CROSSING THRESHOLDS
Curating Across Contexts within the Public Sphere

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This thesis aims to investigate how a shift of the context in which artwork is presented necessitates a shift in curatorial approach. The discussion considers the overlapping categories of public and private in the spaces in which art is presented and encountered within the public sphere.

By critically engaging with public sphere discourse, I construct a theoretical perspective rooted in Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic space. I advocate an adaptive curatorial approach which regards potential audiences as plural and fragmented. This perspective is then used as a lens through which to analyse the curatorial strategies operative within three case studies of exhibition projects from the artistic practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst, and to reflect on the future potential for agonistic curatorial approaches.

Keywords: audience, public sphere, public space, public, private, agonism, curating, site-specific, situation, curatorial, context, democratic space.
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INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

*Museum audiences come from a certain bandwidth of the population that feels their interests are represented.*

Suzanne Lacy¹

*I think that is most important to keep in mind - where is the space we have the right to and where is the space we are invited to enter, it’s a big difference.*

Johanna Gustafsson Fürst²

The context in which contemporary art is encountered frames the audience’s relation to the work. This thesis will investigate and examine the encountering of artworks in different contexts within the public sphere: public space, the institution, the commercial gallery. In doing so, I analyse the artistic and curatorial strategies which are operative in creating a context for the presentation of artwork, and the myriad factors at play in situating art within the public realm. The debate surrounding the public sphere is a key line of enquiry in this research. Hence, the shifting categories of private, public, and questions of democratic space and the commons will also configure my analysis of the contexts. As such, this thesis aims to propose new approaches and curatorial strategies for presenting artwork which engages with and requires a specific context. Furthermore, this research considers how strategies of placing art in the public realm could be refracted back into the exhibition space, and what potential effects this could have.

The interests which inform this research are broad and intersecting. Therefore, in order to discuss concretely, I focus specifically on one artistic practice. Through a series of case studies of the practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst, this thesis will unpack and analyse multiple theoretical and practical aspects which structure and condition the encounter between the artwork and potential audiences. Gustafsson Fürst’s practice oscillates between sculpture, text, performance and site-specific installation. Her work interrogates and reformulates questions around democracy, the commons, privatisation and commercialism, and has been presented in a variety of contexts.

The seed for this research was planted several years ago, when I was collaborating with artists to create temporary site-specific installations and exhibition situations in disused spaces in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland. This project was called *Hidden Door*, and my

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² Email interview with Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. (2016-10-26).
role comprised transforming a series of 22 vaulted archways into exhibition spaces, sites for experiential performance-based encounters, and the staging of musical and choreographed practice, each one different in size. The spaces were then opened to visitors across a programme of nine days, after which the vaults, owned by the city council, were to be sold to developers for commercial regeneration. Thus the project could also be read as an indirect step in the rebranding and gentrification process, though I did not perceive this to be the council’s intention, and certainly not that of *Hidden Door*. This experience working on projects in found-spaces stimulated a deeper interest into the question of audience, leading to questions which ultimately provoked this research.

Whilst working on the project *Hidden Door*, I began to reflect on how a temporary artwork in an ordinarily disused space might find an audience. Must a new audience be created? How to communicate with this audience? Questions surrounding the relations between artist, audience and artwork converged with my interest in public space to set a trajectory of investigation into curatorial work within the public sphere. The research questions in this thesis are a more developed and specific iteration of these initial reflections.

The interest in the practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst came more recently, and has given a sharper focus to my research. In 2016 I initiated a collaborative project with Gustafsson Fürst, which acted as a catalyst for my long-standing interest in the public sphere and questions regarding curating across different contexts. *Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space* was my curatorial degree project, and took the format of a three day exhibition at Färgfabriken, Stockholm in November 2016. *Codified Environments* presented *The Red Line* (2016), a video work by artist and filmmaker Lucia Pagano and a spatial intervention *The Eyes* (2016), by Gustafsson Fürst. Pagano’s film work was shot on the metro system in Stockholm, filmed in and outside the stations on the red line, and also inside the train carriages. *The Red Line* offers a collage of fragmented everyday moments, through the observation of strangers.³ Through discussions with visitors to the exhibition, it became clear that some interpreted the work as a visualisation of segregation in Stockholm, whilst others were more struck by the presence of the underground system as a shared space, a system built to connect society.

³ The red metro line in Stockholm runs between Ropsten and Norsborg, and thus connects one of the wealthiest areas in Stockholm, where the residents are predominantly white, middle-class Swedes, with areas where unemployment is high and the majority of residents have a translocal background. For an interactive journey which illuminates the statistics behind the disparity in income, profession, ethnic background, of people living along the red metro line, see klassresan.aftonbladet.se/ (Accessed 2017-08-10).
Gustafsson Fürst’s work responded to Pagano’s film, and was conceived of by the artist as a spatial intervention, steering the visitors within the exhibition space. Titled *The Eyes*, the work comprised a series of metal spikes, such as those found in railway stations to deter pigeons. These spikes were painted with the same green colour which is found in Stockholm’s public spaces, used to paint the objects of publicly maintained infrastructure such as bus stops, bins, lampposts etc. As will be discussed later, this “public green” recurs frequently in Gustafsson Fürst’s work. The spikes were then installed on the pillars of the exhibition space, precisely where visitors would lean or stand to watch Pagano’s film. Through content and form, the project aimed to construct an extended platform for discussion around notions of public and private. The programming around the exhibition included a talk with the artists, that I moderated, and which then opened to the audience to engage with the theme. Interesting questions came from the audience, whose reflections showed their curiosity about the artistic processes and choices, and the driving forces of the work. In creating an exhibition situation which provoked and intrigued the audience, they were motivated to voice their own reactions and discuss with each other. This project encouraged the present research, and gave me confidence in my curatorial approach and line of enquiry.

My relocation to Sweden in 2015 piqued an interest into the specific context of Stockholm. Stockholm is a city which is well organised, highly functioning and increasingly becoming commercialised, as of course are many cities in Western Europe. The privatisation of public space is a key concern. One cannot understand the factors which condition public space and the increasing privatisation of it without taking account of the history of the Million programme\(^4\) and the visible social segregation which is reinforced by the Stockholm housing market, and an ongoing cycle of redevelopment and increased rents in the suburbs. Irene Molina, Professor of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University, has written extensively on the Million programme and segregation in Sweden. In the 2016 article “From Folkhem to Lifestyle Housing in Sweden: Segregation and Urban Form, 1930s–2010s”, co-authored by Molina and Karin Grundström, three key historical shifts are considered: regulation of the Folkhem housing, de-regulation of Folkhem housing, and “back to business” housing, affected by market forces.\(^5\) Molina and Grundström examine the disparity

\(^4\) The Million programme is the common term for the ambitious housing development project initiated by the Swedish government, to provide a home for everyone. Between 1965-74, 1 million housing units were built – a quarter of Sweden’s housing. Many Million programme housing areas in the suburbs around Stockholm were attributed with reputations as problem areas, with media continuing to play a considerable role in the perpetuated stigmatisation of these residential areas. See Erik Stenberg, “Preface” to *Structural Systems of the Million Program Era*. (Ed. Erik Stenberg). KTH School of Architecture, Stockholm, 2013. pp. 8 – 9.

\(^5\) Folkhem or Folkhemmet (the definite form), meaning The People’s Home is a socio-political concept which was central to the Swedish Social Democrats’ government and the post-war welfare state in Sweden. The term is now used to describe the era between the 1930s and the mid 1960s. The term was
between the Folkhem aim of “housing for all” and the current situation which prioritises “housing the privileged”.  

Furthermore, the potential affordances of the public sphere are increasingly important against a backdrop of increasing migration. Spaces free from moneyed agendas or authoritative control are scarce, but vital for providing a platform for discussion. Akin to the majority of Western Europe, Sweden’s politics and societal codes are structured by a history of social democratic policy and deliberative democracy which aims at consensus. Further to this, it is my opinion as an outsider that in Swedish society – generally speaking – the majority of people are averse to conflict and would sooner avoid it rather than openly voice an opinion which goes against the grain. This personal observation is worthy of mention in its relation to the model for radical democracy advocated by the social and political theorist Chantal Mouffe, a central influence in my research, which will be discussed in depth within the theoretical framework of this thesis. Mouffe is a proponent of agonistic relations, rather than antagonistic, and hence advocates an approach whereby agents with conflicting opinions treat one another as adversaries rather than enemies, thus leading to debate without resolve, rather than the ideal of a deliberative process which aims to result in consensus.

Mouffe’s theories have significant implications for this research, and form a key line of enquiry in the research questions, as will be discussed later. Specifically, I draw on Mouffe’s concept of agonistic space and investigate its implications for curating and presenting art in the public sphere.

The position from which I base my investigation is that of an outsider – or a dual insider-outsider. A familiarity and integration into the Swedish cultural landscape affords me the description of an insider, or least one who is initiated to the codes and relations of the Stockholm visual arts network and institutions. Simultaneously, as an individual who has recently relocated to Stockholm, having grown up in a non-Swedish

originally used in Per Albin Hansson’s speech from 1928. For further details see nordiskamuseet.se/kunskapsomraden/folkhemmet. (Accessed 2017-08-01).

6 Molina and Grundström surmise the present day situation, stating that “[w]hile privileged classes, more than ever before in modern Swedish housing history, have the possibility to choose new forms of housing, the most impoverished groups live in residual and often stigmatised peripheral housing areas.” Karin Grundström & Irene Molina, “From Folkhem to Lifestyle Housing in Sweden: Segregation and Urban Form, 1930s–2010s”, International Journal of Housing Policy, Volume 16, Issue 3, 2016. p. 1.

7 For further reading, I recommend the work of historian Lars Trägårdh, who argues that Swedish political culture can be “said to be democratic rather than liberal.” Trägårdh states that “It is characterized by centralized power and uniformity as well as by an ancient tradition of inclusive, participatory democracy. It offers the peasants communes’ broadly defines access to the democratic process even as it places rather narrow limits on the possibility of diverging from the communal consensus.” (Trägårdh, “The ‘Civil Society’ Debate in Sweden,” in State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered. (Ed. Lars Trägårdh), Berghahn Books, New York, 2007. pp. 9 – 36. p. 29.

8 Chantal Mouffe. See Chapter 4 of The Democratic Paradox (2009) and Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically (2013).
context, my position also remains one of an outsider. Meanwhile, this duality of insider-outsider is not without its limitations. To generalise about attitudes towards the public sphere and social behaviour in Sweden would be neither scientific nor productive. Therefore, I will endeavour to remain specific in my analysis of the case studies, in order to form stable ground for others to follow with me, and to give a clear and a solid basis for my argument.

Further, my own curatorial position has no doubt been influenced by the British arts context, with its tradition of community arts, museum education and focus on audience. Curator and critic Claire Bishop has written of the impact of New Labour’s cultural policies on the arts field in the UK, which have no doubt contributed to the ‘social turn’ in curating and arts production in the UK.⁹ The intertwining of urban regeneration with art in the public realm, and socially engaged art practices during the New Labour government has shaped the backdrop against which art in the public sphere is considered – and appraised – in the UK. This is a particularly pertinent consideration against the context of a fragile arts sector which has been continually affected by austerity cuts to arts funding, and an increasingly complex relationship between public institutions and private sponsorship or patronage.

There is no such thing as a neutral context for the presentation of – and encounter with – artwork, whether it is within a state-funded institution in Stockholm or in a disused archway on a side street in Edinburgh. It is beyond the scope – and neither the purpose – of this thesis to present a history of art in the public realm. Rather, this thesis focuses on a specific artistic practice which intersects with questions of public and private, the commons, and democratic public sphere, in order to draw connections between theory and practice.

Throughout this thesis I will set out my argument for a curatorial approach which re-articulates relations between the unfixed and shifting elements of the artwork, audience and context. My theoretical perspective is informed by Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonistic space. Drawing on Mouffe’s position to ground my theoretical foundation, I engage with discourse surrounding the public sphere and curating, to develop my own curatorial stance toward agonistic curating. In doing so, I draw on the work of

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⁹ In Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (2006), Bishop wrote that: “In the UK, New Labour (1997–2010) deployed a rhetoric almost identical to that of the practitioners of socially engaged art in order to justify public spending on the arts. Anxious for accountability, the question it asked on entering office in 1997 was: what can the arts do for society? The answers included increasing employability, minimising crime, fostering aspiration – anything but artistic experimentation and research as values in and of themselves. The production and reception of the arts was therefore reshaped within a political logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics became essential to securing public funding.” Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, Verso, London and New York, 2012. p. 13.
resea
[85x746]rcher and curator Simon Sheikh, specifically his argument that we are in a “post-
[413x746]public situation”\textsuperscript{10}, where the term and conception of “the public” as singular and
unified is no longer adequate, and must be reconfigured as fragmented and plural.

This thesis combines theory and practice from a curatorial perspective; first by engaging
with theory to produce new perspectives on curating within the public sphere, and then
by analysing an artistic practice through a series of case studies. Practice is thus
analysed and considered against the debate on public sphere, the spatialisation of
politics, and relating to previous attempts at the interface between these lines of enquiry.
Though some significant contributions to the field have been made, for example by
Rosalyn Deutsche, Simon Sheikh and more recently, Lynn Wray\textsuperscript{11}, I believe there is a
need for greater focus on agonistic curatorial strategies in curating across different
contexts within the public sphere. This thesis therefore aims to propose new
possibilities for strategies of agonistic curating, explored through the practice of
Johanna Gustafsson Fürst.

AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis will examine the curatorial strategies operative in presenting artwork in
different contexts. Specifically, this will be investigated through the analysis of projects
within the artistic practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. Particular attention will be
directed towards examining the strategies – both artistic and curatorial – which have
been implemented in the presentation and framing of the works. By first engaging
theoretically with the discourse surrounding the public sphere, I argue for an adaptive
curatorial approach which acknowledges potential audiences as multiple and
fragmented publics, and works to address them on such terms. This requires both a shift
from aiming to foster communication which hopes only for a deliberative debate ending
in consensus, and also an understanding of the hegemonic structures inbuilt in the
spaces within the public sphere.

By then applying the concluding reflections from my theoretical development to
analysis of artistic practice through a series of case studies, this thesis aims to

\textsuperscript{10} Sheikh describes post-public, “not in the sense of being after or beyond publicness as such, that we are
somehow unpublic, or even returning to clandestine pre-public states, but rather a double movement of
dematerialization and expansion of what could be considered public.” in Simon Sheikh, “Publics and
Post-Publics: The Production of the Social”. Open 2008/ No.14/Art as a Public Issue: How Art and Its

\textsuperscript{11} Lynn Wray’s 2016 PhD thesis Turning Left: Counter-Hegemonic Exhibition-Making in the Post-
Socialist Era (1989-2014) was a valuable contribution to this field, and will be discussed later in the
Previous Research section.
investigate how the shifting of context in the presentation of artwork necessitates a shift in curatorial practice. By combining theory and analysis of these projects, I will investigate and discuss the potential scope for new curatorial approaches, grounded in an understanding of potential audiences as plural and fragmented, and an agonistic model of a democratic public sphere.

By developing a theoretical framework which draws on Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model set forward by Chantal Mouffe, and is anchored in the ongoing debate surrounding the public sphere and public space, this thesis aims to test notions of “bringing the outside in”, hoping to learn from strategies of working in the public sphere. Thus, potential outcomes of bringing methods of curating in the public realm back into exhibition spaces could be to democratise the spatial and communicative presentation of the artwork, and to foster a platform where dissensus is possible, and productive debate can take place.

The research questions at the core of this thesis can therefore be understood as follows:

- How has the shift in understanding in the discourse of the public sphere affected curatorial strategies?
- How might one implement curatorial strategies which recognise publics as fragmented and plural?
- How can Chantal Mouffe’s notion of agonistic space be applied within the field of curatorial work?
- How can curatorial strategies be adapted when the context shifts between public and private spaces?

I also pose a tentative, more open-ended research question, which points at the potential future applications of the reflections on this project:

- Is it possible to develop a mode of ‘cross-curating’, whereby particular focus is given to drawing an audience across thresholds, out of one context and into another?
MATERIAL AND METHOD
1.1 MATERIAL

Outlining the Case Studies

This thesis uses three case studies to examine artistic projects in the practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. In doing so, the aim is to discuss and analyse the aspects of the artistic and the curatorial approach to creating a context, and to critically investigate the possible effects of these decisions. By combining discussion of the practical projects with the theoretical perspective and, where relevant, drawing on previous research to highlight connections and disparities, my aim is to provide a more full and in depth understanding of how curatorial strategies can be adapted for different contexts within the public sphere.

Case Study One:

The first case study analyses Gustafsson Fürst’s participation in Society Acts (2014), a group exhibition of work from Nordic and Baltic contemporary artists, produced by Moderna Museet Malmö. Gustafsson Fürst presented one site-specific work in Möllevångstorget, a central public square in Malmö. Three of Gustafsson Fürst’s sculptural works were presented in the exhibition space at the museum. The overarching curatorial context was therefore a combination of state-funded art institutional curating, and a process of site-specific installation of a new work within public space.

In my examination of the exhibition Society Acts I draw on several layers of material. I use narrative evidence from interviews undertaken with the artist, and from an artist talk. I also refer to Gustafsson Fürst’s written account of the process, published as a contribution to Place to Place, edited by Lisa Torell.12 Photographic documentation and analysis of the curatorial text in the exhibition catalogue is also useful in gaining insight into the exhibition’s realisation. In order to attempt to access the audience’s reactions, I have interviewed the artist on her experience of interacting with passersby during the process of installation and once the project was in situ. Furthermore, to gain an external perspective, I draw on a review of Society Acts by the art critic, curator and educator

Fredrik Svensk, “Contemporary, All Too Contemporary”, published via the art criticism platform Kunstkritikk in October 2014.13

Case Study Two:

Public Green : Belenius, Stockholm, 2013

The second case study investigates two exhibitions within the context of gallery curating. Belenius is a commercial gallery which represents Gustafsson Fürst and has produced several exhibitions which feature her work, both in their smaller basement space in Östermalm, Stockholm’s inner city, and in their location for 2015 – 2016, a large, glass-fronted space on street level at Jakobs torg, in central Stockholm. The first example is a solo exhibition titled Public Green which took place in March 2013. The second exhibition in this case study was also a solo exhibition of Gustafsson Fürst’s work, titled Expand Stretch Distribute (2016). Discussion and analysis of these two quite different exhibitions produced by the same gallery provides fertile ground for comparison and reflection on the strategies implemented by the artist and the curatorial team.

