

The Anthropologist as Curator

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The recursivity of the curatorial

Jonas Tinius and Sharon Macdonald

Introduction

It has become increasingly evident and is widely attested in museum, contemporary art and other exhibition contexts that curating is a pervasive buzzword. Some might even say we no longer live in an age of the engineer, the bricoleur or the flâneur, but in an age of the curator, whose figure, depending on your point of view, evokes awe, annoyance or anxiety. There is no shortage of art historical, museological and anthropological texts (this one and the volume of which it is part included) speaking of the prominence and pervasiveness of curatorial discourse and practice. The number of workshops and graduate programmes for ‘up-and-coming’ curators, at which new, or those described as such, theories about art and curating are distributed, is itself both cause and result of this discursive formation that began, arguably, some three decades ago.

Curatorial practices no longer refer primarily to the taking care of an exhibition or the selection and interpellation of (art, ethnographic, etc.) objects and artists, but have expanded beyond museum and exhibition contexts to the questioning of these infrastructures themselves and the arrangement of theories as well as participatory and discursive formats. On the one hand, post-Fordist labour modalities that ‘valorise hyper-production’ (Rogoff 2013: 41) have led to a proliferation of theories and practices in an expanded curatorial field, in which everyone appears to be a curator and everything appears in need of curation. Or so it seems. Not only does this interpretation appear to suggest that this kind of valorization is the primary driver of such a theoretical advancement; it also downplays the complex range of other processes at play, such as the mobilization of innovation in the creative industries, changing institutional structures in art academies that combine theory and practice, and transforming formats across the arts (e.g. curating in the performing arts), and so on. On the other hand, Rogoff has suggested that the increasing transdisciplinarity of artistic and curatorial production has not just led to a blurring of lines across art or exhibition contexts, but has also, simultaneously, provoked a new set of formats, programmes and conversations that interrogate the meaning of curatorial practice itself (*ibid.*). The long list of publications addressing the relation between ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’ attests to this evidently generative phenomenon (see the introduction to this volume).

This chapter starts from the observation that merely pointing out the broadening scope and prevalence of curating as a practice, the curator as a professional role and 'the curatorial' as a theoretical discourse, overlooks some of the nuanced differences and shifts that occur in different exhibition constellations and curatorial fields, and fails to address reasons for the contemporary allure of the curatorial. In fact, the pervasive notion of the curator as a networking broker, who no longer requires connoisseurial competence and skills in handling objects, refers to a particular form of curating that has emerged from a relational and participatory shift in the arts, globalization and deinstitutionalization of the contemporary arts field from the 1990s onwards. It refers to an 'independent curator' no longer based in museums, but instead an initiator of project-based representations and thematic group shows, both gatekeeper of artistic visibility and translator of different epistemological realms no longer confined to one discipline. It also refers to a particular understanding of curatorial practice, less as an object-based and visual form of showing than as a reflection on curating itself as well as on its infrastructures, epistemologies and power relations. Focussing only on this form of curatorship, however, ignores less glamorous kinds of curating. Yet even object-based and more strongly museum-based and non-arts curating can be implicated in new assemblies of objects, relations, ideas and people (see Basu and Macdonald 2007).

Here, we look at the two central conceptual phenomena indicated in the title of this contribution: recursivity and the curatorial, before analysing the ways in which these theoretical distinctions play out and can be made sense of with respect to our own ethnographic field-sites in Berlin. These sites are themselves overlapping and expanded fields of curatorial practice, crossing the sometimes precarious membranes of museums, heritage and contemporary art. As such, they serve not as an illustration of our preceding conceptual analysis, but as themselves ways of thinking of the recursivity of the curatorial. Following from this, we interrogate not just the recursivity of the curatorial, but also its consequences for anthropological practice and theorizing.

The first concept we address is 'the curatorial'. It has been mobilized to open up the infrastructures of curating and curatorial theorizing; not as another term to ground the field professionally and define what curating is, but precisely 'to challenge the very protocols and formats that define it: collecting, conserving, displaying, visualizing, discoursing, contextualizing, criticizing, publicizing, spectacularizing, etc.' (Rogoff 2013: 45). In this sense, as Rogoff has put it, 'the curatorial' is meant 'to become the staging ground of the development of an idea', rather than a choice for another definition of what curating is. The curatorial, then, is a way to describe the reflexivity of the 'expanded field' of curatorial practice on itself. This, it appears to us, is a useful way into understanding the relation of anthropology to curatorial practice, and one to which our ethnographic accounts speak. But it is also a notion that may allow us to address the slightly less easily marketable story about the buzzword 'curating'. Just at that point when everything seems curatable and everyone appears to be curating something or someone, the term – we are not the first to note this (see Balzer 2015 and Obrist 2008) – becomes fuzzy and the boundaries of the practice porous and indecipherable. Instead of curator-envy (to borrow from Hal Foster's take on art and ethnography, see Foster 1995: 304), there is increasing malaise, even doubt, about its critical potential and pervasiveness. In an age of the managerial self-

borrowing from social and artistic critique (see Boltanski and Chiapello 2007 [1999]; Bröckling 2007; Gielen and De Bruyne 2012), is the curator yet another mediator in the project dynamics of a post-Fordist labour modality? Unlike the attested mutual fascination with each other's fields (curating and anthropology, respectively), we have also observed sceptical reciprocal interrogations into the practice at the heart of anthropology, leading to exchanges beyond envy and towards criticality. Instead of asking why curators want to be anthropologists and the other way around, we proceed by examining the implications and consequences of *not* desiring this metamorphosis. It is just at this moment, however, that an analysis of and a reflection on these relations of exchange or co-criticality may be helpful, especially for anthropologists who curate, curators who are interested in anthropology, and those trying to understand this precise interrelationship. Thinking recursively about the protocols, formats and infrastructures of how anthropology relates to curatorial practice in our ethnographic sites, we may illuminate some usually overlooked and perhaps generative tensions between both anthropology and curatorial practice.

In this chapter, therefore, we do not restrict our gaze to the independent curator emerging within the field of contemporary art but also consider a wider range of curatorial roles and practices. Our aim is not to rehearse and inscribe a genealogy of curatorial 'types', but rather to elucidate various approaches to, understandings of and reflections upon curating by curators, and to ask what the consequences of these could be for anthropologists in their relation to curating or their role *as* curators. For, to understand the implications of this porousness of the relation between anthropology and curatorial practice and its potential embrace or rejection of anthropological curating and a curatorial anthropology (an anthropology, perhaps, that continually reshapes itself recursively through curatorial practice), means asking about the potential end as well as the future of both.

