The Curatorial (and Curating) as Radical Democracy

A Single-Case Study of Kuratorisk Aktion as a Counter-Hegemonic Intervention

Iliane Kiefer

Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University
Curating Art. International Master’s Program in Curating Art, including Management and Law
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the counter-hegemonic formation of Danish-based transnational feminist curatorial collective Kuratorisk Aktion in a single-case study. It serves as a unique example, presenting how the collective engages to overcome the existing gap between curatorial aims and the implementation through curating. Their work and approach is shaped highly by their political mindset, aiming to resist tendencies of depoliticisation, right-wing populism or neoliberalism with the means of curating. Chantal Mouffe’s theory of radical democracy and her deliberations and notions concerning agonisms, citizenship, feminism, counter-hegemonic interventions and activism through art are used in order to contextualise and discuss the possibilities and limitations of the political work by Kuratorisk Aktion. An interview with the collective conducted by scholar Angela Dimitrakaki in 2010 as well as their realised curatorial projects enhanced the argumentation. The analysis exemplified, that over the years Kuratorisk Aktion has developed their personal and exceptional curatorial paradigm, which is able to counteract hegemonic structures. This reveals their radical democratic potential and aspiration through curating and the curatorial.

Keywords

Activism, Agonism, Chantal Mouffe, Collectives, Critical Theory, Curating, Curatorial, Ernesto Laclau, Exhibition, Feminisms, Feminist Curating, Kuratorisk Aktion, Postcolonial Theory, Radical Democracy
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INTRODUCTION

Isn’t feminism more a matter of intervention [...]?
Griselda Pollock

There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art.
Chantal Mouffe

The idea of radical democracy, described by Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe (b. 1943), partly established in collaboration with her husband Ernesto Laclau (1953-2014), encourages a left-wing project in order to provoke social change. As promising as such a theory sounds first and foremost, it becomes more difficult to understand how those deliberations are implemented in practice when taking a deeper look. A similar trouble is detected by scholar Irit Rogoff between curators’ or exhibitions’ initial aims and the actual implementation and impact of them through curating. Curatorial approaches often hope for an active and insightful audience, which resolves this issues with their own associations. Kuratorisk Aktion⁴, a Danish-based transnational feminist curatorial collective, tries to overcome this gap between preset aims and curatorial outcomes by refusing to compromise their high and own set standards, without relying on a sympathetic public. Their curatorial paradigm is inseparably linked to questions of ‘politics’ and ‘the political’, the latter describes antagonisms which are part of all human relations, while politics are a reaction to these frictions and take shape in regulative structures.⁵ KA seeks likewise the theory of radical democracy for social change and a more just world order.

Such an ambition is urgently needed, as right-wing populism, neoliberalism, globalisation and capitalism are putting currently democracy in danger, affecting marginalised groups the hardest. As their effects are bleeding into every part of economy, politics or the social and cultural life, their significance is no less noticeable in the art world. Nevertheless, the art field has often been entrusted to be a location of

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⁴ In the following I will use KA as an abbreviation for Kuratorisk Aktion.
hope, of friction, of subversion and criticism. The big and pressing question is only how such a position is possible, without being absorbed by or neutralised by current tendencies. The editorial of the *e-flux Journal* from June 2013 analyses:

> Where did the critical tradition of art go? Maybe that’s the wrong question. Because we know the answer. It went into spectacle. It went into finance. It got privatized, democratized, scrutinized, defunded, bureaucratized, then professionalized.6

That means for example, that blockbuster exhibitions gained popularity, sales of artworks in auctions have reached incredibly high prices, private museums are growing while critical institutions are not surviving.7

As art and artistic practices seem to be in trouble, there has been a shift in the 2000s from exhibitions dealing with the topic of politics towards politicised curators, “practicing politics through the curatorial, as an act of caring as well as punishing what is governing.”8 This shift has been influenced by a variety of developments in the curatorial field, whereby the ‘feminist turn’ and the ‘collective turn’ are playing a critical role. Working collectively or with a feminist mindset equips curators with new politicised strategies and viewpoints, in order to react against forms of hegemonic oppression, for example by uniting forces or by being part of a politic-academical movement. Even if these ‘turns’ have been labeled in the last 20 years, theorist and curator Elke Krasny highlights that the women’s movement in the 1970s has had a great impact on feminist art and exhibition making, while it was at the same time characterised by “collective curatorial energy and endeavour.”9 These shifts do not necessarily need to be looked at separately, as they can benefit each other. Collectivity and the idea of collaboration can be described as an important structure and component to accommodate and perform feminisms. This is particularly interesting for the idea of curating, as it opposes the hegemonic histories, dominated by subject positions of the individualistic, white, male curator.10

Since the 21st century feminisms got another uplift in the strategies and policies of the practice of curating. A great number of symposiums, discussion rounds, publications

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and talks address topics of feministic curating and self organisation. Back in the 1960s, the research about feminist or collaborative forms of working in the field of art and exhibition making has mostly been received in Europe and north-America. Lately it got anew recognition in relation to latter notions of curatorial work, also pushing the research focus and voices further to ‘east’ and ‘south’. The research in the field of feminist and collective curating is rapidly growing, nevertheless it is still young, eclectic and fragmentary. KA takes a very distinct and inspiring position within this field, even besides the former described hegemonic position of the ‘father-king-curatur.’ Formed in 2005, by Danish independent curators Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen and supported since 2009 by Faroese art historian and researcher Mirjam Joensen, the feminist and all-female curatorial collective KA has combined the objectives of collaborative feminist practices of curating with a postcolonial perspective. As highly politicised curators, they do not want to leave the possibility of social change with the support of critical art to chance:

[…] in our opinion transnational and cross-disciplinary curating and art making cannot replace politics, but both are able to facilitate new kinds of queries and unlearnings, to offer much-needed sites for remembering and healing, and to provide alternative models for linking us up as singularities in the common. Some of these sites and models could potentially help pave the way for just, sustainable change that will transform women’s lives as well.

This locates their work not only in the territory of the political or politics, but also in a field of power relations and hegemonies, which is facing different struggles in realising a counter-hegemonic project.

As the two introducing quotes by art historian and feminist Griselda Pollock and Chantal Mouffe already indicate, if art and feminisms are combined, it opens the search for ways on how to enable (a) political intervention(s). In the case of KA in relation to Mouffe’s theory of radical democracy, I am interested in how successful KA is in overcoming the gaps which exists between curatorial aims as well as the related theoretical paradigms and the implementation of such deliberations. Especially while bearing in mind the existing influences of global capitalism or racism. KA is highly influenced by theoretical thoughts and ideas which are often in line with radical democracy, without getting paralysed by theory, but rather enabled, as their name already indicates, to take ‘curatorial action’ - or even radical democratic curatorial


12 The notions of ‘east’ and ‘south’ are determined by a Eurocentric perspective, which should be troubled as it tends to interpret the world from a dominant position, related to European or Anglo-american values and orders.
action. In order to frame my approach to a topic of such great interest, I have formulated four research questions, which enable me to investigate KA in a single-case study.

Aim and Research Question

In this thesis I aim to investigate the spheres of how the idea of radical democracy becomes relevant primarily for the curatorial, but also for curating, when relating it to the work of KA. More profoundly I am interested in the possibilities and limitations of these conceptual viewpoints regarding feminist and collective curation.

My personal interest in feminisms, political theory and strategies of social change have led me to investigate these topics within my professional education in becoming a curator as well as working within the art field. This combination of my interests and my profession is also informed by a presumably infinite search for or ever-changing designation of a personal curatorial standpoint. Identifying as a female curator with a transnational working-class background, my ambition also relates to the concern of “becoming-women-curator” in my future field of practice, which is described by Suzana Milevska as follows:

[S]ticking with Deleuze’s concept of ‘becoming woman’, I want to stress that two movements are necessary for ‘becoming-woman-curator’: first, there must be an isolation from the majority, as a female curator, and then there must be an isolation from the minority, as a feminist curator.13

This realisation consequently demands feminist strategies, methodologies and interventions. My initial interest was therefore guided by a search for feminist curatorial articulations in curating and the curatorial.

The aim for this thesis has also been shaped by the personal experience of working and curating collaboratively for my master’s final exhibition show ‘Rethinking Flânerie’ together with Elena Jarl in 2016. Maria Lind rephrases the idea of the curatorial collective WHW and states: “the motivation to collaborate is that it has to result in something that would otherwise not take place; it simply has to make possible that which is otherwise impossible.”14 Exactly this moment of being able to extend and challenge my own expectations and preconceptions by working collaboratively, inspired


me to exceed this personal experience into a research-oriented investigation. It added to my opening question the dimension of collectivity within feminist curating.

An awareness of ‘being-women-curator’ seems to be already incorporated, practiced and extended with a post-colonial and queer perspective by the all-female independent curatorial collective KA, which describes their work as “an attempt to translate a transnational feminist project of decolonisation into a curatorial ethos.” By placing their work boldly within the field of the political, KA aims for social change, while opposing capitalism and working as a collective. As a curatorial transnational feminist collective, KA proved not only to be a very exciting case to examine, but furthermore a very relevant one, considering my interest and interrogations presented so far. It required to specify on how to investigate KA and what perspective might be appropriate and supportive in solidifying and navigating a prolific discussion.

The theoretical deliberations by Mouffe and Laclau in respect of their articulation of radical democracy manifest valuable and interesting considerations regarding an analysis of collective structures and left politics. Their theory of radical democracy became a milestone for rethinking marxism by formulating an idea, which simply put, aimed to make democracy more democratic. Mouffe further developed their idea of a radical democracy in her works, contending that democracy has been threatened and weakened by tendencies of right-wing populism, neo-liberalism, tendencies of post-democracy and even by actual practices of democracy itself. She advocates a position of agonistic pluralism, a type of conflict which is able to account for pluralistic orders, without dissolving them in consensus. Her writings are embedded in a great theoretical framework, reflecting on notions of hegemonies, institutions, citizenship, feminisms, the power of passion, social identity, domination, essentialism, etc. All of them can be associated and scrutinised in relation to radical democracy’s ambition to create social changes.

Mouffe’s intentions and propositions resonate with KA’s curatorial ethos and positions it within a larger theoretic-political framework, which enables an analysis not only on the micro level, but also on the macro level. Means, to render a viewpoint which positions their work and agency in a larger project of left politics.

My curiosity and my above stated aim can hence be developed to a more specific one, which attempts to analyse KA’s work and projects for agonistic pluralism and radical democracy as defined by Mouffe. Simultaneously I would like to focus on the specifics

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of feminist and collaborative curatorial work of KA as an independent curatorial collective.

This proposition is related to a positioning of curatorial work in the spheres of politics, hegemonies and power relations. I am relating it to the initial quote by Mouffe, presented in the introduction, while also expanding the notion of art to the intersecting notions of ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’. ‘Curating’ can be summarised as a process of exhibition-making, while ‘the curatorial’ can be elusively described as critical/methodological approaches, which go beyond mere curating and act in an expanded curatorial and cultural field.\(^\text{17}\) Maria Lind even compares the relational characteristics of ‘curating’ / ‘the curatorial’ to Mouffe’s description of ‘politics’ / ‘the political’ as follows:

\[\ldots\] the curatorial operates in parallel with political philosopher Chantal Mouffe’s notion of the ‘political.’ Mouffe famously challenges representative democracy’s tendency to consensualize and foreclose, proposing outspoken opposition and agonism as alternatives. Referring to political theorist Carl Schmitt, she argues for the political as an ever-present potential that cannot be precisely located. At the same time, it develops out of the antagonistic bond between friend and enemy. Thus the political sits in the middle of life and is complicit with divergence and dissent - in other words, it is the antithesis of consensus. In this scenario, ‘politics’ is the formal side of practices that reproduce certain order, which is what politicians and apparatuses are busy with on a day-to-day basis. Seen this way, ‘curating’ would be the technical modality - which we know from art institutions and independent projects alike - and ‘the curatorial’ a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, that strives to create friction and push new ideas - to do something other than ‘business as usual’ within and beyond contemporary art.

Similarly to Lind, Beatrice von Bismarck highlights the importance of tensions and discussions within the curatorial, which will be analysed in the work of KA in the main part of this thesis.\(^\text{18}\) As curators often depart from theoretical conceptions, which are then influencing and translated into materialised form of e.g. exhibitions, talks, screenings, I am consciously positioning my interest at a very early stage of the curatorial work, in order to understand how feminist and collaborative theoretical preconditions are shaping and intervening in the processes of curating. This shifts the focus of my thesis in the first place on the multilayered functions of ‘the curatorial’, which of course also effects the more formal modalities of ‘curating’.\(^\text{19}\)


With the following research questions, I am aiming to investigate the feminist curatorial collective *KA*, while relating it to Mouffe’s theoretical deliberations. By using the methodology of a single-case study I propose that these questions will be elaborated in a targeted discussion and a qualitative in-depth analysis:

1. How can *KA’s* curatorial work and their paradigm be contextualised when relating it to radical democracy presented by Mouffe? What does it reveal?
2. How does *KA’s* formation as ‘feminist’ and ‘collective’ affect their paradigm and work? How does it enable or threaten radical democracy?
3. How can questions of activism and influence of *KA’s* work be approached, when taking radical democracy into account?
4. What about art? Where does it remain and how does it matter for *KA’s* curatorial paradigm and their practice?

It is important for me to highlight, that my ambition to research the connections between radical democracy and a feminist curatorial collective does not intend to prove a ‘right’ way of the role of the curator, but rather to contribute to the emerging field of (feminist) curatorial research, while articulating a critical standpoint, especially in the light of ‘becoming-woman-curato.’

Lastly I would like to take up an issue, posed by Maura Reilly. She asks, when remarking the too little interest in problems of racism and sexism within the art world: “Are they [the mainstream curators] studying in curatorial programs that don’t offer up a more inclusive curriculum (e.g. courses in feminist art; post-colonial studies; critical race theory)?” Curatorial programs have to a certain degree the opportunity as well as the responsibility to counteract this kind of ‘mainstream curator’ and encourage more progressive positions. My research aim as well as this thesis, can therefore be translated into a critical response, an encouraging demand or as a vital need towards the current curriculum of the program in Curating Art at Stockholm University to expand the program with main courses and an academic framework to discuss e.g. queer, (post-)colonial and feminist issues related to curating. As a matter of urgency it would contribute to formulate a sharp, relevant and critical standpoint among other curatorial programs.

Material

The main body of investigation is constituted in this thesis by an online interview from 2010 between the interviewee Angela Dimitrakaki and the two founders of *KA* Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen. The approximately 9000 words long text is

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one of the few available materials, in which KA is talking in-depth about their formation and work as a feminist curatorial collective. The interview is of course shaped by the questions asked by Dimitrakaki, which therefore reflects her interest in curatorial collectives, politics and activism. Nevertheless, it gives an informative insight in their curatorial deliberations, greatly affected by postcolonial and transnational feminist thinkers and writers as well as reflections on their own projects executed until 2010.

As their website remains under construction since 2010, I tried to contact KA via e-mail to ask for further material, e.g. unpublished readings, which I would not be able to encounter otherwise. Hansen replied and directed me to their website of their latest project CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics from 2015 as well as their websites on their project of “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism” from 2006 and their project “Troubling Ireland” from 2010/2011. These websites as well as their Facebook page give brief overviews plus documentation materials about the different projects. In addition to the interview, these materials and sources will be used in the case study.

Furthermore, they drew my attention to their engagement as guest editors and authors of the text ‘Metropolitan Repressions: A Curatorial Collective Crosses Its Tracks’ in the Danish magazine SUM: Magazine for Contemporary Art in 2009, focussing on the so called ‘Greenland question’. This text will also serve as a complementary source for the investigation.

Finally, their comprehensive catalogue TUPILAKOSAURUS: An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke’s Artistic Work and Research (2012) will provide insight into another project and will be used for the final example in this case study.

Method and Research Design

Curating as part of an academic education intersects with a variety of fields, from sociology to art history, philosophy, museology, political or cultural studies and other related subjects. As there are no common methods to investigate curatorial matters and topics, interdisciplinary approaches are most suitable to accommodate the various demands. Therefore, the methodology of a single-case study will serve to discuss the above stated research questions and to adjust the method to the specificity of the thesis.

A case study is a “comprehensive research strategy” which “cover[s] the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis.”21 A single-case study gives, in addition to that, the opportunity to analyse a phenomenon, institution,

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Robert K. Yin proposes the following constituent parts, in order to create a suitable research design:

1. a study’s questions
2. its propositions, if any
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings.

In the following I will outline briefly these different enumerations, in order to exemplify the applied method and research design. The presented listing does not reflect a chronological order in how the research design emerged, especially as the process is determined by a reciprocal exchange of each of the points. Nevertheless, it aims to demonstrate a coherent reasoning of the choices made.

