Curatorial approaches to site specific performance and action in the public realm

by

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Preface

The role of the art curator gained importance during the last 20 years following interesting experiments in the 1990’s. The main curatorial impulse was re-exploring urban public space and exhibiting in alternative locations and warehouses. Another major characteristic was the dominating political engagement. These combinations of socio-political site specificity called for more performative art since social and political issues usually involve people and relationship in the public realm.

There is a very lively discourse evolving about performance in public realm but only few study cases that examine it from the curatorial point of view.

The following research deals with the discursive field of curatorial practice of site specific performances and action in the public realm. This field is very dynamic, it functions as a sensitive seismograph influenced by local, global, social, geo-political and financial factors and reacting to them.

The following practice based research deals with the discursive field of curatorial practice of site specific performances, action and intervention in the public realm.

One purpose of the theoretic part was to find out what are the existing common strategies or models to curate performance, action and interventions in public space. Another purpose is to reflect on my practical curatorial project and the Hit and run as a curatorial strategy and evaluate the effect of the project and its artistic result.

During my research I have detected a shift in the role of the curator. From curator who only curates to a curator who is also producing and commissioning, this change applies as well in the working strategies of organisations that focus on projects in public space, contributed to the emerging of durational projects and to the shift from local events to networking. The purpose of the first chapters is to point out these aspects and to analyse the factors that contributed to these changes. In order to do so I examine the curator’s role and identify different working methods. In the second chapter I describe three common existing curatorial models.

For the practical part of my study I curated art projects at the Holocaust Memorial for the murdered Jews in Berlin. I have invited the Israeli artist and performer Moran Sanderovich, the
German performer-producer Birgit Auf der Lauer and the Argentinean artist, curator and producer Valeria Schwarz to develop performance/intervention/action at the memorial. The memorial is a public space built on a private area that belongs to the German government and it is managed by the Holocaust Memorial Foundation.

This makes it one of those many public/private in-between places. Art projects of any kind are forbidden and asking permits to take photos and film video in the memorial for future public screening is doomed to be refused as part of the policy of the memorial foundation. Due to this strict position I have applied the *Hit and run* curatorial approach to produce there my project.

Finally, I describe my own project, report my working methods and processes, reflect on the result and raise the question whether the *Hit and run* model that I have chosen served the artists and supported their artistic process and weather it served my curatorial intention.

During my research I crossed many interesting themes related to this field.

Due to the limited scope of this work I do not include them in this work. I am also aware that my work is influenced by the fact that I am a Berlin based Israeli performance artist.

1. **Chapter one - The curatorial turn**

In this chapter I discuss the emerging curator and her/his multifunctional role. In the second and third sub chapter I bring examples for types of curator’s new vocabulary, but before doing so I give a short definition of the term “curator” and brief historic background.

The word curator derives from the Latin cura - to cure, heal or change and also overseer, guardian, and agent. Curatus refers to something which belongs to someone. In Latin law the curator was a person who was appointed to take care of a person legally unfit to take care of him or herself, such as a child or a lunatic. However the curator of the middle ages was somebody “in a clerical position”, a priest for whom the exhibition would be an ecclesiastical display and who would be crucial to the organisation of religious spaces and beyond.\(^1\)

During the 1960’s the discourse around art began to turn away from criticizing the artwork towards a form of curatorial criticism that gave more importance to the spaces where the exhibitions take place than to the art exhibitions themselves.

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\(^1\) Stephen Bann, Exhibition Reflecting the Art and Spirit of the age in Stopping the Process: Contemporary views on Art and Exhibitions, ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, Finland, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in 1988, in Carolee Thea, On curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009, interview with Charles Esche, p. 60
In the 1990’s another kind of curatorial practice began to establish itself. According to Paul O’Neill who coined for it the term *curatorial turn* “During this period curators and artists have reached to, and engaged with this ‘Neo-criticality’ by extending the parameters of the exhibition form to incorporate more discursive conventional and geo political discussion”\(^2\)

The *curatorial turn* signifies the expending curatorial discourse, involving discussion and engaged with critique and debate. Moreover, the curator became a symptom of changes in the art market social and financial structures. This flourishing curatorial discourse was in the 1960’s and 90’s as well as today reference to various themes and fields that expand beyond art. In the 1990’s art was discovering itself as a social space and exhibitions increasingly became “happening”. Maria Lind coined for it the term “performative curating”, meaning that the exhibition itself has performative characteristics. People came not only in order to view art but to take part in an art event.