It is for this reason that we connect a discussion of 'the curatorial' with one about 'recursivity'. The latter term seeks to achieve, we contend, an effect in anthropology similar to that of the former in the curatorial field. In a parallel move to the debate on the ethnographic turn in contemporary arts scholarship and practice (Siegenthaler 2013), which has analysed and often favourably described the overlapping, approximating relationship between artistic and anthropological practice (see Sansi 2015; Schneider and Wright 2005, 2010, 2013), this volume attests to a similar interest in thinking about the similarities and mutual interests that lie between anthropological and curatorial practice. Moreover, art and curating are variously seen as ways to rethink anthropological practice, and vice versa. Anthropology, in many of these seminal writings on the art–curating–anthropology nexus, appears as a source of inspiration for artistic and curatorial work. Roger Sansi (Introduction, this volume) invites contributors to this book to ask: 'How does the practice of curation help anthropologists rethink their practice, work, and concerns of contemporary anthropology?' For the curator Okwui Enwezor (2012 et al.: 21), cited in Sansi's introduction, 'like the ethnographer, the contemporary curator is a creature of wanderlust'.¹ Enwezor's curatorial take on the 2012 Paris Triennale, from the catalogue of which his statement is drawn, presented a 'radical break with national approaches' to the renowned curatorial event and introduced a pioneering non-representational,

transnational, postcolonial – and, above all, anthropological – frame of reference (see Oswald 2016: 679, 683). Yet, his ascription of ‘the curator [as] a co-traveller with the ethnographer in the same procedures of contact and exploration’ (Enwezor et al. 2012: 21) lends itself to an all-too-easy methodological, epistemological and, ironically, what some would regard as a colonially connoted equivocation.² Rather than regarding the curator and the anthropologist as joint explorative travellers, we would like to highlight the ways in which their conceptual frames, especially in contexts of close collaborations like the ones analysed in this book, operate rather on a recursive level of *ricochet* difference. Ricochet effects do not replicate sameness or present a perfect copy; rather, they introduce refracted, distorted and sometimes accidentally formed perspectives onto an object, person, or practice – and, importantly, they differ depending on one’s standpoint. Borrowing from Sarah Franklin (2013), for whom ‘the anthropological meanings of both recursivity and reflexivity [...] turn on the question of comparison’ (2013: 17), we wish to underscore the way in which the relationship between anthropology and curating can be analysed critically through the lens of generative recursive relationships. Franklin offers a neat image for thinking about the analogy: ‘like two mirrors facing each other (a classic image of recursion), the reflections are also ricochets’ (ibid.: 21). In the same vein, we are not interested here in showing merely *that* anthropology and curating are intertwined, or that one is *like* the other (‘anthropology as curating’), but rather, our focus is on what the ‘effects of sameness’ (ibid.) *do* to our understanding of each. How can we appreciate the proximity without blurring the boundaries, and thus also the differences, unevenness and scepticism between anthropology and curating?

The two overlapping field-sites presented in this chapter directly speak to the analyses above, while articulating responses to the question of recursivity, anthropology and the curatorial from different fields of curatorial practice. Departing from the multi-researcher project ‘Making Differences: Transforming Museums and Heritage’ at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, we have been conducting ethnographic research on a variety of different museum, exhibition-making and curatorial contexts in Berlin.³ While researchers study fields as divergent as the restitution of colonial-era objects (Förster et al. 2018), exhibition-making in museums of Islamic art, social media engagement in memorials to Holocaust victims or data management structures in museums of natural history, to name but a few, these fields are variously bounded and unbounded, overlapping and mutually distinguishing. What we mean by this is that the institutions we study are at times connected through infrastructures of state patronage and funding, or share public presence through events and discourses, while often, simultaneously, situating themselves publicly and discursively as quite different kinds of institutions, fields and practices. We have elaborated how certain concepts – provenance, translocality, engagement, alterity, the post-ethnological – appear and shift meaning across these fields, being both variously understood and mobilized in different institutional fields, as well as sometimes even becoming means of challenging formats and structures of exhibition contexts (CARMAH 2018). Complementing this research, we brought forward a methodological proposition for how to think through the complexity of interlocked and idiosyncratic organizations in this context, without

giving up the ethnographic specificity of each context or giving in to the trap of institutional relativism and ‘methodological containerism’ (Macdonald, Gerbich and Oswald 2018).

Most noticeably, many of the institutions we study in Berlin react in one way or another to the much discussed and contentious Humboldt Forum (hereafter, HuFo) in the Berliner Schloss (Berlin City Palace) that is nearing completion and meant to open to the public in late 2020. This monumental, partially reconstructed Prussian-era palace, erected on the site of the former GDR’s Palace of the Republic, will display objects from the collections of the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art, as well as showing other exhibitions, including one about Berlin. While critical debates about the palace and the ambivalent image of German identity and national self-understanding that it might project onto the capital began many decades ago (see Binder 2009), it has more recently become a focus for debates about anthropology, colonialism and German identity (e.g. von Bose 2016). In such a context, the role of curators working inside and outside institutions affiliated with the HuFo has become one of critical mediators between public discourses and institutional affordances.

The HuFo presents a provocative research backdrop and, for some members of our team, a direct field-site. Its complex entanglement of curatorial practices and negotiations sometimes concerns the very questions we are also asking ourselves as anthropologists. These questions include those of how to study and describe related museum discourses in a city; how to understand the current reckoning with the arguably problematic role of German anthropology during the country’s colonial era; and what curatorial strategies dealing with postcolonial theory in the field of contemporary art in Berlin can contribute to reflecting on such complex museum and heritage developments.

We address these theoretical challenges and ethnographic dilemmas in this chapter by way of two of our field-sites. One of these is the making of the Berlin Exhibition in the HuFo, whose content is primarily conceived and shaped by a curatorial team specifically assembled for the purpose, drawn from established institutions as well as freelance curators, under the leadership of the Director of the City Museums (*Stadtmuseen*) of Berlin. The curators also work closely with communication and education staff from the cultural educational organization *Kulturprojekte* and the design company *Krafthaus* as well as with many others. The other field-site is of collaborative research with the independent contemporary art project space SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin’s northern district of Wedding.⁴ These two projects are dealing, in different ways and with different emphases, with the legacy of German colonialism, German identity in the present and migration. But the focus of our analyses in this contribution is the modalities of our engagement as anthropologists with the curatorial team and the strategies and processes of these organizations. In both cases, we have experienced our relationships to be ones of critical, shifting and, at times, even uncomfortable engagements between curatorial and anthropological practice. Given the heightened public and professional attention in recent years to the role of anthropology and the colonality of ethnological museums, our roles as anthropologists studying curators engaging with these legacies were sometimes ones in which we would face projections of anthropology during our research. We variously experienced pragmatic interest

in understanding what each (anthropology/curating) has to offer in rethinking the other's practice and theorizing about museums and heritage, yet we are wary of describing these relations as ones of sameness, equivocation or even enthusiasm, let alone envious and uncritical approximation. Rather, as Arnd Schneider has noted, we found ourselves in relations marked by a 'mutual recognition of difference' (2015: 27) in a generative albeit 'uneven hermeneutic field' (ibid.) between anthropological and curatorial practices. Without assuming that we are already doing the same thing, we wish here to interrogate the kinds of relations made and unmade between these two practices. Based on comparative ethnographic research, we thus explore what kinds of insights each field-site offers for thinking about the recursive relational modalities of anthropology, ethnography and curating.