The thesis' single-case study questions have already been presented in the chapter *Aim and Research Question*. These questions anticipate the proposition, that Mouffe’s concept of radical democracy is relevant as well as existent in the scope of feminist and collective curation as stated already in the introduction. As the questions mainly raise the issue of ‘how’ these ideas are expressed in its certain specificity, a qualitative analysis will serve to scrutinise the chosen material. Like in the case of *KA*, qualitative research is particularly suitable when “focusing on organizational processes, outcomes, and [when] trying to understand both individual and group experiences of work.”

Especially as *KA* still operates as an active organisation and affects certain contexts, there is no precise delimitation of the case’s start and/or end. Hence, the used “unit(s) of analysis,” offer a snapshot in time and locus, rather than an all-encompassing and closed overview of the case. This is also shaped by the choice of material. In the chapter *Delimitations, Limitations and Possibilities*, I will give space to discuss how the choice of material has structured the thesis and vice versa.

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25 Yin, p. 9.


27 Kohlbacher, p. 23.
Furthermore, the choice of scrutinising KA as a single- and not multiple-case study, is led by the criteria of using KA as a “critical” as well as “unusual” [highlights by Yin] case.28 This means, that KA can be defined as a unique case, whose singularity will be analysed in a critical and not a comparative manner. This choice gives the opportunity to provide an in-depth analysis, closely applied to the theory of Mouffe.29

In the case study, the material will be analysed and discussed in relation to the propositions by Mouffe as well as in combination with further theories and writings from the field of research. As Yin highlights, “the case study researcher must preserve a chain of evidence [highlights by Yin] as each analytic step is conducted.”30 This will be done through a theory-guided text analysis, scrutinising the data in consideration of the research questions and Mouffe’s theoretical arguments.31 As KA’s theoretical deliberations are shaped among others by transnational feminism and postcolonial theory, the philosophical political theory by Mouffe will intersect and be discussed with a variety of fields ranging from sociology, psychoanalysis, postcolonial and gender studies to philosophy and theories on capitalism or globalisation. The analysis and interpretation of the material and theory will endorse Robert E. Stake’s proposition, that “[t]he more qualitative approach usually means finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case.”32

The understanding of generalisability through case studies is widely discussed and controversial.33 Taking Yin’s last component, concerning the interpretation of the case’s results into account, the thesis will follow Stake’s proposition, arguing that:

Themes and hypotheses may be important, but they remain subordinate to the understanding of the case. […] The case study, however, proliferates rather than narrows. One is left with more to pay attention to rather than less. The case study attends to the idiosyncratic more than to the pervasive. […] Its best use appears to me to be for adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding.34

This is especially relevant for this single-case study, as the thesis does not aim for generalisation throughout space and time, but rather for “generalization within the case(s) investigated.”35 Furthermore, Stake underlines, that the researcher’s subjective

29 Yin, pp. 51-52.
31 Yin, Case study research: design and methods, 2014, p. 136.
33 See here e.g. Hammersley and Gomm’s introduction of Case study method: key issues, key texts, which introduces a variety of viewpoints and approaches regarding that topic.
narration can be seen as a vehicle, that mediates and stimulates reflective learning processes to the reader. Therefore, the interpretation and the conclusion of the case study will be shaped by the understanding that it is more valuable to generate hypotheses, rather then test them. The uniqueness of the case will hopefully generate new relations as well as questions of this specific investigation.

Theory

The thesis’ theoretical grounding is mainly informed by the writings of Chantal Mouffe, political theorist and Professor at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster in London. In 1985 Mouffe and Laclau published their influential political theoretic work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. By developing Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony theory further, their anti-essentialist and post-marxist project of a “radical democratic pluralist theory” aimed for social changes while facilitating differences. Mouffe and Laclau highlight in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, that antagonism, as well as hegemony, are part of the nature of the political. Antagonisms and hegemonies are not only describing these dissents and conflicts, which are unavoidable, they also temporarily fix certain orders, due to different power relations. Politics describes the attempt to organise these disputes, which are of course affected by the ruling hegemony. Politics expresses therefore in “practices, discourses and institutions” which try to regulate the political. Mouffe underlines that these political problems, especially in their pluralistic dimension, can not be simply solved with a “rationalist and individualist approach” which liberalism represents. In their preface to the second edition of this publication, written in 2000, they highlight, that the discussed topics of right-wing populism, pluralism or e.g agonism have actually become more pressing in the last few years and affirmed their articulated deliberations back then. Since then, Mouffe has constantly extended and discussed their ideas of a radical and pluralistic democracy in her following writings.

Next to the game-changing work of Mouffe and Laclau, she published the book *The Return of the Political* (1993), a collection of nine articles, some of which had already been published previously. From an anti-essentialist, she redevelops a left interpretation

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42 Mouffe, *Agonistics: thinking the world politically*, 2013, p. 3.
of “radical and plural democracy,” while criticising liberal democracy, reflecting on themes like citizenship, pluralism, consensus and feminism.\textsuperscript{44}

One of Mouffe’s important arguments in favour of ‘adversaries’ has been used since the 1990s. It is informed by ideas from German political philosopher Carl Schmitt. Schmitt obtains a controversial perception as an intellectual, due to his relation to the NS-Regime from the 1930s on. Mouffe is aware that considering his background, while discussing his writings might have a “chilling effect.”\textsuperscript{45} Nevertheless, Mouffe tries to “think with Schmitt against Schmitt, and to use his insights in order to strengthen liberal democracy against his critique.”\textsuperscript{46} This concludes with her support of a friend/adversary relation between political opponents, instead of one defined by a friend/enemy encounter. This thought is essential for her idea of agonism.

In 2000 she published the book \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, which draws a critique on the Western ideal of democracy and its dichotomy of liberal and democratic tradition, taking theorists such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas into account. She argues that the liberal democratic tradition is unable to unite the ideas of liberty and equality, which exist in permanent tension, alternating between one or the other.\textsuperscript{47} She proposes her agonistic model, which is able to take the conflicts and the impossibility of a unity into account, while trying to provide space for acknowledging differences without hostility or antagonism.\textsuperscript{48}

In her publication \textit{On the Political} (2005) Mouffe continues her redevelopment on left politics, highlighting that the left is missing serious self-criticism. Again advocating the importance of agonism within politics, she rejects tendencies of cosmopolitan democracy, Third Way politics and other notions of ‘optimistic’ political theories, which ignore the antagonistic character of politics.\textsuperscript{49} She argues, that they support post-political tendencies, which become blind to antagonism due to their belief in consensus, a troubling and dangerous concept according to Mouffe.\textsuperscript{50} By drawing lines to the rise of right-wing populism, nationalism and terrorism, she tries to elaborate her perspective

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\textsuperscript{46} Mouffe, \textit{The Return of the Political}, 1993, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{50} Mouffe, pp. 1-3.
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supporting agonistic positions, while discussing the power of passions and collective identifications.51

Likewise, in her latest publication Agonistics: thinking the world politically (2013), Mouffe discusses the importance and difficulties of an agonism, which supports the political theory of radical and pluralist democracy. Mouffe’s analysis and placement of agonism and agonistic pluralism are intertwined in discussions related to capitalism, liberalism, hegemonies and social struggles.

The idea of radical democracy and Mouffe’s writings and definitions can seem very abstract, Julia Hamann describes the theory as “neither descriptive, nor normative, but rather […] deeply committed to experience and its practical applicability [my own translation].”52 Exactly this understanding of the theory, made it very attractive, but at the same time challenging to relate it to KA experiences and formation as a feminist curatorial collective. Mouffe herself argues, that the theory can enable real practices.53 Furthermore, scholar Noëlle McAfee categorises Mouffe’s theory as ‘performative feminisms’, being part of feminist political philosophy.54 Using the emphasis on performativity and therefore on the ability to promote action through language, I am arguing in favour of adopting her theory in this thesis as a stimulator and amplifier to provide a viewpoint and a route on how to discuss and approach the single-case study on KA. One can say, that the theory becomes a dialogue partner, something to rub against in order to find different solutions on how to enable social change, activism and transformations in the specific field of art and political curation in a moment of urgent need.

Previous Research

The previous research of this thesis was mainly influenced by an interest in feminist and collaborative thoughts within curating. In the following I will outline which different perspectives and texts have influenced my departure point for this thesis. Furthermore, selected readings are presented and summarised in order to define the research field.

51 Mouffe, pp. 5-6.
My personal background as an undergraduate in Sociology and Philosophy with a focus on Cultural Sciences shapes my understanding of how to encounter a curatorial issue from an academic perspective. It has affected my previous research in that sense, that finding an appropriate theory, and in this specific case a political theory, has built an important cornerstone and tool. The theory guides the research and supports it to conduct a qualitative discussion, while operating as a relational element throughout the analysis, corresponding to the material. The ambition to include Mouffe’s and Laclau’s idea of a radical democracy has been articulated simultaneously with an interest in KA. The understanding of curating as not being a definite scientific discipline or field, but rather a phenomenon, which can be looked at from different points of view like sociology, history of art, philosophy, politics or other fields, determines my specific perspective. At the same time the interdisciplinarity of curating allows a more open, creative and undetermined approach towards it.

The current discussions and studies which are related to the topic of feminisms, art and exhibition making have been initiated to a broad extent by (female) scholars in the field of art history. In the introduction of her publication *Gender, artWork and the global imperative. A materialist feminist critique* (2013), Angela Dimitrakaki relocates the “feminist art movement” in the spheres of “feminist art” as well as in the “art history movement.”55 This is reflected in most of the essays and texts of my previous research, which are balancing between these two fields.

The emerging domain of curatorial studies combines regarding questions of feminisms and curating these two areas mentioned above. In recent years, scholars within the field of curatorial studies such as Elke Krasny and Dorothee Richter have organised symposia such as “Curating in feminist thought” at the ZHdK in Zurich (2016) and “Unsettling Feminist Curating” at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2017) and investigated questions of feminist curating with a variety of guest speakers.

In 2016, in her article ‘Feminist Thought and Curating: On Method’, published in the online magazine *OnCurating*, Elke Krasny described the current developments and researches regarding feminisms, art and curation as a “feminist turn in curating.”56 The demarcation of shifts in the discourse of curatorial practices have been often described as so called ‘turns’. In the text Krasny discusses the close relation of feminist thought to feminist practice within curating, while using the example of ‘The International Dinner Party’ by Suzanne Lacy in her analysis. She describes her specific approach as follows:


My critical refusal of the displacement narratives and the novelty imperative leads me to using an associative logic and a transgressive feminist imagination of linking *The International Dinner Party* [highlights by Krasny] with a possible extension toward curating’s history, embodied in the salon model, and toward curating’s future via feminist and queer feminist living archive practices and imagined communities of resistance.57

Opposing a chronopolitical approach regarding feminist historiography, she transforms the questions of what feminism is to its own answer and method - which means, making feminist paradoxes and its resistance of being defined as part of the method.58 While writing about the feminist thought/practice relation, Krasny herself presents a challenging and inspiring strategy on how to access this topic by working interdisciplinary and by subverting the “academic compartmentalization.”

In the introduction of *Working with feminism: curating and exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012) Katrin Kivimaa and Sirje Ratso highlight that the interest in feminist curatorial questions has grown and deepened, especially through big international exhibitions dealing with the topics of feminisms and exhibiting female artists in renowned institutions in North America and Western Europe as well as through emerging programs related to the curatorial field.59 The publication is an accumulation of essays and interviews, initiated by the symposium *Common Differences: Issues for Feminist Curating in Post-Socialist Europe* (2011, Tallinn), which takes as its focus the underrepresented positions and histories from Eastern Europe. An important problem which Angela Dimitrakaki presents is that “feminist curating […] has not managed to articulate a long-term dialogue between feminist positions and radical curatorial theory.”60 This issue might reflect the relatively young – in academic terms – liaison of radical curating and feminisms, which is still searching for its roots and legacies.

As previously mentioned Dimitrakaki published her work *Gender, artWork and the global imperative: a materialist feminist critique* in 2013. It became an influential reading for my previous research, as it contains an essay by Dimitrakaki, which discusses KA and the all-female curatorial collective What, How & for Whom / WHW from a materialist feminist perspective. In the same year, the book *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* (2013) edited by Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry was published. The interview with KA, which is going to be

57 Krasny, p. 66.
58 Krasny, p. 57.; Krasny relates to publications and writings by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Renée Baert, Amelia Jones, Sarah Bracke, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa or Maria Meskimmon.
analysed within this thesis, is printed in this book. The first publication takes a look at how postmodernism has influenced labour and work since the 1990s in the broad field of working with arts, while focussing on the question of feminisms. The second one aims with its collection to “map a series of positions in a field constituted by feminist’s contact with art exhibition practices.” Furthermore, through their contributions, both of the publications address Eastern European perspectives and examples. These publications present, that the field of research related to feminisms as well as collectivity and exhibition making are essentially linked to pressing questions of labour, accessibility and visibility. Furthermore these readings point to the importance of taking into account the different geographical, political and economical circumstances and histories, influencing further interrogations.

Feminisms is still our name: seven essays on historiography and curatorial practices (2010) is also a response to a lack of “vital and challenging discussions regarding theoretical and methodological issues” in the field of art history, while focussing on “feminist art history” and “feminist curatorial practices.” Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces (2017), one of the most recent publications in relation to feminisms and curatorial practices, is a collection of essays, mostly presented in the session Feminisms and Curating as part of the NORDIK X conference in Stockholm, 2012. It “present[s] critical perspectives on and analyses of feminist art curating and exhibiting, its strategies, interventions and histories.” Both of these publications reveal that the research field already provides a variety of interesting cases to learn from. But it also points out, that this area is shaped by a non-uniformity, making it difficult (not necessarily to be understood in a negative way) to unite methodologies or theoretical approaches towards feminist curatorial practices.

The field of feminist curating and related discussions on radical and alternative practices is not only delimited by exhibitions, publications and symposiums, but also magazines like the feminist art journal n.paradoxa, active since 1996, and the on-curating online magazine, formed in 2008, which have contributed to important discussions within the area. Furthermore organisations like Feminist Curators United, founded by Maura Reilley, Helena Reckitt and Lara Perry and The Feminist Art Project are actively and collectively pushing the boundaries of curating to feminist spheres.

In addition to the research related to feminist curatorial practices, the previous research has also been shaped by an interest in collective and collaborative curatorial practices

and theories. Through engaging with the research field of feminist curating I realised, that many experiences, knowledges or exhibition projects were highly marked by processes of alliances, collaborations and common forms of organisation. I am therefore presenting only briefly two readings related to collective curatorial questions, as I am rendering the research field of feminist curating as a field shaped by collectivity and collaborations.

Together with Johanna Billing and Lars Nilsson, Maria Lind has published the work *Taking the matter into common hands: [on contemporary art and collaborative practices]* in 2007. This publication discovers the means of arising collaborations, not only among artists themselves, but also between a variety of practitioners in the cultural field. In Lind’s contribution ‘The Collaborative Turn’, she offers a brief overview of (artistic and curatorial) collaborative projects, while discussing this turn in the light of a variety of deliberations by critical theorists, including Chantal Mouffe. Lind indicates, that the terms ‘collective’ and ‘collaborative’ are often used interchangeably and attempts to differentiate them in order to highlight each of their specifics. A more precisely and comprehensible differentiation is given in Eszter Lázár’s article ‘Collaboration’, which is part of the collaborative research project ‘Curatorial Dictionary’ by *tranzit.org*:

> When their [talking about collaboration and collectivity] difference is highlighted, then collaboration rather signifies simultaneous and dialogical practices. However, collectivity, in this case, is characterized by parallel working phases. Moreover, collectivity is not necessarily associated with practical realization; it can refer to the idea of thinking together.

The international magazine *Manifesta Journal* is interested in “practices and theories of contemporary curating” and has dedicated its Issue #8 (2010) to the topic of collective curating. The contributions by artists, curators and collectives give insights in the complexity of working as a collective, while reflecting upon questions of authorship and responsibility and giving an overview of current collectives. Curating and curatorial processes are only possible through engagement with others, therefore collaborative practices are annexed. Nevertheless, the visibility, emphasis or structure of such collaborative relations shapes their character and can therefore be articulated as a byproduct or hub of the curatorial work.

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66 Lind, p. 17.


The publication *Women’s Museum, Curatorial Politics in feminism, education, history and art* (2013) by Elke Krasny and the Frauenmuseum Meran emerged through two symposia in Vienna (2010) and Merano (2011). It can serve as an example for how feminist and collaborative curating are intertwined, as not only the content of the book, but also the realisation and initiative of this project itself can be read as a “translocal exchange and collaboration in self-organised networks.”

The publications and readings of the previous research, depart and end up with similar questions and struggles. Many of the previous readings were influenced by the (re)discovering and (re)using of female and feminist art histories, exhibitions, issues and methodologies. They have in common, that the field of feminist and collaborative curation is determined by breaks and a discontinuity of narratives. Nevertheless, they challenge the relationship of the feminist art movement within time and locality and the continuation of feminist and collaborative methods and strategies since the 60s within the arts and curating. Common questions arise throughout the texts, such as how to make a (social) change and how to disrupt hierarchies, oppression, canons, institutions, conditions of labour, while having future visions, long-term ideas and moving beyond the preexisting framework. The search for suitable and ‘efficient’ methodologies, strategies, theories and practices complicates with the need to think beyond the predominant European and North American foci.

