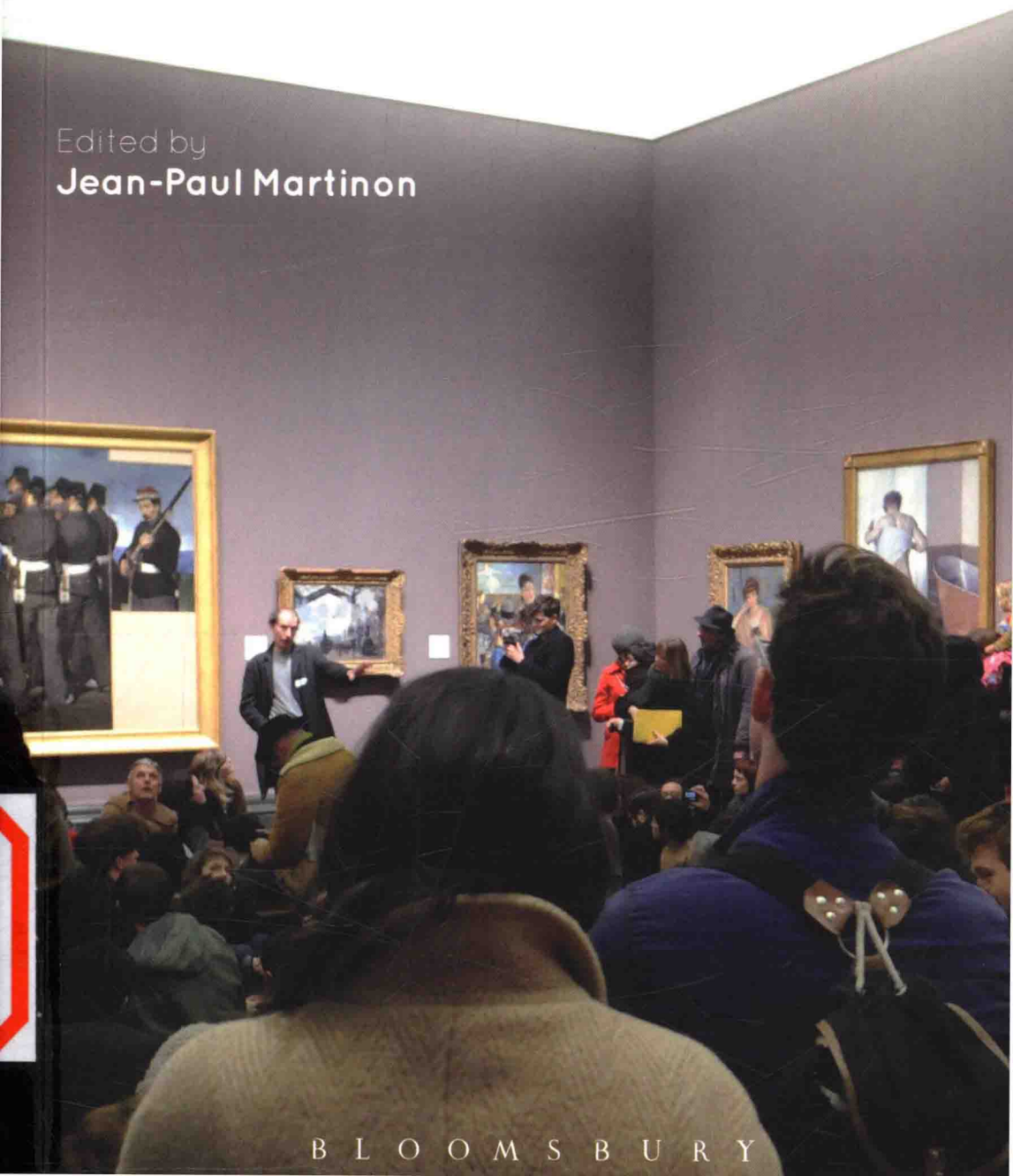


# THE CURATORIAL

A Philosophy of Curating

Edited by  
**Jean-Paul Martinon**



B L O O M S B U R Y

## Stop curating! And think what curating is all about.

This book starts from a simple premise: thinking the activity of curating. To achieve this it distinguishes between 'curating' and 'the curatorial'. If 'curating' is a gamut of professional practices for setting up exhibitions, then 'the curatorial' explores what takes place on the stage set up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator. It therefore refers not to the staging of an event, but to the event of knowledge itself. In order to start thinking about curating, this book takes a new approach to the topic. Instead of relying on conventional art historical narratives (for example, identifying the moments when artistic and curatorial practices merged or when the global curator-author was first identified), this book puts forward a multiplicity of perspectives that range from the anecdotal to the theoretical and from the personal to the philosophical.