Anthropology, recursivity and the curatorial

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. (Martinon and Rogoff 2013: viii)

'The curatorial' has been one of the keywords in debates on curatorial practices and theorizing during the last ten years (see e.g. O'Neill 2012 and Smith 2012). Meant not as an adjective, but as a noun, it is used to evoke and conjure up a set of different entry points into curating, alternative ways of thinking about curatorial practice and theorizing. Across a wide number of publications and programmes, the term addresses the observation that the 'expanded field of the curatorial is built upon the expanded field of art', as Roger Sansi (Introduction, this volume) notes. Just as the meaning of contemporary art – and its possible definitions – have shifted, expanded and blurred into fields beyond the classic confines of modern autonomous art in recent decades (see Canclini 2014), so too has the meaning of curating. What interests us here is the way in which this discussion has arisen not from without, but from within curatorial programmes and curatorial initiatives.

In the preface to the widely cited anthology *The Curatorial* (2013), Irit Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon reflect on the origins for their concern about a distinction between 'curating' and 'the curatorial'. They write:

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 emphasise a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance. (ibid.: ix)

While Martinon describes the curatorial in his editor's introduction as a 'strategy for inventing new forms of departure' (2013: 4), the distinction he ponders with Irit Rogoff

in the paragraph above, from the book's preface, is more reflexive and less performative. As anthropologists we too are not simply concerned with the intricacies of 'putting on an event', but rather with understanding 'the staging ground of the development of an idea or an insight' (2013: 45). In that sense, Rogoff and Martinon's elision and elusion of a definition of 'the curatorial' open up the practice of curating for interrogation. If 'the curatorial' is the 'staging ground or the development of an idea or an insight', rather than being concerned with the practical staging of the event (understood here as, say, an exhibition or a performance), then it begins to question its own beginning and ending, its modalities and premises. It is a notion that operationalizes and marks off elements within curatorial practice as 'set aside', or rather it emphasizes how and where things become framed within a curatorial field. 'The curatorial [...] 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"' (Martinon and Rogoff 2013: ix). Put in this way, it is akin to the way in which anthropologist Karin Barber (2007) and performance studies scholars Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (2003) have described 'theatricality', namely as ways in which theatre and performance draw attention to their own 'conventions in the moment of its transpiring' (ibid.: 15). 'The curatorial', then, is a way for the curatorial field to refer back to its own conventions, discursive formations and protocols, not just in their moments of enactment, but before and after as well.

Rogoff suggests that there is good reason for mobilizing 'the curatorial' in such a recursive and reflexive way. In her essay 'The Expanding Field' (2013), she suggests that two parallel processes undergird the flourishing of what David Balzar has since coined as 'curationism' (2015). First, as noted above, Rogoff suggests that the expansion of curatorial agency and visibility is directly linked to 'the dominance of neoliberal models of work that valorise hyper-production' (2013: 41), thus rendering the curator a post-Fordist entrepreneur par excellence. Second, she argues that the absence of a stringent disciplinary history of curating, 'or a body of stable empirical or theoretical knowledge' (ibid.: 45), has been to the benefit of the production of knowledge in the field of curatorial practice. Even though the latter claim in particular is arguable and highly contingent on the kind of curating we refer to, it leads to an interesting argument, namely that 'such absences allow for a flexibility of operating and for the possibility of considerable invention, be it of archives or subjects or methodologies' (ibid.).

For Rogoff, thus, 'both curating and the curatorial [...] are largely fields grounded in a series of work-protocols with little cumulative history or a body of stable empirical or theoretical knowledge at their disposal' (ibid.). While this means that their epistemological grounding is unstable, it also affords a flexibility to draw on a variety of archives and methodologies. Neither Rogoff nor Martinon write from a neutral standpoint, of course: situating themselves within programmes that deploy specific discourses, their interventions are situated within particular historical and epistemic formations.⁵

Her own involvement with this programme, as she writes, did not seek to 'determine *which* knowledges went into the work of curating but would insist on a new set of relations between these knowledges' (ibid.). As such, an exploration of the curatorial

was less interested in ‘ground[ing] the field professionally’ than in ‘map[ping] the movement of knowledges in and out of the field and how they are able to challenge the very protocols and formats that define it: collecting, conserving, displaying, visualizing, discoursing, contextualizing, criticizing, publicizing, spectacularizing, etc.’ (ibid.). These are, at heart, also anthropological questions, or at least ones that would allow for a generative comparison between what ‘the curatorial’ offers to an anthropology as and an anthropology of curating. What, one might also ask, would it mean to translate the concept of ‘the curatorial’ into anthropology or ethnographic practice?

It is not our purpose to dwell on a rejection or approval of their theses or analyses of the post-Fordist present. Rather, we wish to take up some of their cues in order to supplement anthropological perspectives on the curatorial as a practice and way of framing. In particular, it is a question for us, as anthropologists engaging with curatorial practices and theorizing, as to what extent this offers potential for a reflexive, recursive analysis of anthropology and curating; a situation that could be seen, as Sarah Franklin puts it, as ‘deriv[ing] from the relationship between framing devices, such as models, and their contents – as in the cases of remodelling models, or re-conceiving concepts’ (2013: 15). Reframed in the context of our research, we thus ask: What differences and similarities are enacted or performed in recursion, and what kinds of ricochet effects do we notice as anthropologists studying curators who themselves engage in anthropological questions and issues we are facing ourselves? What are the ‘generative effects of recursion’ (Barnes 1971, 1973, cited in Franklin 2013: 19) of their practice and our study of their practices? And more so, does it offer potential for a continuous reshuffling and rethinking so that we each consequently – perhaps in a series of endless moves – change what we do?