It is impossible to ignore the constant growing interest in performance in general and site specific action and intervention in public space in particular, following lively discourse evolving the curatorial shift from the museum and gallery oriented art to performance in non gallery public space.

“I am interested in the different ways curators deal with the challenge of producing events that do not bear products but discourse”.\(^3\) Live site specific Performance is elusive, dynamic and cross medial. It makes a great challenge to curate it in a consumerism world where many performances end up as socio-political and art culture critical commodities.

Some curators choose to work in the performance and site specific field deliberately, in order to criticise the hyper commercial product oriented art world by finding alternative ways of producing ephemeral process and space oriented performances with the hope to balance the art market with an anti product oriented projects and events\(^4\).

One way to deal with this gap is by reflecting on this aspect within the curatorial concept itself, or presenting the working process and the discourse as a product. In the past most of these curators were working in the marginal art context, but gradually began to operate within, and were promoted by the institutions themselves\(^5\).


\(^3\) Möntmann Nina, Kunst als Sozialer Raum, Walther König, Köln, 2002 p.118, Möntmann refers here to the fact that in the 70’s the art work went through a dematerialisation process whereas today the wide frame that constitute the art product in the exhibition is the context itself which stands to disposal.

\(^4\) i.e the social housing projects which I discuss in the chapter about the Curatorial models

\(^5\) Ibid. from the chapter ‘Desired Critique the institutional critique which is desired by institution’ p. 69 and ‘s it still institution critic when MoMA says, that Museum is muse’159
Before I move to discuss the curator’s role more profoundly I wish to point out two of the consequences of the curatorial turn. First, international curators network and second, postgraduate curatorial programs, both deserve to have their own chapters but due to the scope of this thesis I shall mention them here only briefly.

1.1 Postgraduate curatorial programs

An interesting development in this field is the growing number of postgraduate and educational programs. The first trend starts in the 80’ when organisations and institutions tried to satisfy their financial supporters through social projects in public spaces. The expansion of contemporary art venues and the need to produce social projects created demands for curators. Such program is offered by the ZHDK⁶ conceived as a discursive platform which imparts key areas of contemporary exhibition-making by way of praxis-oriented project work. Most of the programs offer art curatorial practice, as context and space conception. Wesleyan Institute for example pioneers program for the study of curatorial practice in performance. The program includes lectures by key curators from MoMa NY, and combines theory with practice. It is too early to evaluate the impact of such programs on the development of the international performance scene. Interesting mission for another paper can be mapping the programs and follow their teaching methodologies.

Many of the academic programs take a very active part in the curatorial discourse out of their universities by opening research groups which respond to the spatial and the curatorial turn by organising international symposiums and publishing books.

A good example for bridging work between academic and non academic context is the curator and writer Claire Doherty. She lives and works in Bristol, UK, since 2003 she has been research fellow in Fine Art at the University of the West of England and coordinator of “Situations” program of projects, commissions, talks, publications and events. She is one of the prominent initiators of ENPAP, European Network of Public Art Producers. This leads me to the following sub chapter where I will give an example to such a network.

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⁶ http://www.curating.org/index.php/program
1.2 International curators network

Parallel to local projects there are growing numbers of networks which take place on the web as well as in symposium round tables and other activities. ICI Independent Curators International⁷ or SYNAPSE⁸ or ENPAP represent such networks and platforms.

I would like to bring the example of ENPAP (European Network of Public Art Producers) which is a network of curators-producers from six organisations across Europe that was formed in 2010.

The Network aim to discover common curatorial practices in order to than promote them in public art.

