwig Fijen, to Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli and to Chiara Cartuccia for challenging my preconceptions on socially engaged art and curatorial practice. My gratitude also goes to Isabella Paghera and Maria Elena Ciullo for their unrestricted enthusiasm and for showing me the importance that loyalty, companionship and truthfulness play in the production processes of socially engaged art projects. I thank all the artists and collaborators of *Riflessioni sull'Abitare*: Davide Basile, Elena Bellantoni, Anna Paola Buonanno, Zeno Franchini, Francesca Gattello, Piergiorgio Italiano, Alessandra Perrone, Simone Sapienza and Federica Vita. It was my work with Federica and everyone that helped me realise that the conclusion of this research does not imply the end of my experimental practice, and I am certain that we will continue the critical conversations and practical investigations we started years ago well into the future.

Finally, there are not enough words to express the gratitude I feel for my family. Their unconditional love, tenacity and trust have been the only reasons why I kept believing in this research and in my work. I am also infinitely appreciative of the attention and support of my friends, who never stopped listening to me and kept exchanging perspectives on my life and research: Simona Arillotta, Elisabetta Bolasco, Giulia Restifo, Micaela Deiana, Alessia Volpe, Francesca Baglietto, Manuel Bach, Francesca Leone and Manuela Boncaldo. I owe thanks also to Federica Vita and the Pomona Pictures team for helping me design this thesis, to Judy Tither for her excellent work and to Dr. Maria Rita Fabio for teaching me that doubts, fears and failures, can open the path to the joyfulness of a new awareness.