By way of material, I have undertaken interviews with the artist, and also interviewed Linnaea Silfvergrip, a curator within the Belenius team who worked alongside the artist on the exhibition Expand Stretch Distribute. I also draw on my own in situ observations and field notes from visiting the 2016 exhibition at the gallery and observing other visitors to the space. Though I was not able to visit Public Green, I draw on installation images, provided courtesy of Belenius, to analyse the spatial aspects of the exhibition. My criticism will also take aim at the text which accompanied Expand Stretch Distribute, written by the art critic Lars-Erik Hjertström Lappalainen.

Case Study Three:


The third case study entails an investigation of Control 20 (2017), a group exhibition at Laure Genillard in London, on the occasion of the launch of Control Magazine Issue 20, edited and published by the British artist Stephen Willats since 1965. Founded in 1988, Laure Genillard describes itself as a “private contemporary art space”.14 The current exhibition space is Laure Genillard’s third location, situated in London’s Fitzrovia area,

14 As stated on Laure Genillard’s website. Available at lglondon.org (Accessed 2017-08-01).
and is described as a project space, rather than a gallery.\textsuperscript{15} Gustafsson Fürst’s contribution to the exhibition constituted of three works in the exhibition space – a video work, a poster and a colour sample – and an intervention in Hanway Place, the street outside the entrance to Laure Genillard.

In my investigation and analysis of \textit{Control 20}, I draw on my own field notes from my visit to the exhibition, notes from my discussion with Lola Bunting of the curatorial team at Laure Genillard, and documentation from the installation images and the artist talk Gustafsson Fürst gave at the opening of the exhibition. Further material comes from interviews with the artist.

My analysis of the case studies will be preceded by an introduction to the artistic practice. By considering how Gustafsson Fürst’s works are presented in various contexts, I aim to position a series of insights and reflections, providing a lens through which to consider the possibilities and potentialities of curatorial and artistic strategies working with situations in the public sphere. Furthermore, this will illuminate the real world challenges and spectrum of curatorial aspects as introduced earlier in this thesis. Of particular interest to my practice, in my analysis of Gustafsson Fürst’s process and approach, is her tendency to reach across thresholds from exhibition format into other areas of the public realm. Her practice thus operates in an expanded setting, drawing her audience with her from context to context.

\textbf{1.2 METHOD}

The research which informs this thesis is qualitative and based on material gathered primarily through narrative experience, collated through semi-structured interviews conducted by myself with the artist and curators or other staff involved in the exhibition projects, where possible.

In my overall approach to the research, I adopt an inductive qualitative method which analyses the material at hand to produce theoretical concepts. In doing so, my methods could be compared to those of grounded theory. There are many versions of grounded theory which have been developed by researchers in the social sciences since the original proponents of the approach, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, set out their statement for grounded theory in 1967. Kathy Charmaz, a key scholar in the field, describes grounded theory as a “constellation of methods.”\textsuperscript{16} The foundational core of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
grounded theory strategies is based in a qualitative, inductive research approach. Charmaz states that grounded theorists:

1) Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process
2) Analyze actions and processes rather than themes and structure
3) Use comparative methods
4) Draw on data (e.g. narratives and descriptions) in service of developing new conceptual categories
5) Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis
6) Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories

In structuring my interviews, and reflecting on the outcome of the material gathered, I have drawn on Steiner Kvale’s guidelines for planning and conducting interviews. Given the specific nature of my research, my interviews had the modes of understanding categorised by Kvale as narrative, specifically-themed and with the dynamic of an interpersonal situation. Though I recognise the “asymmetrical power relation” of the interview, and acknowledge that this may have been the case in my interview with the curatorial team at Belenius and Laure Genillard, I would argue that my interviews with Gustafsson Fürst varied, and were more akin to discussions centring on mutual interest in the theme and issues at hand.

My interviews were semi-structured, based on questions which shaped the discussion but did not give a rigid formula to be followed. Thus I aimed to encourage the interviewees to be descriptive in relaying their experience and point-of-view. Interviews were primarily conducted verbally and recorded, then transcribed and edited for language. In certain instances, interviews were conducted via email. Where this has been done, the reference makes this clear.

Additionally I draw on an artist talk in which Gustafsson Fürst participated within the framework of my own curatorial degree project. This project consisted of a three day exhibition at Färgfabriken, Stockholm titled Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space. I moderated the discussion with the two artists, and therefore designed the questions. This talk will be referenced clearly so as to avoid confusion with interviews or other material.

17 Charmaz, 2014. p. 15.
20 Gustafsson Fürst and Lucia Pagano, a Swedish artist and filmmaker.
Curatorial research departs from the ethnographic, social science or even art historical traditions of research methods and of academic writing traditions. This is of course in part due to curatorial writing being a relatively new field which must form its own conventions. I have therefore made every effort to be transparent in my working methods, my arguments and my analysis. However, I would argue that relations are the producers of meaning in curating, and hence readings and interpretations of the effects of artistic or curatorial strategies will always have a degree of subjectivity.

1.3 DELIMITATIONS

The field of curatorial research and in particular, the aims of this thesis are better served by qualitative and experience-based research techniques, rather than quantitative measuring of exhibition visitor numbers etc.

The analysis material for this thesis has been gathered through interviews, participant observation and additional research through published material and archives. (See ‘Method’ section for details of my interview approach). As mentioned previously within “Material”, I was not able to visit all of the exhibitions. Though it would have been preferable if I had been able to visit Public Green and Society Acts, in order to see the works in situ and observe the reactions to the works, I argue that by drawing on a variety of material in order to give a balanced investigation into the contexts, I have sufficient knowledge of the exhibitions to include them in my analysis.

In my first case study, which takes as its focus Society Acts, I have endeavoured to present a perspective on the audience’s reaction through interviewing the artist, and drawing on her description of the event in Place to Place. I trust Gustafsson Fürst’s ability to separate her experience in the role of artist from her observations and interactions with people who respond to her work, however I have regarded my material with an awareness my sources are also shaped by their own experience.

The field of writing and research on art in the public realm is ever growing. I have focused my review of the previous research on those proponents of the debate which have relevance for my line of enquiry. Given a broader time frame and scope of research, I would extend my field of previous research to compare and contrast theory on public sphere on a more international scale.

Finally, a word on specificity. In order to produce a valuable contribution to the field, and propose tentative curatorial strategies, it was necessary to focus on a particular
practice (that of Gustafsson Fürst) and a specific context (Sweden). Therefore, the scope of this thesis has been limited somewhat in order to avoid an attempted historical retelling of the development of art in the public realm. Too broad a focus – for instance, contrasting multiple case studies of multiple artistic practices – would have stretched this research beyond the scope of this thesis project. My aim in presenting a specific focus on one practice is to consider what can be learned, what could be reflected on and extrapolated, to reveal the potential future curatorial strategies which can better support artistic work, and rethink the constellations between artwork, context and audience.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided and structured as follows. The Introduction section comprised the Aim and Research Questions, Material and Method, including an overview of the case studies, and the Delimitations of the research. The Introduction will continue with the outlining of the Theoretical Framework, followed by Previous Research, which situates this research in the broader field.

The main body of the thesis is divided into two main sections which have been designed to guide the reader through my approach, argument and analysis. “Part 1: Theoretical Articulation” comprises an in depth engagement with the theoretical discourse surrounding the public sphere, in which I develop and produce my theoretical curatorial perspective. The reflections and conclusions which I draw from the theoretical discussion in Part 1 will then be applied to “Part 2: From Theory to Practice”, which comprises three case studies of artistic practice, through analysis of exhibitions of the work of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. Discussion and analysis within each of these chapters explores intersections between the material and theory and previous research. The main body of the text is then followed by the Conclusion and Discussion on the research. The conclusion draws together insights and analysis from the case studies, relating these back to the research questions. The discussion section which follows reflects on the implications for the prospects of agonistic curating.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The departure point for building theory

Social space is produced and structured by conflicts. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins.

Rosalyn Deutsche

My curatorial perspective and my frame of reference for this research project have been shaped by the discourse on the public sphere, and by the theories of the social and political theorist Chantal Mouffe. This framework draws on Mouffe’s theories regarding agonistic democracy and counter-hegemonic strategies of intervention. As Mouffe states, antagonism “is struggle between enemies while agonism is struggle between adversaries.” An agonistic approach is one that, rather than aiming for consensus through rational and deliberative process, accepts that dissensus and never-ending debate is the outcome of multiple voices in modern society, and must be the model for democratic debate. Consequently, I draw on Mouffe’s standpoint as a departure point from which to develop my curatorial perspective through theoretical engagement with public sphere theory, in “Part 1: Theoretical Articulation”. This section expands my theoretical framework which in turn guides the investigation within this thesis, and makes clear my analytical approach.

For this research, the three key concepts which I take from Mouffe’s writing are those of agonistic public space; counter-hegemonic strategies; and articulation theory. These concepts can be understood in less theoretical terms as follows, respectively: as producing a space where dissensus is possible, and consensus is not the overall aim; attempting to push against the dominant order imposed by those in power; and the constellation, or relation between different elements in a given situation, which can potentially be shifted to produce alternate connections and interpretations. By drawing on these concepts, and interpreting them as curatorial strategies, I advocate an agonistic curatorial approach which opens up possibilities for reconfiguring the encounter with the artwork.

Besides Mouffe, the curator and writer Simon Sheikh’s work forms an overarching theoretical foundation to my analytical approach. In his essay “In Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments” (2004), Sheikh unpacks and refutes the notion of

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23 See Chapter 4 of The Democratic Paradox (2009) and later Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically (2013).
“the public” as singular and unified, arguing instead for a reconfiguration of the concept, which grasps at an understanding of constitutive, pluralistic and fragmented publics.

Conclusion and Application of Theoretical Framework

I will therefore draw on both Mouffe and Sheikh in my construction of a theoretical framework with a specific focus on the perceived problematics of the public sphere, and an aim to test Mouffe’s concept of agonistic space in the case studies investigated. Furthermore, my conception of publics as fragmented and multiple, rather than a unified entity, will consistently inform my approach to curatorial strategies. Mediation of artwork necessitates a fluid and flexible understanding of publics and audience, and acknowledgement that the spaces and contexts in which art is presented not only shape the encounter with the artwork, but also are also constitutive of the audience(s) themselves. It is against this background, and with these definitions, that I investigate and analyse the case studies from Gustafsson Fürst’s practice.

STIPULATIVE DEFINITIONS

Public space

*Physical spaces to which members of the general population have access, without payment. It is worth mentioning the increasing privatisation of public space, and the ever-growing presence of advertising which reaches into public spaces and transforms these areas. Though access to these spaces may be free of charge, it does not mean that the spaces themselves are not charged with the agendas or messages of capitalist consumerism, where the public function blurs into private profit.*

Public sphere

*Public sphere is conceptually defined as the space where individuals come together to communicate, to exchange ideas, but also the arena where things are made visible. Public sphere as a term can also extend to the virtual realm, for instance the internet and social media.*

Conceptually, there is a difference between public space and public sphere, though they are often used interchangeably. The former is more concrete and can be thought of as physical spaces with boundaries, walls, borders, denoting an inside and an outside. These terms certainly have multiple overlaps and their definitions would no doubt be contested by scholars from different fields. In my use here, I will use public space to refer to physical locations where people have free physical access. I will use the term
public sphere to refer to the spaces and places where people can communicate, exchange, debate. However, in doing so I acknowledge that certain domains within the public sphere are not equally open and accessible to some, on grounds of age, gender, race, class, economic or social status.

To expand on the overlaps between and within these categories, we can consider concrete examples from the cultural landscape. For instance, the shifting nature of these terms can be highlighted by the example of a museum where exhibitions are ticketed. This is on one level, a public arena for debate, yet I would also argue that it could not truly be considered a public space, as it necessarily excludes a section of society on financial grounds. Additionally, a free exhibition in a museum or gallery may still have a potential threshold of access on a level of class, education, etc. In terms of drawing a distinction between the town square, for example, and a museum with free entrance, I would term the latter a semi-public space. These grey areas point at the unfixed nature of the public sphere.

**Agonistic**

An agonistic approach is one whereby antagonism (viewing those with different opinions as enemies) is transformed to viewing those who oppose you as adversaries. The agonistic approach is characterised by its acknowledgement that instead of aiming at deliberative and rational consensus, a plurality of opinions must result in an ongoing negotiation of debate. This concept is attributed to the political and social theorist Chantal Mouffe.⁴

**Counter-publics**

Counter-publics was a term originally used by Nancy Fraser in 1990 in her phrase “subaltern counter-publics”. The term has since been used by Michael Warner and Simon Sheikh. I will use this term, unless otherwise stated, as Sheikh does, to mean parallel or sometimes opposing groups within the dominant or normative notion of “the public”.

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⁴ See Chapter 4 of *The Democratic Paradox* (2009) and later *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (2013).
A note on Space and Place

Michel de Certeau argues that space is a practiced place\textsuperscript{25}, giving the example that “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.”\textsuperscript{26}

Doreen Massey, writing in 1991 on a definition of a global sense of place, states the following:

“Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent.”\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 118.

ESTABLISHING THE FIELD / PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This next section of the thesis plots previous research in the field, indicating those theorists and practitioners whose work has been influential in my investigation, and identifying the niche in the field which I attempt to address. This section will therefore highlight existing literature and theory, and outline several key projects and symposia which have attempted to address fundamental considerations at the interface of curatorial theory and practice, public sphere and socio-political dynamics.

Several key figures within artistic and curatorial practice have spearheaded attempts to redefine and investigate art which is encountered in public space. In the early 90s, Suzanne Lacy’s term “new genre public art” pointed to the complexity of talking about art in public which moves beyond placing sculptures in town squares.\(^{28}\) Besides Lacy, Rosalyn Deutsche and Miwon Kwon have also been influential voices in the development of the field of art practices in public space.\(^{29}\) In 1996, Rosalyn Deutsche’s seminal text “Agoraphobia” raised important and critical questions both about the nature of public space, and the presentation of art in public space. Deutsche’s writing will be discussed and built on in “Part 1: Theoretical Articulation”, where I engage with the discourse of the public sphere in greater depth, to develop and explain the theoretical basis for advocating an agonistic curatorial approach. Curator and art theoretician Nina Möntmann’s writing on art in social space and the changing role of the institution, in relation to New Institutionalism, has also influenced the field. What I regard as Möntmann’s most important argument is that institutions must make these changes from within, in order to take a stance which simultaneously uses the position afforded to them by their role as institutions, and leverages against how they can depart from this dominant structure to produce interstices between.\(^{30}\)

During my investigation into attempts to combine curatorial research and theories of agonism, I have encountered three academic contributions within the field of curating which bear significant relevance to my own research. The first of these is the aforementioned Simon Sheikh’s PhD thesis *Exhibition Making and The Political Imaginary: On Modalities and Potentialities of Curatorial Practice* (2012). Though his

\(^{28}\) The term was first used in a 1991 public performance and series of discussions organised by Lacy, as well as in the title of Lacy’s 1995 book. The term indicates public art which was often activist, and engaged directly with the audience. See *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, (Ed. Suzanne Lacy), Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.


use of articulation theory as an analogy for curatorial work is particularly interesting, much of the thesis remained tied to academic discussion which did not extend to a convincing application to practice. Thus, for my own curatorial approach, and the present research, Sheikh’s conceptions of plural and fragmented publics are far more operative. A more in depth discussion of the pertinent aspects of Sheikh’s thesis and his writing on the post-public condition and the fragmentation of the public sphere will be discussed in greater detail later in this research within “Part 1: Theoretical Articulation”.

Another significant attempt in academic curatorial research is the PhD thesis of Lynn Wray, who sets out to test the application of Mouffe’s notion of agonism in a curatorial project. Wray’s thesis *Turning Left: Counter-Hegemonic Exhibition-Making in the Post-Socialist Era (1989-2014)*, (2016) was part of a research project which also entailed her co-curation of an exhibition at Tate Liverpool in 2013 titled *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789 – 2012* (2013). *Art Turning Left* was described as a thematic exhibition examining how the production and reception of art has been influenced by left-wing values, from the French Revolution to the present.31 Wray’s doctoral thesis examines how “curating has been used to further counter-hegemonic agendas in public art institutions since 1989”.32 Wray’s thesis aims to provide a more “full and contextualised understanding of how the institutional exhibition might be used to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism and the post-political consensus politics that sustains its dominance.”33 Wray analyses several exhibition projects, developing a critical framework which draws heavily on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s theories of counter-hegemonic critique from within, applying these to exhibition making. Her insights “problematises the idea that the institutional art exhibition is a viable medium for counter-hegemonic critique”34, and that the format “represents the ideal space for the development of an agonistic public discourse”.35

Though Wray’s concluding discussion points to a negative appraisal of the practical application of agonistic models in exhibition making within the art institution, I maintain that the model has value for curating across contexts in the public realm. Wray’s research provides a useful point of reference and indicates the variation in approach, between an institutional exhibition format and the more experimental and intersectional artistic strategies employed in the practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. Thus, I carefully position my argument, not in opposition to Wray’s standpoint and

31 Available online at tate.org.uk (Accessed 2017-07-31).
33 Ibid. p. 1.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
conclusion, but with the acknowledgement that curatorial awareness of the fragmented publics calls for sensitivity towards antagonism and agonism, and a case-by-case approach to each artistic practice and context in which an encounter with art is supported and realised.

A third recent significant contribution to academic curatorial research at the interface of these issues is Anna Lundström’s PhD thesis *Former av politik: Tre utställningssituationer på Moderna Museet 1998–2008*, (2015). Lundström’s thesis engages conceptually with the categories of art, politics and the art institution, through three case studies of exhibition projects at Moderna Museet Stockholm. Lundström investigates spectator positions within three exhibitions which transcend the conventional boundaries of the art institution, as they are also situated outside of the institution’s walls. Though this thesis is certainly relevant to my line of enquiry, and the specific Swedish cultural context, I have been unable to draw extensively on it as it is written in Swedish, with the exception of an English abstract.