**The Curatorial** is a book without compromise: it asks us to think again, fight against sweeping art historical generalizations, the sedimentation of ideas and the draw of the sound bite. Curating will not stop, but at least with this book it can begin to allow itself to be challenged by some of the most complex and ethics-driven thought of our times.

Arguing that *curating* like *mapping* is an outmoded concept, the specially commissioned essays in **The Curatorial** propose *curatorial* as a disruptive activity that provokes us to rethink received knowledge about art, art history, philosophy and cultural heritage. With its rich collection of texts by leading writers and theorists, **The Curatorial** is essential reading for anyone active in the arts as a curator, practitioner or writer.

DR. SUE MALVERN, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Art, University of Reading, UK

JEAN-PAUL MARTINON is Programme Leader of the MPhil/PhD in Visual Cultures and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK.

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Cihat Aring, Ariella Azoulay, Alfredo Cramerotti, Bridget Crone, Anshuman Dasgupta, Jean-Louis Déotte, Valentina Desideri, Jenny Doussan, Helmut Draxler, Charles Esche, Valeria Graziano, Stefano Harney, Natasa Ilić, Susan Kelly, Adnan Madani, Jean-Paul Martinon, Doreen Mende, Suzana Milevska, Je Yun Moon, Ines Moreira, Stefan Nowotny, Sarah Pierce, Raqs Media Collective, Irit Rogoff, Joshua Simon, Roopesh Sitharan, Nora Sternfeld, Aneta Szylak, Leire Vérgara

### PHILOSOPHY

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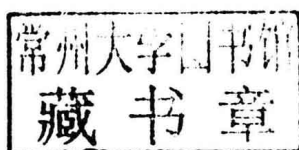
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# The Curatorial

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*Art and Institution*, Rajiv Kaushik

# Preface

## Curatorial/Knowledge PhD Programme, Goldsmiths College

We wish to talk about curating: about its potentials and its scopes.

We wish to talk about curating: about the knowledges it builds on and the knowledges it produces.

We wish to talk about curating: about its sociabilities, collectivities and convivialities.

We wish to talk about curating: about its commitments to seeing, reading and speaking and exchanging as a form of public activity.

We wish to talk about curating: because it has been seeking novel ways of instantiating the crises of our world in other modalities, of finding other ways to engage with our current woes.

We wish to talk about curating, because we thought we saw a possibility nestling within its protocols, a possibility for other ways of working, relating and knowing.

This wish of ours to talk about curating led us to institute a space of gathering, a practice-led PhD programme in 2006 called Curatorial/Knowledge to which many young curators and artists have come to share in the discussion and embark on their own investigations. Our friends and colleagues from many different arenas have also come along and held seminars and discussed their complex practices and intricate thought processes.

At the very beginning, six years ago, someone said half-jokingly, 'our project is to stop people curating!' and some weeks later someone else said, a bit more vehemently: 'so are we agreed that this programme is not about becoming better curators?' With hindsight, these were actually statements of considerable substance, which recognized that the proliferation of curatorial activities, courses, residencies and prizes has led to massive activity, driven by energy and an enthusiasm for displays and events, much of which is less than fully considered. It also recognizes that all this activity is not founded on a solid intellectual basis that might empower its practitioners to have the critical courage to resist



demands to simply supply more and more excitement to a market ravenous for spectacle and entertainment.

It has always been our desire to enter the discussion as 'provocateurs' rather than as 'experts' – we have understood that historical and other expertise is easily converted into the legitimization of market-driven spectacles and therefore cannot provide the self-reflexive speculation we continue to think the field requires if it is to become more than a series of professional protocols.