The brief summary of questions and struggles reveals that it seems nearly impossible to define a specific *status questionis* in relation to the broad interest of my previous research and fragmentary groundings and investigations. However, it can be concluded, that there is no widespread consensus, except of the one, that there are still vast topics and histories to research and as well as many important discussions to have and to expect within the field. I hope to investigate one of these discussions further.

**Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions**

In the following I would like to outline some of my delimitations, limitations and assumptions in order to reason my steps and choices as well as to make my research process and my personal standpoint more transparent and accessible.

My very specific interest in collective and feminist curatorial structures, especially connected to the curatorial, demanded a specific case. *KA* appeared to be a very suitable one to study, therefore I refused to choose another case and the option to execute a

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comparison. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Dimitrakaki has already opposed KA with the Zagreb based all-female curatorial collective WHW (who would be one of the few curatorial collectives suitable for such a comparative analysis) in her publication *Gender, artWork and the global imperative: a materialist feminist critique*.

At several points I have thought about conducting my own interview with KA. I had and still have quite ambiguous feelings regarding my choice not to undertake it, which at different moments seemed more appropriate than in others. I decided against it for various reasons. On the one hand side, the interview by Dimitrakaki already offered me a great overview of their curatorial deliberations and experiences, though unfortunately it is already seven years old. Nevertheless, compared to more recent texts or interviews their curatorial thoughts seem to solidify rather than diverge. The interview gave me the opportunity to read between the lines and also to take into account questions and answers I would not have been expected, if I would conducted the interview myself. It made it possible for me to think beyond my own assumptions. Unfortunately the interview does not provide a lot of information on the third member Mirjam Joensen, as she has joined the collective only one year before its realisation. Nevertheless, she seems to be only infrequently involved in projects. Overall, I was satisfied with the material I had. Finally, I think, that after going through their interview and scrutinising all the different topics I have been interested in, I would now feel more prepared to formulate challenging and relevant questions for a potential interview. Possible questions or further research will therefore be outlined in the conclusion.

Due to the material I am working with, I will rather concentrate on the curatorial ventilations and not too much on the techniques of curating. As the division between the curatorial and curating can become blurred, the one will blend in the other occasionally in this thesis. Nevertheless, focussing rather on the curatorial can lead sometimes to a feeling of frustration, which has been the case for myself as well. When discussing curatorial thoughts, concrete guidelines or a checklist on how to curate in a feminist and collective manner becomes a pressing wish in order to take the next step after thinking and discussing, finally become active. Expecting a toolbox-like manual would run the risk of becoming a moral oversimplification which would fail to grasp the complexity translating curatorial paradigms in curating, taking into account for example locality, ethics, economy and other specific dimensions. Unfortunately discussing this topic in-depth in addition to my own chosen area of focus would go beyond the scope of this thesis and would need a different kind of investigation and material. Nevertheless, it reflects, that the curatorial deliberations can only be separated theoretically from curating, but that the curatorial affects and demands curatorial action. Having this emphasis, it also means, that I will not be able to look in detail at the questions of aesthetics, presentations of exhibitions or art in-depth. Only in the last chapter will I elaborate the relation of art and artists to KA further, by discussing the project of KA and artist Pia Arke.
Initially I thought about drawing a historical outline on feminist curating as well as collective curating in order to position KA in a wider field. Nevertheless, during my previous readings I realised that such an undertaking might be very ambitious, but not manageable or reasonable. Furthermore I realised that such a historical overview would not be needed in order to access my research questions. My previous research concentrates therefore on more recently published texts and publications from 2002-2017, foremost with a focus on curatorial practices and methodologies related to feminisms and collaborations.

I am considering my peers within the Curating Art master programme as my target audience, in addition to the tutors and professors of the department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University. Thus, this target audience influences the choice of which thoughts and terminologies I decided to elaborate further or not. As I am not assuming that the theory of radical democracy by Mouffe is widely known, especially not in depth, I will present it rather precisely in order to enable an understanding on common grounds. Bearing the scope of the thesis in mind as well as the emphasis, I will only seldom take up critiques on Mouffe’s radical democracy itself, which means that e.g. concerns regarding the theories exclusion on issues on class will not be able to be elaborated further. Mouffe’s work is furthermore influenced by a variety of well-known theorists, like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Hanna Arendt, Carl Schmitt, and Jürgen Habermas. In order to approach the ideas of Mouffe directly, as well as due to the limitations of this case study, theoretical detours will be minimised. It would also go beyond the theory’s function in this case study, as it is used only as a catalyst and tool to work out a critical analysis on KA’s curatorial paradigm as radical democracy.

The readings influencing my thesis are mostly English language publications, except of a few german readings. This of course also reflects a delimitation to the Anglosphere, not only in terms of publications, but consequently also in terms of perspective. As some of the readings take up discussions on e.g. sex, gender, ethnicity, class or ‘race’, it becomes necessary to point out my own standpoint and privileges, hence, identifying as a white, able-bodied, female and German citizen with migration background, transitioning from working to middle class. This positioning as well as my Eurocentric perspective has influenced my readings and writing wittingly or unwittingly and effects the subject position from which I speak. Furthermore it follows a self-reflective methodology in gender and (post)colonial studies in order to unravel: “Who is speaking from which social positioning about what and whom?” With this brief self positioning as well as my choice to use the first-person pronoun in the thesis, I am aiming to demystify the viewpoint and hierarchy of the scientist in being objective or unbiased.

71 In the following I am using ‘race’ in quotations marks (except when citing), in order to highlight its contested meaning. See also in the Race Equality Toolkit by Universities Scotland, [online text], https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit/terminology.htm#race, (accessed 27 November 2017).

Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in three parts: the introduction, the case study / main part and the conclusion. Following this introduction, the main part starts with a brief description of KA, giving dates, facts and an overview of already realised projects. The Case Study’s structure is defined by the research questions. In order to answer the first research question

1. How can KA’s curatorial work and their paradigm be contextualised when relating it to radical democracy presented by Mouffe? What does it reveal?

KA will be contextualised, while considering Mouffe’s deliberations about the need for a radical democracy. This part will give a lot of space to Mouffe’s theoretical argumentation, in order to establish a common ground for the following questions and discussions. It is linked to an investigation on feminism and citizenship, while examining KA formation, the curators background as well as the specific Danish context they are operating in.

After contextualising KA and defining relations between radical democracy and their work, their curatorial paradigm will be examined in relation to Mouffe’s understanding of the ‘chain of equivalence’. After giving space to Mouffe’s deliberations, this part will concentrate on KA very specific curatorial paradigm, highly shaped by transnational feminisms and postcolonial theory.

This groundwork enables to introduce the second research question:

2. How does KA’s formation as ‘feminist’ and ‘collective’ affect their paradigm and work? How does it enable or threaten radical democracy?

This question will be answered in the following chapter and subchapter. Drawing a connection between KA’s feminist and collective formation and the idea of pluralistic agonism, the concept of the salonnière will illustrate the exceptional character of KA. Their project “Troubling Ireland” (2010-2012) will herby serve as an example case.

It is followed by a subchapter, presenting Mouffe’s deliberations on the adversary/enemy, which point to the blind spots in KA’s work. This conflict will be discussed on their large-scale project “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts” (2006).

Through the presented research in the previous chapters, the third question

3. How can questions of activism and influence of KA’s work be approached, when taking radical democracy into account?
can already be partly answered. KA’s position as a counter-hegemonic intervention in the framework of radical democracy will be reasoned, while concentrating in a subchapter on the specific methodology on ‘engaging with’ institutions and KA’s approach on practicing critique. The case of their newly established exhibition venue CAMP will hereby serve as example to scrutinise.

Lastly, a consideration which can be thought of as a fourth research question became quite pressing while answering the first ones

4. What about art? Where does it remain and how does it matter for KA’s curatorial paradigm and practice?

In order not to disregard the meaning of art and position its influence in the work of KA, this chapter will round out the main part of the thesis. The question of KA’s relation to art will be put in relation to Mouffe’s theory, while discussing the importance of radical art to enable visions and challenge hegemony.

In the conclusion the research questions answered through the analysis of the main part will be summarised, the previous research aims will be taken up again while a prospect for further research questions will be given.

SINGLE CASE STUDY - KURATORISK AKTION

About Kuratorisk Aktion

KA describe themselves as an “all-female curatorial collective engaged in decolonial-transnational feminist work,” while applying a methodology of “curating across capitalist divides.”73 KA was founded in 2005 by Frederikke Hansen (b. 1969) and Tone Olaf Nielsen (b. 1967), with Mirjam Joensen (b. 1979) joining the collective in 2009. Hansen holds an MA in Art History and Political Science from Aarhus University and worked as a curator in a variety of venues in Denmark and Germany. From 2000-2004 she worked as a curator at the Shedhalle in Zurich, where she became artistic director in 2003. In 2008 she moved back to Denmark, shaping and being involved in the art scene in Askeby. Nielsen holds a Cand.phil. in Art History from the University of Copenhagen plus a MA in Critical and Curatorial Studies from UCLA. She worked in a variety of positions as a curator and educator in Scandinavia and central Europe. Currently Nielsen is the PR and Program Coordinator at the Trampoline House at Copenhagen.

which she co-founded in 2009-2010. Joensen holds a MA in Art History and Faroese Language and Literature from the University of the Faroe Islands and Aarhus University. Working as a curatorial assistant at the Faroe Islands Art Museum, she worked with KA as a researcher and project coordinator and continues their collaboration. Working not only as a group or collective, KA also collaborates with a variety of artists, activists and scholar in different mediums, ranging from talks, publications, workshops and screenings to interdisciplinary exhibition formats.74


Their latest undertaking was the opening of CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics in 2015, a nonprofit exhibition space in Copenhagen, situated inside the self-governing community centre Trampoline House.76 As the name already suggests, CAMP deals with exhibitions and events related to topics of “displacement and migration.”77 It aims to offer not only, but especially a platform for artists with migration background, while being placed in Trampoline House, an institution which tries to connect asylum seekers and Danish citizens and residents.78

Contextualising Kuratorisk Aktion I - Radical Democracy

In the following I aim to draw a relation between Dimitrakaki’s starting point of the interview, Mouffe’s argumentation for the need for a radical democracy as well as the political situation in Denmark and its rise of right-wing populism. They are all

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75 Kuratorisk Aktion, About.
76 CAMP Center for Art on Migration Politics, About CAMP, [website], http://campcph.org/about-camp, (accessed 12 October 2017).
77 CAMP Center for Art on Migration Politics, About CAMP.
78 CAMP Center for Art on Migration Politics, About Trampoline House, [website], http://campcph.org/about-trampoline-house/, (accessed 12 October 2017).
Angela Dimitrakaki (b. 1968) who invited KA to participate with an interview in the publication *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* (2013) has been Programme Director in Modern and Contemporary Art and MSC Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Edinburgh since 2007. Her interest lies in feminisms, politics and marxism in art history, which is not only represented in her already vast list of publications and writings, but also in her two forthcoming books *Feminism, Art, Capitalism* and *The Economic Subjects of Contemporary Art*.

Dimitrakaki was born in Mytilene, Greece in 1968, while Tone Olaf Nielsen and Frederikke Hansen were born in Denmark in 1967 and 1969 respectively. Dimitrakaki proposes all of them a part of a “European youth” – a generation which shares a European history, which was marked by certain transitions and breaks. Dimitrakaki names two major and common shifts having a big impact on that generation: on the one hand side ‘The Fall of Communism’, also called the ‘Revolutions of 1989’ as well as the ‘End of Feminism’, due to ‘post-feminism’ in the 80s and 90s. She concludes, that therefore “[their common] youth was defined by processes of de-politicisation and mass disillusionment.”

This specific generational experience, analysed and highlighted by Dimitrakaki, reappears in Mouffe’s and Laclau’s writings. It constitutes for them one of the nodal points to develop their argumentation for the need for a radical democracy. The riots and protests which back then caused the collapse of the Soviet model, led in many parts of the world to different policies of democracy and a demand for human rights. Mouffe and Laclau see democracy, as it is currently practiced, in danger as well as not radical enough, as “liberty and equality for all” are not the problem itself, but rather the failure of their practical implementation.

Mouffe problematises the “collapse of the Soviet model” in that way, that it has led to an “unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism with its claim that there is no alternative to the existing order.” She names this, as one of the major reasons, next to the “shortcomings of the liberal approach,” why an agonistic model has still not been
applied yet. She argues, that the proposed alternative of a “cosmopolitan democracy” by a variety of scholars is lacking the dimension of plurality and therefore becomes another threat to the project of a ‘radicalised’ democracy, which aims to have a “real purchase on people’s desires and fantasies” in the future. She elaborates it as follows:

Contrary to the numerous theorists who see the end of the bipolar system as bringing the hope of a cosmopolitan democracy, I will argue that the dangers entailed by the current unipolar order can be avoided only by the implementation of a multipolar world, with an equilibrium among several regional poles allowing for a plurality of hegemonic powers. This is the only way to avoid the hegemony of one single hyperpower.

Hence, her theoretical ideas are informed by a counterposition of these rationalist developments and the “hegemony of liberalism,” as well as by a conviction for the possibility for an alternative and a pluralistic democracy.

Dimitrakaki and Mouffe both see this past moment of “de-politicisation and mass disillusionment,” as Dimitrakaki has put it very precisely, as a crucial turning point, whose aftermath determines our current situation. Mouffe analyses the relation of the past with the present and argues, that this lack of imagining or even having alternatives goes hand in hand with a “lack of a vibrant democratic debate in our post-democracies,” where no real choices are offered and consensus is established without being accompanied by dissent. She highlights, that as the characteristic of consensus is an expression of the exclusion of other opinions, it is therefore not able to acknowledge existing differences.

Mouffe’s critique regarding most liberal thoughts is related to the limitations that individualism as well as consensus bring, foremost a rejection of giving space for pluralistic thoughts, which are a great part of our society. Criticising the idea of consent, she explains, that creating consent seems to be the aim for liberal theorists or democracy, while it does not offer any real choices or options, which Jacques Rancière categorised as ‘post-democracy’. Even, if living in the so called ‘post-democracy’, consensus is nevertheless necessary for some decisions, but it should be accompanied by opposition. Mouffe argues, that especially this lack of alternatives has paved the way for...
way for right-wing populism throughout Europe in the 21st century, which often communicated their “real democratic demands.” Mouffe, pp. 65-66, 71. Without any alternative, she argues, people’s interest in politics will – and already is diminishing. Mouffe, p. 24. Or in other words: “A well functioning democracy calls for a clash of legitimate democratic political positions. [...] Consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent.” Mouffe, pp. 30-31.

Mouffe’s analysis of the growing popularity of right-wing parties throughout Europe can also be noticed in Denmark. She explains this development in an interview from 2013 as follows:

The emergence of right-wing populist parties in many countries – in Scandinavia for example – can be explained with the incapacity of socialist parties, which define themselves as centre-left, to adjust to demands. Also because these parties directed themselves to the middle classes. The traditional working classes create a problem for them because they don’t see a space for those people in the process of neoliberal modernisation. They really define their programme around modernisation, which means to adapt oneself to neoliberal modernisation. This threatens this sector of the population for which the socialist parties have no discourse anymore. They don’t fit into their view. So these sectors are a very good terrain for right-wing populist parties to show that they provide as an alternative.