In addition to recent academic research, I have also surveyed the contributions made to this area of focus in the form of symposia, and other interdisciplinary investigations into what it means to curate across contexts within the shifting public sphere. In 2012, Laznia CCA in Poland presented a symposium titled “THIS troublesome, uncomfortable and questionable RELEVANCE of Art in Public Space: In Search of a Possible Paradigm”. Curated by Julia Draganovic and Adam Budak, and realised as part of the broader project “The Outdoor Gallery of the City of Gdansk”, the symposium featured a keynote speech by Chantal Mouffe and lectures by Simon Sheikh and the writer, curator and lecturer Mika Hannula. Hannula’s 2010 publication, *Politics, Identity and Public Space* offered a critical and thought-provoking reflection on the potential for intersection between social sciences and contemporary art. Specifically, Hannula argues for a transformation from the social imaginary into acts of social imagination. His self-reflexive text highlights several useful perspectives, drawing on the discourse which has followed after Henri Lefebvre’s seminal 1974 work *The Production of Space*.

The 2012 symposium drew connections between theorists and researchers, whose works inform my theoretical framework, and thus my perspective on the research. I learned of

this symposium and its programme of speakers during my research into the social theory of public sphere, public space and agonistic strategies, yet a significant time after I had already drawn my own connections between the work of Mouffe, Sheikh, and Hannula. This confirms that my line of enquiry – though it may not be unique – is certainly an avenue worth pursuing, and one which builds on existing knowledge and research. Unfortunately, though the symposium connected theorists and practitioners, little documentary material is available to further the learning or potential practical application of the exchange of ideas and strategies. Thus, I argue that my curatorial position regarding the research aims of this thesis, and the analysis of a specific artistic practice is a relevant contribution to the production of knowledge within this field.

Claire Doherty has been a leading voice in the field of art in the public realm and the discussion surrounding curating or producing situations. In 2002 she founded the UK-based organisation Situations which realises artistic projects in the public realm, primarily within the UK but also on an international scale. Doherty has done much to lead and reconfigure theory surrounding the production and curation of situations, or contexts, in which art is encountered. Writing in 2009 in the introduction to Situation: Documents of Contemporary Art, Doherty reflects on the impact of “[Robert] Smithson’s indexical theorization of site (non-gallery) and nonsite (gallery-based)”,39 as early categories for discussing art in different contexts. She has also been a vocal proponent of focusing on duration and the effect of time, as an equal condition to place, in the realisation of artistic projects outside of the exhibition. In her introduction to Situation: Documents of Contemporary Art, Doherty highlights the necessity to rethink curating with regards to working in the public realm. She questions whether, curatorial systems, refined over the last twenty years, to support artistic engagement with specific places, and in particular public space, truly acknowledge the conflictual and changing nature of public space and place itself.40

Thus, Doherty pinpoints the lack of discussion and literature on adapting curatorial strategies to take account of the shift in public space and the public sphere. Though the above quote was from 2009, we can see that recent publications and symposia are still wrangling with the same themes.

One relevant attempt at enquiry into curatorial work which deals with shifting contexts of artwork within the public sphere, and thus to bring to the fore the need for multifaceted and collaborative approaches, was the symposium “Curating Context. Beyond

the Gallery and into Other Fields”. Held in Stockholm in March 2017, the one-day symposium was organised by Public Art Agency Sweden on the occasion of the publication of their anthology of the same name. “Curating Context” positioned itself as responding to a lack within curatorial discourse and education. Thus, it is a pertinent point of departure from which to better situate my own research within the field. The aim of both the seminar and the anthology was to draw practitioners together to reflect on methods of curating beyond and outside of the exhibition format, to focus on curating entire contexts which support the presentation of an artwork. In doing so, Public Art Agency Sweden argued that these specific curatorial approaches are rarely the focus of publication, nor of programmes of curatorial study, which have proliferated significantly in the last 15 years.41

In her introduction to the symposium, Magdalena Malm, Director of Public Art Agency Sweden and founder of MAP (Mobile Art Productions) set forth her argument for the relevancy of the focus. Malm acknowledged the effect of Institutional critique, asserting that the white cube format is widely regarded as designed for modernist art to exclude context. She referred to the movements in artistic practice to “[step] out of the white cube” in order to place themselves within a context42. Malm called for a greater attention to curatorial work in relation to this:

We haven’t maybe so much considered what it means for the curatorial practice. What does it mean if we realise that for some works are perfect in the gallery space but that other works need to find their place or stage their situation. What as curators do we have to know?”43

In the introduction to the publication of the same name, Malm reinforces the relevancy of discourse surrounding public space over the last decade:

In the past ten years we have seen an increased engagement in questions regarding the civic. As society is experienced as increasingly divided, the notion of public space has moved back into focus and aspects of the common and the civic have gained new relevance. […] Art does not only raise issues of public space, it also has the power to perform it.44

41 As stated in the description of the symposium. Available online at statenskonstrad.se (Accessed 2017-07-25).
43 Ibid.
The symposium itself did indeed draw together practitioners with a wealth of experience, and yet the projects described in the anthology operate as a mere show and tell of various approaches. Though the proclaimed methods included using friction as methodology, the resulting exchange of knowledge left little scope for the extrapolation of a curatorial approach, but rather as a series of specific projects. Furthermore, there was little space given for the artists’ voice, and an ironic lack of conflict or dissensus amongst the audience of practitioners.45 My position is not to criticise the format, which was interesting and indeed successful in highlighting the lack of research and writing into this area within the curatorial field. My interest is in questioning how strategies of working curatorially in the public sphere and ‘curating context’ may be directed back to the exhibition format.

**Conclusion of Previous Research**

As a closing remark to this review of existing literature and previous research projects, it is worth emphasising the number of influential theorists and practitioners in this field who are working within a Swedish context. This not only reveals the unique positioning of my research within the specific debate and context, but also points to the importance of continuing this debate, in order to broaden and deepen the discourse. Combining my curatorial approach and interest and simultaneously making use of my dual insider-outsider position, in order to peer in, and analyse and provoke in the aim of contributing to new strategies of support and collaboration.

The niche this curatorial research project occupies is at the intersection between public sphere theory, curatorial practice and socio-political models for democratic agonistic space. This line of enquiry will be explored by adopting a pluralist understanding of publics, and drawing on agonistic models for democracy which allows for dissensus. The aim is to test the potential for adopting a curatorial approach that responds to and supports the relation between artwork, audience and context, within the shifting and unstable public sphere. Investigating the points of intersection in previous research at the crux of the interdependent fields of curating, social and political theory, and urban planning has allowed me to position my research. From this point I take my theoretical framework and analyse the artistic practice of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst. In doing so, I draw connections to the existing debate and extrapolate potential curatorial approaches which may prove operative for future work in supporting art in the public sphere.

45 It is certainly worthy of mention that the only artist who spoke at the symposium was Johanna Gustafsson Fürst, who moderated the panel discussion “Curating the Urban – from Social Fabric to Infrastructure” with the architect and producer Joanna Zawieja and curators Sophie Goltz and Lotta Mossum. Available online at statenskonstrad.se. (Accessed 2017-07-25).
PART 1: THEORETICAL ARTICULATION

Before setting forth my own theoretical approach, I will first engage with certain key developments within the debate on the public sphere, connecting central theorists and standpoints to the work of Chantal Mouffe. By outlining relevant shifts in exhibition conventions and the potential for interconnection between these fields, I locate my focus and argument, indicating the relevance of Mouffe’s theories for the present research, and the potential implications for future curatorial work.

Tracing the debate surrounding the public sphere since Jürgen Habermas’s influential, but also later much contested, 1962 essay “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” is helpful as a foreground to my investigation of the shift in discourse on the public sphere. In his 1962 essay, Habermas set forth his conceptualisation of the public sphere, describing the ideal liberal arena of public debate as that to be found in cafes, bars and the other public spaces of the middle class, or those citizens who had the luxury of debating issues. Many have contested Habermas’s conception of a singular bourgeois public sphere on the grounds of it being normative and idealist.\(^{46}\) Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge critiqued the social exclusion ingrained in the Habermasian ideal, arguing that an individual’s engagement with the surfaces within the public sphere is dependent on experience.\(^{47}\) They instead advocated an alternative conceptualisation of a proletarian public sphere.\(^{48}\) Hannah Arendt’s model conceived of a public sphere as the space through which a shared reality is materialised. In her 1958 text “The Public Realm: The Common” Arendt describes her conception of reality as formed in the public realm as follows:

> Since our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm.\(^{49}\)

Though Arendt and Habermas thought of the public sphere in different ways, Mouffe criticises them both for ultimately conceiving of the public sphere, (or political public space, as Mouffe terms it), which aims at creating consensus, rather than fostering

\(^{46}\) Amongst others, key figures in the critique of the Habermasian notion of public sphere include Nancy Fraser, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.


Mouffe criticises Arendt on the basis that “according to [Arendt], to think politically is to develop the ability to see things from a multiplicity of perspectives”.

Mouffe’s complaint therefore, is that Arendt “never acknowledges that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts”. Mouffe, meanwhile, advocates a model of agonistic democratic space, which acknowledges that the antagonistic is a necessary element of democracy. Within her argument for an agonistic model of democracy – across many texts – Mouffe also considers the intersections between agonistic democracy and artistic practice, and the implications of these. Mouffe writes:

To bring to the fore the relevance of the agonistic models of democratic politics for artistic practices, I want to examine its consequences for visualizing the public space. The most important consequence is that it challenges the widespread conception that, albeit in different ways, informs most visions of the public space, conceived as the terrain where consensus can emerge. For the agonistic model, on the contrary, the public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation. I have spoken so far of the public space, but I need to specify straight away that we are not dealing here with one single space.

Mouffe’s notion of agonistic public space is significant, and I argue has considerable potential to radicalise curatorial discourse. This opening up of the public space into a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces within the public sphere illuminates the complexities of staging an encounter between audience, artwork and context. An awareness of these complexities is fundamental in working curatorially, as to consider public realm as one homogenous context not only avoids the inherent power structures within different contexts, but also limits the possible conceptions of the publics who inhabit these different spaces, and how they relate to their contexts. As the following quote demonstrates, Mouffe conceives of artistic practice that pushes against the dominant structures as counter-hegemonic. She states:

I am convinced that artistic and cultural practices can offer spaces for resistance that undermine the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction. But I think that to apprehend their political potential, we should visualize forms of

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51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

artistic resistance as agonistic interventions within the context of counter-hegemonic struggles.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus, Mouffe’s conception of agonistic space as a battleground for struggle, and her understanding of artistic practice as a driving force – and key strategy – for resisting counter-hegemonic structures, has profound implications for understanding the performative relations in placing art in the public sphere. Though Mouffe’s writing with Laclau on counter-hegemonic strategies has been influential in curatorial work,\textsuperscript{55} I would argue that the unrealised potential for translating this agonistic approach into curatorial perspective remains significant. Hence, though there are certain theorists and practitioners working with these issues – many of whom acknowledged in this research – there remains a lack of discussion at the interface of these issues within contemporary curatorial discourse.

Rosalyn Deutsche’s significant contribution to the discourse on art and public space has also been formative in my approach. In her 1996 text “Agoraphobia” Deutsche proclaimed that much debate around democracy and public space had been on-going during the decade prior to her text’s publication. Indeed, it is not a new topic. Yet today the issue remains increasingly important. Against a backdrop of expanding cities, irreversible effects of globalisation, ever increasing privatisation and the changes both in the housing market, public space and its affordances in society are ever more important. Writing in 1996, Deutsche outlined the problematics of an overly simplified treatment of the concepts of “public”, and public art:

Critics often treat both art and the public as universal spheres that, harmonized by a common human essence, stand above the conflictual realm of atomized individuals, purely private differences, and special interests. In these cases, ‘public art’ is not […] a contradictory entity, but instead comes doubly burdened as a figure of universal accessibility. Although the two formulations – art opposed to public, art united with public – place art on different sides of the public/private divide, they stay within the same polarizing framework. The failure to question this framework has led many critics to open and close the question of the public in a single gesture. While they note that public art is difficult to define and stress the incoherence of the contemporary public, they

\textsuperscript{55} Examples of specific projects and academic texts which chart this influence can be found in the ‘Previous Research’ section of this thesis.
still equate public space with consensus, coherence, and universality and relegate pluralism, division and difference to the realm of the private.\textsuperscript{56}

I would therefore argue that Deutsche’s considerations of political space were clearly informed by Mouffe’s conceptualisation of political space. Deutsche reflects that,

Conflict, division and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are the conditions of its existence. The threat arises with efforts to supersede conflict, for the public sphere remains democratic only insofar as its exclusions are taken into account and open to contestation. When the exclusions governing the constitution of political public space are naturalized and contests erased by declaring particular forms of space inherently, eternally, or self-evidently public, public space is appropriated.\textsuperscript{57}

Deutsche’s assertion confirms the resonance of Mouffe’s stance that agonism is necessary for democratic space. Furthermore, Deutsche’s work indicates how this understanding of political public space can have implications for art in public space.

This shift in discourse on the public sphere and its implications for the interface between urban planning, architecture and the art can also be traced within a the Swedish academic context. A symposium held at Konstfack, Stockholm in August 2007 which later led to a publication of the same name, \textit{Placing Art in the Public Realm}, is relevant in providing insight into how the discussion has developed within the Swedish context. In her essay for \textit{Placing Art in the Public Realm}, Catharina Gabrielsson, an architect, critic and writer, highlights the importance of the public space as a visual field. Gabrielsson traces the denouement of the debate from Habermas’s 1962 work “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere”, drawing connections between the fall of modernism and the effects of capitalism on social public space. She elaborates that:

\begin{quote}
[t]he notion of public space as “lost” runs through the work of all its post-war advocates, such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett. The “rhetoric of loss” is clearly mixed with a critique of Modernity as such, associated with a deep sense of “placelessness” and alienation brought on by mass-democracy and a society based on capitalism, technology and mobility.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Gabrielsson astutely reflects on the importance of public space as a visual field, arguing that, [i]n the name of protecting the “open society” from the enemy within, public space


\textsuperscript{57} Deutsche, 1996. p. 289.

and buildings are increasingly being subjected to restrictions, surveillance and control.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, the construction and aesthetic symbolism of the architectural design of public spaces and public buildings can be understood as signifiers for control in the name of transparency and security:

There is […] an ongoing deconstruction of public space in theory, a letting go of its pre-set forms and ideals in order to expand on its meaning and scope. And although these recent attempts to re-name and re-locate public space have the virtue of bringing about an awareness of its formal complexity and social significance, it comes at the expense of deeper political meaning. Its institutional quality – as a \textit{form} for democratic society – is even placed in opposition to its capacity to generate meanings on a social or personal level. Ignoring the significance of a space where we appear to one another as \textit{equals}, this theoretical position makes no contribution to defending public spaces from surveillance and privatization. Therefore, the current tendency to de-politicize public spaces, to restrict access to them and the democratic right that public space at once symbolizes and guarantees, proceeds undisputed – for lack of better arguments.

Gabrielsson’s analysis alerts her readers to the problematic conception of public space as equally and universally accessible for all. Gabrielsson emphasises that Habermas’s “definition of an ideal liberal public space is clearly at odds with modern society”\textsuperscript{60}, regarding both the effect of capitalism on culture and politics, and also in terms of contemporary democracy. Put simply, Habermas’s influential but later much contested concept of a singular, bourgeois public sphere collapses when everyone, irrespective of education or status, has a voice. The Habermasian model of a public sphere – as an arena for discussion, originating in coffee houses, clubs, parks and other spaces of deliberative debate by a select group deemed to have worthy opinions – clashes with contemporary society.

Furthermore, Gabrielsson claims that “[i]t could therefore be argued that the liberal conception of public space is not really public at all. It is really only an extension of the bourgeois home, a platform for the hegemony of the middle classes who take it upon themselves to speak ‘for all’.”\textsuperscript{61} In one sense, the understanding of public space as a living room connects back to Habermas’s concept of public sphere. The analogy of public space as a living room is still a common one today, in the rhetoric of urban planning. It is not without its complications, as it implies class-based exclusivity and a

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. pp. 32 – 33.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. p. 34.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. p. 35.
domestic interiority structured by the dominant hegemonic order. The paradoxical tension between public and private is inherent within the debate on public sphere, and has its roots in the ancient Greek polis, as Gabrielsson explains:

The various restrictions that guard access to and use of public space can be seen as an echo of the ancient polis, whose openness was guarded by walls. [...] This tension between openness and closure, freedom and restrictions, is one of the most difficult paradoxes within the imagination of public space.62

Though an awareness of the paradoxical properties of public space certainly have a bearing on my analysis of presented art in the public realm, I will avoid thinking in binary terms of private and public. Furthermore, my approach does not rely on strict divisions or oppositions between interior and exterior. Though this has an impact on context, and of course the exposure an artwork has to particular audiences – those who chose to visit a space or those who happen upon a work, I argue that binary oppositions in this context are more reductive and limiting than they are useful.

The theorist and writer Sven-Olov Wallenstein also contributed to the symposium and publication Placing Art in the Public Realm. His research focuses on aesthetic theory with a particular emphasis on visual art and architecture. In his essay “Public Subjects” Wallenstein addresses the transformation of public space from the notion of Greek public life, taking account of German Enlightenment theory and Michel Foucault’s concept of the panopticon as a method of control. Wallenstein then invokes Mouffe’s model of agonistic pluralism, applying it to his focus on the formation of a political subject in public space:

Mouffe understands public space not as one singular entity that could subsequently be overtaken by hostile forces, but as a constitutive plurality. It is a continually contested and non-symmetric space, a battleground fraught with the full range of all insecurities that result from struggles for hegemony.63

In considering the relation that this perspective has to art, Wallenstein reflects that “‘site specificity’ [...] in no way implies a return to pre-modern versions of place-boundedness. Instead it invests the place with a disruptive energy.”64 Wallenstein continues, arguing that “public space is indeed the space where politics is realized, but

62 Ibid. p. 35.
64 Ibid. p. 25.
this can only occur through acts of confrontation and unmasking that, in the end, must also turn against the authority of the work itself."\textsuperscript{65} Wallenstein states:

\begin{quote}
[T]he kind of place that the artwork wants to occupy when it moves out into the street does not pre-exist the work of the work, as it were. It is never simply ‘there,’ but neither does it simply result from a set of operations performed: the site is always already structured, architectonically, symbolically, ideologically, and the work of the work is to pry it open, to expose its hidden contradictions.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

Relevant to this understanding of space and place as being constantly produced is the work of Mika Hannula, whose publications have contributed to the discourse on public sphere in Sweden. Hannula’s body of work draws both on the works of Henri Lefebvre and Mouffe. In his 2010 publication, \textit{Politics, Identity and Public Space}, Hannula argues that the contemporary public sphere and public space is never there automatically, but rather constantly produced. Hannula’s focus is on place as a space which gains a temporary singularity:

\begin{quote}
Thus, whether we admit it or not, or whether we choose to pay attention to it or not, at every site and in every situation there is that process going on. A space – especially here with our specific focus on a place – is constantly being produced and reproduced. This is a reminder that claiming or longing for authentic and real space is not a plausible aim. […] What is most crucial here is to see how these definitions are carefully catered toward a specific site and situation. It is never about public space being, for example, fully and completely accessible. It is about the variations and grades that are manufactured and manifested – and also materialized.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Hannula reflects on how the Habermasian ideal figures into this debate, and how the stagnation of his concept has become a normative ideal against which other alternatives can be imagined:

\begin{quote}
It is striking how Habermas’s view has since evolved strongly towards solid and also stagnated conceptualizations of a much more normative character – a move that in itself reveals why this notion of a becoming a place in its publicness is so underarticulated and under-used.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid. p. 25.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. p. 25.
\textsuperscript{67} Mika Hannula. 2010. p. 119.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. p. 27.
Hannula’s approach is to investigate how situations can be carefully produced through “[generating] sites and situations of loving and caring conflict”\textsuperscript{69} drawing parallels with Mouffe’s advocation of agonism, rather than antagonism. In emphasising that space is constantly produced, Hannula’s writing provokes me to reflect that public space is not only temporary and contingent on innumerable other factors, but also that it is fragile, and the temporary sense of place could potentially be eroded at any moment.