Alongside these market-driven spectacles a whole gamut of curatorial activities take place, calling into question what it is that is really taking place underneath all this glitter. These activities have taken many shapes: for example, we have seen the entry of the pedagogical into the field under the aegis of 'the educational turn', the (re)animation of abandoned sites and the (re-)infiltration of existing institutions, and we have also witnessed a strong insistence on talking, conversing, discussing and reading, activities that are in themselves often understood as the very stuff of what it is to make things visible, legible and relevant.

And so our discussions have taken place between these two quite opposite poles of what it means to work in the field, two poles whose differences have become increasingly accentuated – bowing to the expanding market on the one hand and an ever-increasing activist spirit within sectors of the worlds of art and artistic education.

Initially we recognized a necessity to distinguish between 'curating' and 'the curatorial'. If 'curating' is a gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display, then 'the curatorial' operates at a very different level: it explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge. So to drive home a distinction between 'curating' and 'the curatorial' means to emphasize a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance. 'Curating' takes place in a promise; it produces a moment of promise, of redemption to come. By contrast, 'the curatorial' is what disturbs this process; it breaks up this stage, yet produces a narrative which comes into being in the very moment in which an utterance takes place, in that moment in which the event communicates and says, as Mieke Bal once observed, 'look, that is how this is'.

So 'the curatorial' is a disturbance, an utterance, a narrative. And within this disturbance, works of art can no longer be a process of interpellation, a conscious or unconscious hailing by some internalized mode of knowledge. Instead, they

engage in another process, that of precipitating our reflection, of encouraging another way of thinking or sensing the world. From being reactive to the world to precipitating another reflection on the world (and inevitably sparking ways to change the world), works of art reflect the myriad ways of being implicated in the world, not just as passive recipients, but as active members of a world that is never one with itself, always out of joint, out of place, but always intrinsically ours – of our own making.

Not wishing to operate within a space of binary oppositions (art vs art history or practice vs theory, for example), we have brought in ‘the philosophical’, not as a master discipline or narrative to explain all, but as a slightly distantiated mode of reflection. This has enabled the introduction of a critical edge that maintains a somewhat sovereign position, detached from the seeming imperatives of everyday demands. The move to ‘the philosophical’ we have affected to enact is not a hierarchical conceit or the privileging of one kind of discipline or practice over another. It is simply the recognition that by bringing some strands of contemporary philosophical and theoretical thought to the discussion of ‘the curatorial’, we open the possibility of reflecting in a way that goes beyond the simple description of projects and experiences. Given the immense expansion of the field and of how central it has become to the visual arts and other modes of cultural practice, it seems to us that it is now imperative to develop a discourse that reaches outwards, beyond the professional milieu, and that allows itself to be challenged by some of the most complex and ethics-driven thought of our times.

We would like to thank all the participants and guests who attended our seminars and the institutions that have hosted us, all of whom continue to contribute to our ongoing discussions. We would particularly like to thank our department at Goldsmiths, Visual Cultures, whose ethos of constant experimentation and testing whatever comes our way has been so hospitable to establishing new programmes that perform the urgencies of the culture we live in. From the moment we established the Curatorial/Knowledge programme, we fell into an ongoing conversation that meandered in many directions and has moved us all, quite unawares, along with it. We probably have not changed the field very significantly, but we have certainly established a conversation about ‘the curatorial’ that has challenged all of us.

What follows includes some of the voices that were heard during the first five years of the programme. This volume does not pretend to be a complete

and authoritative delineation of a body of knowledge but we hope that it will encourage the kind of deconstructive speculation that has been the most productive and enjoyable part of our studies.

Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff  
Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College  
University of London

## Notes on Contributors

**Cihat Arinç** is independent writer and academic researcher based in London. His research interests focus on memory and global film cultures exploring themes such as haunted subjectivities, auto/biographical narratives, silenced histories and the ruins left by war. He has published a number of essays in edited books and film magazines, and also contributed to art projects and exhibitions in art institutions such as The Serpentine Gallery, Institute of International Visual Arts and The Showroom Gallery, London. He has just completed his PhD entitled *Postcolonial Cyprus on the Haunted Screen: Spectral Realism and the Politics of Remembering in New Turkish Cinema*.