Denmark, as a constitutional monarchy, but organised as a parliamentary democracy, has implemented since the 1950s the so called ‘Nordic model’ as their present economic system, a welfare state, marked by consensus decisions and a free market capitalism fostered by the social democrats. A party, which has moved from “socialism, Marxism and welfare to liberalism and competition” and therefore, as analysed in the dissertation by Bekke and Persson, provided a gap for the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party to rise. Mouffe argues, that especially the combination of liberalism and democracy, often leads to a tendency in favour of liberalism and the free market, while ignoring the importance of popular sovereignty. As a breakaway group form the 1970s established Progress Party, the Danish right-wing populist party Danish People’s Party was founded in 1995 and gained influence from the 2000s on as the third largest party in the Danish parliament and in 2015 became the second strongest party in Denmark. They managed to gain popularity, as Mouffe outlined in the quote above, by mobilising the working class, while supporting ideas against immigration and the European Union and offering

94 Mouffe, pp. 65-66, 71.
95 Mouffe, p. 24.
96 Mouffe, pp. 30-31.
a desired and unexpected ‘alternative’.100 It is important to reveal, that their concept is illusive and misleading, as it is based “on unacceptable mechanisms of exclusion where xenophobia usually plays a central role.”101

Touching already on the generational aspect and as stated throughout feminist movements in the 1960s that The personal is political, the formation and personal experience of the curators of KA has highly shaped their identification as political subjects as well as “politicised curators.”102 Stating, that this process took some time, they identify, that “patriarchy and capitalism, alongside the alleged deaths of feminism and communism, had once again naturalised themselves, this time on a global scale.”103 They affirm Dimitrakaki’s analysis and emphasise the importance of the “two paradigmatic shifts” during their European youth.104 Similar to the described situation of post-democracy by Rancière, KA relates exactly this situation of the “post-political” within the logics of the Danish welfare state, which promoted the delusive self-conception of a “fully realised [highlights by KA], transparent social democracy premised on equal rights.”105 In accusing the social democratic party in Denmark, of choosing the ‘third-way politics’ KA are in accordance with Mouffe’s analysis and criticism, which states that this “betray[s] the interests of the Danish working and lower middle classes as well as the growing immigrant population.”106 Mouffe claims, that Giddens proposal for a third-way solution, a perspective of centrumtism, which aims to unite left-wing and right-wing ideas, is “a consensual, post-political perspective […] characterized by a side-stepping of fundamental conflicts and by an evasion of any critical analysis of modern capitalism” and concludes: “This is why it is unable to challenge the hegemony of neo-liberalism.”107 As a political subject, KA has analysed critically the specific political and local situation in their sphere of action and comes to terms with Chantal Mouffe’s claim that democracy is in crisis. Nevertheless this analysis comes hand in hand with more pressing questions, of how to take political/curatorial action against or within this moment of crisis.

103 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
104 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
105 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
106 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
107 Mouffe, On the political, 2005, p. 60.
Contextualising Kuratorisk Aktion II - Feminisms and Citizenship

In the following I would like to reflect upon KA’s biographic and personal experiences and developments, while taking into account Mouffe’s understanding of feminisms and citizenship and considering the specificities of the Danish context. The previous chapter has already analysed their roles as politicised curators in relation to the Danish welfare state. KA mentioned that this understanding of their positions was part of a long defining process, which will be examined now in more detail.

While studying in Aarhus and Copenhagen, both Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen felt like “maladjusted” individuals, perceiving the Danish ‘progressiveness’ as a veneer. Besides their critique on political apathy, especially the idea of the “financial independence of the ‘always already liberated Danish woman’ resting upon her sexual and intellectual dependency” contradicted their personal perception as ‘being women’.

By looking back at the women's movement in Denmark, I will try to locate the roots for the emergence of the ‘liberated Danish woman’ in order to make the ambivalence of KA related to that figure comprehensible.

The women’s movement in Denmark has been perceived as strong and pioneering, especially from other Western perspectives. As analysed by the ‘second wave’ feminists Sue Lees and Mary McIntosh at the first international socialist-feminist conference in 1985, the “liberated Danish woman” as well as the institutionalisation of feminism within the welfare state can nevertheless bear downsides, especially for the life of women:

Danish women, who have achieved most in terms of political representation and feminist demands for free nursery provision, shared childcare and greater opportunities in the labour market, were concerned about the effect on the quality of women's lives. Several investigations have shown that women still carry the main burden of housework and childcare, at the same time as two salaries are needed to raise a family. This has led to what the Danish women called ‘double motherhood’. One motherhood women practise at home; the other motherhood the state practises in its institutions. They need to find a way in which women do not have to work a double shift and a policy on motherhood that is both socialist and feminist.

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109 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
Critics took different standpoints on how the welfare state effects women and women’s life negatively.\textsuperscript{112} Even if a lot of positive developments have been achieved, disadvantages still exist, often disguised as opportunities or choices, which KA’s critique most probably implies. The question itself is, if the state is able to overcome this oppression.\textsuperscript{113} Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim argue in their essay ‘Women and the advanced welfare state - a new kind of patriarchal power?’, that women have achieved liberation from the husband, but depend therefore on the state. Agreeing with Lees and McIntosh they argue that the welfare state paved the way for substituting “family patriarchy” for “social patriarchy.”\textsuperscript{114} Anne Showstack Sassoon summarises forthrightly in her introduction of the book \textit{Women and the State}:

Thus the development of the welfare state has led to a new potential unity but also to new contradictions [talking about class and other social differences]. It has vastly improved women’s social and economic position and enabled women to gain more influence as workers and citizens at the same time as the locus of oppression has shifted from private to public.\textsuperscript{115}

These developments still affect the lives of many women nowadays and this is highly related to the question of feminisms and citizenship. Raia Prokhovnik describes in her essay ‘Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness’, that the debate concerning citizenship and feminisms has been divided into two factions: one which tries to liberate women from the private spheres, while the other one aims to include the private issues within citizenship and politics.\textsuperscript{116} Liberation from the private could mean the possibility to participate equally as men in public political terms, while the other position promotes that the ‘private is political’ and politics should include a gendered perspective.\textsuperscript{117}

As both approaches are working against each other, Prokhovnik supports a concept of citizenship, which overcomes this “dichotomous character,” which does not necessarily mean that the private and public have to be merged nor separated.\textsuperscript{118} It can be achieved by realising, that “[p]ublic and private are crucially inter-connected by the fully human selves that charaterize both spheres.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{112} A great collection of striking essays and analyses concerning the topic of feminism and the (Danish) welfare state has been written by Laura Balbo, Helga Maria Hernes, Anette Borchorst, Birte Siim and Anne Showstack Sassoon in A. Schowstack Sassoon (red.), \textit{Women and the State}, Routledge, London, 1992.
\textsuperscript{117} Prokhovnik, pp. 89-94.
\textsuperscript{118} Prokhovnik, pp. 89,98.
\textsuperscript{119} Prokhovnik, p. 98.
To put another layer of complexity upon the discussion of citizenship and connect it to *KA*, I would like to reflect upon Mouffe’s idea of a feminist citizenship. Before doing this, I will delineate how the concept of citizenship is to be understood within the framework of radical democracy and what role it plays.

Mouffe argues that the definition and application of the idea of citizenship depends on the way we want society to be. She uses the idea of citizenship in order to discuss the relation of individuals within and to the political community. It is a very important concept in the realisation of a democratic project and is currently in different contexts in dispute and has to be rethought under modern terms. For the implementation of a radical democracy, a radical democratic citizenship has to be the consequence. The realisation of such a project is in need of an approach which thinks in terms of ‘a chain of equivalence’, which will be developed further in the following chapter. Mouffe argues, that even if the “modern idea of the citizen” contributed to the initiation of democratic processes, today it has become an “obstacle to its extension.” Hence, a radical democratic citizenship would combin[e] the ideal of rights and pluralism with the ideas of public spiritedness and ethico-political concern, a new modern democratic conception of citizenship could restore dignity to the political and provide the vehicle for the construction of a radical democratic hegemony.

Mouffe again criticises the relation between liberty and equality, which exists in a “permanent tension.” She continues Prokhovnik’s mentioned problematics of division further, by explaining that the dilemma is established through the dichotomy between the individual (liberty/private) and the citizen (public), opposing the “duties as a citizen” and the “freedom as an individual.” Inheriting both positions as an individual can lead to very conflicting situations, in which a reconciliation of such a situation would favour one or the other position. The only way to overcome this quandary seems to be to deconstruct it, by uniting both spheres. Here lies one of the cores of Mouffe’s argumentation as well as the twist and its connection to Prokhovnik’s argument: as the deconstruction does not offer any ‘real’ or ‘realistic’ opportunity, it can only exist, when

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121 Mouffe, p. 60.
122 Mouffe, p. 60.
123 Mouffe, p. 60.
124 Mouffe, p. 71.
125 Mouffe, pp. 72-73.
126 Mouffe, p. 72.
127 Mouffe, p. 72.
128 Mouffe, p. 72.
its impossible fulfilment and its continuous struggle are truly acknowledged.  
Hence, part of it is therefore an awareness for the infinite struggle or the never reachable unity. An attempt to overcome this tension by reconciling both spheres would lead to the corrosion of democracy itself, as it would deny the existence and importance of contradictions.

In the chapter ‘Feminism, Citizenship and Politics’ in her book *The Return of the Political*, Mouffe underlines her anti-essentialist position as a feminist. Admitting that there might be “progressive way[s]” in essentialist approaches, she nevertheless insists, that it is not applicable in the realisation of a radical democracy. Especially as anti-essentialism is able to recognise intersectionality, hence the “struggles linked to different forms of oppression.”

Like Prokhovnik, she describes that feminists have encountered the question of feminism and citizenship from a dichotomous perspective, but criticises, that the preexisting model of citizenship has not been questioned itself.

This points to the excluding notion of citizenship, which is not able to account for individuals who do not belong to the state e.g. stateless people or some refugee seekers. Inheriting an anti-essentialist view of feminisms makes political polarisations like ‘women should be equal to men’ or ‘the differences of being a women should be recognised’ void. Therefore Mouffe argues for the need of a distinct perception on how to participate in a political struggle and a new form of citizenship.

Relating the struggle of citizenship especially in connection to feminisms back to *KA*, it opens the question of their self-positioning within a specific Danish context of working politically as well as curatorial. Tone Olaf Nielsen and Frederikke Hansen have not only acknowledged their transformation to politicised curators, but are also taking a standpoint as feminist curators. Regarding their ‘maladjusted’ position within their environment, they describe their taken consequences and their first formation as follows:

Frederikke embarked on a personal feminist-lesbian crusade within the emerging scene of alternative artist-run spaces, while Tone’s flirting with the growing punk and squat...
movements dovetailed with theoretical and curatorial investigations into relational aesthetics, late-modern subject formation and cultural diversity. In short, from our zones of invisibility, we began to see others: zones of racialised and classed invisibility.\textsuperscript{136}

Their personal experience, as not fitting into the Danish concept of the liberated women, as well as their exploration of subcultures and their discovery of a more suitable position within Danish society, determined Nielsen and Hansen’s private as well as political subject positions. They accumulated a range of positions, which Mouffe unites in the idea of a ‘social agent’. Social agents are “an ensemble of subject positions that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences.”\textsuperscript{137} To put it in the framework of citizenship:

\[\ldots\] [citizenship] is not one identity among others, as in liberalism, nor is it the dominant identity that overrides all others, as it is in civic republicanism. It is an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty.\textsuperscript{138}

This is highlighted by KA’s realisation of other ‘invisible’ positions by realising their own ‘invisible’ subject positions. It also means an understanding that there is not only one subject position as a social agent, but maybe multiple, e.g. as ‘women’, ‘Danish’, ‘lesbian’, ‘feminist’, ‘punk’, ‘squatter’, ‘academic’. It resonates with Mouffe’s understanding of a social agent, who inhabits a variety of subject positions and is not a “unified, homogenous entity.”\textsuperscript{139} From Nielsen and Hansen’s perspective as social agents, it made them aware of other subject positions besides their own obvious ones, e.g. race and class. Mouffe highlights, that such positions exist in certain discourses in a constant tension of “overdetermination and displacement” and indicates already her anti-essentialist perspective, which will be elaborated further in the following chapter.\textsuperscript{140}

KA’s broadening of different subject positions as social agents can also be related to Hansen and Nielsen’s migration in 1997, which was a consequence of experiencing their “social and intellectual environment too limiting.”\textsuperscript{141} They gained new insights in political, feminist as well as curatorial questions in Los Angeles, Berlin and Zurich and described this as: “radicalising experiences away from Denmark that eventually enabled us to join forces and form Kuratorisk Aktion.”\textsuperscript{142} Returning in 2004 to Denmark, KA mentions that different “paradigmatic events” took place: 9/11, the Afghanistan and Iraq

\textsuperscript{136}Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{138}Mouffe, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{139}Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 1993, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{140}Mouffe, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{141}Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{142}Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 2.
war as well as the election of the Danish People’s Party. Their encounter and experiences led them to initiate Kuratorisk Aktion:

Unsurprisingly, we found that we were equally committed to seeking out new forms of agency, resistance, and envisioning in the arena of global capitalism, migration, and war, and that we abroad had acquired similar discourses, ambitions, and different yet complementary tools with which to ‘take curatorial action.’

Furthermore they aimed to

[…] supplement Western feminist politics with a global transnational feminism as well as with queer, postcolonial, anticapitalist, and environmental justice theories and practices in order to take curatorial action against the injustices and inequalities produced and sustained by the divisions of global capitalism.

One can assume while tracing their formation, reflections and current standpoint, that they act and identify in the terms of Mouffe as radical democratic citizens, marked by their “collective form of identification among the democratic demands found in a variety of [social] movements […].” This reflection and positioning has apparently been stimulated by their personal criticism regarding the insufficiency of the Danish welfare state to offer the possibility for an acceptable and suitable feminist citizenship as well as by their ambition to make a noticeable change.

By posing the question: “To what extent was your feminist consciousness, as part of your political subjectivity, nurtured by your immediate cultural context?,” Angela Dimitrakaki indicates already her assumption that KA was influenced by Denmark’s “strong tradition of feminist activism in the arts.” Their answer again problematises the effects of “post-politics feminism,” which KA names as a reason for the delayed examination in the early 2000’s of powerful feminist art moments back in the 1990’s, also beyond the Danish context. They state, that “political processes are not irreversible,” which can simultaneously be interpreted as a threat as well as a chance of their curatorial work, bearing their actual context in mind.

143 Kuratorisk Aktion, pp. 2.
144 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 3.
146 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 1993, p. 70.
147 Kuratorisk Aktion, pp. 2.
A Curatorial Paradigm: Transnational Feminism and the Chain of Equivalence

Having already given a broad contextualisation of KA, while relating it to Mouffe’s ideas of citizenship and radical democracy, I argue that Mouffe’s idea of anti-essentialist feminism challenges other notions of transnational feminism supported by KA. This will be discussed in the following chapter, after drawing connections between KA’s alliance to transnational feminism and Mouffe’s concept of a ‘chain of equivalence’. It offers the possibility to raise the question of KA’s curatorial paradigm, while expanding the notion of radical citizenship, which Mouffe argues, demands a ‘chain of equivalence’.

While discussing the subject of feminisms in view of their Danish context, KA reveals, that especially ‘Scandinavian feminism’ “has historically tended to operate with stable categories of gender and sexuality, that extend to Scandinavian, white, middle class, straight (and occasionally lesbian) women only.”149 Again, their experience abroad has introduced them to a broader understanding of feminism:

So, in Berlin and Zurich Frederikke found aesthetic and activist zones that complicated these inherited categories and made room for transgender and transnational perspectives in her work. As for Tone, it was the encounter with colored150 women’s community organizations in LA that enabled her to see the urgent need for a feminism capable of fostering solidarity and co-responsibility between women across divides of nation state, ‘race’, class, sexuality, and privilege.151

Their transnational and intersectional feminist perspective as well as their demand for a feminism, that is inclusive, can foster solidarity as well as liable can be analysed as an attempt to become aware of and react to the existing plurality of subject positions away from ones own. It resonates, as already mentioned in the chapter before, with Mouffe’s concept of a “radical democratic citizen.” She highlights the importance of the “collective form of identification among the democratic demands found in a variety of movements: women, workers, black, gay, ecological as well as in several other ‘new social movements’.”152 Which results consequently in the establishing of a ‘chain of equivalence’, an attempt to create social change. Mouffe’s understanding of the chain of equivalence wants to unite the various “democratic struggles,” but in a way which avoids the compression to one single issue. She advocates a viewpoint, which considers the particularity of each demand, but admits, that in order to sustain and being able to

149 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 3.
150 The term ‘coloured’ is outdated, but still widely used, it is rather suggested to use the more inclusive term of ‘people of colour’, see also Universities Scotland, Race Equality Toolkit.
152 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 1993, p. 70.
act, there is nevertheless a need for a "common adversary." KA names quite clearly, that 'global capitalism' is one of their major 'opponents'. Whether this relation is one of an enemy or an adversary and what consequences can be drawn from that, will be elaborated further in the chapter *Adversaries/Enemies and the Blind Spot*.

Dimitrakaki’s search for a relation between KA’s feminist ambitions and their immediate cultural context bears more urgent questions, like: “is feminism as a political discourse mainly possible in liberal societies?” and “[c]an we indeed distinguish between patronising forms of pseudo-universalising feminism and a feminism that is all-inclusive and globally thinking?” It embodies the question of the possibility to create a ‘chain of equivalence’, while, as Mouffe advocates, “creating] an equivalent articulation between the demands of women, blacks, workers, gays and others.” Dimitrakaki builds her question upon the existing imbalance of women’s rights in different parts of the world. While KA is admitting that they are unable to answer the first question, it is interesting to mention that Mouffe’s theoretical deliberations are limited to liberal societies, which will be brought up later in this section. Nevertheless, the second question seems to be more substantial, when investigating KA’s curatorial paradigms and the potential for social change. The question discloses the dilemma on how to accommodate equivalent voices under apparently unequal preconditions.