The concept of space as being constantly produced has other proponents in the art field, and is an important influence in the research set out in this thesis. Speaking at the symposium “Curating Context” in 2017, Claire Doherty emphasised not only the durational aspect of projects she works on, but also the understanding of place as being in a constant state of becoming. Doherty draws on Edward Soja’s notion of \textit{thirdspace} to evoke and expand on her notion of time-based art, or creating a situation – and an art project – which ‘grows out of place’. Soja was a post-modern political geographer and urban theorist whose work built on Lefebvre’s \textit{The Production of Space}. Lefebvre outlined three categories of social space: perceived, conceived and lived.\textsuperscript{70} Soja developed Lefebvre’s theory to create his own terms of first, second and third spaces, in order to differentiate and describe the spatial aspects of society. Doherty draws on Soja’s writing, explaining that \textit{firstspace} is “empirically measurable and mapped and produced by social processes, whilst \textit{secondspace} is conceived space-subjective and imagined”\textsuperscript{71}. \textit{Thirdspace}, or lived space, as Soja also terms it, describes spaces which are both real and imagined. Soja’s writing is influential in that it highlights the spatial aspect of any situation and the systems which create or produce it. This is highly relevant to the artistic practice in question. Furthermore, I argue that an awareness of such a perspective is vital to curatorial approaches which account for how a shift in context transforms the audience’s relation with an artwork.

All social relations become relation and concrete, a part of our lived social existence, only when they are spatially ‘inscribed’ - that is, concretely represented – in the social production of social space. Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing ‘in’ space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. p. 8.
representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension.\textsuperscript{72}

This focus on durational and spatial experience within the expanded context of an artwork has interesting implications for my analysis of Gustafsson Fürst’s projects. Specifically, Doherty and Soja’s conceptions of spatial experience direct me to focus on the artistic strategies of working with the site where the artwork will be presented, and considering the ways in which the context and the work interact to produce or disrupt a situation.

Whilst it would be distracting to give a full history of the debate on notions of the public sphere, it is nonetheless useful to outline the ways in which Habermas’s standpoint has been refuted. Drawing on this allows me to formulate a clearer grasp of the complex and layered factors within the overlapping categories of public and private operative in the myriad contexts in which an audience encounters artwork, and interacts with one another. This has particular relevance to the practice of Gustafsson Fürst, not only in terms of the variety of contexts in which her work is presented, but also to the ideas she investigates through her works, as will be explored later in the discussion.

\textbf{ARTISTIC PRACTICE BEYOND THE EXHIBITION SETTING}

In addition to the shifts in how the public sphere is conceived, it is relevant to consider the certain relevant trends and movements within exhibition conventions and formats, and how these have been shaped by changing artistic practices, and other factors. An increased focus on curating art outside of the gallery space can be traced to a number of influential trends. Following in the tradition of the Situationist International movement of the late 1950s onwards, artists have long-since been working beyond the confines of studio practice. The influence of the Fluxus group’s activities in the 1960s and 1970s shaped not only definitions of art, but also the categories of how and where interactions between art and audience could take place, through ‘happenings’ and performative events.\textsuperscript{73} Experimental practices transgressed the boundaries of the gallery, reflected in numerous artistic movements and terms: site-specific, land-based art, post-studio and social art practice. Furthermore, the rise in the role of the curator in the 1990s, including shifts such as the ‘educational turn’ and ‘the social turn’, contributed to an increase in


curatorial work which focuses on the public sphere. Additionally, the exponential rise of biennials and art fairs has seen art move out into the city more, not only as a shift in artist practice but also as part of the trajectory of place-making and the instrumentalisation of art in urban planning and city marketing. These numerous factors have a myriad of stakeholders and actors driving them.

Of course, the spaces in which art has been presented within the museum and gallery settings have also undergone myriad changes, with differing exhibition formats influenced by the intentions of the institution. The salon style hanging of the 17th century, to be found in the early public galleries and national museums of France, Britain and Germany, was inextricably linked with notions of nation building and education of the citizen. This has been discussed in Charlotte Klonk’s *Spaces of Experience* (2009), which examines the transformation of the art gallery between the years 1800 and 2000, and traces its evolution in relation to the changing role of the spectator. Klonk also discusses the ways in which institutions have addressed their audiences, since the early national museums, which aimed at contributing to the development their citizens. More common in contemporary presentations of art today is the familiar format of the white cube; however, it could be questioned whether the exhibition format of the white cube is actually more neutral than the salon style hanging of the past, in terms of its effect on audiences.

The white cube exhibition environment – with its clean white walls, light directed from the ceiling and absence of direct daylight – excludes context, and aims to present artworks as autonomous and separate from the rest of the world. Art theorists have ascribed the white cube model as belonging to modernism, designed to present art in a ‘vacuum’. In his text of 1976, *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O’Doherty writes that “[a]esthetics are turned into a kind of social elitism – the gallery space is exclusive.” Furthermore, and specifically relevant for the present research, is O’Doherty’s assertion that the white cube sets up a complex relation between context, artist – and artwork – and society at large. O’Doherty writes that: “The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access.” Hence, the setting of the white cube can be seen to operate as a

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77 As discussed by Klonk in *Spaces of Experience*, 2009.
79 Ibid. p. 80.
barrier or border of sorts, excluding not only context but also impinging on the artist’s connection to her audience.

Though much has changed since O’Doherty’s text was written, it is still a worthy point from which to address the gallery space, and the implications of the context on audiences. Namely, that exhibition spaces can be considered constitutive, in that they produce their audiences, through a subject – object relation. Inherently connected to this audience relation, and to the previously highlighted shifts in thinking about the public sphere, is the very category of “public”. As will be discussed in greater depth shortly, curator and writer Simon Sheikh argues that the term “public” is no longer able to accurately reflect or represent contemporary society. Sheikh states:

[T]he notion of publics and post-publics indicates how the public – again, be it a people, space or notion – is a mainly historical notion, a nineteenth-century concept based on specific ideas of subjectivity and citizenship, that cannot be so easily translated into the modular and hybrid societies of late global capital, into the postmodern as opposed to emerging modern era.⁸⁰

Despite these considerable changes in public sphere discourse, in exhibition conventions and indeed, the seismic shifts in the notion of the curator’s role, the potential audience of an art project or an institution is still often considered as a singular, or unified whole. Having acknowledged key aspects which have shaped developments in the discourse of the public sphere, and also the changing conditions and settings in which art is presented, this thesis now turns to consider the implications of Mouffe’s theories for curatorial work. Specifically, I will now argue for a understanding of the relation between audience and artwork which conceives of a notion of publics as plural, conflicted, unfixed and constantly in flux.

ADVOCATING AGONISTIC CURATORIAL STRATEGIES

In order to construct a curatorial perspective which acknowledges the shifting dynamics of the public sphere, and to set forth a constellation of context, artwork and audience, I now draw on the work of curator and writer Simon Sheikh. I propose that Sheikh’s contribution to the discourse around the notion of public sphere has significant implications for the field of curating. By connecting Mouffe’s theories of agonistic relations, and Sheikh’s conceptualisation of publics, I will now consider the potential of new agonistic curatorial strategies.

Specifically, I draw on Sheikh’s use of the term counter-publics and his call for new iterations or models of the public sphere, to set forth my argument for new curatorial strategies to develop platforms for discussion and debate around artistic work. In his discussion of the very notion of “the public” as a collective body, Sheikh engages with Michael Warner’s use of the term counter-publics to explore the concept of parallel publics which exist in opposition to the normative group. Sheikh explains that:

Counter-publics can be understood as particular parallel formations of a minor or even subordinate character where other or oppositional discourses and practices can be formulated and circulated. Where the classic bourgeois notion of the public sphere claimed universality and rationality, counter-publics often claims [sic] the opposite.

In highlighting the multiple publics who inhabit the numerous spaces within the public sphere, Sheikh forces a reconsideration of the properties – and perhaps the hierarchies – of publics and counter-publics. Thus, I would argue that Sheikh’s broadening of the concept of publics mirrors Mouffe’s understanding of multiple public spaces. Sheikh then takes this further by applying this pluralistic lens to the public sphere. He argues that “we have to think of the public sphere as fragmented, as consisting of a number of spaces and/or formations that sometimes connect, sometimes close off, and that are in conflictual and contradictory relations to each other.” This refusal of the notion of public as singular and unified has significant implications for curatorial practice. It forces a reconsideration of who, how and why, regarding the tone and mode of address in the forms of text, spatial placement and organisation, and numerous other aspects.

Tracing the debate surrounding the public sphere exposes the multifaceted and loaded nature of the terms used to talk about the spaces which society shares, and where individual and society meet. The public sphere, and the notion of the commons are often invoked to suggest a democratic space where all individuals have freedom of speech, regardless of their class, race, gender, economic standing, religion, etc. Of course this is rarely the case, as all spaces and spheres originate from or are produced by dominant hegemonic structures, whether this is visible or not. To unpack these common assumptions and dissect the public sphere is vital as a precursor to my investigation of the presentation of artwork in differing contexts within the public sphere. Sheikh argues that:

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81 The term counter-publics was originally used by Nancy Fraser in the phrase ‘subaltern counterpublics’, in her 1990 essay ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’. The term was later used by Michael Warner. See *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2002.


83 Ibid.
The public sphere was never entered and used uniformly, and art works naturally had both different conceptions and significations to be read in different ways. We must, then, rather talk of a fragmentation and differentiation of the public sphere on the one hand, and of an expansion and/or dematerialization of art works on the other.\(^84\)

In emphasising that the public sphere is not equal to all, Sheikh reveals the complexities of placing art within this public sphere. He argues that “[w]e cannot talk of art's spaces as a common, shared space we enter with equal experiences”, and that rather, “on the contrary, the idea of the neutral spectator has been dissolved and criticized, and the identity of the viewer have been specified and differentiated by both art practices and theories since the 1960s.”\(^85\)

Sheikh’s essay is pivotal to my research, as it not only turns ideas regarding publics on their head, but also constructs a dynamic between the triad of the work, the context and spectator, as shifting elements within a fragile world in flux. He identifies these elements as “three variable categories, that, in turn, influence the definition of each other; work, context and spectator. None of which are given, and each of which are conflictual, indeed agonistic.”\(^86\) What might be the implications of this understanding for situating artistic practice? Sheikh argues that:

\[ \text{His shift also entails, naturally, different notions of communicative possibilities and methods for the artwork, where neither its form, context or spectator is fixed or stable: such relations must be constantly (re)negotiated, and conceived in notions of publics or public spheres. This means, one the hand, that the artwork itself (in an expanded sense), is unhinged from its traditional forms (as material) and contexts (galleries, museums etc), and on the other hand, is made contingent on a(ther) set of parameters that can be described as spaces of experience, that is, notions of spectatorship and the establishment of communicative platforms and/or networks in or around the artwork that are contingent on, and changing according to different points of departure in terms of spectatorship.}^{87}\]

My argument throughout this thesis is thus that Sheikh’s rethinking of the myriad aspects which are operative or performative in the situating and mediation of the artwork, and the relation between spectator, work and context necessitate a flexible curatorial approach. Relevant to the “constant (re)negotiation” of the unfixed elements

\(^84\) Ibid.  
\(^85\) Ibid.  
\(^86\) Ibid.  
\(^87\) Ibid.
is the concept of articulation theory, as formulated by Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. Articulation theory is a concept in social cultural theory discourse analysis which argues that meaning (or cultural/social order) is maintained by the articulation (or relation between) multiple elements or agents. These are unfixed and so numerous other alternative articulations are possible. Mouffe also helps illuminate this:

The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed, are what we call ‘hegemonic practices.’ Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices.  

Furthermore, whilst Mouffe argues for the disarticulation of relations (to destabilise hegemonic structures), she also demands that this be followed by critique and re-articulation, rather than merely ‘taking-apart’ the dominant structure:

It is therefore important that the moment of de-identification, be accompanied with a moment of re-identification and that the critique and disarticulation of the existing hegemony will go hand in hand with a process of rearticulation.

This conceptual process of articulation, disarticulation and re-articulation is pertinent here, and worthy of consideration. Conceiving of relations between agents within society and social space in this way bears a certain correlation with curatorial practice. As mentioned within the Previous Research section, others have also connected articulation theory with curatorial work. Indeed, in his PhD thesis *Exhibition Making and The Political Imaginary: On Modalities and Potentialities of Curatorial Practice* (2012), Sheikh proposes articulation as one of three future terms for exhibition making: Institution, Articulation and Horizons. These three terms are valuable contributions to the field, and in referring to them I aim to connect elements of Sheikh’s propositions with my own, investigating the potential application of these theories. In his discussion on the institution, he explores the implications of New Institutionalism – the term borrowed from the field of sociology, which began to be used in the early 2000s within curatorial theory to denote the way in which certain art institutions began to self-reflexively critique their practices and attempt to find alternative and progressive ways

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89 Ibid.
in which to reach out to their publics.\textsuperscript{92} Sheikh’s proposition of articulation as a curatorial strategy, or rather, “exhibition as articulatory practice” is highly relevant. Articulation is considered in terms of the “language of exhibition-making” in expanded terms, implicating not only the linguistic (textual) elements, but also the “spatial techniques of narration.”\textsuperscript{93} These expanded terms therefore constitute the exhibition’s address to the subject. He states that “[i]t is necessary to position, or even translate, the exhibition into terms of scene of address and accountable subject, or, more generally, discursive formation and conditioned statement […] to understand the concept of articulation.”\textsuperscript{94}

Sheikh’s third term of horizons describes the world which an institution produces around it, in order to imagine and relate to its public.\textsuperscript{95} From these three terms, the most relevant for my discussion, and perhaps the most conceptually complex yet potentially productive, is that of articulation. Though Sheikh acknowledges that articulation cannot simply be transferred (practically) to an exhibition making situation, he highlights it as an “important notion for understanding the politics of exhibition-making.”\textsuperscript{96} Whilst I agree on this point - that it is not a simple analogy which can be applied to the articulation of physical elements – I also argue that the potential of this concept is the awareness within the theoretical approach of the multiple aspects which impact on the scene of address, which shape the audience’s encounter.

**A SHIFT IN CURATORIAL APPROACH**

My proposed approach for agonistic curating borrows Sheikh’s three concepts, those of the spectator, the context and the work, and acknowledges that the notion of “the public” no longer fits contemporary society. Rather than conceiving of “the public” as a singular, unified mass, publics must be recognised as fragmented, plural, and inherently conflictual.

Thus, I argue that a particular curatorial approach which takes account of this shifting discourse is necessary, and advocate one which draws on Mouffe’s model of agonistic space, and with an awareness of Mouffe and Laclau’s work on counter-hegemonic strategies as operating from within, to work flexibly and in support of the artist in shaping contexts for society to encounter the artwork. Curatorial work – whether in the gallery, the institution or in the public realm – must therefore work sensitively and on a
project-by-project basis to devise approaches which make visible dominant hegemonic structures and give space for conflicting voices.

The questions underpinning this research have a great relevancy at the present time. We have to acknowledge that art in the public space is no less affected by the art market than the white cube. Furthermore, public spaces are becoming increasingly privatised, often in ways which are not explicitly visible. What can be done to subvert this, to expose the hierarchies and hegemonic structures in operation within every context, not only the private galleries or the company-funded spaces of public art institutions?

Against the current backdrop of consensus based democracy, and with a sweeping rise of right-wing populist nationalism across Europe and America, and inequality which surpasses that, it is increasingly important that there are opportunities for the airing of conflicting opinions. Migration and integration are issues which will only become more relevant, and it is therefore paramount that societies – and the institutions of societies – rethink the constellations for facilitating meaningful exchange and debate. Indeed, Sheikh writes that “[i]n the public language game, no-one can argue against democracy within democracy, and by insisting on the art institution as the place for democracy and indeed, its everlasting agonism, I believe one can counter both populism and managerialism.”

He continues, arguing that:

> This emphasis indicates how our notions of audience, the dialogical, various modes of address and conception(s) of the public sphere(s) have become the all important points for our institutional constitution, and how this entails both the ethical and the political: art that is not just concerned with the art world, but with the world.

I maintain that contemporary art is one of the few areas which allows discussion where strangers are willing to enter into debate, and can potentially transcend into the ethereal, crossing geographical, political and theological divides. It is therefore a relevant line of research to attempt to re-configure strategies for curating within contexts of the public sphere.