Recursivity differs from reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to reflection on one’s own position, and in our research contexts could indicate anthropologists coming to new understandings of themselves through reflecting on others, or other people thinking about anthropologists and thus coming to altered understanding of themselves. Recursivity, however, is about a ‘sequence of revelation’ in which the relation between two perspectives ‘is constantly redefining the partners in the exchange, the objects of exchange, and the very concept of exchange’ (Sansi 2018: 123). As such, recursivity is performative and implies action. It refers to an ongoing mutually affecting relationality between things, people, thoughts and forms of knowledge. This is not just a combination of reflexive processes but the generation of something new. More than just anthropologists and curators thinking about each other, recursivity can – perhaps in a long series of additive moves – lead to altogether novel positions. In the context of laboratory stem cell research, Sarah Franklin (2013: 20) points to what is necessary to achieve this:

Recursion, in this sense – attention to the properties of the equipment you are using to determine, or manage, the properties of something else – is itself an empirical, necessary and pragmatic art.

In our situations, we are not dealing with ‘properties of equipment’, and we are not interested in ‘determining or managing’ the properties of something else, but the

recursive phenomenon remains similar. What kinds of equipment, here understood in the sense of ‘what ways of analysing’, do we have at hand for dealing with the protocols of reflexive curating? How do we ‘mind the gap’ between anthropology studying curatorial practice and problematizing anthropology without either ‘evening out’ (ibid.) the differences or simply positing a direct symmetry between the two fields? And lastly, how do we avoid turning this process into another exercise of reflexive anthropology, where curating appears merely as an object-mirror, instead of one of two eye-level perspectives? In some sense, it could be argued, as Martin Holbraad (2013: 123) suggests, that

all knowledge is recursive, inasmuch as it always involves calibrating the means of knowledge (empirical and analytical procedures, experimental protocols and tools, scales of measurement, assumptions, concepts – in short, its ‘equipment’) with the object of knowledge [...] to know something is recursively to adjust one’s body of knowledge to it.

Yet, there are specific ways in which this recursive generation of knowledge plays out in different fields. In the case of the relation between anthropology and curating, and to return to the mirror-image metaphor of the ricochet effects of recursivity, we are dealing with a socio-epistemic exchange. As Holbraad puts it, ‘if what anthropology strives to “grasp” is itself *another* way of grasping [...], then the anthropologists’ attempt can only take the form of a *shift of perspective*’ (ibid.: 124). Crucially, he argues, this is not a matter of ‘adjusting’ to a body of knowledge imagined as logically or epistemically inferior (ibid.: 126), but one of ‘epistemic xenophilia’ where two points of view, like in the recursive mirror image, ‘stand in a relationship of mutual constitution’ where one ‘(recursively) provides the terms with which [the other’s] knowledge itself is composed’ (ibid.). Recursivity, therefore, describes not the reproduction of difference (alterity) or sameness (mimesis), but the open-endedness of this mutually constitutive relation. An emphasis on it acknowledges ‘the injunction to keep constitutively open the question of what any given object of ethnographic investigation might *be* and, therefore, how existing concepts and theories have to be modulated in order the better to articulate it’, as Holbraad and Pedersen (2017: x) have suggested in the context of the ontological turn. Thinking recursively about the curatorial from an anthropological point of view, then, means engendering, or allowing the contexts of our fieldwork to engender, ‘transformational [...] conceptual landscapes’ (Holbraad 2012: 47). This then leads to the questions of how such a recursive perspective might ‘help to sustain [...] the transformation of anthropology itself, and what ... this transformation [would] entail?’ (ibid.).

In the following, we explore some of the ways in which our field-sites offer ethnographic inroads into these conversations. We ask, among other things, what happens when anthropology is not a desired ‘co-traveller’ (Enwezor) to curating, but an invited, critical commentator: or, indeed, something more akin to a ‘sparring partner’ (Tinius, forthcoming and 2017)? What are some of the generative differences and discrepancies between the protocols of curators and anthropologists reflecting on their practices? And what kinds of transformations do these different kinds of differences

in such co-critical, recursive and collaborative relations between anthropologists and curators entail for the possible recalibration of each position, especially for the anthropologist?

Berlin's recursive curatorial fields

As part of our joint research project, we have been conducting a multi-researcher ethnographic study of the transformations of museum institutions and discourses on exhibition-making in the city for over two years now.⁶ In frequent research meetings, our team comes together to exchange our experiences and compare perspectives. Several among us who have been trained as anthropologists (or who have been trained in ethnography in a related discipline, such as sociology) have also been involved in the curation of exhibitions in ethnological museums, historical museums and museums of art. Most of us are actively engaged in participant-observation in exhibition-making in an even broader range of institutions, ranging from large and well-known public institutions to smaller and often project-based initiatives across the city of Berlin, and sometimes beyond it. Many of these ethnographic projects address in some ways the institutions and the practices of curating, including, for instance, through concerns with visitor engagement, modes of display or the social routines of exhibition-making procedures, ranging from *jours fixes* to public symposia and publications. Moreover, many of us have constructed joint activities, often in explicit co-funded frameworks and with collaborative aims, in which our interlocutors may also include other professional anthropologists who work in the field themselves. These projects are thus not just about anthropologists studying curators and creating broad descriptions about their practices, but are also about creating new practices, methods and understandings of anthropology and curating, attempting to create and rethink through each collaborative and critical inquiry, and thus, in a move not unlike that of the ethnographic conceptualism proposed by Ssorin-Chaikov (2013), creating new forms and social realities as part of our research.

Our collective project thus offers a broad set of possible routes into the recursivity of curatorial practice, but we have deliberately chosen two particular instances. One, drawn from Sharon Macdonald's research on the making of the Berlin Exhibition in the HuFo, concerns the development of modes of participatory curation. As Roger Sansi writes in the introduction to this book, the move towards participatory curation has become widespread, and clearly entails curators working, in some sense at least, ethnographically. What they do, however, is not simply a version of anthropological activity but a mode of engagement with its own motivations, constraints and possibilities. As he observes, the role of such curators can be rather managerial, acting as mediators between different agents. This is a rather different figure of the curator from the artistic freewheeler that is often privileged in anthropologists' 'curator envy', as we discussed above. Indeed, as Sansi notes, from the perspective of the more managerial curator, it is the ethnographer who may seem to be the relatively unfettered and creative agent. In the brief discussion here, what we want to focus upon, however, is not so much the views that the anthropologist and the curators held of each other's form of work but,

rather, the shared yet distinct enterprise in which both were engaged of trying to figure out what might be meant by and entailed in participatory approaches. In particular, we draw attention to moments in which the approaches of each were recursively shaped by the other, or in which they might further be so.

Let us here say something first about the idea of ‘participation’ in our own multi-researcher ethnography, as well as in the Berlin Exhibition ethnography. Written into our project’s shared set of methodological premises was that we would aim to find modes of engaging ethnographically that were not restricted to a ‘distanced observer’ role and that would welcome and even seek active participation beyond the more usual ‘going along with’ positions of established ‘participant-observation’. We often talked about this as ‘collaborative’, and some of our colleagues chose to use variations of the term ‘observant-participation’ (see Macdonald, Gerbich and Oswald 2018: 148) to indicate the desired greater emphasis on participating than in more conventional fieldwork.