A mutually supportive network evolved over the two years of the study, where each organisation explored the challenges that they confronted in their own projects in their country and then gather in symposiums to share their experiences and reflect on them.

Most of the organisations at the ENPAP Network are non-profit organisations founded to widen the possibilities for artistic productions outside the traditional institutional framework.

The network’s organisations are; BAC-Baltic Art Center (SE), Consonni (ES), Mossutställningar (SE), Situations, University of the West of England (UK), SKOR | Foundation for Art and Public (NL), Vector Association (RO)

I had the chance to be part of the networks last international symposium “Going Out Public” in Bilbao Spain. March 2012. The very rich four days program gave me an overview on the network’s infrastructure and its aim. The network it is not focusing explicitly on performance art and action but rather on general projects in the public realm but the correlation of the network with art and academic institution was very informative and contribute to my practical work. Although not directly related to the main subject of my work, the interesting thing that came out from this cooperating network of artists, curators and funders was a kind of “a language to distinguish a visual arts curatorial approach to art in the public realm from gallery-based curating, public art consultancy and outdoor art event management”⁹ which is the main theme for the next sub chapter.

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⁷ http://www.curatorsintl.org/
⁸ www.synapse.info The International Curators’ Network at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin at the framework of the Asia-Pacific Weeks 2011
⁹ Claire Doherty, http://www.e-n-p-a-p.net/
1.3 Creating new field vocabulary

Parallel to the trend of the late 1960’s to burst out of the conventional galleries, one can observe the emerging of a new vocabulary and the trend of borrowing terms from other fields and implementing them in the curatorial field.

Already the early public interventionists of the 60’ and 70’ realised the need of new vocabulary to fit the emerging field of public art. Words that describe better their activities, i.e. those of Wim Beeren and his project Sonsbeek 71 “It is evident that the term exhibition is only partly relevant; we have turned to the word “manifestation” and subsequently to activity. Sonsbeek 71 is more like a workshop than a show” 10 Spatial relations for Beeren mean to be involved and the way of involvement can determinate the way it is being observed.

According to a text by the curator Mary Jane Jacob; one can only speak of a category of contemporary art called ‘Projects’ and new genre known as site exhibitions. Andrea Fraser, one of the most important institution critic artists contributed the term ‘Services’ to describe the appearance for this demand for a project work 11 This had very important and troubling implications; it represented a state of affairs in which artists were undertaking projects not only for specific sites and situations but also within specific relations to organisations and their representatives, curators and other arts professionals. It appears to be the specificity of these relations- more that the physical or temporal specificity or the works themselves-that distinguished this contemporary “Projects” from other forms of artistic activity. The term “Services” was introduced above all to describe these relations in their economic and social aspects. 12 Fraser continues with this sharp observation of the economic aspect of project service, which is the honorarium or the payment for the artists’ work itself and what few years later earned the new term ‘commission’.

Farquharson suggests that what differentiates the shift in the role of the curator who is taking care of things from the curator who takes a more creative and active in the process of production of art itself, 13 is the new verb ‘to curate’. It suggests the shift in the conception of what curators do, from organisers of things to a sort of participants.

10 Wim Beeren “from exhibition to activity”, at Doherty Claire (eds.), Situation Whitechapel gallery London 2009 p.192
11 “Project-work” is a form of artistic activity that began in the 90’s when exhibitions called for artists to create new work for specific theme or situations to be referred to as a project; “artists were being invited to “do a project for” a particular exhibition”, usually for little or no budget.
12 Doherty Claire (eds.), Situation Whitechapel gallery London 2009 p. 204
I disagree with Farquharson. The discourse around the curator expanded and it was only natural that words such as ‘curatorial’ and ‘curation’ will evolve from it. I do not see this verb as a signifier to this shift but rather the word “producer” which will be borrowed in this context from the film field few years later.

Another film related jargon term that entered the curatorial field is *feature*, used by galleries to announce the exhibition of a certain artist.