KA unites different strategies and theoretical deliberations in order to overcome this dilemma and to transform it into a common struggle. One strategy to subdue representative and patronising articulations, is to aim to “directly connect [highlights by KA] their [‘women who have less then us’] local and regional struggles with ours and link us all to the larger project of decolonisation in the age of global capitalism.” This strategy still gives space for a plurality of women’s (and non-women's) struggles, while reading them not in a hierarchical order, but in an overlapping and relational one. The way how KA tries to “directly connect” the struggles among different localities and situations, is marked by a “synchronic reading up the ladder of privilege […] accompanied by a diachronic analysis of the ladder’s European roots.” This means to reconsider and proceed from their own privileged position, in order to offer (self-)criticism, which investigates and reveals the related ties and abysses. This approach is closely linked to KA’s focus on transnational feminism.

157 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 4.
158 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 4.
Transnational feminism emerged as counter-reaction to the idea of ‘global sisterhood’, criticising from a postcolonial perspective the idea of the nation state as well as the unquestioned imposing of Western feminisms in the ‘Global South’ while not being able to recognise the striking differences which exist among the various groups.\textsuperscript{159} Scholars describe it as a movement or methodology, which tries to critically analyse the effects of globalisation, capitalism and neoliberalism on gender, sex, nation, ethnicity, ‘race’, class, etc.\textsuperscript{160} KA summarises, that their work is an “attempt to translate a transnational feminist project of decolonisation into a curatorial ethos.”\textsuperscript{161} Their ‘chain of equivalence’, highly shaped by transnational feminisms, considers both – the dimension of equivalence as well as the one of a united struggle without concessions:

So, as curators we are indeed engaged in a ‘politics of alliance’ that combines various struggles, practices and theories in order to stress that the war has to be fought on both sides of the (neo)colonial divide.\textsuperscript{162}

Obviously KA locates themselves on the ‘(neo)colonial divide’ or as they harshly put it: “on the right side of capitalism.”\textsuperscript{163}

As KA rejects the fixed categories of Scandinavian feminism, while being highly committed to scholars like M. Jacqui Alexander, Chandra Talpade Mohanty or Vandana Shiva, it bears questions of feminisms and (anti-)essentialism when considering Mouffe.

Mouffe upholds a strict anti-essentialist standpoint in her theoretical deliberations, therefore she rejects any idea of a “fixed identity” or an “unitary subject.”\textsuperscript{164} She argues that subject positions exist in an always challenged, never fixed, discursive structure whose links between each other are also always contested.\textsuperscript{165} Still categories like “women” or “black” can be used to talk about “collective subjects,” but their commonness should be interpreted as a “partial fixation of identities through the creation of nodal points” and should not be confused with a permanent essence.\textsuperscript{166} This particularly affects thinking related to feminisms, and represents a constant dispute between the essentialistic viewpoints of feminists of the so called ‘second wave’ and


\textsuperscript{160} Nadkarni.

\textsuperscript{161} Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{162} Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 9.


\textsuperscript{164} Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 1993, pp. 8,21.

\textsuperscript{165} Mouffe, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{166} Mouffe, p. 78.
those of the mostly anti-essential ‘third wave’. Mouffe explains her position and the struggle as follows:

It is often said that the deconstruction of essential identities, which is the result of acknowledging the contingency and ambiguity of every identity, renders feminist political action impossible. Many feminists believe that, without seeing women as a coherent identity, we cannot ground the possibility of a feminist political movement in which women could unite as women in order to formulate and pursue specific feminist aims. Contrary to that view, I will argue that, for those feminists committed to a radical democratic politics, the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and equality should apply. […] A single individual can be the bearer of this multiplicity and be dominant in one relation while subordinated in another. We can thus conceive the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement.\[167\]

The former questions of essentialism vs. anti-essentialism adds to the critique by transnational feminists and postcolonial activists toward the dimension of ‘race’. Scholars criticise, that with the emergence of communities of people of colour and communities of ‘Third World’\[168\] feminists, this important alliance of resistance was hindered and rendered useless by hegemonic feminism, who called their “racialised categories” essential.\[169\] The claim is not necessarily focused on the question of essentialism itself, but rather on the dissimulation, that an anti-essentialistic perspective is practiced, when marginalised groups appropriate essentialism widely used by hegemonic groups in order to counteract domination and exclusion.\[170\] It opens the question of who masters the discourse related to anti-essentialism. Mridula Nath Chakraborty answers this question in her article ‘Wa(i)ving it All Away: Producing Subject and Knowledge in Feminisms of Colour’ as follows:

[…] essentialism has always been a way of standardising acceptability and gauging inclusion. The current trend of anti-essentialism merely reinscribes the racist and ethnocentric assumptions of hegemonic feminist theorising.\[171\]

Scholars have tried to overcome theoretically the dilemma of essentialism and anti-essentialism with different concepts, like the one of strategic essentialism by Gayatri

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167 Mouffe, pp. 76,77.
Spivak. Spivak suggests to accept essentialism only in a conceptual dimension in order to act politically.\textsuperscript{172} Mouffe rejects this approach, as it represents and depends on a misconception of anti-essentialism. She argues, that Spivak’s approach is unable to recognise that anti-essentialism does not reject any “politically constructed categories,” therefore any ‘imagined essentialistic categories’ are unnecessary as well as redundant.\textsuperscript{173}

By outlining these struggles and controversies, I want to give space to reflect on Mouffe’s conceptions critically, while at the same time proposing that transnational feminist theories offer possibilities and deliberations to become aware of some of the named blind spots.

One of the critiques by Amarpal K. Dhaliwal points exactly to Mouffe’s enumeration of “race” or “ethnicity” when talking about united struggles, feminisms and new social movements.\textsuperscript{174} She argues, that even if Mouffe names them, she is not “theorising” them, which leads to different shortcomings.\textsuperscript{175} On the one hand side Dhaliwal remarks, that Mouffe “does not sufficiently account for forms of domination related to race, geopolitical location, or nationality, to name only a few.”\textsuperscript{176} This consequently leads on the other hand side to the lack of her definition of the liberal citizen, which criticises and takes into account the gendered emergence of that figure, but excludes dimensions of ‘race’ and class.\textsuperscript{177} Her critique sharpens, when it comes to democracy itself, which from Dhaliwal’s perspective is built on colonial legacies and which definition and power of interpretation is inherited by ‘the West’:

In suggesting that “democracy” - even its more “radical” versions - currently acts as a (neo)colonial discourse by virtue of its deployment to assert Western superiority, I want to highlight the political uses and limits of the term. […] While not suggesting its complete or total recuperability, I also do not wish to imply its inevitable, eternal weddedness to or function as a (neo)colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{178}

By questioning the liberal citizen, democracy and Western feminisms itself, this criticism can give a prospect to the complexity of the first question, stated by

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{dhaliwal_2} Dhaliwal, ‘Can the Subaltern Vote? Radical Democracy, Discourses of Representation and Rights, a Question of Race’, p. 45.
\bibitem{dhaliwal_3} Dhaliwal, p. 45.
\bibitem{dhaliwal_4} Dhaliwal, p. 46.
\bibitem{dhaliwal_5} Dhaliwal, pp. 56.
\end{thebibliography}
Dimitrakaki related to the possibilities for feminisms in non-liberal societies. Nevertheless, it also highlights and delimits the specific context in which KA acts.

Mouffe is aware of this critique, especially as democratic theory often takes for granted, that in “idealized conditions” their regime would be favoured by “all rational individuals.” Confiding in the “superiority of liberal democracy” is not only questionable, but also problematic, as it does not take into account that we live in a “pluriverse” and not a “universe,” means that myriad forms of practices and knowledges exist. This is also related to Eurocentric positions, which arrogate the right of inhabiting rationality and morality. Mouffe claims to recognise, that we live in a world whose character is highly pluralistic and therefore demands to create a “multipolar world order.” That implies, that the transposing or imposing of one Western model on other orders within the world is a very incompatible option. Nevertheless, Mouffe’s conception of democratic pluralist politics draws limits to only agonistic debates, while taking into account, that “[t]he agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all forms of exclusions.” The discussion about the limitations and possibilities of agonistic and antagonistic standpoints will be continued in the following chapters.

Transnational and postcolonial feminist theorist Mohanty, named by KA as one of the scholars to whom they are “highly indebted” expands the idea of “imagined communities” by Benedict Anderson from 1983. She advocates to leave essential connotations behind, while reading these communities in a political and not biological way. It means, not to make categories like “race” or “colour” the main object of the community, categories which should not be read in an essential way, but rather to be able to form alliances by linking political struggles of these categories and acknowledging that these categories have a real effect on peoples lives. Furthermore she sees the possibility to establish a “noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders,” which accounts for “common differences,” based on specific and profound analyses of differences while linking it to questions of capitalism and globalisation, in order to

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180 Mouffe, p. 87.
181 Mouffe, pp. 124-125.
182 Mouffe, p. 92.
183 Mouffe, p. 103.
184 Mouffe, p. 120.
186 Mohanty, p. 4.
create “deep solidarities” among a variety of identities and groups. Mohanty advocates and puts right that which has often been misunderstood, that when “Western feminists” take the critique of postcolonial and “Third World” feminists into account, the strong project of a united cross-national feminist solidarity which counteracts capitalism could be possible.

In the Introduction of Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures by M. Jacqui Alexander and Mohanty, Mouffe’s work is named as “useful in defining the limits of citizenship and democratic rights for women under capitalism,” but they highlight that they want to include decolonisation within the project of democracy. I propose, that Mohanty’s deliberations on ‘imagined communities’ come close to the aspiration of ‘strategic essentialism’, while taking Mouffe’s critique into account and expanding it with a postcolonial perspective. Hence it could add a more complex as well as postcolonial reading of Mouffe’s idea of the ‘chain of equivalence’. I am arguing, that KA’s transnational, feministic and postcolonial curatorial paradigm can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the ‘shortcomings’, or to put it less harshly, to put an emphasis on decolonisation of Mouffe’s ‘White Western feminist perspective’ and might be able to contribute to or even expand the ‘radicalness’ of the radical democracy and social change advocated by Mouffe.

KA’s summary of the influences, shaping their curatorial paradigm can be read as a methodology to effectively realise a chain of equivalence, especially while bearing their Western position in mind:

[...] second-wave feminism provided us with intersectionality theory, an understanding of how forms of oppression based on gender and sexuality do not act independently from one another, but intersect with each other and with other forms of oppression based on ‘race,’ ethnicity, class, nationality, disability, etc. to create a complex system of multifaceted oppression. This intersectionalist approach – first heralded by Euro-American coloured and lesbian feminists of the second wave and now applied on a global scale through the ‘deep solidarity’ concept of transnational feminism – has in our work translated into an examination of exactly where the ‘race’-and-gender thinking of historical colonialism intersects with current capitalist globalization to transform into neocolonial forms of inequality, exploitation and oppression, and exactly where historical and present resistances to this neocolonialism can be found. Not just in the so-called poor South, but ‘at home’ in the so-called wealthy North.


188 Mohanty, p. 509.


190 see Footnote 144.

KA’s paradigm aims to think in a chain of equivalence in order to create an impact and a social change. Their methodology to “curat[e] across [highlights by KA] capitalist divides” generates a situation, in which crossing not only others’ but also one’s own inherited boundaries (may it be boundaries of ‘race’, gender, nationality, etc.) becomes a necessity.\(^{192}\) By traversing these demarcations, a deep solidarity can be practiced, as advocated by Mohanty cause, as Alexander promotes, inequalities can be read in a relational dimension and not in a comparative one.\(^{193}\) Exactly at this friction point, KA sees the potential to shift power relations and evoke social change.

Mouffe’s criticism of the newly arising racism and the challenges for formulating a radical democratic project, are both problems which postcolonial scholar Paul Gilroy detects as well. In addition he is convinced, and KA is in line with that, that Europe has to look at its colonial past in order to counteract racism and to create a democratic future.\(^{194}\)

Collectivity, Agonistic Pluralism and the Salonnière

So far the contextualisation of KA in the framework of radical democracy, citizenship and feminisms has introduced the establishing of KA’s curatorial paradigm, highly shaped by a transnational and postcolonial feminist critique on capitalism. This deliberation discloses new questions of methodologies, related to possibilities and struggles in curating, political activism as well as in the combination of both. In order to further investigate the first research question on KA’s contextualisation related to radical democracy, the second question will be scrutinised; namely how KA’s formation as ‘feminist’ and ‘collective’ affect their paradigm and work as well as how it enables or threatens radical democracy.

As already mentioned in the introduction, Mouffe differentiates between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. The latter describes antagonisms which are part of all human relations, while politics are a reaction to these frictions and take shape in regulative structures.\(^{195}\) Curating and the curatorial, despite their relational similarity to politics and the political determined by Lind, are affected by these notions.

\(^{192}\) Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 5.


Conflicts are a very apparent and ever-present condition of human societies. One of Mouffe’s parameters is therefore, that antagonisms will always exist as part of social relations, while taking a variety of shapes. Together with Laclau she argues, that “to think politically requires recognizing the ontological dimension of radical negativity.” This negativity is marked by the conditions, that pure objectivity is a false delusion, conflicts always have the potential to arise and are often not even necessarily solvable. In Mouffe’s words and to reconnect to the introduction: “what antagonism reveals is the very limit of any rational consensus.” Hence, a consensus is usually a “conflictual consensus,” as it is excluding other options. Through the antagonistic/agonistic division she aims to offer a democratic model, which allows the acknowledgement of this ‘radical negativity’.

In their methodology, KA unites a variety of theories and practices, related to transnational feminisms and queer politics as well as concerning issues of ecology, post-colonialism or perspectives which offer a critique on capitalism. This curatorial paradigm, presented already in the chapter before, offers the opportunity to bring together bodies and mentalities normally held apart and create a multi-vocal, crossdisciplinary project format where diverse, sometimes conflicting, knowledges and experiences can be articulated, exchanged and engaged with in ways that by-pass established [dichotomous] demarcations.

It reveals that through their practice conflicts can arise and are most probably even provoked by combining such a variety of theories and formats. The question is what kind of shape do these conflicts take? To discuss this question, Mouffe’s problematisation of antagonism will be presented in the following, while introducing her advocated concept of agonism.

The characteristics of antagonisms are marked by a friend/enemy relation, which contrasts a collective identity of a ‘we’ with a ‘they’. Mouffe’s idea of this concept offers an opportunity to recognise that the division of a we/they does not necessarily have to take the form of a friend/enemy arrangement - but can take many other shapes,
like an agonistic one.205 The relationship between individuals or collectives demonstrates, that every (political) identity is a relational one, as it defines itself by defining the other.206 Hence, Mouffe concludes, that establishing political identities cannot be imagined without antagonisms/agonisms.207 Even if some liberal theorists still want to abolish antagonisms as a whole, they are embedded in our lives and a ‘we’ only exists with a demarcation of a ‘they’.208 Following this idea does not mean, that only disputes will dominate; Mouffe is rather interested in acknowledging the possibilities of antagonism and aims: “to show how antagonism can be transformed so as to make available a form of we/they opposition compatible with pluralist democracy.”209 In relation to that, Mouffe is interested in giving antagonisms the possibility to take an agonistic shape.

It is necessary to provide political conditions which allow the articulation of a dissent in a non-agonistic form.210 The friend/enemy position is a very unproductive position to discuss within, as both parties do not act on common grounds and do not take into account that some point of views might be incompatible with the others - it can even lead to hostility.211 Agonism, in contrast to antagonism, does take ‘enemies’ seriously and does not deny their legitimation, which changes their position from ‘enemies’ into ‘adversaries’ or ‘legitimate enemies’.212 Hence, articulating dissent takes place in a “common symbolic space among opponents,” who disagree or fight to a “shared set of rules,” which positions their (legitimate) enemies on a level playing field.213 This is a very important perspective, as equalising the opponent’s position allows a conflict to become a real and democratic confrontation.214 These kinds of conflicts give space to new ideas of implementing radical democracy.215 In that sense, it can lead to other alternatives and approaches. One of the difficulties Mouffe mentions for realising agonistic politics, is that after the failure of the Soviet model, neoliberalism contends that there are no other options out there.216 Another problem can come to serve, when moral arguments replace political ones. Under such conditions, antagonisms can not be

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205 Mouffe, p. 16.
207 Mouffe, p. 5.
208 Mouffe, p. 5.
210 Mouffe, p. 21.
212 Mouffe, *On the political*, 2005, pp. 20, 52. Chantal Mouffe distinguishes in *Agonistics* (p. 9) her use of the term ‘adversary’ from the one appearing in liberal discussions, which she rather describes as ‘competitors’ who participate only in “a competition among elites.” In contrast to liberal thoughts, her ‘adversary’ is still aware of antagonism, even if “sublimated” and questioning the hegemony.
213 Mouffe, p. 52.
214 Mouffe, p. 52.
215 Mouffe, p. 33.
216 Mouffe, p. 31.
transformed to agonism, as their opponent cannot be accepted morally as an ‘adversary’, but only as an ‘evil them’.\textsuperscript{217}

Through her agonistic model, Mouffe stresses to “contribute to a revitalization and deepening of democracy” and states that the agenda of an agonistic approach “is a profound transformation of the existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony. This is why it can properly be called ‘radical’.”\textsuperscript{218}

In order to come back to KA, the question of the specific kind of conflicts emerging in their curatorial work is followed by another one: Who is the enemy/adversary of KA?