In the case of the Berlin Exhibition, Sharon Macdonald took on roles of various kinds and degrees of participation at different moments – a process that was sometimes awkward to negotiate.⁷ The role that was clearly flagged as ‘ethnographer’ was mostly described by the curators, and by herself, as one of ‘accompanying’ or ‘following’ the exhibition-making – though all also emphasized that this was a role in which she would also have input, drawing on her experience as a museologist, especially if, as the curators put it, she detected possible ‘mistakes being made’. While at the regular meetings of the curators she was mostly occupied primarily with listening and writing notes; she also joined in to varying degrees, depending on the topics being discussed. There, as well as in other meetings or via email, she made suggestions for possible content or contacts – such as providing ideas for people, including some of our own research team (Jonas Tinius among them), who might help mediate with the diverse communities in Berlin; and she commented on content and text. In addition to accompanying the exhibition-making process as an intermittently intervening ethnographer, Sharon contributed to the shaping of the exhibition in a more formal capacity, as a member of the exhibition’s Advisory Board. Despite the fact that the remit of the Advisory Board was partly the same as that of the participating ethnographer, namely to help the curators avoid making errors and to contribute to improving the exhibition, switching to the more formal position could feel awkward. One instance of this was at the first meeting of the board, when she automatically went to sit next to the curators, only to be told by them, ‘No – you are supposed to sit at the other end of the table’. There were other role switches or blurrings of boundaries too, such as when curators came to events organized at our research centre, CARMAH, or sought out Sharon’s advice on ideas for their Ph.Ds, or shared experiences of dealing as a foreigner with German bureaucracy, or discussed anthropology – as some curators had studied it, including within our own university department.⁸

It is worth noting, as we discuss in the conclusion to this chapter, that the work of the Berlin team was highly discursive, with extensive debates among the curators – and later with others, including the Advisory Board members and further interlocutors known as ‘critical friends’ – about the approach that they would take. Early discussion led to decisions that the exhibition would not be ‘object-based’ or ‘object-led’ but,

rather, that it would be highly 'participatory' and 'multivocal'. Discussion often focused on concepts that would be deployed in shaping the exhibition, with this sometimes drawing on anthropological and other theoretical sources, as in relation to 'migration' and 'colonialism', for example. Curators brought in examples from museums and exhibitions elsewhere, sometimes including ones that our anthropological team were looking at or had expertise in. As in our own research team, much thought was given to the contested site of the Humboldt Forum itself, and the ethnological collections in particular. However, while we, as a team of anthropologists, also needed to figure out where we stood in relation to it, for the curators this was a more constantly pressing and practical matter, as well as one that had even more weighing upon it politically, than was the case for us. Not only did the extensive discussion among the curators guide the internal planning of the exhibition, it also created a basis for presentations to politicians, press and public, in numerous talks and interviews, especially with the exhibition's chief curator, Paul Spies. Particularly significant was a document produced by the curators called *Berlin und die Welt. Konzept der Ausstellung des Landes Berlin im Humboldt Forum* ('Berlin and the World. Concept of the Exhibition of the Berlin City-State in the Humboldt Forum') that was presented to press and public in July 2016. Although profiled as a guiding concept, it was far from representing the end of the extensive discursive work – rather, in its own recursivity, it was not so much a blueprint for a next stage of practical work as a basis for continued reflection, development and revision.

Within the overlapping contexts (see also Macdonald 1997) of the work of the Berlin Exhibition curators and our 'Making Differences' research, what we want to briefly focus upon here is the ethnographer's participation in the curators' development of participatory approaches, the similarities and differences between the results of this involvement, and the recursive effects of such work for thinking about ethnographic research within the 'Making Differences' project. It was decided early on in the making of the Berlin exhibition that 'participation' would be fundamental to its approach. Precisely what this meant, however, needed to be worked out, not least as it was sometimes evident in early meetings that there were different assumptions in play – some curators regarding it as primarily relating to providing interactive opportunities within the exhibition, and others as entailing various degrees of involvement of 'communities' (as it was usually expressed) and relinquishment of curatorial authority. A series of meetings was established in order to draw up what the participatory approach would be. Sharon joined these, sharing some of her museological knowledge. Nina Simon's classification of different kinds of participation – ranging from 'contributing' to 'hosting' and 'co-creating' (2010) – became part of the regular curatorial discourse as the curators figured out which particular combination of participatory modes they would seek to achieve in different parts of the exhibition. As well as this contributing to a general rationale of how they would proceed – in particular, how they would attempt to avoid what they called a 'top-down' approach – they also addressed what it would mean in practice. Sharon took part in these discussions as well, and additionally contributed by writing a report in which she drew on her anthropological and museological knowledge about issues that needed to be considered when working with communities. Some of the points that she made, such as about the risk of communities feeling 'used' and even abandoned after a project had finished, played directly into the

planned practices of the curators, and helped them to argue their case for a dedicated member of staff who would carry out this work.

In some ways, the discourse of 'participation' among the curators was similar to that within our own research team. In particular, it tended to be seen as 'more democratic', as allowing for 'a greater range of voices' and, thus, as making for a livelier product. It was also, however, in several respects more carefully worked out and far reaching than that of the ethnographers. Even though Sharon had introduced to the curators the issue of long-term engagement and what might happen after a project formally ends, this had not at that time been something discussed within our own research project. Furthermore, there was a level of detail of discussion about matters such as the payment of community participants, and of the kinds of contracts that they would sign, that did not have a close ethnographic parallel (though it might have done so – and a recursive effect could prompt it). Likewise, what some see as the most radical of Simon's forms of 'participation', namely 'hosting' – in which an institution gives up its space for a community or other group to do with it what they will – was contemplated by the curators, and later was instantiated. At that time, however, nothing similar had been attempted within our team's fieldwork, and what it might mean within an ethnographic research project was, thus, a question that the curatorial practice raised – and one that we have only begun to contemplate. 'Co-creation' – which some see as more radical than 'hosting', as Simon herself seems to do – was also much discussed by the curators, and is also part of the exhibition that is in the making. In this case, there was more within our research centre that could be seen in this light,⁹ though the tendency has been for the co-creation to be within the realm of exhibitions and public engagement rather than anthropology as such. An exception to this, however, is the work of Jonas Tinius described below. Intimated here, then, are not simply reflections by curators and ethnographers about each other's practice or ideas, but also ways in which those practices can recursively 'bounce back' and reshape the ensuing ways of doing things by both parties.