As a “Due to the global economic crises” I foresee further cuts in budget and reduction in appointed curators in culture institutions and shortage in funding for independent projects. As a consequence I have recognised increasing numbers of curators-producers and organisations that work as production offices.

Beatrice von Bismark claims that the new vocabulary from “Author, artwork and creation” to “producer, art work production” exemplify the altered definition of artistic working process. She argues that “what has established itself here is the figure of a manager of information, objects, spaces, finances and people whose work consist of creating constellations and whose manifold product can be described as a “set”  

I would like to suggest the term *Productional turn* to describe this development, which is marked here.

1.4 The role of the curator

“As curator you become a diplomat”  

The role of the curator in the last twenty years has gone through rapid changes and has become lately extremely important and popular in the art fields.

One of the main roles of the curator is to bring to a change; Carolyn Christov Bakargiev says in an interview that she believes that we are at a point where the system is in crisis. The people who organize and curate feel they need more depth. This impulse has brought a lot of interesting curatorial experimentation in the 1990’s. She brings the example of Hans Ulrich Obrist which was frustrated with the traditional group exhibition and started to experiment with different forms of group exhibitions throughout the 1990’s. His working method was both intuitive and systematic, which helped to open up the system “I believe in intuition. Thinking

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14 Curating performance arts journal 55. CDU Center for drama art Croatia 2010 p. 53
15 Massimiliano Giomi, in an Interview with Carolee Thea, on Curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009 p. 31
about process is overly self conscious, and analyzing contributed to the failure of Postmodernism.”

1.4.1 Creating a context and a discourse

One of the most important tasks of curating an exhibition is contextualising and creating discourse around it. That includes verbalisation, communication, discussion and publications as press release and catalogue which are important part of the exhibition.

A good example is the curators of the 7 Berlin Biennale 2012. The video Artist and curator, Arthur Zmijewsky and his co-curator artist Joanna Warszawa from Poland, curated international artists who’s projects deal with burning socio political issues such as; the capitalist critic Occupy organisation in New York and videos of Israeli – Palestinian demonstrations at the West Bank, of the Arabs countries uprising at the Arabic spring, or the Russian street-art group Voina, known for their provocative and politically charged works of performance. The result was an art related activist Biennale. Unfortunately, most of the radical projects were screened as videos documentations of action in public space and the Biennale didn’t succeeded to point out the importance of the public realm in the Political discourse. It seems to me that Zmijewsky and Warszawa were trying to open their discourse beyond the artistic one. Their position is supported by Maria Lind’s notion of curating. In “performing the curatorial” (2012) Maria Lind questions whether “curatorial” is something else than “curator”.

“The term curator used as the technical modality of making art goes public. it is a craft that is involved in much more than making exhibitions-beyond the walls of an institution as well as beyond what are traditionally called programming and education this is curating in expended field” while curatorial is “something that can also operate beyond the field of art. So far, the curatorial is understood to have a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, fund raising etc. but even more importantly the curatorial goes beyond “roles” and takes the shape of function and methods even a methodology.”

Lind claims here a more comprehensive definition of the term curatorial, one that is beyond the art field. The following parts of this work will support her idea as most of the curatorial cases brought here are drifting between mediums and implemented in praxis beyond the artistic context.

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16 Ibid Christov Bakargiev quotes Hans Ulrich Obrist in an interview with Carolee Thea p. 72
17 Lind Maria, Performing the curatorial within and beyond Art, Sternberg Press, 2012 p.11,12
To sum up, curating is not only about contextualising and creating discourse. About who get the possibility to present and to what audience? It is primarily about choice making. Choosing a theme, choosing a team and choosing artists according to own artistic taste. Deciding who receives production expenses, travel and accommodation costs, who receives only an official invitation and has to make the hard work of fund raising by her/him self. Who gets paid to create and present her/his creation and who does not! “Curating means excluding and this excluding has existential consequences for artists”18

“Curating means excluding and this excluding has existential consequences for artists”19

1.5 Types of curators

Dividing the curators into categories might do injustice to them, as their work is far more diverse and complex; nevertheless I look at this sub chapter as a small mapping exercise of the most prominent curator’s types and highlight their different positions. This does not mean that the whole exhibition is due to play under this motto but the general spirit or atmosphere might be inspired by it. Needless to mention there are curators who fit several categories or switch from one to another and others who can’t fit in any category.