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98 Ibid.
PART 2: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE
INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTISTIC PRACTICE OF JOHANNA GUSTAFSSON FÜRST

Before beginning the analysis of the material for each case study, this section will first give a grounding of Johanna Gustafsson Fürst’s practice, to introduce the central working processes of the artist. Drawing connections between the artist’s approach and the recurring themes and traits within her works highlights the various threads which can be productive in expanding the discussion on public sphere and the presentation of artwork within different contexts. Below is Gustafsson Fürst’s description of her practice:

Works in a field between self-organized platforms, performances, text, sculptures and site-specific installations. The starting point is the constantly ongoing preoccupation of the relation between the self and the world and the desire for fusion and boundaries between them, an interest in how everyday life encounters political and social systems and how these merge in objects, surfaces and spaces.99

Gustafsson Fürst (born 1973) holds an MFA from the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm (2003). She lives and works in Stockholm. She was co-founder of ak28, an exhibition space and a self-organised collective of artists, architects and curators which was active in Stockholm between 2003 – 2008. She has been actively working in Husby, a neighbourhood of Stockholm, in various ways since 2009. This has comprised working with residents and “[creating] transdisciplinary spaces for interaction”.100 In discussing the driving forces of her practice in her contribution to Place to Place (2017), Gustafsson Fürst describes her interest:

Since 2008, I have been concerned with how and when something that holds transforms and becomes totalitarian, and how the privatization of the public space erodes this holding. When I use the expression holding, I refer to it in the wider sense; social security, schools and day care, how a road gets fixed when it is broken and how a street light illuminates a dark passage so that I can walk home safely, but also in human relationships, such as friendship and parenthood.101

100 Ibid.
Gustafsson Fürst presents work in a variety of contexts. She is represented by Belenius, a commercial gallery based in Stockholm, and her work has been presented in exhibitions produced by state funded art institutions as well as a range of international independent organisations and collectives. A significant part of her practice centres around site-specific work, responding to place and the people who live in and occupy those spaces. Gustafsson Fürst explains:

I want my site-specific works to be objects that grasp and create situations where the body, the space and the physical manifestation collaborate. That they can be a place for the constant preoccupation with the relationship between the self and the world. The individual and society and the will to examine both overlaps as well as the boundaries in between.\(^{102}\)

Her practice is deeply engaged with issues of the commons and public space, and outside of her artistic practice, Gustafsson Fürst has also been an active voice in debates around privatisation of public buildings and services:

I have been occupied for some time by camouflaged steering mechanisms, and how the public sphere is becoming more hostilely programmed and privatised in parallel to the current political development in Sweden.\(^{103}\)

This “public green” is a red – or rather green – thread through much of Gustafsson Fürst’s recent sculptural works, and connects very specifically to the context and debate around public space and public authorities in a Swedish context.

Speaking during an artist talk within the framework of the project *Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space*, Gustafsson Fürst emphasised the importance of unprogrammed spaces, stating that “this value of having non-programmed space is very important for me, and very much connected to public space”.\(^{104}\) This line of interest can be traced through many of her projects and will be expanded and discussed where relevant in the case studies which follow. Interestingly, this engagement with questions of publicness and access which can be interpreted from the content and form of her works also feeds into the issues which must be considered from a curatorial perspective in the presentation and communication of her work. Hence, the overarching interest in civic and societal issues forms a meta-level of enquiry, both within and outside of the works themselves.

\(^{102}\) Ibid. N.p.n.
\(^{103}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist. (2016-10-26).
\(^{104}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Artist talk within the framework of *Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space*. Stockholm. (2016-11-14).
Gustafsson Fürst’s practice is multi-faceted and unique, oscillating between contexts, methods and approaches. Her direct approach, careful consideration and astute reflections form a very specific artistic process which at times, I would argue, could be considered curatorial. As will be discussed through examples in the following case studies, Gustafsson Fürst’s practice pushes forward with issues of the public sphere which have been discussed in the above chapters of this thesis. By analysing the case studies through a lens directed by the theories of Mouffe and Sheikh, I will now expand on aspects of particular relevance within the curatorial and artistic processes in these projects. I argue therefore that Gustafsson Fürst’s practice illuminates new possibilities for curatorial approaches which work agonistically, adaptively and sensitively to context, audience and artwork.

Gustafsson Fürst’s practice is pioneering and unique in that her processes and approach investigate and reconfigure concepts through combined enquiry and experimentation in content, form and context. Her complex practice highlights the necessity for curatorial work to operative in an equally adaptive, plural and responsive way. My research into Gustafsson Fürst’s working process has convinced me of a lack of such a multi-faceted and connected curatorial strategy which is able to deftly transcend contextual boundaries and simultaneously collaborate with, subvert and expose the existing hierarchical structures which condition and steer the art world and audiences’ experiences within it.
THREE CASE STUDIES WITHIN THE PRACTICE OF JOHANNA GUSTAFSSON FÜRST

The following three case studies have been selected specifically for the variety of contexts in which they are set, and the differing curatorial approaches operative in each project. The first context is a Swedish state-funded art institution; the second a commercial gallery which represents the artist in Stockholm, and the third an independent private contemporary art space in London. This is worthy of explicit mention to highlight that these three case studies reveal multiple stakeholders, cultural agents and potential audiences. Furthermore, by their placement in such different places and spaces within the public sphere, the projects presented various barriers and thresholds to their potential publics.

CASE STUDY ONE

The first case study is a reading of the way in which Gustafsson Fürst’s work was presented in *The Moderna Exhibition - Society Acts*, Moderna Museet Malmö, (2014). This case study follows a structure that will first introduce and present the exhibition, including details of the artworks presented and particularly relevant curatorial aspects regarding space, textual communication and so on. I will then investigate the artistic processes and strategies, drawing on material from interviews with the artist as well as her description of the project in Lisa Torell’s book *Place to Place* (2017). My analysis thereafter draws on external perspectives from the art critic, educator and curator Fredrik Svensk, whose critical appraisal of the exhibition was published in Kunstkritikk. Concluding remarks will tie together the most pertinent and relevant insights which will be brought into the overall conclusion of this thesis.

*The Moderna Exhibition – Society Acts* ran between 20 September 2014 and 25 January 2015, and presented works within Moderna Museet Malmö, and beyond the museum space, in public spaces within the city. The exhibition was the 2014 iteration of *The Moderna Exhibition*, a quadrennial group survey show, described on Moderna’s website as an “inventory of Swedish contemporary art”.105 The previous two iterations, in 2006 and 2010, were held at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. In 2014, the format was expanded to include artists not only from Sweden, but also from other Nordic and Baltic countries. The 38 artists who participated hailed from Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. *Society Acts* featured approximately 50 works.

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from 38 artists and was curated by Andreas Nilsson. The co-curator was Maija
Rudovska, with assistant curator Julia Björnborg. The exhibition was sponsored by the
European energy company E.ON.

Three sculptures were presented in the exhibition space at Moderna Museet. These
culptures – shown in Images 1, 2 & 3 on p. 60 - were Europe2013 (textile found by the
shore of the Baltic Sea, marble windowsills, steel frame, 2013), Public Green Bark
(aluminium, NCS S8010-G10Y, 2014) and No! (copper, textile found by the shore of
the Baltic Sea, steel ring, 2013).106 Given the focus on including Baltic and
Scandinavian artists in Society Acts, the materiality of the works gains a new
significance. Gustafsson Fürst’s site-specific work White Pillars was installed in the
town square of Möllevångstorget in Malmö. The work, as can be seen in Images 4 and 5
on p. 61, comprised three 12 metre tall pillars, each erected around an existing lamppost
on the square. The pillars were made of white laminate board.

By presenting artworks both within the exhibition space and beyond it, in
Möllevångstorget, Gustafsson Fürst gives audiences different possibilities to engage
with her practice. Gustafsson Fürst explains:

In the case of Society Acts, the starting point was that I wanted to connect the
spaces; the museum and the square, and to show that they belong, or at least
ought to belong together. The title of the exhibition, Society Acts called for that
kind of activity. 107

The artist’s driving force to connect the spaces of the museum and the square invites the
audience to compare the contexts, provoking reflection on the structures which are
operative in creating and maintaining arenas for society to occupy and to act within. In
Place to Place, Gustafsson Fürst describes her approach to producing work for Society
Acts:

Inside the museum, I exhibited three sculptures, Europe, Public Green Bark and
No! but I also wanted to create a piece of work in a different sort of public
space. A central tenet of my practice is that I use the amplification of the
different relationships between the bodies (the audience), the objects and the
spaces as my material. A kind of silent theatre in sculpture, often with an open
story in connection with the relationship between the individual – society –

106 As described on Belenius’ website. Available at belenius.com/artists/johanna-gustafsson-furst
[Accessed 2017-08-08].
I will now discuss Gustafsson Fürst’s three works which were presented in the exhibition space within the museum. All three of the works comprise found objects, two of these – *Europe2013* and *No!* – in part consisting of material found on the shore of the Baltic Sea. In my interview with Gustafsson Fürst, she described the experience of working with the exhibition and placement of works within the group exhibition inside Moderna Museet:

I was impressed by how sensitive the team that installed the works, *No*, *Europe2013* and *Public Bark*, were. I was mostly worried of how *Europe2013* would work in conjunction with other works by other artists as it is made to not give the audience a fixed point of view. The work is made to push around the viewers, which means that the work itself seems to drift around. The exhibition was cramped and the works contaminated each other, mostly in a good way. I think my sculptures actually work well in group shows and that effect that I really like that the works are characters that hang around at a party or in a demonstration occurred. They neither became invisible nor central monuments-objects.

Thus, from the above quote, we gain an insight into the spatial significance of the placement of the works within the exhibition space at Moderna Museet Malmö, and also the artist’s approach to the works being placed in relation to other artworks within the exhibition. As can be seen in the images included on p. 60, the works combine found objects and feature the public green paint, the colour with which the artist has been working with for a number of years. This specific shade of public green is the colour of the lampposts in Möllevångstorget around which the work *White Pillars* has been constructed, the works in the exhibition at Moderna Museet Malmö, and in later works which feature across the entire artistic practice.

In *Place to Place*, Gustafsson Fürst explains that the green colour has a different significance in relation to Malmö, where it is quite new, than to Stockholm, where it has been prevalent since the mid 90s. Though visually, it is the same green, its usage and symbolism in Malmö reveals the intentionality of the Malmö city council. On the one
hand, it has been used to represent the coming together of ideas, the connection between individuals. On the other hand, the city council’s explicit recommendation that private property owners should also use the same paint on their fences and outdoor structures in order to “make the city appear more uniform” exposes the tensions and problematic blurring of signification between public and private space and property. Gustafsson Fürst’s fascination with the colour hints at the intersection of the visual, the symbolic with the very real hierarchies of social relation, power and control, which is an aspect of her practice. Again, in *Place to Place*, the artist questions Malmö City Council’s statement on the use of the green, and interrogates the intentions behind their position:

It says that the green colour creates a restful environment and that it strengthens identity. Identity as a singular? It also says that the green colour sets a good example. Colour as example? Suddenly, the green colour has become something oppressive, and when private property owners are encouraged to use it, a scenario is created whereby society blurs around the edges and slips into something one cannot get a grip of.  

By connecting the two spaces, the exhibition space and the public square, Gustafsson Fürst has created an opposite gesture in mirrored form – placing the public green within the museum, and covering the existing public green structures in Möllevångstorget.

Having considered the artist’s perspective on her approach and processes within *Society Acts*, I will now focus on the curatorial framing of the exhibition. The curatorial exhibition text aimed to highlight political and societal issues by inviting the audience to reflect on the titular word “acts”, as both verb and noun. In the curatorial text within the exhibition space, the curator Andreas Nilsson explained that the subtitle “Society Acts” “is to be understood as a comprehensive and transparent concept, where acts refers to visible and invisible movement, social action and to performative gesture.”

The text also states that:

railings an lampposts. In a simple and obvious way, the colour assists in profiling the city and to create a historic and timeless identity. […] The purpose of giving Malmö a unified colour is to create a restful cityscape and simultaneously set a good example. […] Malmö Green is one component of an urban environment program, developed to give Malmö a clear and enhanced identity. […] For this reason, Malmö City Council welcomes and encourages the use of Malmö Green by private property owners in order to make the city appear more uniform. In order to avoid many different ‘interpretations’ of the green colour, it is important to use the right colour code: NCS8080G10Y-S.” (Source: About Malmö Green at Malmö.se). As quoted in “White Pillars, laminate and NCS S8010-G10Y” in *Place to Place*, 2017. N.p.n.


Questions of private and collective identities, political expressions and personal reflections take shape in the exhibition. Several works discuss or engage in a performative, participatory expression in which the relationship between observation and action is central.\(^\text{114}\)

Within the exhibition catalogue, Nilsson’s curatorial voice is expanded through the format of a longer text, connecting theory on geographical space, borders and cartography with theory of time and simultaneity. The text opens with a quote from Michel Foucault, invoking a conceptual view of our global interconnectivity, across geographical borders:

> We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience if the world is less that of a long life depending through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.\(^\text{115}\)

The essay then draws on examples of specific artworks included in the exhibition. Nilsson ruminates on the notion of place, stating that the exhibition “illuminates the human condition in relation to an area or place, and not just on a global level.”\(^\text{116}\) The essay offers a departure point for audiences, with a balance between conceptual theory and some historical and geographical “facts” relating to places and events. Nilsson closes with a quote by an artist whose textual work features in the exhibition:

> And perhaps Laura Kaminskaitė provides the best description of the space in-between where everything appears possible and everything could begin: ‘I’m strolling around the exhibition space, which is bright and spacious, as a blank sheet of paper is.’\(^\text{117}\)

Though not in direct reference to the installation of this particular exhibition, I would find it hard – as a reader, a visitor to the gallery – not to draw comparison between the “blank sheet of paper”, and the setting for the group exhibition of 50 works from 38 artists. Furthermore, from a curatorial perspective, the artist’s description of an exhibition space invokes the white cube, that format where exclusion of context has become a laden content within exhibition spaces. On a curatorial level it is hard not to

\(^{114}\) Ibid.


\(^{117}\) Ibid. p. 22. Footnote in original reference links to the reference for Kaminskatitė’s work: “Quoted from Laura Kaminskatitė’s textual work Walking in a Title (2012), presented in the exhibition.”. p. 23.
read this closing quote as a somewhat naïve gesture to indicate the freedom of a blank slate from which the audience may depart, to draw their own conclusions. Though this may be an encouraging invitation from the perspective of visitors, the presentation of an institution and an exhibition as so clean, innocent, where anything is possible, provokes my critique. The strings, as it were, behind the exhibition, and the structures and hierarchies within the institution and the political and social context that this exhibition hopes to address, are not made visible here. I would argue that to draw attention to these structures would be a significant shift in the exhibition’s tone, welcoming audiences to delve into the complexities which encourage and force society to act. Curatorial texts, though they must be clear and accessible, can also be an opportunity for a more individual stance. While I do not criticise Nilsson’s text on the grounds that it detracts from the exhibition, I rather wish to emphasise that another approach would have been possible, which would have shifted the criticality and focus of the exhibition. Of course, it is worth remarking that not all state funded institutions wish to present criticality in every exhibition, yet the title *Society Acts* and the curatorial statement suggests these kinds of objectives. Thus, to promise such a socio-political engagement and then shy away from taking a critical position is somewhat disappointing, and results in a lightweight tone which risks missing its mark. The curatorial text neither engages fully with societal issues, nor challenges its audiences by provoking deeper reflections.

The art critic and curator Fredrik Svensk’s critique of *Society Acts* was published in Kunstkritikk, shortly after the exhibition opened to the public. Though I will not consider his account of the exhibition as a full guide to my analysis, it gives some (subjective) insights into the exhibition within Moderna Museet Malmö. In his account of the exhibition, Svensk looks back at the thematic approach in the 2006 and 2010 exhibitions:

The exhibition’s first two incarnations were held at the Moderna museet in Stockholm in 2006 and 2010 during Lars Nittve’s tenure as director. In those two shows it was interesting how the shows’ very concept felt so anachronistically nationalistic – as if the format of the exhibition itself mimicked a time that has past, which created a peculiar tension in the Swedish art scene.\(^{118}\)

It is therefore perhaps significant that the 2014 exhibition, in opening up to feature works from artists in neighbouring countries, moved away from the nationalistic concept which pervaded the first two Moderna Exhibition shows, presented at Moderna Museet Stockholm during the period when Lars Nittve was director.\(^{119}\)


\(^{119}\) The 2006 and 2010 formats presented works from only Swedish artists. The 2014 exhibition *Society Acts* featured works from other Nordic and Baltic countries.
perceives the intentionality operative in these previous iterations as related to identifying a lack, encouraging audiences to reflect on which artists had been included and excluded from the canon. Connecting this strategy to Society Acts, Svensk outlines the shift:

In Malmö in 2014, a completely different strategy as to the politics of desire applies. Here the organizers have instead started by identifying a lack: Sweden’s close relation to Western Europe and the USA has been at the expense of their relationship with neighboring countries in the Baltic region. Moderna wants to re-establish this relationship by tying it to the 100th anniversary of The Baltic Exhibition, which took place in Malmö in 1914. That said, few works actually deal concretely with the changes in the region. 120

This therefore provides insight into the potential intentions on the part of the institution in its societal responsibilities, and possibly in response to shifting trends in the art world and in the impact of social changes, not least related to the movement of a huge number of refugees throughout Europe and the arrival of many migrants to Sweden. It is then very possible that the choice to reflect on societal acts within the thematic concept of the exhibition mirrors this shift to broaden the scope of this survey show.

Though Svensk had positive remarks for certain artworks, he was fairly sceptical of the curatorial placement of the works, and of certain communicative strategies within the theme of the exhibition. His main criticism was that the exhibition itself was somewhat boring, and had not been declarative enough in its presenting a survey of a particular approach or focus of the artworks. This can often be a common criticism levelled at large thematic group show, and particularly the format of a survey show, which as the past iterations of this quadrennial Moderna Exhibition have claimed, present an “inventory of contemporary Swedish art.”121

If earlier Moderna Exhibitions distinctly gave a lot of space to individual artistry, the initial impression of the incarnation in Malmö is rather messy. This is reinforced by the fact that it is easy to incorrectly connect the wall texts with their respective artworks. Another aesthetic affect of this is that the notion of the artist as auteur is toned down in favour of a coherent exhibition.122

Svensk links this aesthetic affect to the overarching concept and title of the exhibition, critically questioning the curatorial positioning of Moderna Museet and the agency of the audience. Svensk writes:

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120 Ibid.
If something «acts» through the artworks, how does the community act through the exhibition? How should we understand The Moderna Exhibition as auteur? What does it mean that Moderna museet says that they can put together the world however they like, just so that one can come to the historical-philosophical insight that all art is potentially contemporary?  