**Ariella Azoulay** teaches in the Department of Modern Culture and Media and Comparative Literature at Brown University in the USA. Her recent books include: *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*, (Pluto, 2011), *Civil Imagination: The Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2012) and *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone, 2008). She is also the co-author with Adi Ophir of *The One State Condition: Occupation and Democracy between the Sea and the River* (Stanford, 2012). She is also a curator and documentary filmmaker. Her recent projects include *Potential History* (2012, Stuk / Artefact, Louven) and *Civil Alliances, Palestine, 47–48* (2012). <http://cargocollective.com/ariellaazoulay>

**Alfredo Cramerotti** is a writer, curator and editor working across TV, radio, publishing, writing and exhibition making. He co-curated Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, 2010, the Maldives Pavilion and the Wales Pavilion at the 55th Venice Art Biennial, 2013. He directs MOSTYN, Wales' leading contemporary art institution, and the itinerant projects AGM Culture and Chamber of Public Secrets. He is Research Scholar at the European Centre for Photography Research, University of Wales, Newport, and Editor of the *Critical Photography* series by Intellect Books. His own publications include the book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* (2009).

**Bridget Crone** is a curator and writer based in London. From 2006–11, she was the director of Media Art Bath – a publicly funded organization dedicated to

commissioning new work in performance and moving image practice. Projects include: *Eye Music for Dancing* (Flat Time House, London, 2012), *The Sensible Stage* (Holburne Museum and various venues, Bath, 2007; Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2008; ICA, London, 2012), *The Body The Ruin* (Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne, 2005). Publications include: *The Sensible Stage: Staging and the Moving Image*, an edited collection addressing the relationships between moving image, performance and theatre (Picture This, 2012). Bridget teaches at Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Anshuman Dasgupta** is an art historian and curator teaching at the Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan since 1997. He studied Art History in Santiniketan and M.S University, Baroda and Film Appreciation from F.T.I.I. Pune. Anshuman has published numerous essays for LKC, Marg, Art-India and de Appel. His essays are also part of larger compilations like *Contemporary Sculptures* (Marg, 2000), *Towards a New Art History* (Printworld, 2003), *Art & Visual Cultures in India 1857–2007* (Marg, 2009). Major curatorial projects include *Santhal Family* at MuHKA, Antwerp and *Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition* at Visva-Bharati in 2006–7. He was organizer and chairperson of Khoj Kolkata in 2006.

**Jean-Louis Déotte** is Professor of Philosophy at the Université Paris 8. Between 1986 and 1992, he directed a research programme on museums and the patrimony of ruins at the College International de Philosophie in Paris. He has participated in numerous conferences and seminars on the idea of the museum and its role in society. He has published over ten books on art, visual culture, aesthetics and politics, including *Le musée, l'origine de l'esthétique* (1993), *Oubliez! L'Europe, les ruines, le musée* (1995), *Qu'est-ce qu'un appareil? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière* (2007) and *Walter Benjamin et la forme plastique* (2012). In English, his latest essay is 'The Museum, a Universal Apparatus', in *Ici et Ailleurs*, 2012 ([ici-et-ailleurs.org/spip.php?article27](http://ici-et-ailleurs.org/spip.php?article27)).

**Valentina Desideri** was best defined by a friend who called her a 20-year-old on tour. Although this was meant as a reproach, she found this definition more suiting than performance artist or anything on that tone. Lately she has also been called a psychic, which now makes of her a psychic 20-year-old on tour. She trained in contemporary dance in London then did a MA in Fine Arts in Amsterdam, she does Fake and Political Therapy, she makes performances, she writes biographies by reading people's palms. She writes other things too but mostly she's around.

**Jenny Doussan** is a philosopher based in London. She is currently a Visiting Tutor in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. She

is the author of *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy* (Palgrave, 2013); 'Time and Presence in Agamben's Critique of Deconstruction', in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2013 (forthcoming); and 'The Scent of the Jonquil', in *Rattle: A Journal at the Convergence of Art & Writing* 3, London, 2012.

**Helmut Draxler** is an art historian, art critic, curator and Professor of Art Theory at the Merz Academy in Stuttgart. He was the director of the Kunstverein Munich from 1992 to 1995. In 2004–6 he co-organized the project *Avant-garde Film Biopolitics* at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht. More recently, Draxler curated the exhibition *Shandyism: Authorship as Genre* at the Secession, Vienna, 2007. He writes extensively on contemporary art and theory for a variety of international magazines and artists' catalogues. Recent publications include: *Film, Avantgarde, Biopolitik* (Schlebrügge, 2009); *Gefährliche Substanzen* (Polypen, 2007); *Coercing Constellations. Space, Reference, and Representation in Fareed Armaly* (Polypen, 2007); and *Shandyism. Authorship as Genre* (Secession, 2007).