Before bringing examples for “types of curators”, I wish to make the basic distinction between two framework groups; 1) Curators in art context who work in Museums and galleries or appointed to curate Biennials and art fairs, or independent projects.
2) Curators in performing arts context who work as programmers or artistic directors in Theatres, dance houses or performance and site specific festivals.
I also make a distinction between A) Art events, exhibitions and Biennials which include performances in public spaces among other pieces and B) events and festivals dedicated explicitly to performance art and more specifically with action in public realm.
It seems to me that the differences in the curators approach to site specific performance lays in the discourse. I discuss this more profoundly in the second chapter about curatorial approaches.

The scientific academic curators develop academic based research projects and symposiums based events that include inviting Artists at Universities and issue publications as catalogues

18 Florian Malzacher, in Fraciia, Curating performance arts journal 55. CDU Denter for drama art Croatia 2010 p.15
19 Florian Malzacher, in Fraciia, Curating performance arts journal 55. CDU Denter for drama art Croatia 2010 p.15
and books. Many art and culture institutions are interested in this kind of collaboration in order to use the academic financial resources. Universities in the UK, such as Warwick, West of England University are leading in this field of academic practical research.

**Autonomous / independent curators** usually navigate between various institutions. For many of the curators of the 60’s, the transformation from institution to independence and from indoors to outdoors was natural, a good example is the independent curator, **Mary Jane Jacob** today considered a pioneer in the development of new forms of public art. Although she did not explicitly curate action and performance she was paving the way out from the museums and galleries. In the 70’ she was organising in the Detroit Institute of Arts numerous exhibitions of artists outside the mainstream, highlighting experimental or non traditional media artists. In the 80’ she was chief curator of the MoCA Chicago, and the MoCA Los Angeles. In 1990 she left the museum milieu to work with artists in projects conceived for locations which called for a more direct, spontaneous and unpredictable interaction with the audience. “Opposed to art that functions merely on symbolic or aesthetics level her ambition has been to unite a community by commissioning artists to create installations that expand on the conventional story of city’s history.”

Jacob’s refused producing entertainment for the post capitalist city but rather transformed the local reality to aesthetic, intellectual and emotional action. Her most meaningful project was the Spoleto Festival in South Carolina in 1991 and 2001.

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, the curator of the current 13 Documenta in Kassel States; “The only thing of any importance is to find a way to be autonomous selves. I’m interested in how knowledge is constructed- to observe art on the micro level of a single artwork and see how it’s negotiated in the world. At the same time, everything we do, including art, is political, one way or another” 21 Christov-Bakargiev expresses here the curators need to become autonomous, which means to stick to the self authentic plan admitting that in reality all we do is political or to put it better…is going through the filters of politics.

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20 Carolee Thea, on curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009 p.7-8
21 ibd. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in interview with Carolee Thea, p.70-71
Spontaneous curators organise events in public spaces usually out of institutional context, curating mostly friends and friends of friends or spread a call on net and facebook. Its most familiar curatorial model is the flash mob\textsuperscript{22}.

**Artist - Curator** is a very common type that can be found internationally in various fields. “Many Curators and artists have come to their profession from other disciplines; Charles Esche thinks that it is important to enter curatorial practice from another field”;\textsuperscript{23} Florian Malzacher thinks the opposite:” artists rarely make good curators, their view is either too narrow (since they are guided by their own aesthetic intransigence or too broad since they are guided by social and solidarity thoughts and feelings)”\textsuperscript{24} It is common to find multifunctional independent people who change hats. The most common are the artist-curator and the curator-producer. A good example for that is the conceptual artist and curator **Rirkrit Tiravanija**, who contributed a great deal to the so called social action art. He was born in Buenos Aires and divides his time between New York, Berlin and Bangkok. He curates trans-disciplinary or collaborative events going around the institutions’ formalities and bureaucracies. His actions interact with the every day social realities and interrelationship of individuals to their cultural, social, economic and natural environment. “He believes that an artist curating an exhibition always brings a different methodology and perspective…and that It’s not what you see that is important, but what takes place between people”\textsuperscript{25}.