KA already mention, that “conflicting knowledges” come to light through their methodology, which can be read as a possibility to broaden and question ones own knowledge and preconceptions.\textsuperscript{219} It demonstrates their understanding of the existence of antagonisms. Especially when working in a chain of equivalence and uniting a variety of struggles like KA does, it can still lead to disputes and different opinions. Acknowledging that is already a first step towards an agonistic practice. Following Alexander’s approach of “crossing whichever boundaries we have inherited” in order to recognise existing “inequalities” among different people, builds another important cornerstone of their methodology, related to the problematic of antagonism.\textsuperscript{220} It gives an opportunity to think from someone else’s position and expands therefore the ‘we/they opposition’. Their theoretical approach seems to provide already interesting possibilities to enhance agonism.

Working as a collective or in a group often opens the question of how to navigate, how to take decisions and how to unite a variety of possible conflicting viewpoints. Interviewer Dimitrakaki is especially interested in their work as a collective. She is curious about the origin of female collectivity, often located within movements of second-wave feminism as well as about the revitalisation of all-women collectives within the art-fields throughout Europe and their political and cultural influence.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{217} Mouffe, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{218} Mouffe, p. 32, 52.
\textsuperscript{219} Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21st-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{221} Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21st-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, pp. 5-11.
KA acknowledges the legacy of second-wave feminist collaboration and the current rise of these kind of collectives. Nevertheless they try to take a critical standpoint:

But there is an urgent need to theorise and historicise the specificity of (all-women) collectives further, as this anthology courageously sets forth to do. On that note, we think it crucial to underline that the proliferation of collectives in terms of mere numbers does not necessarily equal the proliferation of collectivist thinking, organising and production. There a [sic] numerous pseudo-collectives organised in a gender-biased, top-to-bottom manner or according to consensus-based decision making processes, where differences are easily bracketed off. So, to avoid the unconscious reproduction of normative values and dynamics, it remains essential to engage the very concepts and definitions of collectivism further.222

Collectivity or all-female collectives per se do not promise to follow already an agonistic model. They can equally run risk of reproducing hierarchies and existing inequalities. In their above quote, KA negatively addresses forms of consensus-based decision making, practiced by collectives. This connects to Mouffe’s critique on the impossibility of agreements by consensus, to realise the antagonistic dimension existing in society. Looking at the experience of Raqs Media Collective, another creative collective, based in New Delhi and working as artists, editors and curators, they mention that disagreements encourage them to discuss further, so that they reach “new levels of connectedness.”223 Being in line with KA they argue that: “To be a collective, it is not enough to simply understand the arithmetic of being more than one.”224 Recognising and promoting the positive as well as productive sides of discussions is often underestimated within strategies of consensus. Raqs Media Collective has already collectively curated the art biennial manifesta 7 and invited other artists and participants to respond to their curatorial deliberations. This is a strategy also followed by KA, as they “work and dialogue closely with institutional and independent partners and consultants, who are touched in other ways than us by the circumstances of the thematics we engage.”225 Being a collective provides already tangible possibilities to let agonistic formats arise. Nevertheless, a mere structural formation does not provide a universal recipe for agonism. KA’s encouraging approach to expand the notion of ‘collectivity’ by engaging in a variety of relations and networks, can supposably provide a more animated and diverse exchange. Conflicting knowledges are therefore acknowledged, while through the engagement in dialogues with these so-called ‘consultants’, their viewpoints are collectively levelled on legitimate positions, allowing to channel antagonistic dissents into agonistic ones.

222 Kuratorisk Aktion, pp. 11-12.
224 Raqs Media Collective, pp. 9-10.
These approaches also resonate with the methodology of a so-called ‘Shadow Curator.’ Inspired by the concept of the Shadow Minister, which aimed to provide institutions with a critical and reflective tool to practice mirroring and alternative thinking, Nuno Sacramento has developed the strategy of a ‘Shadow Curator’. Additionally to the consultants, mentioned by KA, the ‘Shadow Curator’ tries to take a position of a “peaceful antagonism or of agonism.” Sacramento describes the function as follows:

The Shadow Curator’s role isn’t to assist or to mentor a curator in regard to a particular project or programme. Their role is, through the use of dialogue and discussion, to challenge the proposals and actions of the curator in order to consolidate his/her methodology.

The work of Raqs Media Collective, similarly to the work of KA work and their experience as a collective, can be compared to the use of (a) ‘Shadow curator(s)’ - while rending it in plural. This kind of tool can be interestingly analysed as a reaction to the need for agonism in the profession of the curator itself. Even if Sacramento names reasons to invite a ‘Shadow Curator’ such as e.g. geographic isolation, I would like to stress another point related to agonism by looking back to the history of the professionalisation of the curator, especially in relation to conversations.

Following the argumentation of Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak in their essay ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur. Inventing a singular position’ (1996), they outline that in recent years, the role of the curator has undergone a process of de-professionalisation, due to an easier access to the profession of curating as well as the transformation of the activities related to it – the curator-as-author was born. As Elke Krasny summarises the work by Heinich and Pollak in her essay ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’ (2017), the curator-as-author describes a subject position, which is characterised by individualistic and masculine authority. In her text, Krasny historicises the conversational turn in curating and highlights the importance and legacy of the ignored figure of the salonnière, a female “carer” and “author” appearing in the 1800s in Berlin and Vienna, who hosted conversations in her private home. Krasny detects a relation between the museum, the salon and the curator during the formation of modern subject positions. Salonnières, in Krasny’s example performed by Jewish women, provided the platform for creative and intellectual discussions as hostesses.

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227 Zeiske and Sacramento, A Shadow Curator Inside the Institution.


230 Krasny, p. 156.
while participating in and creating at the same time stimulating conversations. Acknowledging the influence of this kind of salon, Krasny argues:

The art of conversation embodies a politics (or utopia) of horizontality and a non-hierarchical society. […] This horizontality and relationality is practised in the domestic sphere, from where it could impact on society at large. This passage from society practised in the domestic sphere to society at large was politically radical. It would have led to a society without hierarchy and without masters. Such a society was put into practice in conversation. […] Ultimately, this salon culture has to be understood as a threat to modernity’s project of the individual, independent, masculinist subject formation. The aesthetic and political stakes were high: in the salons, a different society and a different art-making appeared possible.

This indeed radical momentum vanished as the hegemony of men as well as the oppression of Jews “devaluated” and “feminised” this kind of salon culture, while imposing their own model, one which was able to reproduce the “masculine subject formation” and defend the artist-as-genius position. In her analysis of the shift from the curator-as-carer to the curator-as-author figure, Krasny detects a failed chance to reanimate the legacy of <i>salonnières</i>. Instead she argues, that the historical concept of the individual and male artist-as-genius recreated the curator-as-author figure, as the <i>salonnière</i> was abolished. She concludes:

More radical lessons to be gained from the exclusion of the salonnière from the historiography of curating might be the following: first, the woman-led culture of the salon embodied art-making with others based upon conversations as opposed to the artist-as-genius in isolation; second, the politics practised in the salon was a society with no masters and no hierarchy; the domestic art of conversation was based upon care as co-emergence, co-dependence, and co-authorship. […] Modernity, modern culture and modern subjects might well have taken a different turn: the salonnière demonstrates that horizontality and relationality in making art and making politics is possible.

Like Krasny, but without historicising the curator-as-author figure, Dorothee Richter warns of current practices of the patriarchal and dominant figure of the “king-curator-father” and advocates practices, which take the relevance of mediation and accessibility into account. Currently she sees, that the figure of the curator is “being re-interpreted […] into a contemporary, post-Fordist, networking, globe-trotting male figure, still

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231 Krasny, p. 151.
232 Krasny, pp. 152, 155.
233 Krasny highlights, that this double exclusion as women and Jews, meant also that Jewish men were oppressed. See Krasny, pp. 153-154.
234 Krasny, p. 155.
235 Krasny, p. 160.
reminiscent of Foucault.”

By following Krasny’s study on the curator as author and Dorothee’s (quite short handed) critique of the king-curatorial-father, I would like to emphasize the downside of a patriarchal, isolated and authority like curatorial subject position, which has dominated and influenced the ongoing curatorial discourse. This individualistic figure and its unquestioned authority and authorship is very unsuitable to accommodate agonism, as it does not leave much space for discussions and conversations. Nevertheless, this does not mean, that the work by feminist male curators who have contributed importantly to questions of equality, should be forgotten or degraded, nor the work by feminist independent curators working outside of institutions or collectives. What I want to emphasize is, that when looking back to KA, their methodology, their described understanding of collectivity, including forming think tanks and alliances, there exist a relevant similarity to the salonnière, who seemed structure wise able to host and ventilate agonism, while imagining new communities and futures. The need for a so called ‘Shadow Curator’, could therefore also be reasoned in the historical hegemony of individualistic and patriarchal curators.

One interesting example, which offers an insight into this collective practice can be found in KA’s year-long project “Troubling Ireland”. The curatorial collective was commissioned in 2010 by the Dublin based art organisation Fire Station Artists’ Studio to conduct a think tank in collaboration with six artists/curators, selected after an open call. The aim of the mobile and cross-border think tank was “to create a critical aesthetic and discursive platform for engaging questions of artistic and curatorial potentiality vis-à-vis the social realities of the two Irelands and their relationship to the global world order.”

A variety of formats became part of the think tank, like lectures, readings, presentation, discussions and walks. The specific structure of this kind of think tank resonates with the historical notion of the educational salon model and expands its notion, e.g. by changing localities and cities for the different gatherings. One common decision of the think tank during the process was to produce a poster campaign, also named “Troubling Ireland”. This also initiated the launch of the website www.troublingireland.com, providing now documentation material about the whole project as well as different posters designed by the six participants. The posters have been presented in public space during a period of two weeks in September 2011 in Dublin and other sites. As a common body, the think tank is better suited to resisting individualism or authority. In a public hearing in September 2011 the closure of the

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241 Troubling Ireland, Introduction.
project invited the think tank as well as the public to discuss the project, which enabled a format, supporting agonistic discussions. During the process artist and cultural geographer Bryonie Reid was invited to attend the meetings of the think tank as an observer, in order to reflect as an ‘outsider’ on the project. In her essay ‘Reflecting on Troubling Ireland: A Cultural Geographer’s Perspectives’ she acknowledge the projects’ undertaking to ‘trouble’, as it enabled her to engage in a self-critical analysis of her position as a Protestant from Northern Ireland, “becom[ing] comfortable in the discomfort.” This position fulfils the function of the ‘Shadow Curator’ and ‘troubles’ KA’s authority as salonnières in an agonistic way. I think that with this example, the intersection and relation of the curatorial paradigm and curating becomes apparent, as their theoretical deliberations are put into action.

As already mentioned before, collectivity itself is not a structure to provide agonistic pluralism, but the way KA define their curatorial paradigm, how they expand the notion of collectivity and implement it in their work, means that it is very likely to resist the idea of consensus, while enabling agonistic debates and formats.

Advocates/Enemies and the Blind Spot

I would argue that through the collective and collaborative methodologies and theoretical deliberations KA is following, conflicts are more likely to emerge in agonistic dimensions then in antagonistic ones. However, the question still remains as to who, or what might constitute their opposing enemy/adversary. Of course, as highlighted in their self-description on Facebook, their work is determined, by an ongoing curatorial investigation into the complex relations between capitalist globalization and historical colonialism, and the ways in which coloniality’s catastrophic race- and gender-thinking continues to structure the nationalized, racialized, classed, gendered, and sexed divides of globalized corporate capitalism.

This description reveals, that they are trying to oppose from a position of left-wing politics, inequalities produced by globalisation, capitalism, colonialism, etc.

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242 Fire Station Artist’s Studios, Troubling Ireland - A Cross-Borders Think Tank for Artists and Curators with Kuratorisk Aktion.


244 Kuratorisk Aktion, About.
I will now return to Mouffe, who states that current discussions within politics are often shaped by moral approaches, differentiating between either “good” or “bad” ways:

On one side the good democrats who respect universal values and on the other side the representatives of evil, the racist and xenophobic right with whom no discussion is permitted and which has to be eradicated through moral condemnation.\textsuperscript{245}

This moral approach is highly problematic for Mouffe, as it shuts down any exchange or conflict before being able to discuss “fundamental questions,” which would be needed in order to create counter hegemonies.\textsuperscript{246}

\textit{KA’s} paradigm is able to facilitate “curatorial action,” as they are not dwelling in moral judgements, which do not provide any tools to make an actual change. This is possible, as they take the impact of capitalism, nationalism or globalisation seriously and try to work against it, with the same set of rules. Their project “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts” (2006) is an insightful example of how \textit{KA} is able to encounter the ‘enemy’ as an ‘adversary’.

\textit{KA} describes this project as one of the first ones, in which their practice of “curating across [highlights by \textit{KA}] capitalist divides” was created.\textsuperscript{247} “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism” aimed to scrutinise critically the colonial past of the Northern regions, which seemed to be often forgotten or romanticised.\textsuperscript{248} Its influence on arising issues of xenophobia or racism has been underestimated, therefore \textit{KA} felt the need to revisit this legacy.\textsuperscript{249} The workshops, exhibitions and talks took place in five acts in four former Scandinavian colonies: Reykjavik (Iceland), Nuuk (Greenland), Tórshavn (The Faroe Islands) and Rovaniemi (Finnish Sápmi).\textsuperscript{250} A documentation of the whole project, including reports, essays and photo documentations has been made accessible on the website www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org.

Their experience showed, that through their methodology of ‘bringing bodies together which are normally held apart’, in this case (postcolonial) bodies of the so called “North” and “South,” they created a situation of conflicting preconceptions and knowledges. In addition, it raised awareness of the ongoing oppressing situation for many subjects within the North, especially as it is perceived as equal or free. This

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\textsuperscript{246} Mouffe.
\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Kuratorisk Aktion}, \textit{Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with \textit{Kuratorisk Aktion}}, 2010, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{248} \textit{Kuratorisk Aktion}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Kuratorisk Aktion}, \textit{Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with \textit{Kuratorisk Aktion}}, 2010, p. 10.
\end{flushleft}
‘joining’ was able to provide an exchange among colonising and colonised subjects. KA states, that

the project created a situation where (post)colonial subjects could learn from one another and where practitioners and audiences belonging to the once-colonising nations were given the opportunity to ‘stay quiet’ for once and listen to these voices.251

Exactly this methodology of uniting struggles (‘chain of equivalence’) and “bringing the war home” as Dimitrakaki proposes, allows the ‘enemy’ to be encountered as the ‘adversary’ in this case. Thus, recognising that these issues have to be fought on both sides of the (neo)colonial-division.252 In this project a we/they division has been brought together in an agonistic way, while taking into account the plurality of (post)colonial experiences.253

But taking e.g. in this case Nordic colonialism as an adversary, it becomes more complicated when encountered in the light of Nielsen and Hansen’s own backgrounds as Danish-born citizens. As editors of a section in the magazine SUM in 2009, they took the opportunity to reflect upon their own positioning within their work related to post-colonialism and asked themselves “Who do we think we are?”254 The analysis of the project “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism” and KA’s paradigm may seem to be a promising approach in the first instance, but nevertheless is also has some downsides, as KA admits by taking the critique by Greenlandic-Danish philosopher and filmmaker Erik Gant into account. Gant states that

And because it [posterial thinking] does not master, but is absorbed into this movement, also post-colonial thinking seems doomed to act, to re-enact a colonial spectacle, so that at last/once again, with open ears, we can listen to it all the way through. The most recent example I know of and have followed with curiosity is a project called Rethinking Nordic Colonialism [highlights by Gant].255

It problematises the repetitive dimensions of post-colonial critique, which can run the risk of stagnating within these “re-enactments” and leads to KA’s admission of guilt and blind spots. They confess, that these topics are of course also affected by “embarrassing pain, guilt and shame at being part of Danish society and the white ‘race’.”256 How to deal with and position such a confession of ‘white guilt’, especially as it is often

251 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 11.
252 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 9.
253 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 11.
256 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 37.
criticised for being an unproductive and even narcissistic point of view, which shifts the focus away from the existing problems of power relations and privilege?