One aspect of Jonas's 'Making Differences' research involves a collaborative project between the anthropologist and the curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung with the working title 'Relexification Dialogues'. The project is based on a year-long series of one-hour or longer conversations around an alphabet of key concepts that address the relation between anthropology and curating in general (e.g. 'exhibition-making' or 'coloniality'), and also draw on specific projects curated by Bonaventure and accompanied as part of his broader ethnographic project by Jonas (e.g. 'b' for 'beer', referring to artist Emeka Ogboh's brewing project as part of the 2017 Kassel-Athens exhibition documenta 14). Relexification is a term borrowed from linguistics, which refers to processes during second-language acquisition 'whereby one language [...] seeds a creole' by having some of its vocabulary replaced with vocabulary from another language, 'while almost everything else in the original language remains unchanged' (DeGraff 2002: 323). Bonaventure and Jonas understand this notion as a description of processes complementary to those in our proposition about recursivity – indeed, around the time of writing this article, they conducted a conversation on the concept for the letter 'r'. As such, these dialogues bring into conversation two ways of speaking and thinking that are not predicated on sameness, or even on a mutually shared

interest: instead, they aim to experiment with a long-term exchange and recalibration of perspectives, conceptual and discursive, but always in response to ongoing fieldwork and shared experiences from phases of participant-observation with the exhibitions curated by Bonaventure and his team at SAVVY Contemporary. They do not seek to define words or create a new joint language, but to perform resonances, creating, as was formulated in an initial project plan, ‘an anthropological and curatorial ‘jargon’ [...] using and inserting changes into established conceptual definitions, helping each other unlearn associations and references, and substituting old vocabularies with new meanings’ (Ndikung and Tinius 2017). The conversations are nearing completion at the time of writing, but their aim is to serve as a published reference point for a deliberate emphasis on the ambivalent and shifting terrain between anthropology and curatorial practice, thus allowing it to feed back into the very conceptual and socio-epistemic field from which it arose.

‘Bonaventure, let’s start these dialogues with the letter ‘a’ to talk about anthropology’ – Jonas opened their first joint session on a 2017 October morning in the subterranean exhibition and office rooms of the SAVVY project space in Berlin’s northern district of Wedding. As a starting point in this first conversation on anthropology, Jonas chose to refer back to their first meeting in the project space. Almost an entire year earlier, in September 2016, as Jonas was starting his ethnographic fieldwork project as part of the ‘Making Differences’ research outlined above, he had already begun visiting exhibitions and had read up on the history and conceptual framework of SAVVY Contemporary. Introducing himself to Bonaventure for the first time as an anthropologist, however, the curator responded ‘I am sceptical of anthropologists’, thus already initiating a tension inherent in the exchange.

The encounter across two very different, rather than similar or mutually attractive standpoints, initiated their joint fieldwork conversations in 2016. Over the ensuing months, they continued to articulate different standpoints, recognizing a generative scepticism about each other’s positions, often aimed at the history and disciplinary presence of anthropology (voiced by Bonaventure), or at simplified representations of anthropology in artistic and curatorial contexts today (voiced by Jonas). These included conversations about exhibitions or large curatorial projects in which Bonaventure was involved, such as documenta 14 in Kassel and Dakar in 2017 or the Dakar Biennale in 2018 in Senegal, both of which contained curated sections and artworks addressing various aspects of the history or practice of European anthropology. In the latter case, Bonaventure had even conceived an exhibition with members of his SAVVY Contemporary project (co-curated by Kamila Metwaly and Marie H el ene Pereira) for the Dakar Biennale 2018 around the work of Egyptian ethnomusicologist Halim El-Dabh (1921–2017) entitled ‘Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog / The Dog Done Gone Deaf’, the opening and set-up of which Jonas accompanied as part of his research.¹⁰

But back to the first letter/dialogue. A few minutes into the conversation on the letter ‘a’ and concept of ‘anthropology’, Bonaventure said:

You know very well that I come from a family, not completely of anthropologists, but my father is an anthropologist. I observed that very early. Although in his time, and his people [in Cameroon], in the 1970s, were very much interested in studying

their own people, their own cultures, but they studied, I mean he studied, within a framework and science that was made to study him. Do you understand where I'm getting to? (Ndikung and Tinius 2017)

What Bonaventure was indicating, as he continued to explain, was the question about the production of difference in anthropology and his curatorial work as a way to counter or produce alternatives to an anthropological knowledge formation. Anthropology, he argued, implies for him a construction of cultural difference to a culturally 'other' understudy in order to reflect on the anthropological self; a 'necessity to be able to create an Other in order to be able to create yourself', as he put it. This, for Bonaventure, 'comes into play when I say that I am sceptical of anthropologists and anthropology as a discipline [...] and so a lot of my practice is about how we take certain things and people out of that 'savage slot', out of where they have been placed, by some anthropologists'. Confronted with such a scepticism, and a self-description that so strongly rejects anthropological knowledge formation, one can hardly speak of an invitation or a desire on the part of the curator to be an anthropologist, as discussed by Sansi in the introduction to this book. However, Bonaventure responded to Jonas's suggestion for a sustained series of conversations around shared concerns between anthropology and curatorial practice, because he recognized that the project was an attempt at dialogic thinking rather than a hierarchical researcher–informant fieldwork relationship. Instead of trying to co-curate, or co-ethnographize each other's practices, they sought to articulate both an anthropology and a curatorial practice that each enacts its knowledge co-production in dialogue, rather than doing so on behalf of the other. Over the course of the next twelve months, they continued conversations on letters including 'b' (blackness/beer), 'c' (coloniality), 'h' (Humboldt Forum), 'm' (masculinity), and so on, to name a few, talking about both their immediate surroundings and the specific projects they have done; also always addressing and referring back to conversations they had conducted before.

As such, the dialogues themselves became reference points for future conversations, generating concepts and terms that recurred in later dialogues. As such, while recursivity is not an evident outcome of any dialogue, the conversations were conducted with the deliberate intention of drawing on aspects of this generated archive. In that sense, they both engaged, and reminded themselves in doing so, in generating discourse about curating and anthropology *through* conversations, rather than from a single perspective of analysis and writing about the other. Moreover, their aim was to generate not only conversations for the purpose of, say, having an archive of dialogues for publication or research, but also as a resource to refer back to in future projects. In other words, they engaged in the creation of a dialogic, non-definitive encyclopaedia that would continue shaping their positions as well as feeding back into their future thinking. Referring to their modalities of speaking as 'rehearsed improvisations' (personal communication), they prepared conversations in loose ways – roughly agreeing to about one hour per letter, and with a few shared notes and reference points for each conversation – but keeping the conversation spontaneous and unplanned in its content, while rereading and returning to that which had already been said and transcribed.