This rather damning summation does however offer interesting points upon which to reflect. Svensk argues there has been a shift from giving generous space to individual works, and therefore a focus on artist as auteur, in the 2006 and 2010 exhibitions, towards the effect of the overarching exhibition – or perhaps the curators - as auteur. I would argue that Svensk invokes the notion of the “Gesamtkunstwerk”, whereby the entire exhibition becomes the artistic or creative expression. Though this may be Svensk’s perception of the exhibition, I would propose that his most interesting reflection is that of the audience’s agency – how does the community act?

Svensk’s question of how the community acts in relation to this project, now leads me to focus in greater depth on Gustafsson Fürst’s work in public space for Society Acts, and compare the performative structures which shape audiences’ encounter with the work. In doing so, I argue that Gustafsson Fürst’s processes of working in public space generate a greater agency for the audience, producing another platform, or surface of the public sphere through which they can engage with the artwork.

Gustafsson Fürst mentions the curatorial influence in choice of place, in that the curator and co-curator of Society Acts recommended Möllevångstorget as a site in which she might develop a work.

Andreas Nilsson, the exhibition’s curator, together with Maija Rudowska, suggested that I should work with Möllevångstorget in central Malmö. Möllevången is an area which is the subject of gentrification. Möllevångstorget is a centre for political activity, it is the place where people gather to march. The

123 Ibid.
124 Within the field of curating, the Gesamtkunstwerk is an often-times negative term for an exhibition or project whereby the overall expression or authorship of the curator or institution can overshadow the integrity of the individual artworks. Writing in e-flux journal, Boris Groys explains that the notion of the Gesamtkunstwerk originally comes from Wagner’s “The Art-Work of The Future” (1849 – 1850), but later gained prominence through Harald Szeemann’s exhibition The Tendency To Gesamtkunstwerk (Der Hang Zum Gesamtkunstwerk) in 1983. Szeeman was fascinated by the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, in the curatorial sense. Groys argues that the contemporary equivalent of the Gesamtkunstwerk is the term curatorial project. Groys argues that “[t]he curatorial project, rather than the exhibition, is then the Gesamtkunstwerk because it instrumentalizes all the exhibited artworks and makes them serve a common purpose that is formulated by the curator.” (Groys, “Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk”, e-flux, Journal #50, 2013).
square is an open space with benches and trees along the edges. The large, un-programmed surface at its centre is a space for meetings, conflict and friction.125

While the curatorial team actively suggested Gustafsson Fürst installing a work in public space, I would argue that it was the artist’s approach to making the work and relating it to this site which created a plurality of interfaces for audiences to engage with the works. I will now set out the specific strategies in Gustafsson Fürst’s approach which I argue are distinctive, and operative in producing an agonistic space for an encounter with the artwork. Furthermore, this is relevant as the processes could be considered artistic-curatorial, and could inform potential future curatorial strategies.

The materiality of the site-specific installation is also significant to the theme of the exhibition, and reveals the artist’s thought process in making and placing the work. Gustafsson Fürst describes:

I wanted [the pillars] to be seen as something which has crept up, and multiplied themselves invisibly. They were constructed from white laminate with a perfect surface at the beginning of the exhibition, but which would subsequently rot, like short-sighted thinking and cheap solutions. White fake-holding which after just a few days would begin to crack and swell and get covered in posters and scribbles.126

The artist also explained how the pillars symbolise the duality of institution – both as control authority and caretaker, stating that, “[w]hite pillars are, in this context, symbols of power, weight, oppression, institution, but also for sustaining, maintenance, insistence and stability. The pillar is at once body and gestalt, building and structure”.127 This interest in public and societal structures is inseparable from Gustafsson Fürst’s practice, and is reinforced across her practice through the recurring engagement with the public green colour.

Though Gustafsson Fürst frequently works with found objects, bringing them into the studio to work alongside them before they become part of a finished piece, working site-specifically – as for White Pillars - requires a different approach. She explains:

I never took a piece from my studio that could be wherever and moved it out [to public space]. So when I work in public space I work to the specific site.

125 Gustafsson Fürst, “White Pillars, laminate and NCS S8010-G10Y”, in Place to Place, 2017. N.p.n.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
Because it’s such a difference when people choose to go and see the work […] and when they just meet them passing by. That is a super big difference.  

A central aspect of Gustafsson Fürst’s distinctive approach to working with place, and with the people active in public space, is revealed through her participation and discussion with passersby during the installation phase. See Image 7, p. 62, for images of the active installation process. Coupled with her ‘approaching’ process, it can be understood that the relation to audience and context is of prime importance in the conceptualisation and implementation of the artwork. Gustafsson Fürst describes her relation to site and the process of installing White Pillars in Malmö:

The building process on site is important to me. I often create situations in which my work demands it. For three days, three of us were working with it, two up in the Skylift doing the construction, and one was on the square. That person made sure that people wouldn’t get hurt if we dropped something, but mainly the job was to answer questions and to discuss the work.

Gustafsson Fürst also described the variety of reactions from passersby during the installation stage, and once the work was in-situ:

We spoke to over one hundred people. Their reactions can be split into three main categories. The first reflected a fierce suspicion that we would erect advertising spaces and was careful to point out that it was not wanted. Others suspected we were mounting surveillance cameras, and they knew with absolute certainty exactly where the cameras overlooking the square were placed. Some people were convinced we were putting up communal notice boards which they would soon be able to avail themselves of. The conversations centred on the square, public space, ownership, and politics.

I would argue that this opportunity for communication during the very installation of the work should not be overlooked. It is significant that the point at which something is being altered – or re-articulated – in the public sphere is the very moment at which people feel they have agency to comment on the situation. The unfixed nature of the work, and the audience’s relation to it, at the point of installation therefore reveals insights into how to further facilitate situations where exchange of ideas is possible.

Furthermore, Gustafsson Fürst explained that a considerable decision was whether - and how - to communicate that the pillars were artworks, and related to a broader exhibition.

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This process is highly significant and gives insight to the layers of consideration of the properties and rights of the public space, and of the audience.

One part of the process was to find a solution for the dissemination of the work after we had finishing building and left the scene. How could we communicate that the pillars were art and that they belonged to an exhibition at Moderna Museet? I dithered with signage and texts, but the declaration of the pillars as art became a limitation; if I put a sign on the pillars with a title and referred to the exhibition, they would become advertising space for Moderna Museet. The notion of art explained their presence and removed the little drama of wondering and speculation which they inspired in the absence of a sign.  

Arguably, the artist’s consideration of whether to use title labels or other signage to communicate White Pillars’ status as an artwork is a significant example of the artist working curatorially. Of course, this consideration of how the artwork is framed and mediated has long-since been a central part of artistic practice. The rise of curatorial practice in supporting artworks in public space does not necessitate a change in artistic working processes, yet it is relevant to consider how the curators of the exhibition may have mediated the work differently, and the effect this could have had on the audiences’ engagement and perception of the works. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note the artist’s agency and strong voice, and reflect that artists less used to working site-specifically may have deferred to curatorial decisions. Gustafsson Fürst explains that she did not wish to frame the work as an advertisement for the exhibition with the museum, giving insight into the complex considerations within her artistic practice regarding advertisement and the encroaching reach of private interests into public spaces.

I wanted to leave the square in peace and for the pillars to be a not so visible intervention. The pillars would be just as open as the square, where people’s doing and being creates the square.  

The artist’s value of unprogrammed space is clear in her statement, which shows not only a deep value of the affordances of public space, but also an understanding of place as in a constant state of becoming. Hence, Gustafsson Fürst’s artistic strategies are arguably related to the perception of space and place advocated by Hannula and Doherty, namely that place should be understood as being in a constant state of becoming. Thus, Gustafsson Fürst activates this understanding through her conception of the relation between her works, the site they are placed in, the implications for the people in these spaces, and these factors all constitute a sense of place. Gustafsson Fürst writes:

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
The pillars became an extra crevice for interaction in the city, they became grafittied and were used for poster ing. Many people didn’t notice them, but through the interaction and engagement they encouraged; a white, blank and open surface, they became a materialisation of the urban life around them – an experience which can neither be measured, nor controlled.132

Evidence of the transformation through poster ing can be seen in Image 8, on p. 62. Therefore, the uses that people developed for the surfaces of the artwork became an extended platform for civic engagement, and part of the commons. Gustafsson Fürst’s strategies of connecting the outside space with the exhibition space generate not only additional artistic agency, but also an interface with the audience to meet her artwork in another context, through a different kind of encounter. In the situation on Möllevångstorget, passersby can reflect on the work – either as a work or as a new structure which has sprung up in the spaces of their daily life – and draw their own conclusions.

Case Study 1 – Concluding Reflections

By including this exhibition as a case study, I wish to draw particular attention to Gustafsson Fürst’s ‘approaching’ process, which comprises part of her preparation to work with site. Furthermore, I argue that her understanding of the installation period as a key opportunity for discussion with potential audiences is significant, as it exposes the shifting thresholds and boundaries to audience engagement within different spaces of the public sphere. Gustafsson Fürst’s deliberation surrounding the mediation of the artwork in Möllevångstorget, and whether to label it as an artwork, also exposes the structures which are part of curatorial decision making, and also form part of shaping the audience’s perception through the framing of the encounter. In turn, this calls into question how the work can be mediated thereafter to extend the platform for discussion.

Combining an understanding of the institution and its curators’ framing of the exhibition, and the artist’s processes in making and placing the works, has allowed me to analyse the specific strategies in place within this project. The curatorial text – both in the exhibition space and in the catalogue – constructed a framework for potential audiences to encounter and engage with the artwork; however, I would argue that the artist’s intention and process of working activates the concept and title of Society Acts in a way which the curatorial text alone did not, or perhaps could not. Through their presentation in different spaces and with different levels of address, the works of Gustafsson Fürst offer multiple publics a variety of points of entry, to access the works and develop their own perspectives.

132 Ibid.
Gustafsson Fürst therefore uses the support – and dominant structures – of the art institution as a platform from which to position her own voice and interventionist approach, through the tension and interplay between the works in the exhibition space of the museum and the central market square. Specifically, I would argue that Gustafsson Fürst’s artistic-curatorial approach to audience and site makes her work performative and adds an additional layer, or a conceptual turn, to Society Acts. Thus, the artist subtly subverts the usual relation between audience, artwork and contexts. I would therefore argue that this case study highlights ways in which artistic projects can implement curatorial strategies which recognise multiple and fragmented publics, and present a variety of possibilities for these publics to engage with the artworks. Furthermore, artistic and curatorial approaches within this project are evidence of how strategies can be adapted to a shift of context, to draw audiences from one setting to another.
Image 1:

Image 2:

Image 3:


Image 7:

Image 8:
CASE STUDY TWO

Gustafsson Fürst is represented by Belenius, a commercial gallery in Stockholm. This second case study examines two exhibitions, both produced by Belenius. The first of these is Public Green, which took place between 2 – 31 March 2013, in Belenius’ basement space on Ulrikagatan, in the Östermalm area of Stockholm. The second exhibition to be discussed is Expand Stretch Distribute, which took place at Belenius’ gallery space on Jakobs torg in central Stockholm between 28 October – 20 November 2016.

This section is structured as follows. I will first outline the exhibition Public Green, describing the works which were presented and the context of the space. As I did not visit the exhibition myself, I will draw on material from interviews with Gustafsson Fürst and an interview with Linnaea Silfvergrip of the curatorial team at Belenius. This will lead to reflections on the artistic approach, and how the series of works presented in Public Green are significant in terms of the ideas they explore, and how this connects the artistic practice to concepts within public sphere discourse.

I will then outline the exhibition Expand Stretch Distribute, explaining the layout and giving a summation of the number and materiality of the works included, the striking spatial and textual aspects of the exhibition, and other pertinent objective details. I will continue to draw on material from my interviews with the artist, and also with Silfvergrip from Belenius. My analysis, structured by the overarching theoretical framework of this thesis and the perspective I have developed through it, then combines insights from the project with relevant theory from the field. Comparative analysis will reflect on the curatorial and artistic strategies operative in this case, connecting these to the theoretical framework rooted in Mouffe and Sheikh’s work, and drawing insights into the potential implications for my advocated agonistic curatorial approach.

Public Green presented a series of sculptures with the same title, which reveal the artist’s interest in specific green colour used in Stockholm, and in Malmö, to paint objects and infrastructure in public space. As discussed earlier in the introduction to the artistic practice, this colour holds a specific fascination for the artist. The objects demarcated with “public green” include bus stops, lampposts, fences, benches, bins, etc., and imply a natural aesthetic, whilst also being a colour which doesn’t show dirt very easily. They also symbolise a space which belongs to society, yet which is owned, maintained and sometimes under surveillance by the city or district council. An installation view of the exhibition Public Green is included as Image 9 on p. 75. In the exhibition, the works which were presented in the exhibition space were a series of sculptural works which featured the public green colour, made in 2013. Their titles are:
There was also a work outside of the exhibition space, on the street outside the gallery. This work was a typical advertising board one often encounters on the pavement, with a sample colour of the public green paint colour. This work was titled *Public Green Sign Friendly Slowing Things Down*, and Gustafsson Fürst explained it was simultaneously a work, an advertisement and a barrier.\(^{133}\) As can be seen in *Image 10* on p. 75, the placement of the work partially obstructs the pedestrians’ pathway, and is thus impossible to ignore. This is an interesting strategy in making visible a colour which has been selected and employed by authorities to create an unobtrusive aesthetic of uniformity. The didactic nature of the titles also hints at the gesture – and humour – which is important in this exhibition. On Gustafsson Fürst’s website, the text describing the exhibition *Public Green* reads as follows:

A sign of the common space we share, the green colour becomes a symbol of a politics that supports the common. By moving a piece of this structure from the public space to the private space, the action mimics a direction in today’s politics that dismantles the commonly owned through privatization. In the public sphere, the bar is a protective fence but in the private space (the gallery) it becomes a governing structure, an obstacle.\(^{134}\)

The artistic process is fascinating and reveals insights into the meta-levels on which the engagement with issues of public and civic rights is played out within Gustafsson Fürst’s practice – and therefore also in the presentation of her works. During the artist talk as part of my curatorial degree project *Codified Environments* (2016), Gustafsson Fürst explained the process in greater depth, giving insights to her intention and the driving forces for making such a gesture:

For the exhibition at the gallery some years ago I decided to steal a bar from a fence in public space and put it in the gallery. That is a gesture that takes something that is public and puts it in a private space. That kind of movement is mimicking things that happen, and could happen even more. And then I put it

\(^{133}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist. (2017-08-08).

\(^{134}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Available at gustafssonfurst.se/public-green/ (Accessed 2017-08-10).
back, I just want to say. This gesture was super important for the exhibition to point out the space that the gallery is, in a way. The bar was also steering the audience who was a bit more reluctant to go in to a gallery like this.\(^{135}\)

As has previously been mentioned, of particular interest to my research in the analysis of Gustafsson Fürst’s process and approach, is her tendency to reach across thresholds from exhibition format into other areas of the public realm. Her practice thus operates in an expanded context, drawing her audience with her from context to context. Gustafsson Fürst comments that, “[i]n most of the exhibitions that are inside I have done something outside. Actually \textit{Expand Stretch Distribute} at Belenius was an exception.”\(^{136}\)

Another aspect which I argue is extremely significant in Gustafsson Fürst’s approach is that of how she regards the relation between her works and their potential audience. In the textual description of the exhibition \textit{Public Green}, it was stated that:

\begin{quote}
The high density and complexity of meaning in the works do not aim for completion. Johanna Gustafsson Fürst is aspiring to make the unfinished permanent. The thoughts in her three-dimensional notebook are drafts, to be developed in collaboration with the visitors.\(^{137}\)
\end{quote}

This is particularly important in terms of the artistic invitation for the audience to contribute their own meaning and interpretation, thus opening the scope of engagement with the artworks within the context. I would argue that the “unfinished” aspect of the works connects to Gustafsson Fürst’s trust of the audience. Speaking during an artist talk at \textit{Codified Environments}, Gustafsson Fürst reflected on how she relates to an imagines her potential audience:

I really value and really trust the audience’s ability and my own ability as audience, to kind of use the work in the way I want to. But I also really like the idea of the piece as something we work with together, and talk with together as a collective process. I value that a lot.\(^{138}\)

In my interview with Linnaea Silfvergrip of Belenius, Silfvergrip described the discussion between herself and the artist about the conceptual aspects of specific works, which took place during preparations for \textit{Expand Stretch Distribute}. She mentioned that

\(^{135}\) Gustafsson Fürst, Artist Talk within the framework of \textit{Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space}. Stockholm. (2016-11-14).

\(^{136}\) Gustafsson Fürst, Email interview with the artist. (2017-08-08).

\(^{137}\) Text describing \textit{Public Green}, used by Belenius to publicise the exhibition opening via Belenius’ Facebook page. Author Unknown. Available at facebook.com/events/257526221049021/ (Accessed 2017-08-03).

Gustafsson Fürst remarked that though the curator’s interpretation of the work was different from her own, it was an equally valid interpretation:

Johanna explained that she likes when people get their own interpretations. When we met and talked about the work, I was really enthusiastic, and talked and talked, and she was like, ok, that’s not really how I thought about it, but I think your interpretation is as valuable as my description of it.\textsuperscript{139}

This further emphasises the potential for approaching the presentation and mediation of artworks with an agonistic perspective; the audience, artist and curator each have rights to varying interpretation. In many ways this is indicative of a democratic production of knowledge, through exchange of ideas, as opposed to the more traditional notions of learning regarding the transferral of “the meaning” of art, which has underscored museum education and art as a subject within schools systems.

II. \textit{Expand Stretch Distribute} (2016)

The contrasts between the presentation of the exhibition \textit{Public Green} in 2013 at Belenius’ smaller space on Ulrikagatan and the 2016 exhibition \textit{Expand Stretch Distribute} on Jakobs torg are significant, not least spatially. The physical settings of the two exhibitions also constitute different thresholds and barriers to different potential audiences, given the open glass-fronted space on Jakobs torg, a location with many passersby. Meanwhile, the basement location in Östermalm would most likely only be visited by those who are already familiar with Belenius, or a dedicated but initiated art crowd.