In her book *Plantation memories: episodes of everyday racism* Grada Kilomba, an interdisciplinary artist and writer of colour with a background in psychology and psychoanalysis, further elaborates the psychological process of five different “ego defense mechanisms” presented by Paul Gilroy.257 The processes of ‘denial’, ‘guilt’, ‘shame’, ‘recognition’ and ‘reparation’ are describing the situation white subjects have to process, in order to leave their position of passiveness and guilt behind, and hence to acknowledge their own racisms and privileges in order to act in solidarity with people of colour and be able to eventually ‘listen’.258 Kilomba argues, that: “Working on one’s own racism is a psychological process and it has nothing to do with morality.”259 She describes the status of ‘guilt’ as an inner conflictive position, related to past racisms which are rather taking place outside oneself.260 The following step of ‘shame’ is therefore rather a reaction related to the inside and one’s own failure in counteracting racisms.261 It can lead to the important situation of ‘recognition’. In a talk by KA at the conference ‘Decolonizing North’ 2017, Nielsen of KA described herself as a “white racist,” in an attempt to recognise and highlight her own privileges and inherited racisms, but it could also be interpreted as a way of exposing ‘guilt’ or ‘shame’.262

Maura Reilly names self-criticism as a very important act for curators, as it helps to question their own power relation within the exhibition field. Especially, as currently galleries and art institutions are ‘whitewashing’ their shows, encouraged by the work of mainstream curators. This representation often comes hand in hand with an underrepresentation of e.g. women, non-Westerners or minorities. She highlights the relevance of self-criticisms, by citing feminist and activist bell hooks, who says that we should:

[...]

produce work that opposes structures of domination, that presents possibilities for a transformed future by willingly interrogating our own work on aesthetic or political grounds. This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fundamentally fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than denial.263

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258 Kilomba, pp. 20-22.
261 Kilomba, p. 21.
For Reilly this has the consequence, that curators should question their own position, and privileges, their own mechanisms of favouritism and actions. Her argument introduces already the last step of the five ego defence mechanisms by Kilomba, the one of ‘reparation’. It is an active position, as it describes “[…] the act of repairing the harm caused by racism by changing structures, agendas, spaces, positions, dynamics, subjective relations, vocabulary, that is, giving up privileges.”

Postcolonial thinking can hopefully exit its doom loop of reenacting, as Gant has put it, the “colonial spectacle” and its ‘diabolic’ position between “jubilation and despair,” by transforming postcolonial thought into the practice of ‘reparation’.

It can be summarised, that KA’s self-criticism becomes paradoxically on the one hand side their own adversary and blind spot, but on the other side their engine towards taking curatorial action, encouraging social change. KA argues for their practice as follows:

The drive that apparently makes Kuratorisk Aktion return to our crime scene with some degree of satisfaction is complex and riddled with blind spots. There is no doubt that our practice is highly conscious of guilt. We are driven by a sense of being accomplices, of being co-responsible. Is this a sense of agonizing and embarrassing pain, guilt and shame at being part of Danish society and the white “race”, which would perhaps be intolerable if we did not constantly engage with it? We legitimize our ongoing practice with an intellectual and emotional awareness of the modernist, Eurocentric, and masculinist tradition which all our movements seek to reject while simultaneously insisting on so-called intersectionality, i.e. that no oppressive system (be it racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) functions in isolation from other oppressive systems. In and through our projects, we position and thus include ourselves within the very field that is being critically examined for asymmetries and blind spots.

The steps named by Kilomba have to be repeated over and over again and cannot be read as steps, which can only lead ‘forwards’, but never ‘backwards’. A transformation of ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ into ‘recognition’ and ‘reparation’, has taken different outcomes or consequences in KA’s work of curating. KA only applied for fundings of the (former) Nordic colonisers and explicitly avoided to raise money from the colonised parts for their project “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism”.

Furthermore, they have put up a representation rate of 65/35 percent, presenting minoritarian-majoritarian subjectivities,
while opening up this methodology for critique and discussion.269 A conclusion drawn from the act of ‘reparation’ can also be located in their future structure of CAMP, in which guest curators, preferably with migration background, will curate the exhibitions from next year onwards.270 Nielsen is aware that such an act can be regarded as simple tokenism, especially as it is currently ‘fashionable’ to work with issues related to refugees and migration. She nevertheless highlights that mainstream museums or curators might work with these issues, but e.g. only as short-termed exhibitions, while KA is aiming for long-term changes and solutions. Only such an approach overcomes a status of ‘recognition’. Translating their curatorial paradigm into curating is part of a process of ‘reparation’, which is a never-ending negotiation, struggle and engagement with one’s own position - which is of course not free from defects or pitfalls.

Kuratorisk Aktion as a Counter-Hegemonic Intervention

In the previous chapters I aimed to answer the first and second research questions by presenting Mouffe’s theoretical framework of radical democracy. Her theoretical deliberations were used as a reference point in order to discuss the specific context of KA’s activities as well as their curatorial paradigm shaped by transnational-feministic and collective curating. Until now the analysis has paved the way to propose, that KA can be read as a counter-hegemonic intervention, borrowing the terminology of Mouffe. In the following this concept will be presented and the placing of KA as a counter-hegemonic intervention reasoned. This brief analysis will provide the basis to investigate the third research question on the influence and activism of the work by KA, focussing on Mouffe’s theory on ‘engaging with institutions’ and criticism.

As concluded in the chapter of Collectivity, Agonistic Pluralism and the Salonnière, the agonistic model’s aim is to subvert power relations and to create new ones.271 Therefore it is highly linked to the idea of hegemonies. Mouffe and Laclau position their understanding of “hegemony as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain.”272 Hegemony is defined by exclusions of possibilities, power relations and hierarchies, furthermore the condition, that things can be different and are temporary.273 Is also describes the fixation or institutionalisation of orders as hegemonic practices as well as their destabilisation by counter-hegemonic practices.274

270 Kuratorisk Aktion (Tone Olaf Nielsen), The Drive to Remember: Kuratorisk Aktion’s Curatorial Engagement with Invisibilized Colonialism and Indigineity in the Nordic Region, 2017.
272 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics, 2001, p. xi.
274 Mouffe, pp. 2-3.
Part of the political is also the nature of hegemonic structures, which are embedded in social orders. Mouffe states, that “[…] since power relations are constitutive of the social, every order is by necessity [highlights by Mouffe] a hegemonic order.” Through ‘hegemonic practices’, an order can be articulated, produced and maybe even institutionalised in social structures.

Mouffe names the “pluralisation of hegemonies” as one of the potential solutions to provide an alternative to our “current unipolar world.” From her perspective, this “multipolar approach” could lead to conflicts which take rather an agonistic, than an antagonistic shape. She opposes a cosmopolitan solution, as already presented in the contextualisation of KA and similar to the idea of consensus. It does not give space for plurality and neglect the influence of “the hegemonic nature of every order.” Therefore she outlines her idea as follows:

For us the radicalization of democracy requires the transformation of the existing power structures and the construction of a new hegemony. In our view, the building of a new hegemony implies the creation of a ‘chain of equivalence’ among the diversity of democratic struggles, old and new, in order to form a ‘collective will’, a ‘we’ of the radical democratic forces. This can be done only by the determination of a ‘they’, the adversary that has to be defeated in order to make the new hegemony possible.

This shows again, that all the concepts and ideas of Mouffe are highly intertwined with each other in the theoretical framework of radical democracy. The agonistic approach, as already stated at the beginning, can therefore intervene and disrupt the preexisting orders (hegemonic practices) and determine their own new ones (hegemonic intervention / counter-hegemonic practices), but only in relation to an ‘adversary’ and not an ‘enemy’. Contesting these predominant, but temporary fixations can be redefined by hegemonic interventions with a new and different order of fixation/hegemony. However, these transitions never happen on “neutral” ground and are shaped and determined by preexisting conditions and relations.

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275 Mouffe, Agonistics: thinking the world politically, 2013, p. 2.
277 Mouffe, Agonistics: thinking the world politically, 2013, p. 2.
278 Mouffe, pp. xiii, 22.
279 Mouffe, p. xiii.
281 Mouffe, p. 53.
282 Mouffe, p. 33,51.
284 Mouffe, p. 3.; Mouffe, On the political, 2005, pp. 34.
KA positions their work and goals as a collective as a form of activism and explain it as follows:

We aim for the transnational, multi-vocal and cross-disciplinary knowledge production fostered in our projects to generate radical critique and critical action at a micro-political and politics-of-the-common level that in the long run could have macro-political effects. In that sense, you could say that our curatorial practice is driven by a desire for exhibitions to contribute to social change that indeed brings curating into the avant-garde equation. We would like to believe that we belong to the growing number of curators who have worked hard to break curating’s ideological isolation from everyday life by stressing the political dimension of exhibitions because of the way they directly contribute to the construction of identity, values and history – be they normative or alternative.285

KA positions themselves in a discursive struggle of micro-politics, which can be lifted up to macro-politics when reading it in its counter-hegemonic dimension. This also represents my interest in using the theory of radical democracy, as it enables to switch the perspective between these micro- and macro-political discourses. Talking about collectivity and the critique on the hegemony of the curator-as-author in the chapter before, it was my aim to present that orders are the temporary result of previous struggles with temporary fixations which are never value-free. KA’s work can therefore be identified as a struggle, whose effects or ramifications are already shaping the discourse. Choosing KA as a ‘unordinary’ case to study and scrutinising their methodology of collective and transnational feminist curating has lead to an understanding of what might constitute the opposite and hegemonic practice in the curatorial field. Dimitrakaki states, that KA’s work “demonstrates a curatorial vision that possibly achieves a significant break with institutionally based curating.”286 While investigating the first research question of the relations between the ideas of radical democracy and KA’s curatorial practice and presenting Mouffe’s continuation of hegemony in order to describe counter-hegemonic interventions, KA can be read as a counter-hegemonic intervention within the politics of the curatorial field.

**Institutions and Criticism**

Scrutinising the first research question, it revealed the anti-hegemonic dimensions of KA’s curatorial paradigm and work and therefore already responded to the second research question. It showed, that KA is working against the current, disrupting the existing hegemony and influencing the discourse. I would like to discuss the two possibilities of working against or working with institutions presented by Mouffe, while taking reflections on institutional critique and new institutionalism into account. KA’s

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286 Dimitrakaki, Gender, artWork and the global imperative: a materialist feminist critique, 2013, p. 222.
latest project CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics will herby serve as an example. It facilitates a focus on the third research question on how questions of activism and influence of KA work can be approached, when taking radical democracy into account.

In her works, Mouffe discusses two different ways of promoting political change or new forms of hegemony. Simply put, one which works against institutions (‘withdrawal from’) or one – and that is the one she is supporting – which works together with institutions (‘engagement with’). She states, that the strategy of ‘withdrawal from’, is at risk of limiting its impact only to processes of “disarticulation,” while not acknowledging the importance of processes of “re-articulation” and the value of working with existing discourses. Mouffe elucidates this as follows:

A properly political intervention is always one that engages with a certain aspect of the existing hegemony in order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements. It can never be merely oppositional or conceived as desertion because it aims at re-articulating the situation in a new configuration.

Therefore, the second way and especially the processes of ‘re-articulation’ stand for what she calls radical politics or counter-hegemonic interventions. Furthermore, in contrast to the withdrawal strategies or ideas of exodus, the actions of ‘engagement’ are not aiming to go beyond the nature of ‘radical negativity’. As an independent curatorial collective how does KA’s relation to institutions function?

KA has, for the most part, operated as freelance curators, choosing and executing their own projects in a nomadic way, beside existing art institutions. This self-organisation has not really been articulated as an active choice to work ‘against institutions’ but demonstrates rather, that some of the existing institutions have not yet been ready to work with KA’s “set of curatorial politics,” which does not allow to “compromise the thematic of the exhibitions project or the contribution of the participants.” To uphold their own curatorial paradigm, external fundings have helped to realise the large projects during a long period of time. Nevertheless, as there is no funding to cover their curatorial and research fees, KA is doomed to act in precarity while counteracting it with 2-3 side jobs. In this example, it becomes clear that working against an institution or against the system most probably just ‘disarticulates’ certain topics or politics, but at the cost of KA’s own sustainability, as it is not able to engage with the current dominant

287 Mouffe, Agonistics: thinking the world politically, 2013, p. 65.
288 Mouffe, p. 73-74.
290 Mouffe, Agonistics: thinking the world politically, 2013, pp. 71-82.
292 Kulturisk Aktion, p. 6.
discourses. KA admits, that the collective dimension of their work was initially seen as a supportive structure, better able to resist “the situation of precarity that neoliberalism imposes on the so-called creative class.” Believing in political theories or activist deliberations on how to subvert power-relations can often work against oneself in the short run or in real life situations. As KA states: “[…] although transnational feminism has played a crucial role in building, practicing and upholding our collective curatorial ethos, it has done little to better our material situation.” Still, their independent work has gained more and more interest by art institutions, festivals or journals. Working within institutions who have to commit and adapt to the curatorial ethos KA brings along, their work itself can be read as an institutional critique. KA’s experience showed, that existing institutions like to invite them temporarily, to provide a challenging programme, discussion or exhibition, but that they are not ready to let KA take directorships and implement long-term changes or critiques within a whole structure. Even if they have applied for several higher positions, KA is not sanguine about a change, as they state: “but [we] never made it to the final selection (and probably never will, apparently being too female or too collective-like, too political or too institutionally inexperienced).” Nevertheless, KA argues for a growing institutional interest in similar formations, as other curatorial or artistic collectives like WHW have been selected to curate biennials like the 11th Istanbul Biennial. Nonetheless, these involvements described are again only temporary positions. Hence, to evoke an incremental and lasting institutional change it goes often hand in hand with occupying a position of power within institutions; posing a critique with fleeting anomalous interventions alone cannot do the job. In order to scrutinise KA's latest project CAMP in relation to institutions and the possibility of activism, I am going to briefly present discussions related to the issue of critique and institutions within the curatorial field.

Providing critique on institutions or forms of organising had and still has an ambivalent standpoint. Terms like ‘institutional critique’ or ‘new institutionalism’ have been used, historicised, reactivated, defined or rejected within the art field. For example, the issue of institutional critique, practiced by artists, has been contested itself by becoming at some point institutionalised and therefore noneffective. The notion of new institutionalism, arose and discussed in the 2000s, united a variety of more or less fixed and embedded structures or actions of reflective self criticism within organisations. In their essay ‘New Institutionalism Revisited’ (2013), Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger give a historical overview with examples on the understanding and practice of New Institutionalism and conclude, that it “is represented as a failed enterprise.”

293 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 6.
294 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 11.
changes, were one of the reasons for this failure, cutting the budget of critical institutions forced their closure or provoked changes regarding the (curatorial) staff. In her text ‘The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism’ Nina Möntmann entrust curators with an important role in adopting and expanding institutional critique on institutional patterns and hierarchies and asks: “What is ‘new institutionalism’ today [stating that question in 2007]?” It resonates with Simon Sheik’s analysis in ‘Notes on Institutional Critique’ (2006), that there has been a return, a so-called ‘third wave’ in institutional critique. He points out that curators now see the solution of the problems and critique of institutions, within the institutions itself. Möntmann, like Mouffe, opens the two possibilities of this democratic ‘dilemma’ to affect a change by following artists Gardar Eide Einarsson’s argument to either engage with institutions or to create something beside them. To take up a last standpoint in relation to new institutionalism, Janet Marstine argues, that agonism as well as care are both important parts of new institutionalism, as it provides an environment, in which care has been taken, to ensure that conflicts can take agonistic shape. Citing Sheikh, who gives credit to feminist and queer curatorial practices in the 1990s, he highlights that these practices brought tools like crossing borders and critical self-reflection in the exhibition making processes forward.

In 2015 KA initiated their first locationally fixed and open-ended project. Their new institution or centre CAMP opened. As already mentioned in the brief outline on KA’s work, the nonprofit exhibition centre CAMP is located inside the Trampoline House. The Trampoline House is an independent community centre, founded in 2010 in Copenhagen and formed “as a citizens’ collaboration between asylum seekers, refugees, artists, scholars, journalists, and others interested in breaking the social isolation, poverty, and paralysis that unfortunately characterize life in Danish asylum centers.” Curator Tone Olaf Nielsen is a co-founder and still active as programmer as well as Women’s Club coordinator. So five years after the realisation of Trampoline House, the exhibition space was hosted within this institution. This has the consequence, as Nielsen describes in an interview, that visitors have to walk through the community centre, closely experiencing the environment and having the opportunity to come into contact

with different groups of people, especially ones with migrant or refugee experience. The exhibition venue aims to be a space for artists, who are dealing with questions of displacement or migration. On their website of Trampoline House it states that they want CAMP “to be a space where audiences, both with and without refugee or migrant backgrounds, are able to identify with the living conditions of displaced peoples through art and find inspiration for an alternative refugee, asylum, and migration political agenda.” Their engagement with an institution like Trampoline House as well as the undertaking to establish their own ‘new’ institution, allows KA to stick to their curatorial paradigm without compromising it, as they have created their own framework. CAMP becomes an ideal example of how KA is working: “Our work is a synthesis of aesthetic and discursive analysis, critique and activism, intended to shed light on the relationships between things, subjects and processes with an aim to subvert the power relations that divide them.”