**Curating as art**, there are curators which consider the curatorial practice itself as an artistic process. Not to confuse with the Curator-artist who is both artist who from time to time curate or vice versa a curator that sometimes create. There is an interesting discourse around this question which I avoid including in my work but relates to in the next type.

**Domineering curator**, not in the control freak sense but rather in that, the curatorial concept takes over the exhibits/pieces. This curator is also claiming curating is an art by itself. Hans Ulrich Obrist uses a strategy “providing simple rules to produce a kind of chaos, and another order arises. This is creative curating taking over the creative side too much, the curator may seem to become the artist and the artworks may seem to be illustrations of his or her idea”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} Group of people carry out actions in public spaces, often with no artistic aim. Sometimes, as a form of critic on different matters about the location itself.  
\textsuperscript{23} Carolee Thea, on curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009, p. 60  
\textsuperscript{24} Fraciia, Curating performance arts journal 55. CDU Denter for drama art Croatia 2010 p. 16  
\textsuperscript{25} Carolee Thea, on curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009 p. 8  
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p.77
Carolee Thea suggests that sometimes dominant curatorship is used as a strategy to get more positive attention to the exhibition. I can imagine that there are ways to moderate ideas which are “hard to digest” in a more friendly way but creative curatorship is not necessarily damaging to the individual works; on the contrary it can suggest new relations and give more impact to the exhibition as a whole. According to Malzacher this type is very rare in the performing arts domain. On the contrary, he sees this kind of curating as courageous act which curators in the performing art context are too fearful to try out. “The Phantom of the super-curato, the Über-curato, boldly creating his own piece out of other people’s artwork is not to be feared in the performative domain anyway on the contrary, there is rather a lack of courage for imparting meaning at all- and not least because of modesty, but out of fear from the task 27

2. Chapter two - Curatorial approaches to site specific performance and action in public space

“I have no more questions about gallery walls” (Gregg Bordowitz)

Both, performance and action are elusive genres, but as elusive and ephemeral in real place or in a virtual one, they have to be located. The correlation between the artist and the place or location stands in the centre of this genre. 28

The curatorial practice and approach to site specific performance working methods and the working process are unique to each and every project/event/exhibition according to the curator, artists, locations, working frame and conditions.

There are probably as many approaches to the curatorial practice as the number of curators who practice it. I do not aim to map all of them but to point out prominent models. I have decided to focus on four models of curating site specific performance action and intervention in public art context; in international performing art festivals, in residencies, in short duration and long duration context.

One of the most meaningful influences that site specific performance had on the art market is dematerialisation. That is not to underestimate the value of original DVD’s documenting live

27 Ibid, p.14
28 Both, performance and action can be a wide rage of activities in the public realm but they still differ one from the other. Site specific or site related performances are live performances which performers develop within a dialog with the place/space/location. Raising questions influenced directly from the set of a given conditions dictated by the place. A special emphasis is given to the here and now of a person or people. Action on the other hand, does not necessary involve performers and audience, but rather people. Action derives from the 60’ term action art, and refer to actions in public space that considered to be more radical and connote with socio-political activism, such as the bread and butter in New York and The Situationists International movement of Guy Debord.
performances which is sold in the art market. Going out of the Gallery spaces can be seen as an anarchist step and a criticism on institutions and the commercialisation of art. In her Book “Art as social space” Nina Möntmann dedicates a chapter to the institutional space and the institutions critic which was developed in the 80’ and 90’.

Möntmann claims that since the museum, gallery or art foundation were involved in most of the site specific practices as interdependent as well as part of even larger system in example with other institutions or entrepreneurial economy, the term “Betriebssystem Kunst“ / ”Operating Art System” describes better the situation at the 90’ than the term institution. Möntmann borrows here a term coined by Thomas Wulffen form the computer lexicon and claims that this terminological choice itself manifest the difference between the idea of the institution in the 70’ and the situation in the art and culture production of the 90’.