\textit{Expand Stretch Distribute} presented many sculptural works, including both new pieces and also works made over recent years. Many sculptures featured the public green colour, as can be seen in the installation images – \textit{Images 11, 12 & 13} on p. 76. The resulting spatial effect was that the gallery, with its high ceilings and large windows, presented works on multiple levels, drawing the eye between where sculptures were placed on floor level, up to where other works were installed high above eye level. Furthermore, certain works protruded out into the middle of the room, steering the audience around the space. The dormant violence in some of the works – those featuring metal rapier spikes, or metal in jagged shapes, also encroached on the space, so that at the opening evening, the busy exhibition meant the audience were sometimes pushed together and sometimes kept apart by the installation and the flow of people moving through the space. Thus, the curatorial strategies in installation mirror the mechanisms

\textsuperscript{139} Interview with Linnea Silfvergrip (2017-05-24).
at work in public space, where the infrastructure – often painted in public green – directs, protects, prevents and steers people to interact or avoid one another.

In an exhibition which contained many works, and was therefore spatially very engaging, mediation was a significant consideration. As has been discussed already, for *Public Green*, Gustafsson Fürst took the decision to make very didactic titles which gave an additional layer of context and, I would argue, create a certain directness between artist and audience. For *Expand Stretch Distribute*, the list of works, including titles, materials and year, was placed in the space, yet not on a wall. This list was also accompanied by a price list, as is customary in commercial galleries. The absence of wall titles relegated all mediation and additional information about the artworks to one small corner of the exhibition space, where the information is held, printed on A4 paper for those who wish to add another layer to their understanding, or enquire about buying a work. Though gallery curation often appears to be pared back and minimal, and certainly less overtly didactic than in exhibitions within state-funded art institutions, it is clear that any choices made regarding the communication – even if this is a choice not to provide any - of the artworks to the potential audience, have a significant bearing on the viewer’s encounter.

In my interview with Silfvergrip, I asked about the mediation of Gustafson Fürst’s work. Her response highlighted the importance of telling the story of each work, which often entailed detailing the location or exact material of the found objects in the works. Silfvergrip responded that:

> Usually when you have these ready mades, or found material artworks, you rarely put what it actually is. With Johanna’s work it’s very important […] that is part of her artworks, because there is a story behind each work, and they need to be told, or at least interpreted from the titles.\(^{140}\)

Indeed, the list of works which accompanied the exhibition did give specific material details, for instance *Autoimmunity*, (Wooden ball made from a park bench, discarded sword tips, 2016); *The Cloud*, 2016, (Rope, steel fence in a mess, 2016); *Win-Win*, (Aluminium casting of tree trunk, undercarriage from discarded seesaw of coloured in green NCS S8010-G10Y, 2015). *Autoimmunity* and *The Cloud* can be seen in Images 11 & 12 on p. 76.

Silfvergrip also reflected on the importance of discussion, remarking that Gustafsson Fürst’s works stimulate much discussion from visitors. Silfvergrip offered her own opinion that in fact, “[Gustafsson Fürst’s works] really are discussions in a physical

\(^{140}\) Interview with Linnea Silfvergrip, (2017-05-24).
form”.

This reflection highlights not only the audience’s responses to the works, but also Gustafsson Fürst’s own working process. Silfvergrip described that Gustafsson Fürst’s process can entail spending a lot of time engaging with the concept, which is later intimated by a didactic title, or else, as Silfvergrip states, needs to be explained through mediation in the exhibition space. I would therefore argue that this highlights the importance of curatorial support and mediation in such a context as a commercial gallery. Indeed, in the clean white space of many commercial galleries, any textual mediation can be thrown into a bright light, and the balance between the artist’s own voice and that of another voice must be carefully struck.

For the exhibition Expand Stretch Distribute, Belenius chose to present a text, printed and placed in the gallery space, written by the art critic Lars-Erik Hjertström Lappalainen. This decision is interesting not only regarding the content of the text, and its placement within the exhibition, but also the choice of a local art critic, rather than the voice of the artist, or one of the team at Belenius. I would argue that this could be interpreted as part of the cycle of validation, legitimation and the production of symbolic value within the art market. Furthermore, when considering that the showing of Gustafsson Fürst’s works – politically charged, and rather less saleable then many works exhibited at Belenius – is a statement by the gallery. This additional layer by Hjertström Lappalainen contributes to the creation or exchange of cultural capital within the art world. Of course, very relevant to this consideration is the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In “The Field of Cultural Production”, where Bourdieu outlines the four kinds of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic, he also argues that symbolic capital is often transformed into economic capital much later, as part of a long-term process of conversion. Bourdieu writes:

Given that works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized, that is, socially instituted as works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such, the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work.142

Hence, Belenius’ reputation and status as an actor within the contemporary art market is buoyed by working with artists whose work invokes a more political conceptual discussion, even if it does not sell during the exhibition run. This of course, is one layer of interpretation. In highlighting this aspect I do not belittle the artist and gallery’s

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141 Ibid.
relationship, nor the mutual interest in each other’s work – but rather I acknowledge the necessary mechanisms of the art market, and highlight that Belenius is in fact a business, and has to make money in order to operate.

In his text, Hjertström Lappalainen mused on the tradition of the museum to function as a cemetery, a resting place – or fatal context – which displays the past, whether this be historical leaders, or, as he postulates here, concepts. He postulates:

What once was living culture became dead art. Nowadays museums no longer appear in this way. They are event sites where contemporary art lives and thrives with the aid of the market.¹⁴³

Hjertström Lappalainen’s text has certain shimmers of poetic insight, but as an introduction, or accompaniment to the exhibition at Belenius, was referentially dense, with awkward phrasing – at least in the English translation. Reflecting curatorially, I found his oblique sweeping statements were in places opaque, even to myself as an initiated art viewer who was familiar with the artistic practice. For example, Hjertström Lappalainen writes:

[F]or the public sphere is no spectacle but a continuous regulation of sensibility. What we need is a monument to our time’s governing and suddenly deceased concepts, to put them lying in state. This is what we see in the exhibition.¹⁴⁴

Hjertström Lappalainen did engage more directly with specific works at certain points within his text, and I would argue it is here where his reflections added another layer to the audience’s possibility for relation to the work and the context, rather than obscuring it.

Every piece in the exhibition demands that the distance of the visual be more or less abolished, so as to affect all the more powerfully the instrument of visualizing technologies. For it is there that the hateful concepts will be made dysfunctional; it is there that they will be embalmed. It is a work of technological precision that requires violent power.¹⁴⁵

Drawing attention to the effect of including such a text within the exhibition space highlights the power of the other elements (besides the artworks) that are operational within the exhibition context, and configure the audiences’ encounter. Though the text functions as an additional layer, and is one individual’s interpretation of the exhibition, I

¹⁴³ Lars-Erik Hjertström Lappalainen. Untitled text accompanying Expand Stretch Distribute. Printed and placed in the exhibition space, and also available online at belenius.com/exhibitions/johanna-gustafson-furst/ (Accessed 2017-08-10).
¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
would argue that it sets up considerable boundaries to the audience’s own encounter with the work, due to the dense and sometimes oblique statements. Whilst I would not necessarily argue for a ‘simpler’ text which would perhaps be more accessible, it is significant to consider that any decision in what to include within the art space has consequential effects on the audience’s engagement and their relation to the individual works, and to the exhibition on the whole. With regards to my proposition of agonistic curating, I advocate an approach which takes into account the accessibility and performativity of each action, balancing these with the presentation of the artworks, the hegemonic structures which bias the context in which the audience meet the artwork, and each other. In the case of *Expand Stretch Distribute*, the installation and presence of the artworks was aesthetically and spatially powerful, and thus was enough to balance with the declarative dense text. In other situations, I would suggest that such a dense and hyperbolic textual accompaniment risks overpowering the artworks themselves, and operate as a barrier to audience’s engagement.

The most intriguing aspect about the two exhibitions at Belenius which I have discussed here is the juxtaposition which occurs between the conceptual core of the artistic practice – invested in issues of public and democratic rights, and interrogating societal relations – and the hypercapitalist context of the commercial, white-cube gallery space. Though I initially interpreted this contrast as a disconnect, a peculiar jarring of interests, through discussion with the curatorial team at Belenius, and with the artist herself, I have reflected and re-evaluated my position. While the presentation and support for Gustafsson Fürst certainly indicates Belenius’ commitment and interest in working with a variety of artistic practices, it arguably constitutes a statement – to show artwork which perhaps is not so saleable.\(^\text{146}\) In fact, I would argue that this contrast sets up a very interesting dynamic, whereby the artworks have a resistance, and a context (both spatially and in terms of the commercial, white cube format) against which to push. This tension between context and practice is supported and nurtured by the team at Belenius through a long-term working relationship, and sensitive mediation and installation in collaboration with the artist.

Thus, the relation between the context and the works is arguably agonistic. In this way, the tension between the artist and the commercial gallery– that of adversary rather than enemy – pushes both the gallery and the artist to explore their boundaries in how to relate to each other, and reframes their own work against the other. This tension offers a resistance which empowers and fortifies both the works and the context. Furthermore,

\(^{146}\) Both the artist and the team at Belenius have openly reflected on this, that against the range of works which Belenius present, Gustafsson Fürst’s large works are not so saleable.
this tension provokes discussion and opens up multiple possibilities for the audience to comment on and reconsider where they stand in this dynamic.

I would therefore argue that a subversion takes place, of the normative relation between the audience and the commercial gallery context. This constitutes a re-articulation, to borrow Mouffe’s terms of articulation theory. In destabilising and re-articulating the relations between audience, context and the work, new dynamics are produced. This is led by the strength of the artistic practice, and specifically by Gustafsson Fürst’s tendency to work not only within the exhibition space, but also to present a work or intervention in public space. By connecting multiple contexts, she opens up the interstices between the multiple surfaces of the public sphere.

Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the differing geographical locations of Belenius’ exhibition spaces as producing a variety of counter-publics. As the team at Belenius have reflected in interviews during my in-situ field observations to the space, their audience comprises a core base of individuals who are already interested in art, and also art buyers. The two locations for the two exhibitions in this case study would have a different audience demographic. The space on Jakobs torg – the setting for Expand Stretch Distribute – was near Kungsträdgården in central Stockholm, where many passersby might see the large windows of the gallery and encounter the exhibition spontaneously, whereas the location of Public Green was the basement space in the residential area of Östermalm. Thus, depending on the location of the exhibition, the gallery at times opens up to new and spontaneous publics, and at other times introduces its audience base of art buyers and those already interested and initiated in the arts scene to artistic works which are less likely to be expected within the commercial gallery setting.

From a curatorial perspective, and indeed within my own practice, it is of particular interest to consider what happens to a work when the context in which is it presented shifts (for example if a work is moved from studio to an exhibition space). When asked about installing a work in a new context, Gustafsson Fürst reflected on the importance of maintaining a connection with the site, and creating new relations between the work and the new setting:

The site is constantly embedded in my process. When the piece is made at one place and moved to another place it interacts with its surroundings in new ways. It is painful to move a thing from for example the studio to the space where it will be shown. It takes a lot of concentration to understand it in the new premises. To a certain extent some of my works carry a space with them but they always have a great deal of plasticity that moulds into the new situation. I
push them to that state that they almost lose their space but then I let them keep a tiny thread that can be disconnected and reconnected at different sites and create new situations.\textsuperscript{147}

I would argue that working with the dynamics of space, site and exhibition context in the way the artist describes above is comparable to the renegotiation of elements in Mouffe’s articulation theory. Furthermore, the understanding that elements of the artworks “carry a space with them” is especially fascinating, and should be considered within the curatorial work of placing and framing artworks in a new context.

In comparing the exhibitions at Belenius – \textit{Public Green} (2013) and \textit{Expand Stretch Distribute} (2016) – Gustafsson Fürst reflected that though the working process with the gallery team was the same, spatially it was very different. Gustafsson Fürst describes the basement gallery space where \textit{Public Green} was installed. She explains:

\begin{quote}
It is unpretentious but still ‘serious’ and I really like my work in that space, I trusted the space. That means that I could install it in an elegant and airy way. The space at Jakobs torg feels like a kind of jewellery or fashion shop, it is elevated slightly from the street level and has large windows, and if I had installed the work in the same way it would have looked spectacular. And I did not want that kind of “spectacular” feeling. So, perhaps at the cost of the possible reading of some of the works as single sculptures, I decided I needed to push a lot of them in and let them take over the space.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

The artist’s consideration of the commercial white cube context against which her works must push, and how they will be perceived and encountered amidst the overall spectacular effect of the exhibition reveals the aesthetic power dynamics at play within a commercial white cube space such as Belenius. The works therefore constitute an occupation of the space, and through the juxtaposition of materiality and conceptual context, the works demand a re-articulation of the commercial context. By emphasising the contrast between setting and artistic practice, the works arguably make visible the disconnections, and the productive tensions within the context.

\textsuperscript{147} Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist. (2016-10-26).
\textsuperscript{148} Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist. (2017-08-08). Originally, Gustafsson Fürst describes the effect as “smashing” – intending to convey a strength of visual effect which overpowers the content, with the result that “the wow is bigger than the what”. Through discussion, we agreed that \textit{smashing} in English does not fully translate the meaning, and so \textit{spectacular} has been used to clarify.
Case Study 2 – Concluding Reflections

Gustafsson Fürst’s practice presents many thought-provoking instances of crossing between contexts, by connecting exhibition spaces with public spaces. A clear example within this case study is the sign/barrier/artwork *Public Green Sign Friendly Slowing Things Down*, placed on the pavement outside Belenius gallery space as part of the exhibition *Public Green*. Though this is an artistic strategy, I would argue strongly that there is scope for rethinking curatorial decisions which straddle contexts in this way, making obvious the threshold between spaces in order to approach the audiences on a variety of levels.

Certainly, it must still be acknowledged that the commercial gallery space has boundaries to many publics, and could perhaps only be considered as a semi-public space. Yet the dynamic set up in this specific relation is one which draws on aspects of conflict and translates this into an unresolved cycle of renegotiation. I would therefore argue that the exhibitions analysed within this case study provide, or demonstrate, the possibility of agonistic spaces, which have multiple levels for access, particularly in the case of *Public Green*, where artwork in public space also confronted passersby. By subverting the usual power relations which are dominant in commercial galleries, Gustafsson Fürst’s works, through these two exhibitions, rupture the ordinary thresholds which might present boundaries to those other than the initiated art audiences. Spatially, visually and physically, Gustafsson Fürst challenges the commercial, white cube context and the boundaries to potential audiences.

Thus, I would argue that Gustafsson Fürst’s exhibitions at Belenius, though different from each other, both operate as counter-hegemonic strategies. The presentation of politically charged works in a hypercapitalist environment – and furthermore work which is not so saleable in comparison to other artists which Belenius represents – sets up an intervention or subversion in the space. The close working relationship between the artist and the supportive curatorial team facilitates a tension which is operative in presenting contrasts, and providing a space in which dissensus and dialogue can occur. Conversely, it could also be argued that the presentation of Gustafsson Fürst’s politically engaged works in a commercial gallery space constitute capitalism’s capacity to absorb critical works within an aestheticised radical statement. This tendency for capitalist forces to fetishize and consume critical art not only contributes to the exchange of cultural and symbolic capital within the art market\(^{149}\), but also emphasises the importance of highlighting these acts, through curatorial work which makes this visible.

\(^{149}\) As previously discussed in terms of Bourdieu’s forms of capital.
Hence, Gustafsson Fürst’s approach within this capitalist context can be read as a clear and convincing example of agonistic strategies; she embraces the tension between context and her own artistic driving forces to produce a dynamic which challenges the works and the audiences. I would therefore argue strongly that this case study shows the potential to transform exhibition situations into critical agonistic platforms. Gustafsson Fürst’s capacity to adapt her strategies to a shift in context also emphasises the possibilities for implementing agonistic artistic-curatorial approaches which acknowledge the fragmented public sphere and work to make visible the dominant structures which condition the spaces within it.
Image 9:

Image 10:
Image 11, 12 & 13:
CASE STUDY THREE

The third case study focuses on the exhibition Control 20, which took place at Laure Genillard, 17 February – 8 April 2017. Laure Genillard describes itself as a “private contemporary art space”, and was founded in 1988. Control 20 was presented in the space on Hanway Place, in Fitzrovia, though Laure Genillard has a history of exhibitions at its two previous locations, Foley Place and Clerkenwell Road.

The exhibition was a group show on the occasion of the launch of Control Magazine Issue 20, a magazine founded by the British conceptual artist Stephen Willats in 1965, which has been edited and self-published by him since that time. The magazine is published irregularly, and the new edition was launched with the opening of this group show in London, which featured works from the artists who contributed to the issue, including Willats, Gustafsson Fürst and five other artists including Merlin Carpenter, Eliana Otta and Gladstone Thompson. The exhibition space is located in a basement, on a back alleyway from the main street, and to enter, one must ring the doorbell (see Image 17 on p. 84). From the street it is not obvious that a gallery is located there. Such a setting already has significant implications as to the number and demographic of visitors that will access this space and encounter the artworks, and how their expectations will already have been shaped by their journey to arrive at that point. For Control 20, Gustafsson Fürst presented three works in the gallery space, and one intervention in the street outside the entrance to the exhibition.

In order to gain a greater insight into Gustafsson Fürst’s perspective on presenting her works within the context of the group exhibition at Laure Genillard, I asked her to compare the experience of working with Control 20 and the exhibitions at Belenius gallery. Gustafsson Fürst explained that the publication created a framework for the exhibition at Laure Genillard which meant “there was a clear context (Control) that made more of a ‘safe’ situation”. She explains:

The exhibition was built physically and contextually so that it was the publication that was expanded in space. The other works that participated supported the reading of my works which made my situation more “free”.

In continuing the comparison, Gustafsson Fürst reflected back on how the context at Laure Genillard differed from that of Belenius for the production of Public Green.

