

WHO CARES?

16 ESSAYS ON CURATING IN ASIA

Edited by Alvaro Rodríguez Fominaya and Michael Lee. Contributions by Cao Weijun, Valerie C. Doran, Norman Ford, Erin Gleeson, Jens Hoffmann, Hou Hanru, Lee Weng Choy, Cédric Maridet, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hu Fang, Magnus Renfrew, Héctor Rodríguez, Russell Storer, Richard Streitmatter-Tran, June Yap, Philip Yenawine and Yeung Yang. Interviews by Hu Yuanxing, Alvaro Rodríguez Fominaya and Carolee Thea.



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PARA
SITE
藝術空間



STUDIO
BIBLIOTHÈQUE

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ideas everywhere

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PARA/SITE ART SPACE is a non-profit art organisation in Hong Kong. It produces, exhibits and communicates local and international contemporary art. Para/Site was involved in various overseas exhibitions such as the Gwangju Biennale 2002 and the Venice Biennale 2003. It is supported by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council as well as vital contributions from patrons and Founding Friends of Para/Site.

STUDIO BIBLIOTHÈQUE facilitates experiments in making, writing, curating and publishing. The studio has an ongoing project series *Things Artists Do*, which addresses the gap amidst the onslaught of survey, thematic art projects by focusing on the being, consumption and activities of artists.

SEED | PROJECTS is the management arm of seed, the thinking and working space of artist Brendan Goh created to incubate creative processes between art and design. seed is about sowing ideas wherever they might sprout, catalysing their germination into better things. The studio has recent projects in food, publishing and curating and welcomes collaborations between like-minded individuals and groups working in any discipline.

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Fragments for a Future Present¹

RICHARD
STREITMATTER-TRAN

Will a preoccupation with national identity be replaced by spheres of influence? Who controls these spheres and who are the challengers?

In Parag Khanna's book, *The Second World*, he predicts that the near future will hold the world controlled by three spheres of influence: The United States, Europe and China—each competing with the empire of the other, and yet entirely reliant on the other for its own survival. Perhaps this is

the final age of empire. A category of a second world emerges of those countries with marketable commodities and resources that shift alliances to different spheres based on immediate and strategic opportunism. I begin to consider artists and those who work with them. Will artists of tomorrow operate as the Second World or Second Life? Will the cultural empires be institutions, the market and resistance, or other configurations?

If the production of knowledge and access to it continue to expand, which will be the right approach: the generalist or the specialist? I believe in the generalist.

When I was younger, my image of a curator was confused with a conservator. Individuals of particular specialisation that had expert reign over an esoteric period or concern all looked like librarians. It didn't occur to me then that librarians are among the greatest generalists around. They make information accessible and sometimes even palatable. I suppose curators are like that too and the curators of the future will have to deal with the problem of knowledge and maybe a loss of mystery.

All generalists are necessarily hybrids. Some are useful: artist-critics, curator-historians, dealer-consultants; others are monstrosities.

Just as librarians have in ways been forced to become equally competent technologists, curators will also

need to adapt at the expense of distraction. I see a plausible possibility that new art professions may emerge to specifically support the curatorial practice. Galleries invent new roles when required, perhaps the curators of the future will too, and it may be a good thing. I hope the curator resists the pull towards public relations and advertising at the expense of curiosity. Monstrosity and demonstration share the same root, as do exhibition and inhibition, they all arrive at the question: to show or not to show.

Does archeology look forward or behind?
That it shares the same root with archive,
how will we examine and interrogate the
objects and documents of the old?

Especially when the old is interesting for only
so long before it is remixed/revised to the
new. Becoming old is a natural process and
in that span, things are lost in order to make
room for the new. Can the archeological/
archival forgive or even encourage loss?

The rivers that have been dammed have
changed ecologies and economies.

By rivers I mean to evoke flow of information
and by dams I mean a method to regulate:
surveillance, censorship, and intellectual
rights/property. I feel that curators are the
cartographers and the artists are the navigators.

Information and intellectual property is an area I am both attracted to and repulsed by.

I want to be both optimistic and naïve.

History looks to the artist. The artist always owes something to the scientist. In this respect, I find a conversation about “the smith” in *Nomadology* always a relevant and new conversation.

The smith lies between the smooth space of the nomad and the striated space of the state. He obtains resources from the nomadic space and sells finished products to the state. How does the curator operate between the artist and the institution? If anything, the curator of the future, as with the curator of the present, is a negotiator.

Curators work together through online social networks to flesh out ideas. Communications technologies will always provide avenues for artistic exploration, the question is, will they ever possess the emotion often lacking in new media work?

David Attenborough would have been a fantastic curator. Anyone, from a child to an adult, watching one of his productions on the natural world is entirely engaged. I think we can all learn something from his approach.

Speed can be creativity’s most dangerous enemy. I feel it now. Maybe duration is the best thing for curatorial exploration of the future.

The most exciting possibilities may exist
in urban planning and design.

Anxiety is the first lesson in art school. It
breeds it. Competition is the second and
the last. Legitimacy may be a cousin.

There will be something interesting
to be said about pirates and art.

The saddest places on earth are reservations;
they are dying exhibitions.

Notes

1 The main references for this text are: Parag Khanna, *The Second World* (New York: Random House, 2008), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

RICHARD STREITMATTER-TRAN is a co-curator of the *6th Asia Pacific Triennial*. He is an artist living and working in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He received his degree in the Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM) at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. His work, solo and collaborative, has been exhibited in several cities in the United States, Europe and Asia including the *52nd Venice Biennale*, the *2007 Shenzhen and Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture*, the *Singapore Biennale* in 2006 and 2008, the *2004 Gwangju Biennale*, *2005 Pocheon Asian Art Festival*, ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, *Asia Art Now* at Arario Beijing, the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Kandada Art Space in Tokyo, the Blue Space Gallery in Ho Chi Minh City, the *Asiatopia Performance Art Festival* in Bangkok, *Art Tech Media 06* in Barcelona. He is an Asia-Pacific correspondent for the Madrid-based arts magazine *Art.Es* and Ho Chi Minh City editor for *Contemporary*. He was awarded the 2005 Martell Contemporary Asian Art Research Grant in 2005 with the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong for his year-long research project, *Mediating the Mekong*. He was a Teaching Fellow at Harvard University (2000-2004), conducted media arts research at the MIT Media Lab (2000), and was a Visiting Lecturer at the Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts University in 2003. Currently he is a lecturer at the RMIT University Vietnam. In 2010 he established dia/projects, a contemporary arts space.

CAROLEE THEA is an art historian and studies artworks, their concepts and structures and their relationship to today's concerns: globalisation, emerging countries, gender, the end of empire, the postcolonial juncture, collectives, formal issues, the digital era, the evolution of the 21st-century museum, theories of exhibitions as in

This anthology compiles 16 essays on curating art in and of Asia. One of the themes is the politics of care, commonly understood as the basic role of curators, with regards to art and artists, across time and contexts. Another theme revolves around markers of success in the realm of contemporary curating. A third recurring theme deals with curating in the globalised art world of advanced travel and communication technologies. A fourth theme reconsiders the audience as active producers in an artistic and curated experience. Through a variety of perspectives and literary styles, these texts constitute primary notes towards 'curatorial criticism,' a subfield of cultural criticism that identifies the new in curating today.

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