In a recursive analytical move, we, the authors of this chapter, contend that the way Bonaventure and Jonas set up the dialogues in itself tells us something about both

anthropology and curatorial practice, in the general and in the specific. Specifically regarding curatorial practice, Bonaventure and Jonas conducted a dialogue on ‘e’ (exhibition-making) that illustrates this point. Asked how Bonaventure regards exhibition-making and what the role of writing ‘concepts’ (project proposal sketches, or curatorial statements that often served as the basis for discussion), he responded that for him,

[w]riting a concept becomes a very significant part of exhibition-making, because I create this kind of a discursive context in which I can work with artists and other curators. Even if I am working from the artist to the exhibition, I try to create a conceptual context within which we want to move. It is like creating a playground, and from there we go on to see how we can dialogue. *The important thing is that the exhibition doesn't become an illustration of the concept, but an extension of it.* If we stick to the allegory of the ground, it is like tilling the soil. The concept becomes the soil; the exhibition becomes the possibility of tilling that soil. How do we work, how do we farm, harvest on that soil? To me, an exhibition is hardly ever about answering a question, but finding ways of posing the right questions. So it's really about looking for that possibility of expressing something for which I don't have the answer yet, and which may be answered by a visitor, or another, in different and multiple ways that I may or may not agree with. ‘How is the question posed?’ then becomes the task. (Ndikung and Tinius 2017; emphasis added)

As such, the ‘Relexification Dialogues’ themselves function as a way to think about the ‘conceptual context’ within which Bonaventure as a curator wants to move. It is, in the rehearsed spontaneity modality mentioned earlier, an attempt at finding the right modes of asking questions. Indeed, for him, ‘very important for understanding exhibition-making is the creating of a context, which in my practice generally has to do with, first, writing a concept’. In the same discursive modality, Bonaventure described a central difficulty of exhibition-making for him being the effort to avoid that it merely illustrates an idea, but instead performs it so that curating becomes a ‘performative gesture’ (Ndikung and Tinius 2017). In some ways, this description of curatorial practice as the translation from concept to context to the creation to performative staging of an idea reflects Rogoff's definition of the curatorial: ‘the staging ground for the development of an idea’. In other ways, however, it may also conjure up questions about the relation between how anthropologists conceptualize their own fields, and the move from methodology to fieldwork to writing-up and theorization. Perhaps it is indeed, as Sharon has put it elsewhere, ‘this dialogic nature of the ethnographic *process* that is one of the most important aspects of, and reasons for doing, ethnography’ (2003: 162), and one in which the ethnographer is not just an author, but equally open to recursive interpretation by their interlocutors.

Conclusion: the recursivity of the curatorial

In this chapter, we have proposed a series of analytical and ethnographic discussions about the intersection of recursivity and the relation between anthropological fieldwork

and curatorial practice. Our choice to mobilize ‘recursivity’ and ‘the curatorial’ as both ethnographic and analytical terms has itself had a performative reason. For both of us, researchers on a project with overlapping field-sites, an analysis of our fieldwork often produces a series of recursive moves, whereby we may end up reading texts by our interlocutors, or analyses from journalists ‘within our field’ whose concepts we reframe for our own analysis.

In the Berlin Exhibition, Sharon was confronted, among other things, with the various meanings of ‘participation’ mobilized by the curatorial team, including those of her own forms of participation in the exhibition’s making and the ways in which our own research project – and the various forms of engagement of our researchers – would operate. Jonas produced a mode of fieldwork that itself also mirrored in style and content some of the models and formats of exhibition-making he was interested in studying. Both of our research projects, therefore, operate at a recursive level, but they also try to analyse the discursive and recursive nature of these curatorial fields. Moreover, besides discussing some of the theoretical references of this text with interlocutors in our field – Jonas conducted a ‘Relexification Dialogue’ on ‘recursivity’ after completing a first draft of this paper with Sharon – ‘the curatorial’ as a concept that emanated from curatorial theorization also became a point of reference in Jonas’ fieldwork.

In *Talking Contemporary Curating* (2015), Terry Smith’s sequel to his seminal *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012), he writes that ‘[p]erhaps the most significant development in curatorial practice in the last decade is that the field has become markedly more discursive in character’ (Smith 2015: 13). More than that, ‘discourse’ for him is now ‘upfront and at the center of curatorship’ (ibid.,: 14). Unpacking his observation, he notes:

Curators now talk more often, and more publicly, about what they do and how they do it. They also talk less guardedly, and in more depth than ever before, about *why* they do it. They speak more searchingly about curating as a practice that is as grounded in processes of conceptualisation, and as committed to the production of new knowledge, as it is in its more traditional pursuits: the pragmatics of caring for collections, planning programmes, working with artists, mounting exhibitions, attracting viewers and educating them. (ibid.)

If, for Smith, this is a result of a dialogue between curators and conceptual artists who increasingly took over the ‘theoretical accounting’ for their own work (ibid.: 15), the ‘Relexification Dialogues’ attest to a different, albeit related, phenomenon. Indeed, some of the most contentious points of the dialogues could be described as struggles about the epistemic jurisdiction of anthropological practice. How do you conduct a conceptual reflection, for instance, on the notion of ‘Heimat’ or ‘hospitality’ without simply rehearsing an anthropological reference corpus, but instead allowing a curatorial take to unpack an anthropological introduction to a dialogue? This might seem like a trivial question. Dominic Boyer, however, in his analysis of the relationship of anthropologists to their expert interlocutors, suggests that not every venture ‘into other domains of expertise’ is an innocent encounter of interdisciplinary endeavour (2008: 42). Rather,

'every intellectual profession ideologically imagines its expertise as occupying the centre of knowledge (even when individual experts have their doubts), and thus exploring and coordinating other epistemic jurisdictions are important professional work that confirms the universalist ambitions of one's own jurisdiction.' (ibid.)

With this critical position in mind, the question of a dialogue between anthropology and curatorial practice that touches on both in a recursive manner becomes more challenging. In what sense is one position interested in confirming their ambitions of epistemic jurisdiction over the other? If, for Bonaventure, the 'Relexification Dialogues' serve as a published archive for future projects, incorporating an expansive personal and professional discursivization of his curatorial thought, they might equally well be conceptualized as forms of fieldwork on Jonas's part, and thus again be incorporated into the field of academic anthropology and publishing formats such as this book chapter. Therefore, Bonaventure and Jonas attempted to maintain and attune to a tone of conversation, and a general intention throughout these dialogues, which aims at a recursive outcome – namely, an attempt to alter their positions and thinking about their own and each other's practice by *talking* about shared concerns (encapsulated in keywords, concepts, places, reference points) from often shared fields (e.g. Berlin, Athens, Dakar) and experiences (e.g. shows they have seen together).