150 As stated on Laure Genillard’s website. Available at lglondon.org (Accessed 2017-08-01).
151 Gustafsson Fürst, Email Interview with the artist, (2017-08-08).
152 Ibid.
Specifically, I was interested in how her strategies varied when presenting works which utilise and feature the green colour, yet showing them in such different settings. The artist said that:

In the case of a solo exhibition in a commercial gallery like Public Green at Belenius, there is not the same clear context in addition to the white-cube which I was not as comfortable with at that time. I think the slightly didactic titles I had on some of the works were a response to it. It was important to create a direction that clearly moved out from the context.\textsuperscript{153}

The framing and mediation of the works in Control 20 was of course shaped by the format of the magazine, to which each artist had contributed. Thus, the communication of the exhibition on the part of Laure Genillard is interesting, as it simultaneously must frame the publication and the exhibition in physical form. Naturally, this communication also frames the audiences’ encounter with the works. Laure Genillard’s press release for the launch of Control Issue 20 draws attention to the persisting aim of Control Magazine to create networks of artists working with questions of community and society in their artistic practices:

Since its first publication in 1965, Control Magazine has operated as a vehicle for initiating networks amongst artists whose focus relies on the polemics and visions of people and their societies. Insinuating a provocation, the magazine’s title calls upon the cybernetic idea that people can take control of their surroundings and thereby deflect the controls of more authoritative systems. Extending this concern, the 20\textsuperscript{th} issue of Control incorporates artists that represent a counter consciousness to the general dominance of object based thinking in contemporary culture.\textsuperscript{154}

Hence, as the group exhibition is a physical manifestation of the magazine issue, Stephen Willats’ editorial aim and voice are arguably evident. Of course, as the editor and driving force behind Control Magazine for over fifty years, this is unsurprising. But it also highlights an important consideration in how Laure Genillard are able to position themselves in relation to this. Thus, the team at Laure Genillard are perhaps facilitators, producers and hosts, as opposed to curators in this situation. This is also connected to Laure Genillard’s description of the exhibition space as a project space – one in which different exhibitions, projects and events can take place, unburdened by any expectation of thematic connection in terms of programming, or overarching curatorial voice or

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Press release from Laure Genillard which accompanied the exhibition.
direction. Nevertheless, this is not a criticism, but more a reflection on the many aspects of the role of producer-facilitator-curator and its interconnection with questions of authorship, and how these dynamics shape the context in which art is presented.

The three works within the exhibition space were *Husby2012* (2012), *You Have to Start to Rethink the Systems* (2015) and *NCS S8010 -G10Y (Colour Sample Swedish Public Green)*, (2017). These works can be seen in the installation photographs included as Image 14 & 15 on p. 83. *Husby2012* comprises a poster showing the original colours of the house façades in Husby – a suburb in Northern Stockholm – made by artist Folke Romell. Romell created a colour scheme for the 101 houses built in the 60s in Husby as part of the Million programme project. These colours were based on 5 basic hues: blue, green, red, terracotta and ochre, with 22 further tones for details of the houses. As the houses in Husby have been privatised and renovated by the Swedish Housing organisation, the original colours have been replaced with whites, beige and less distinctive colours, to create a more uniform appearance. Gustafsson Fürst has worked with residents of the community in Husby for several years, through projects such as *Scene 1* (2011), a stage created for Husby as part of a theatre performance of Antigone across 12 site-specific public and temporary sculptures, in collaboration with a theatre project in the neighbouring area of Kista. Indeed, the artist has become known within Stockholm for her work in Husby, prompting her to occasionally reflect on what it can mean to be an artist who works locally, or to be one who does not work directly in her own neighbourhood.

The poster work was placed close to the entrance to the exhibition space, and so was one of the first works encountered within the group exhibition. The second of Gustafsson Fürst’s works which visitors encounter is *You Have to Start to Rethink the Systems*. The work comprises a video showing filmed documentation of a workshop with school students (as distinct from a video work).

The third work within the exhibition environment was titled *NCS S8010 –G10Y (Colour Sample Swedish Public Green)*, 2017. The work was described in the works list – available to the audience in the exhibition – as “A4 colour sample from NCS Colour”.

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155 Information on the works, provided by Gustafsson Fürst to LG. This unpublished, printed information was provided to me by Lola Bunting, Curatorial Assistant of LG.
156 In her talk at the opening of the group exhibition, Gustafsson Fürst spoke of the “violent waves” of gentrification and ‘renoviction’, a process whereby houses are renovated, the rents raised dramatically which forced occupants to move out, effectively evicting them and pushing those with lower incomes to rent elsewhere. Video footage of the talk on 2017-02-17 provided by Laure Genillard on my visit to the exhibition on 2017-04-07.
NCS being the Natural Colour System, used across the creative fields by designers, artists, etc. The colour sample was framed simply and presented against a white wall, adjacent to other works. Displaying this Swedish public green colour as a sample, disconnected from an object, presents and emphasises the abstract and symbolic aspects of the colour. The gesture is operative on multiple levels. It highlights all that the colour represents in Swedish public space, when used to paint familiar structures such as lampposts, bins etc. Yet the presentation of a simple colour sample also emphasises that the colour has become a signifier, with meaning projected and conveyed both by the city council authorities, and the users of public spaces in Sweden who have become accustomed to the colour and what it represents – perhaps up to the point that it is invisible within the public realm. This double interpretation reveals the complexities of the artist’s fascination with the colour, but also points back to confirm the importance of context, and also highlights how colour, and other visual aspects of the public realm, are simultaneously visible and invisible, laden and empty but for the users’ projections and interpretations.

This work gains an additional layer of interpretation when read in conjunction with the work on the street outside. Titled *NCS S8010–G10Y (Colour Sample Swedish Public Green) II*, 2017, the work comprised of a metal railing on Hanway Place, almost directly outside of the entrance to Laure Genillard’s exhibition space. Image 16 on p. 84 shows the painted railing in situ. The railing is placed along the edge of the pavement, to separate the pedestrians’ walkway from the road. The particular section of railing in question is bent, bearing the marks of a vehicle collision. While the other railings on the street are black – London’s standard black anti-graffiti paint – the bent railing has been painted green. Of the decision to create this work in the public space outside of Laure Genillard, Gustafsson Fürst described the process and the gesture:

> It was exciting and interesting. It was a metal-coloured broken fence that someone had driven into so it had a nice "twisted motion" to it, and it was really trashy. It had a gesture in itself, it was both an object and something that was part of a system at the same time.\(^{158}\)

By placing a sample of the public green colour in the exhibition space as well as on the railing outside, Gustafsson Fürst again connects the two contexts, and in doing so makes evident the structures and authorities which shape, maintain and control different settings within the public sphere. In our interview, I asked the artist about the gesture of connecting the two contexts though the two colour sample works. Gustafsson Fürst stated:

\(^{158}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Email Interview with the artist, (2017-08-08).
I am pleased with the framed NCS colour samples and the painting of the fence outside, which worked as abstract in situ-in time embodiments of gestures that arise when politics meet bodies in social contexts that I strive for.\textsuperscript{159}

The audience’s interpretations may be shaped by whether they first encounter – and recognise – the work in the street outside as a work, and carry this impression with them into the exhibition space, or whether they first see the colour sample within the exhibition and then recognise the work outside on leaving the exhibition. It is of course also entirely possible that many visitors would not see the work outside, or would not interpret it as an artwork.

The work also provokes the question of what it might mean to paint a railing in London with the Swedish public green. As this green does not have the same symbolic significance in London as it does in Sweden, does it have an opposite effect? Making the public structure more obvious, rather than uniform and invisible? Indeed, the titles of the two works (the colour sample inside and the railing outside), name it “Swedish Public Green”. Though of course this is true, it has only become Swedish by taking it outside of Sweden, where it can safely be called Public Green. This is a minor reflection which points at the layers of emphasis and connection – and disconnection – in presenting a work which has such clear references to the public space of one context, within another setting, in another country. It is however, very relevant in the consideration of the necessary mediation and communication choices made by artist and curatorial team, both in contextualising the work, and in how much to convey to a potential audience.

Gustafsson Fürst’s process of working in situ, in painting the railing on the street, is also an interesting consideration and worthy of further analysis. As discussed earlier with regards \textit{White Pillars}, the duration of the installation, or making of the work, is an opportunity for the artist and passersby to have a dialogue around the work. Gustafsson Fürst describes the process of painting the railing on Hanway Place in London, and the interactions with passersby:

\begin{quote}

The fence was in a dirty back street with a lot of rubbish so we were convinced that nobody would care about what I was doing and it would hardly be noticeable. In the area where Laure Genillard is situated, it is decided that all public infrastructure should be painted in black and after 20 minutes of painting, the first comment came from a passer by on the fact that the colour was wrong.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
One man was more upset and talked at length about the importance of aesthetic uniformity. I do not know if Laure Genillard have repainted it black now, because I told the angry man we will do it later .... No one said anything about the piles of garbage they had beside them when they fought about the colour of the fence. I appreciate people who take the time and engage with the physical infrastructures in public space. We have a common interest, so I do not want to mock. However, the choice of object for the complaint for this situation was an interesting reaction.160

By transforming an element of infrastructure in public space, and therefore staging an intervention, rather than installing a new work, Gustafsson Fürst provides an opportunity for discussion and exchange with other individuals in society. Furthermore, I would argue that this direct communication with passersby during the installation process subverts the usual relations in the encounter between viewer and artwork, which is something I find very interesting from a societal point of view as well as a curatorial/artistic perspective.

Case Study 3 – Concluding Reflections

The key insights which can be drawn from this case study centre around Gustafsson Fürst’s strategy to once again connect different contexts through placing works not only within exhibition settings, but also in the public space, where passersby may encounter them directly, without mediation. In addition to the encounter that audiences can have with her works in the gallery space, Gustafsson Fürst’s practice becomes accessible on multiple levels. Significantly, the artist demonstrates a willingness to interact directly with her audience, and vitally, respects and trusts the viewers’ opinions as equally valid. This is perhaps the clearest parallel yet within her practice which supports an agonistic approach. Differing, and at times even opposing, perspectives are considered with respect and mutual interest – constructing a platform for discussion which does not aim at consensus, but rather embraces disagreement as productive.

Throughout her practice, Gustafsson Fürst’s projects reveal strategies which acknowledge and conceive of her audiences as plural, and understand the intersecting codes of public, private and shared spaces which condition and structure the contexts in which her artworks are presented. In the following and final section, I will now draw together my insights from this analysis of artistic practice, relating these to my research questions before reflecting on the future potential for advocating an agonistic curatorial approach.

160 Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist (2017-08-08).
Image 14:

Image 15:
Image 16:

Image 17:
CONCLUSION

In this section, I will now turn to consider the conclusions which can be drawn from the theoretical investigation and analysis of practice undertaken in this thesis. In doing so, I will relate these conclusions and reflections back to the aims and research questions stated at the outset of this thesis. I will first explicitly address my research questions, before connecting the insights drawn from this research to reflections on the broader potentialities for future application.

How has the shift in understanding in the discourse of the public sphere affected curatorial strategies?
Throughout “Part 1” of this thesis, I have argued that the shift in the discourse surrounding the public sphere has certainly had bearing on curatorial strategies – as discussed in the works of Rosalyn Deutsche, Simon Sheikh, Lynn Wray and Anna Lundström. The theoretical discourse within the field of possible intersections between Mouffe’s theories of agonistic space; counter-hegemonic strategies and curating has been traced in this thesis in the examples of symposia and research projects. Thus, there has been a clear impact of the shift in how public sphere is conceived, on curatorial discourse. Despite this, and though there clearly have been efforts to combine agonistic approaches Mouffe’s perspective with curatorial strategies, and indeed by adopting Sheikh’s argument on the post-public state of the public sphere, none has been coherently and comprehensively combined with the aim of producing new agonistic curatorial approaches which take account of working between different contexts. Such approaches could readily learn from artistic strategies, combining the approach necessary for placing site-specific works in the public realm, and applying these to the exhibition space.

How can Chantal Mouffe’s notion of agonistic space be applied within the field of curatorial work?
Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted particular strategies within the practice of Gustafsson Fürst, arguing that they, on the one hand, could be considered artistic-curatorial strategies, and on the other hand, are examples of agonistic approaches to presenting art in the public sphere. Though certain strategies from the curatorial teams involved in the exhibitions discussed show clear examples of supportive curatorial collaboration, I still argue firmly that it is Gustafsson Fürst’s own artistic agency and her strong voice that pushes the situations in which her artwork is encountered, to expose the potential to subvert the dominant relations.
How might one implement curatorial strategies which recognise publics as fragmented and plural?

As has been discussed through each case study, the exhibitions analysed within the practice of Gustafsson Fürst highlight the potential for adaptive strategies to placing artwork within different contexts of the public sphere. The artistic practice in question is pioneering and unique, and highlights the possibilities for connecting contexts and addressing publics as multiple and conflicting. As such, I would argue that the exhibitions discussed in this research make clear the potential for – and also the current lack of – curatorial strategies which can address their publics more directly, working to connect contexts and make visible the dominant structures which condition not only art spaces, but all spaces within the public sphere.

How can curatorial strategies be adapted when the context shifts between public and private spaces?

Through my concluding analysis of each case study, I have argued that new curatorial strategies are possible by adopting an approach which takes account of the shifts in discourse surrounding the public sphere. Furthermore, I insist that Gustafsson Fürst’s practice makes evident the ways in which artistic-curatorial strategies can be adapted when the context shifts, to take into account the overlapping categories of public and privates spaces. Thus, I have also addressed the research questions of how curatorial work can address publics as fragmented and plural.

In setting forth my aims and line of enquiry, I also posed a more open-ended research question: that of the possibility of developing a strategy of ‘cross-curating’, which might attempt to draw an audience across thresholds between contexts. I would certainly argue that Gustafsson Fürst’s practice highlights multiple effective strategies which encourage or challenge audiences’ behaviour, steering them spatially or else making obvious the separation between contexts. Her practice is unusual and pioneering; her are works simultaneously direct and hard to grasp, her strategies transparent and oblique, both artistic and, I would argue, curatorial. By connecting the exhibition space with public space, and through her engagement with passersby, Gustafsson Fürst’s works create opportunities for people to ask questions. Her approach to audience and to context highlights the lack within curatorial practice to straddle contexts and encourages audiences gently from one to another, simultaneously pushing the viewers, sometimes towards discomfort, whilst displaying an absolute trust in the audience.

Thus, I would argue there is potential for developing curatorial strategies which also attempt to address the boundaries between contexts, not by mirroring artistic processes,
but by also aiming to make visible the thresholds and dominant structures which condition contexts in which art is presented and encountered.

I have therefore addressed my research aims and questions, considering how the shift in public sphere discourse has affected curatorial strategies, and also taking into account other practitioners who do adopt a pluralistic understanding of publics.

DISCUSSION
ON ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND CURATORIAL PRAXIS

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for the necessity of curatorial approaches which take account of the shift in public theory discourse. I have advocated an approach which draws on Mouffe’s model of agonistic space, and with an awareness of Mouffe and Laclau’s work on counter-hegemonic strategies as operating from within, to work flexibly and in support of the artist in shaping contexts for society to encounter the artwork. In doing so, I aimed to point towards new methods which are relevant not only for working in public space, but which might also radically change the curatorial approach within institutions, to create adaptive and flexible perspectives on presenting contemporary art to publics which are fragmented and plural.

Though the agonistic curatorial position I advocate is in part a conceptual approach, there are certain strategies which can be applied through practice. These are largely related to visibility, and specifically making visible the structures which are operative – revealing the “strings” behind the institution, organisation or relations conditioning the context. Practical agonistic approaches can also entail the mediation of the works – the choices made in the information in titles, and balancing the introductory text with the other elements in the exhibition space – or indeed choosing not to signify the artwork as such through title labels, as Gustafsson Fürst did for White Pillars. These questions relating to communication connect directly to how the audience is addressed, and condition the dynamic that is set up between the viewer, context and work. As Gustafsson Fürst has mentioned, this amounts to trusting the audience, judging what is the right level of information to provide, and providing a context in which the audience is has reassurance that their interpretations are also valid.

Other practical approaches for highlighting the tensions between different contexts and the hegemonic powers operative within them is to consider ‘cross-curating’ a term I use
to highlight the potential of curatorial and artistic strategies which draw potential audiences across thresholds which may otherwise present barriers to them.\footnote{161}

**REFLECTIONS / FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

Self-reflexivity in curatorial work demands that strategies of presenting artwork are necessarily called into question on an ongoing basis. Simon Sheikh maintains that “[i]n order to alter the script of the existing formats, we need more rather than less reflection on the conception of publics, and the contingencies and histories of various modes of address.”\footnote{162} Key considerations which can be taken forward into the development of future curatorial approaches include a sensitivity to the porosity and interrelation between contexts within the public sphere, and an awareness that these are conditioned by unfixed and shifting structures.

The concluding reflections of this research project are related directly to the future of my own practice, and also point towards potential new curatorial strategies. I advocate a pluralistic understanding of audience, and a movement away from a goal of communication which aims for deliberative consensus. Exhibition and curatorial strategies must approach artistic projects on a case-by-case basis, developing contexts which support the artwork and artist, but also provide multiple levels of access and engagement for different audiences. This research has highlighted within my own practice an interest in strategies which expose and point to the hierarchies which exist within the very contexts in which artwork is presented. By emphasising and addressing the hegemonic structures that condition the spaces in which we find ourselves, productive exchanges of ideas can occur.

Vital to my own curatorial practice is the understanding of the constant remaking of relations, and the re-negotiation between elements – audience, artwork and context – which constitute the praxis of curating and curatorial work. Furthermore, this research has prompted a reflection on the terms of public and publicness. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to avoid binaries between public and private, recognising instead that all contexts have overlapping traits, governed by the dominant structures which condition every place and space. Therefore, it is perhaps more productive to consider relations and structures in terms of visibility and invisibility.

\footnote{161 Though these strategies can be artistic, I have used the term cross-curating tentatively, as I would argue that the placement and relation between works, space, audience can be considered as part of the curatorial work around an artistic practice, irrespective of whether it is undertaken by an artist or a curator.}

I would like to conclude with a reflection from the artist on our own collaborative endeavour, the project *Codified Environments: Renderings of Public Space* (2016). When I asked Gustafsson Fürst to compare the approaching process to this project with those for other projects and exhibitions, she responded:

Since I felt from the beginning that you were searching for something, asking a question you did not know the answer to and started the process from there, the project was more as part of a joint process than an exhibition. Of course the “end product” was an exhibition but the process was organic and developing over time. […] This means this project is more something that I remember as a joint process. In a way I try to make exhibitions as something that works like that always but sometimes the “machine” is stronger than the question so it’s a greater effort to keep that.\(^{163}\)

In closing, this reflection also leads me to question whether agonism should also be more actively embraced as part of the process, rather than only as an exhibition or curatorial strategy? The process of collaboration, discussion, disagreement and the presentation not of a finished and resolved ‘answer’ to a question, but rather a snapshot of the present moment, the present relations as they are currently articulated, in time, space and place.

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\(^{163}\) Gustafsson Fürst. Email interview with the artist (2017-08-08).
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LIST OF IMAGES


All images were collated through contact with the photographer, gallery or the artist, and have been approved for use in this academic thesis.