To go back to the marginality of some of the site specific projects, Nina Möntmann that claims that artists who localise themselves in the art system and link their questions in public spaces through the Operating Art System\(^\text{29}\), enable to localise their position in their own set of conditions instead of in another applied field. I agree with her that positioning oneself in the operating art system is recognised within its context and faced with questions of public space. Though it sounds as a paradox (especially when dealing with institution critic), artists can form their position in the art milieu much better than through self positioning in a self framed context. These artists, claims Möntmann, can become much more political if they work within the operating art system than the actions of actionists who work out of any frame of condition, and therefore their actions not considered as art.\(^\text{30}\)

Möntmann’s main reasoning is that an artist, who works as an “insider” in the art apparatus, is in a much better position to be heard, and eventually succeeds to enter the public art related discourse, rather than working on its margins or out of it. And those who turn their back to institutions as a mean of critic are merely “choosing a weaker partner.”\(^\text{31}\)

The “weaker partner” that Möntmann wrote about ten year ago, refers to the public which is not part of the hermetic art system. This attitude is exactly what many of the artists who work out of the art system criticise. The constant hermetic self reflection and self references of the art system brought it to its solitude. This position changed dramatically in the last ten years when prominent Galleries and Museums began to curate street artists and initiate curatorial projects in public spaces.

\(^{29}\) Wulffen 1994 s.56 in Möntmann Nina, Kunst als Sozialer Raum, Walther König, Köln, 2002
\(^{30}\) Carolee Thea, on curating interviews with ten international curators, DAP 2009 p. 46. 47
\(^{31}\) Ibid. p. 46
Before the internet revolution, the power of the art system was partly a consequence of the exclusivity of the institutions on the mass media as a distribution mechanism. Since the existence of the internet this is not the case anymore. Today, the web and the digital print enable even small projects in remote places to spread and receive feedbacks internationally within minutes. However it does not guarantee that they receive attention.

The reason projects of marginal artists/activists that are produced through institutions and anchored in the art world are more effective than independent projects which are being produced by artists/activists outside the institutions lays in the different distribution mechanism of institutions. The reception of those projects is not necessary wider in the sense of a large audience or how many people see it, but rather specific, who are those people. It is a discourse based system and therefore a project that is processed through this system has better chance to become meaningful in a way that people from the system will talk about it, write articles about it, record, print publications and archive it, teach it, spread it, and locate it in art context. The echo is not in the number of the “Like” clicks or online feedback but in the way it is received and processed in the hermetic art discourse. This mechanism does not necessarily have more impact but a different kind of impact.

Ostensibly one would think that the internet will enforce this limitation and help opening the close art world, when in fact even though marginal art projects receive much exposure and attention, the power of projects being realized out of the operating art system is in the fact that they do not ask for its legitimacy, entitlement or recognition, just the opposite, their craft is in their marginality, parallel and many times beyond the art field discourse. Unfortunately, most of the marginal projects that manage to be clicked by the tens of thousands on the net mostly stay on net and failed to maintain a meaningful discourse and activity out of the virtual world. Many are working hard to change this fact. I couldn’t find recent art projects that were meaningful in a way that they managed to effectively criticize the hermetic mechanism of the operating art system the way that artists as Andrea Fraser manage to do in the 90’s.

The main question is in what context an artist wishes to create, art, social, political, or virtual? The curatorial models which I bring in this chapter describe a frame work which already determinate a certain context for the work.
2.1 Festivals and residencies approach

The literature list about site specific performances from the curatorial point of view is quite limited. Information is more likely to be found on the web and in festivals catalogues than in books. One way to collect information for my research was to read the online CALLS for International site specific festivals and residencies. I drew information from web sites of organisations that focus on public spaces. Another way was to visit symposiums, lectures, gallery talks and read their publications. I have recognised two main curators groups, the first are curators who choose artists and commission them to develop a performance in a certain location and the other is curating through a call. There are two kinds of calls for events or exhibitions; those who work with budget and those who don’t.