**Charles Esche** is a curator and writer based in Scotland. He is director of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven since 2004 and co-director of *Afterall Journal and Books* based at Central St. Martins College, London since 1998. He has (co-)curated a number of major international exhibitions including: Sao Paulo Bienal (2014); U3 Triennale, Ljubljana (2011); Riwaq Biennale, Ramallah (2007 and 2009); Istanbul Biennale (2005); Gwangju Biennale (2002). He teaches regularly on the Exhibition Studies course at the University of the Arts, London and the De Appel Curatorial Course, Amsterdam. From 2000–4 he was director of Rooseum, Malmö.

**Valeria Graziano** practises as a researcher, educator and organizer within (and against) contemporary artistic circuits and academia. Some of the items she holds dear include adventures, carrots, schizo-practices, relays and photo-romances. She teaches and is undertaking her PhD at Queen Mary University, London. Her research theorizes the role of radical conviviality emerging within histories of self-organizing, institutional analysis and militant research. She has a penchant for deviceful pedagogical experiments, which she has been breeding with the Micropolitics Research Group ([micropolitics.wordpress.com](http://micropolitics.wordpress.com)), The Centre for Ethics and Politics ([cfep.org.uk](http://cfep.org.uk)) and many other ravishing collaborators over the years.

**Stefano Harney** is Professor of Strategic Management Education at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University and a co-founder of the School for Study. He is the author of *State Work: Public Administration and Mass Intellectuality* (Duke University Press, 2002) and with Fred Moten of *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, published by Autonomedia in 2013. His recent writings include 'Fate Work: A Conversation' with Valentina Desideri, in the journal *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* ([www.ephemerajournal.org](http://www.ephemerajournal.org)).

**Natasa Ilić** is a curator and critic. She is a member of What, How and for Whom/WHW, a curatorial collective formed in 1999 and based in Zagreb and Berlin. Its members also include Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Sabina Sabolović and designer Dejan Kršić. WHW organizes a range of exhibitions and publishing projects and runs Gallery Nova, a non-profit, city-owned gallery in Zagreb. Recent WHW exhibitions include *One Needs to Live Self-confidently . . . Watching*, Croatian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial (2011), *Second World*, Steirischer Herbst, Graz (2011), *How much fascism?*, BAK, Utrecht (2012), *Dear Art*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (2012). WHW is currently curating the next edition of *Meeting Points*, a multidisciplinary event taking place in various cities in Europe and the Middle East (2013–14).

**Susan Kelly** is a writer and artist whose research looks at the relationships between art and micropolitics, rhetoric and practices of organization. She works in performance, installation, video, and writes and publishes. She works both independently and collectively with various art-activist groups in London. Over the last ten years, she has shown her work in Belfast, New York, Toronto, Helsinki, Prague, Dublin, St Petersburg, Krasnoyarsk, Tallin, Innsbruck and Zagreb, and has published articles in *re-public art*, *Parallax*, *Journal of Visual Cultures* and elsewhere. In 2012, she was Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen Fellow in Art and Theory. She currently teaches Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

**Adnan Madani** is an artist and writer. Born in Karachi, he graduated from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2001. His work has been shown in numerous galleries in Karachi, Dubai, Mumbai and Lahore. He has written widely on Pakistani art, with a focus on the relationship between the artist and the nation. He is a regular contributor to *NuktaArt*, the *Contemporary Art Magazine of Pakistan* ([www.nuktaartmag.com](http://www.nuktaartmag.com)). His research interests include contemporary South Asian visual culture, theories of modernity and

contemporaneity. He is currently pursuing a PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London and divides his time between London and Karachi.