Besides these recursive moments of our overlapping curatorial fields, we would like to draw out a set of further observations from our above analyses. First, an obvious question is about the kinds of curatorships we are dealing with in our ethnographic contexts. There are certainly some overlaps – in particular, neither is what we might term 'traditional curatorship', especially in that neither begins from an existing collection of objects that is 'cared after' and put on show. Both exist in some ways outside established structures, the Berlin Exhibition team having been created specifically for this one purpose and existing only temporarily as an organizational structure, and SAVVY being an independent yet publicly funded institution encompassing a broad range of activities encompassing artistic, but also activist, academic, even spiritual or anthropological, realms. Moreover, both – and especially their charismatic directors, Paul Spies and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung respectively – position themselves, albeit in different ways, in what might even be called an 'ethnographic' stance of critically reflecting on Berlin and its institutions, including the Humboldt Forum. At the same time, however, the Berlin Exhibition, as part of the Humboldt Forum, remains more within those structures; what feels 'radical' or 'critical' here is not identical with how the same ideas are perceived at SAVVY. In addition, SAVVY draws mostly from the context of artistic practices, discourses and objects, and sees its position as contributing primarily to creating different protocols and parameters from this field of publishing and theorizing, whereas the curators of the Berlin Exhibition position themselves more within participatory exhibition development aimed at wider publics, including artistic practice within this, rather than as a self-referential field in itself. To achieve the former, individual curators at SAVVY are encouraged to articulate their own positions in the kinds of concept papers Bonaventure mentions in his dialogues with Jonas; whereas curators at the Berlin Exhibition were encouraged to draw on individual strengths and creativity to contribute to what became a collective project that will result in a single, albeit multivocal, exhibition.

Second, what generative consequences do each of these fields then have for our possible ways of thinking of a curatorial anthropology, that is, one that explores the protocols of exhibitions and modes of display, viewing curating as ‘an event of knowledge’ (Martinon and Rogoff 2013: ix)? For us, curatorial practice thus conceived undoubtedly offers a modality of engaging with wider audiences, as alternatives to the predominantly wordy modes of anthropological expression. Moreover, a recursive curatorial anthropology that would pay greater attention to the protocols of its discursive formation and to the development of ideas, to their ‘staging’, in Rogoff’s words – not as a reflection on method, but as a way of doing anthropology – might have the effect of producing generative tensions across the still widely entrenched discrete stages of research design, fieldwork, writing-up and theorizing. It would also allow for an opening-up of formats and protocols of communication – moving perhaps closer to a conceptual ethnographic enterprise as outlined by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2013). But perhaps some of this is already happening, and we may just need to reframe our way of looking at our own practices. Some of the museums we are studying in Berlin, for instance, are after all ‘not only ... part of a familiar Western cultural framework, [but] it also offer parallels and overlaps with ethnography’s own institutional context, politics and practices’. In other words, they ‘mirror ... and collide ... with aspects of the ethnographic endeavour itself’ (Macdonald 1997: 161), thus offering a possibility for a ‘parallel context’ (ibid.) or a recursive curatorial ethnography in dialogue with debates on an anthropology at home.

Our proposal might seem to move back from curatorial practice to anthropology, but we also detect another possibility. Instead of analysing what curating can do for anthropology, we would like to see the prospect of a recursive curatorial field for anthropology in an invitation for anthropology to transgress itself. As Roger Sansi (2018: 124) has suggested in relation to the recursivity of the gift, maybe we can also, in this context, shift the focus towards seeing the relation between the curatorial and anthropology as a possibility for a mutual becoming of something else. But rather than speculating on abandoning anthropology or declaring it at an end (Jebens and Kohl 2011), we prefer to think of the recursivity of the curatorial as a field that invites anthropology to attend to possible metamorphoses or transgressions of itself without becoming unrecognizable. This means retaining recognition of the distinct nature of our respective endeavours while not seeing these as completed or immutable. In conversation about the concept ‘recursivity’ Bonaventure once asked: ‘What if one were to have a broken mirror facing another broken mirror?’ Acknowledging that our respective projects are incomplete and riddled with cracks – that is, as productively rather than fatally ‘broken’ – is precisely what can allow for an energizing experimentation with anthropological formats, practices and concepts in a recursive relation with the curatorial.

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Notes

- 1 The French version of the sentence reads: 'Comme l'ethnologue, le commissaire contemporain est une créature vouée à l'errance, hormis à l'instant présent [...]'. (Enwezor et al. 2012: 21).
- 2 French version: 'Le commissaire est-il un compagnon de voyage de l'ethnologue, partageant ses procédures de mise en contact et d'exploration?' (ibid.).
- 3 For an overview of the project, visit www.carmah.berlin (last accessed 9 October 2018).
- 4 For more information on SAVVY Contemporary and the Berlin Exhibition, see Tinius 2018 and <https://www.stadtmuseum.de/humboldt-forum> (last accessed 4 December 2018), respectively.
- 5 Indeed, at the time of a first draft of this chapter (October 2018), the 'Curating/Knowledge' Ph.D. programme at Goldsmiths, University of London, from which the cited volume arose, celebrated its 12th anniversary with a conference on the relationship between curating and knowledge – thus perhaps offsetting to some slight extent Rogoff's own earlier observation that there is little cumulative or at least discursively reflected history on curating and the curatorial. A brief description of the event *C/K12* at the Department of Visual Culture of Goldsmiths, University of London (11 October 2018), which included a talk by Ndikung, can be found here: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=11832> (last accessed 5 December 2018).
- 6 This was initiated in 2015 by an Alexander von Humboldt research professorship granted to Sharon Macdonald. For further details see <http://www.carmah.berlin/making-differences-in-berlin/> (last accessed 9 December 2018).
- 7 From this point we use our first names, as those are how we refer to each other and are how we were primarily referred to in our field-sites.
- 8 The Institute of European Ethnology in which CARMAH is located.
- 9 In particular, a notion of 'creative co-production' – originally developed by Tal Adler – is central to the TRACES (Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production), funded as part of the Horizon 2020 *Reflective Society* programme. That project's work package 5, *Contentious Collections*, led by Sharon Macdonald, is based in CARMAH, as are Tal Adler and Anna Szöke, who also work on the project's *Dead Images* creative co-production. Creative co-productions are teams of artists, researchers and cultural institution staff who work on a problem, jointly developing techniques to tackle it, over a long period of time. See <http://www.traces.polimi.it> (last accessed 14 October 2018).
- 10 For more information on the project, visit: <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/projects/2018/the-dog-done-gone-deaf/> (last accessed 14 October 2018).

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