So how is it possible to position the institution of CAMP within the framework of radical democracy as well as bearing in mind institutional critique or new institutionalism? In her article ‘The Uneasy Relationship of Self-Critique in the Public Art Institution’ (2016), Emma Mahony has critically examined exactly this complex relation of the third wave institutional critique and the limitations of conducting this critique within the institutions structure. For her analysis she examined two contested projects which took place in the 2000s in MACBA under Borja-Villel’s lead as director and summarises, that: “Borja-Villel achieved something so radical that it exceeded the institution’s ability to contain it.” Her analysis revealed, that there are bureaucratic limitations within institutions, which can be an obstacle to fulfil a radical project, as critique is often encouraged, but apparently only within the institution’s reality. Nevertheless, by challenging this double standard certain borders might be able to be transgressed. It is exactly this limitation, which kept KA away from engaging with existing institutions in the position of a directorship and to make a change from top to bottom. Mohany criticises Chantal Mouffe’s idea of creating a change from within institutions, as it does not take into account the ties to funding, political bodies or board

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308 Mahony, p. 233.

309 Mahony, pp. 231-234.
members, which constrain radical criticism to only a representative one.\textsuperscript{310} She evaluates:

A further distinction between critique that targets the art institution as a whole and critique that targets its neoliberal operational structure needs to be made here. While the former was been historically accepted and indeed invited by the art museum, the latter is frequently not tolerated.\textsuperscript{311}

\textit{CAMP} can therefore be categorised as a transgressive reaction towards this limitation. Even while being part of a bigger structural complex of neoliberal constraints, \textit{KA} still created a framework in which they can operate politically, while being faithful to their curatorial paradigm. This happens without any form of exodus nor through a change within an existing system. But nevertheless, as Mouffe endorses in her idea of ‘engagement with institutions’, the creation of an own institution like \textit{CAMP} is still able to formulate a “[…] critique and disarticulation of the existing hegemony [which] will go hand in hand with a process of rearticulation.”\textsuperscript{312}

To go back to Möntmann’s question on how new institutionalism is articulated today, \textit{CAMP} might be one answer. Möntmann’s interest in this question has turned her research towards organisations active in the southern hemisphere. There she found possible articulations and inspirations in small-scale organisations which develop organically into bigger ones. She outlined the problem and concludes:

[…] what is therefore required is the establishment of transgressive institutions that question and break with the current developments of privatization and simultaneously orient themselves towards other disciplines and areas besides the corporative business of globalized capitalism. […] In my opinion, what institutions in western countries need to do is precisely to reduce the number of structures and standards, and disengage spaces from too many codes and contexts. Here, where we have an institutionalized art field – and consequently the opportunities to participate in semi-public spaces, but also the difficulties caused by the control mechanisms of these spaces – the options are somewhat different.\textsuperscript{313}

I am arguing, that Möntmann’s proposal takes the critique by Mohany on Mouffe into account and reveals the activist potential of \textit{CAMP}. By creating their own institution, it can be argued, \textit{KA} avoid certain preexisting codes, especially by locating it within the \textit{Trampoline House}. \textit{CAMP}’s work resonates with Möntmann’s demand for a progressive form of an art organisation, which collaborates with popular institutions, (e.g. their exhibition project ‘Migration Politics’ which was re-exhibited in the national gallery of Denmark \textit{SMK}) and alternative organisations, (e.g. \textit{Trampoline House}) and opposes the

\textsuperscript{310} Mahony, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{311} Mahony, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{312} Mouffe, \textit{Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention}, 2008.
\textsuperscript{313} Möntmann, \textit{The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism. Perspectives on a Possible Future}, 2007.
idea of the nation-state by enabling a “global exchange of diverse public groups and individual voices,” which is represented in their exhibition format.314 In terms of both contentwise and structure, CAMP seems to offer a promising alternative. Nevertheless, as Möntmann argues, and CAMP most probably also experiences, things would still need to change on the level of funding in order to support KA’s activism from the bottom up, with “a globalization from below.”315 In such an ideal situation, institutional critique would be able to transgress capitalist boundaries.

To sum up, Katrin Kivimaa suggests in the introduction of Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe that Dimitrakaki’s text on ‘Feminist Politics and Institutional Critiques: Imagining a curatorial commons’ shows that feminist curating can be categorised as a form of institutional critique, able to oppose patriarchy as well as the “capitalist foundations of the art system and its institutions.”316 Dimitrakaki nevertheless sees, that the project of a “pluralism of feminist institutional critique” in the field of feminist curating has not been able yet to be realised properly, as it is still fighting to include female artists within institutions or collections.317 Even if Dimitrakaki limits her analysis to post-socialist countries, it reveals, that feminist curating incorporates an institutional critique, which strives to change the criticised structures, which prevent women from shaping the art institutions or the canon.

‘What about Art?’ - Radical Democracy and the Case of Pia Arke

In this last chapter I would like to take up the question of art. One might tend to query the relevance of it, as until now, the importance of artists and artworks in the current analysis of KA’s has mostly been bracketed out. KA admit in their interview with Dimitrakaki, that they have already been confronted with questions asking for the role of art. In order to include this question in the discussion of KA, I would like to combine it with a brief presentation by Mouffe’s arguments of her article on ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’ from 2007, which illustrates her idea of the possibility of hegemonic interventions by artists and cultural practices, under post-Fordist capitalism. Following, I would like to discuss the importance and use of art and artists in KA’s work, aiming to create new imageries, critical narrative of the ‘unwritable’, while bearing in mind radical democracy. KA’s investigation on artist Pia Arke, presented in

314 Möntmann.
315 ‘Globalisation from below’ can be defined as following: “Participants in the movement for globalization from below have varied agendas, but the movement’s unifying mission is to bring about sufficient democratic control over states, markets and corporations to insure a viable future for people and the planet” see J. Brecher, Globalization From below. International solidarity is the key to consolidating the legacy of Seattle, 2000, [online text], https://www.thenation.com/article/globalization-below/, (accessed 29 November 2017); Möntmann, The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism. Perspectives on a Possible Future, 2007.
the publication *TUPILAKOSAURUS: An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research* (2012) will hereby serve as an example.

Mouffe dedicated some of her writings to the question, if art can still play nowadays a critical role and if so, how it is connected to the agonistic struggle.318 This question has to be read while considering the changes of the cultural industry, determined by neoliberalism and capitalism. According to Mouffe, its consequences are articulated in a form of “hybridization,” which can be described as follows: “Today the boundaries between pure intellectual activity, political action and labour have dissolved and post-fordist labour has absorbed into itself many of the characteristics of political action.”319 In order to overcome the recuperation by capitalism and making use of these new social relations, artistic interventions have to broaden their field of impact, especially in a “multiplicity of social spaces.”320 Remembering the struggles of the New Social Movements during the 1960’s, Mouffe refers to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (first published in 1999). Boltanski and Chiapello trace down and scrutinise, how “capitalist productivity” has transformed in the 1970s and 1980s from fordism to post-fordism, by accommodating the demands of artistic counter-culture for autonomy and freedom.321 They reveal, that back then the artists’ and intellectuals’ criticism of capitalism itself unintentionally gave the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ the knowledge to extend its impact by accommodating and appropriating their formulated needs.322 Even if this argumentation seems to paralyse the subversive power of art and artists, it rather serves Mouffe as a reason to support the broadening of the spheres of artistic actions and to scrutinise it within her theory of radical democracy.323

Dimitrakaki asks KA how they resist such a system, which nowadays demands to work collaboratively, in order to keep up with the times.324 KA is aware of the danger, that their curatorial work can run the risk of being instrumentalised and monopolised by capitalism or neoliberal developments, especially as in the last years, practices like ‘networking’ or ‘cooperating’ are enforced by the neoliberal system itself.325 Their curatorial activist demands are accompanied by a critical consciousness of such risks.

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318 e.g. See chapter 5 in her book *Agnostics: thinking the world politically* (2013) as well as her article ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’ from 2007.
325 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 12.
As their curatorial paradigm is never subject to compromises in their practice, KA becomes quite resistant towards such cooptations.

Mouffe sees the areas of politics and arts in a relational way, claiming, that “[t]here is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art.”\textsuperscript{326} She argues that all kinds of art have political dimensions, but it is rather a question of what kind of art can become a form of critical expression. In order to challenge the existing order of hegemony, critical art should foster dissensus and discussions, in order to expose the suppressed opinions and voices, which be silenced and made invisible in the aim for consensus. Mouffe attributes the potential of critical art and therefore practices which follow an agonistic way of expression to forms which combine art with activism. She argues,

\[\text{[…]}\text{ that to grasp the political character of those varieties of artistic activism we need to see them as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character.}\textsuperscript{327}

The effect and influence of art should neither be under- nor overestimated. Mouffe suggests to read it in her idea of the ‘chain of equivalence’, relating the variety of struggles, while fighting against the hegemony on different battle grounds.\textsuperscript{328}

\textit{KA}'s work unites different struggles and intervenes in various arenas, while speaking through the voice of art and illustrating it through exhibitions. As already mentioned in the introduction, they do not see their work as a replacement for politics, but as a political interference, striving for social change:

\begin{quote}
Our work is a synthesis of aesthetic and discursive analysis, critique and activism, intended to shed light on the relationships between things, subjects and processes with an aim to subvert the power relations that divide them.\textsuperscript{329}
\end{quote}

Even if \textit{KA}'s work is highly informed by theoretical deliberations, they underline that art forms the precondition for their work and engagement.\textsuperscript{330} Especially as it enables, in a situation, as Dimitrakaki described it at the beginning of the interview, of “de-politicisation and mass disillusionment,” new narratives, futures and visions, “a place which allows for the very engagement with radical difference in its own terms.”\textsuperscript{331}

\textsuperscript{326} Mouffe, ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’, 2007, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{327} Mouffe, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{328} Mouffe, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{329} Kuratorisk Aktion, Curatorial Collectives and Feminist Politics in 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Europe: An Interview with Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{330} Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{331} Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 15.
Positioning with Greenlandic-Danish artist Pia Arke (1958-2007) an artist and her practice at the centre of KA’s vast long-term investigation (started in 2007), the reciprocal character of their work uniting activism and critique with artists’ narratives can be exemplified. With her work and methodology, Arke has inspired KA profoundly. Shortly after Arke’s death, as a way of addressing that Arke’s oeuvre has been underrepresented and under-appreciated, KA formed the Pia Arke Society, in collaboration with Arke’s relatives and colleagues which aims to change this marginalisation.332 Arke grew up in Greenland as a self-described ‘mongrel’, emerging from the relation between an east Greenlandic sewer and a Danish telegraphist.333 In 1978 she moved to Denmark in order to visit the art school.334 Her work investigates from this position of in betweenness regarding the colonial relation of Greenland and Denmark and irritates the preexisting prejudices related to “primitive art and Eskimoic authenticity” in an anthropologic manner.335 KA describes Arke’s methodology as a “mongrel-like” practice, which becomes itself “un-classifiable” and “un-disciplinable” and therefore difficult to be understood and reused by systems of global capitalism.336 It reflects therefore a resistance, similar to that found in KA’s own practice.

Up until the time of writing, KA’s ‘incomplete(able)’ survey and investigation encompasses an international and professional essay-producing seminar on the aesthetic research of Arke (Copenhagen, 2010), a travelling exhibition (Denmark, Greenland, Sweden, 2010), a community meeting in Katuaq (Greenland, 2010) in order to reflect on Arke’s practice and further the postcolonial Greenland context and the possibility of contemporary art to contribute to decolonisation, a republishing of Arke’s Danish-written books Ethno-Aesthetics (1995/2010) and Stories from Scoresbysund: Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping (2003/2010) in a trilingual version in English, Greenlandic and Danish together with an enormous publication, presenting a variety of texts and essays about and by Arke and the specific Greenlandic-Danish context, a documentation of the exhibition, and a first attempt to provide a (fragmentary) biography, exhibitions history and bibliography plus a catalogue raisonné (2012).337 KA raises Arke’s “postcolonial aesthetics, visual thinking, and artistic research” to a broader struggle and argues for its potential to not only dismantle Denmark’s colonial legacy and tell Greenland’s (his)stories of colonisation, but also its ability to map something about “the much ‘bigger’ history of Western imperialism and the dynamics

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333 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 8.
334 Kuratorisk Aktion, p. 8.
335 Kuratorisk Aktion, pp. 8-9.
of today’s world order.” KA’s expanded use and positioning of the ‘artist’ or ‘art’ can therefore be summarised as follows:

[…] we don’t subscribe to the view that artistic practice is necessarily endowed with the gift of seeing things differently, in our accentuation of art’s potential to become an active social and political player within the current world order, we do jump the fence of ideological isolation and land in the hybrid field where the artist is engaged as one among many agents invited to, concertedly, pose new (kinds of) questions and look for alternative answers or complications.

With this example of KA’s great survey on Pia Arke’s work, their extensive research and collaboration with a variety of networks, partners and scholars, their whole undertaking can be analysed as an inspiring attempt to continue and spread Arke’s work of resistance, unlearning and trauma-healing in order to establish progressive and motivating narratives. By supporting critical art and challenging the hegemony in a variety of ways, KA’s agonistic articulation of activism is able to provide a platform for unheard voices, at least in one of the many battle grounds.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction and my presented aims and research questions, I have analysed in this single-case study the uniqueness of KA, who aim to create social change by means of curating. Through the theoretical lens of Mouffe’s idea of radical democracy, the four research questions have been accessed and discussed, whereby examples of KA’s curatorial projects deepened and reinforced the analysis and dialogue.

Contextualising KA with a perspective on radical democracy, feminisms and citizenship it can be summarised that KA has, in addition to their subject position as politicised curators formulated over time a critical self position as social agents within their specific geographical and social contexts. Through a distanced viewpoint as well as private experiences KA has been enabled and educated to find a position to oppose the widespread glorification of the Danish welfare state accompanied by an uncritical use of white feminisms. In their words, they had no other opportunity, than to “associate [their] professional lives with the political.” It reveals, that the uniqueness of KA’s paradigms are very much related to a long and comprehensive critique and reflection on

their surrounded contexts, resulting into a transnational feminist, postcolonial and anti-capitalist paradigm, highly committed to solidarity and social change.

Their structural formation and self understanding as a curatorial and feminist collective shapes not only their paradigm, but also their strategies and methodologies. KA's pronounced use of their conception of collectivity goes beyond mere numbers and is able to accommodate agonistic pluralism through the acceptance and encouragement of conflicting knowledges. Through think tanks, alliances and structural formations similar to the figure of the salonnière, KA expands the notion of collectivity and feminist organising to new levels and therefore obtains an exceptional position against the former patriarchal and individualist’s prevalences within curating. The transformation of seeing the enemy as an adversary and their analysis of their own blind spots pushes their work to radical democratic borders, being openly vulnerable for contestation and renewals.

In the analysis it becomes apparent that KA's form of activism can be positioned as a counter-hegemonic project within the framework of radical politics, as they attempt to disrupt inequalities created through capitalism or racism and other existing hegemonic structures through theory and practice. The success of such a great undertaking, which aims to transform the balance of hierarchies and resources in the long run, can be easily questioned. In the chapter on institutions and criticism KA's difficulties in influencing the discourse from positions of power become clear. Institutions want criticism, but not permanently. Creating their own organisation with CAMP is one of the possibilities. Only the future will show if this promising alternative will survive, without breaking under the pressure of precarity, separation and the distribution of fundings.

KA's political dedications are amplified through the pluralistic and regenerating voice of art. Artists and curators are both understood as social agents, acting on the same level field among a variety of other subject positions. Through the example of Pia Arke’s work, the importance of such aesthetic disruptions becomes comprehensible, reading it in a chain of equivalence in order to sum up a variety of struggles for realising radical democratic conditions.

As already mentioned in the introduction, this study of KA has its limitations, and further research is always possible. Conducting an interview with KA at this point would be a great and insightful opportunity, especially as I would be interested in learning more about their own vision for KA, situations where agonism transformed into antagonism, mistakes and pitfalls, and the current situation of CAMP.

With this in-depth single-case study, I demonstrated that the way KA works, thinks and organises cannot be simply adopted or generalised in order to advocate positions which are in line with Mouffe’s idea of radical democracy. It rather revealed the personal
effort, research and passion the team of KA devoted to create structures of collectivity, of agonism, of self-reflectiveness and equality. An inspiring undertaking, not free of flaws and contradictions, but still a very challenging attempt to evoke social change through curating and the curatorial.

The title of my thesis ‘Curating (and the Curatorial) as Radical Democracy’ therefore has to be read with caution, as it does not imply that radical democracy offers a guideline on how to curate. The theory rather worked as a dialogue partner and a possibility to borrow vocabulary and deliberations in order to lift KA’s work into the spheres of politics, philosophy and critical theories. In the end, their counter-hegemonic formation revealed their proper and exceptional way of curating (and the curatorial) as radical democracy.
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