**Jean-Paul Martinon** was the co-founder and curator of Rear Window ([www.rear-window.org.uk](http://www.rear-window.org.uk)) an independent arts trust that staged a series of exhibitions and conferences in temporary sites across London. He is currently the Programme Leader of the MPhil-PhD Programme in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has written monographs on a Victorian workhouse (*Swelling Grounds*, Rear Window, 1995), the idea of the future in the work of Derrida, Malabou and Nancy (*On Futurity*, Palgrave, 2007), the temporal dimension of masculinity (*The End of Man*, Punctum, 2013) and the concept of peace after the Rwandan genocide (*After 'Rwanda'*, Rodopi, 2013). [www.jeanpaulmartinon.net](http://www.jeanpaulmartinon.net)

**Doreen Mende** is a curator and theorist who lives in Berlin and London. Her practice-based PhD at Goldsmiths addresses the geopolitics of exhibiting. It starts with photography as a practice of solidarity and liberation during the period of socialist internationalism. Its aim is to rethink the potential of exhibition today. As a curator, one of her recent projects include *doubleboundeconomies.net*. She is currently working on an exhibition of KP Brehmer's work for Raven Row in London. She is the co-founder of the magazine *Displayr* at HfG/ZKM Karlsruhe. Since 2010, Mende runs a theory class at the Dutch Art Institute, in The Netherlands.

**Suzana Milevska** is a theoretician and curator. In 2013 she was appointed the Endowed Professor for Central and South Eastern European Art Histories at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She holds a PhD in visual culture from the University of London. She lectured at various institutions: Alvar Aalto University Helsinki, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Oxford University, The Chicago School of Art Institute, Columbia University, IUAV Venice, Akademie der Kunst Berlin, Moderna Museet Stockholm, Tate Modern London, KIASMA Helsinki, MUMOK Vienna, CAMK Japan, etc. In 2010, she published her book *Gender Difference in the Balkans*. In 2012 she won Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory and ALICE Award for political curating.

**Je Yun Moon** is a curator and writer. She lives and works in Seoul and in London. She is currently finishing her PhD at Goldsmiths College, working with the notion of choreography as a particular technology of making and unmaking the modern subject. She studied curatorial studies at the Royal College of Arts and art history at Cornell University. She has worked in various areas of art, architecture



and performance projects, including exhibitions, public programmes, seminars and publications at institutions such as the Sonje Art Center, the Anyang Public Art Project, the Venice Architecture Biennale and the Nam June Paik Art Center, Seoul.

**Ines Moreira** is an architect, researcher and curator based in Portugal. In 2013, she completed her PhD, an epistemological and processual research on the issues of curating architecture, space and exhibition display, presented under the title *Performing Building Sites: A Curatorial Research on Space*, developed on the Curatorial / Knowledge PhD Programme, Goldsmiths College. Her curatorial projects approach specific spaces (as post-industrial hangars, burnt historical buildings, minor architectures or abandoned museums) exploring knowledge-oriented research/production in the intersection of art, architecture, technology and the humanities. [www.petitcabanon.org](http://www.petitcabanon.org)

**Stefan Nowotny** is a philosopher based in Vienna. He is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, University of London, where he teaches on the Curatorial / Knowledge PhD Programme. He is a member of the Vienna-based European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies ([www.eipcp.net](http://www.eipcp.net)). He has published widely on philosophical and political topics, co-edited several anthologies, translated a number of texts from both French and English into German, and co-authored the volumes *Instituierende Praxen: Bruchlinien der Institutionskritik* (with Gerald Raunig, 2008) and *Übersetzung: Das Versprechen eines Begriffs* (with Boris Buden, 2008). He is also a co-editor of the book series *Es kommt darauf an: Texte zur Theorie der politischen Praxis*.

**Sarah Pierce** is an artist based in Dublin. Since 2003, she has used the term The Metropolitan Complex to describe a practice involving different working methods including performance, self-publishing, workshops and installation. Alongside recent exhibitions and performances, between 2011–13, she was artist-in-residence and guest faculty at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and in 2010 she was a DIVA fellow with the University of Copenhagen where she guest taught on the MA Curating. In 2013–15, she will join the School of Missing Studies as a tutor on the Sandberg Institute's MA in Art and Learning.

**Raqs Media Collective** enjoys playing a plurality of roles, often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators, sometimes as philosophical agent provocateurs. They make contemporary art, films, exhibitions, books, staged events; often collaborating with architects, computer programmers, writers and theatre directors. Their projects have been exhibited at numerous international venues