Curating and producing art events of every kind without any budget at all is possible but is a very hard task that might influence the professionalism and quality of the exhibition.

Then it is not surprising that even well known performer curator and author such as Rose Lee Goldberg spends most of her time on fund raising for her centre for performance art Performa in New York.

“Biatrice von Bismark describes the problematic of a trend that began in the early 90’s, the Project work …In addition to being expected to undertake site-specific projects for little or no fee, artists were routinely expected to design invitations, posters, advertisements and catalogues, write catalogue texts or prepare sections of catalogues without compensation. Artists with policies not to undertake projects without receiving a fee were treated as "difficult" and set against other artists in exhibitions. Sometimes artists were promised fees, only to be told after the exhibition opened that those fees were considered part of the project budgets and had already been used up in production. Artists' budgets were suspended when their process oriented projects took longer to complete than the duration of the temporary exhibitions they were commissioned for.”

Additional factor that influence site specific work is to what extent it is creates in a specific space or created elsewhere and adapted to it.

Artists participating in local festivals enjoy the accessibility to the locations. They can either choose their own location or visit the given location at any time.

This is not the case in international festivals where international artists are invited. Some festivals can afford to commission the artist to come for a period of time and develop their projects in site. Other, such as Stromereien in Zurich, invite the artists to an early weekend meeting where they can present their concept and have the chance to try it out in the actual location. In other cases the festival posts photos and descriptions of the location/s on the festivals web site so the artists can develop the work in relation to the photos of the place. I call
this kind of fictive, artificial projects virtual specific or site related performances, since the performances are not actually developed in the real physical place. This does not indicate on the quality of the performances that can eventually be very high.

Curating a site specific festival in public space will be totally different if it works legally with permit or as an independent festival which works without permits.

2.1.1 Invite me to your festival and I invite you to mine, curatorial strategy

This is also a small model which is an extension of Friend brings friend. Group of performers-curators are circulating between each others site specific international festivals. This kind of hermetic working group and networking is dangerous since it creates kind of a “swamp” where the curators always invite the same artists instead of re-searching and selecting upcoming emerging or established interesting performers according to a certain thematic.

2.1.2 Curating according to possible financing sources

At some of the festivals in which I participated during the last years, I have noticed the curator producer was obliged to invite artists from a region or country which supported financially the festival. In some cases curators /artistic directors can find themselves caught in a situation where they are forced to put the artistic decision on the side and respond to curatorial political or financial factors.

I had once the experience of contacting the Israeli embassy in a foreign country and applied for financial sponsoring for my art project. And I was surprised to find out that the inviting festival already asked and received funding on my behalf without me being notified.

I was told by the artistic director of the festival that it is a “normal and common” procedure. It is not a secret that the financial side is also influenced by politics and therefore one of the tasks of the artistic director and curator is to create a program which is not compromising. That means to find the way to concentrate on the curatorial line and realise it in spite of other, non artistic factors.

32 Friend bring friend is a very common working strategy that can be found in small scale local group exhibitions as well as large scale prominent international festivals. This working strategy can be found in many other fields
2.1.3 Festivals

The audience of site specific performance festivals is mostly everyday passers by and pedestrians. The most common way to present it to the public is the parcoure, a guided tour between the sites of the performances/projects. The meeting point can be any central place. If the locations are within walking distance it is a walking parcoure. In case of distant locations there are shuttles. Entrance fee for the whole parcoure or single tickets are sold at the meeting point or at each location.

In some cases the meeting point is the headquarter which is the headquarter of the organisation or institution which produces the event. One of the main common characteristics for site specific performance action and intervention in public spaces is the unpredictability of the action itself as well as the reaction of the passers by and pedestrians. Factors as weather or unpredictable changes in the place itself have to be taken in consideration. The action itself often changes the area and causes people to choose alternative ways from those they are used to.

2.2 Site specific performance residencies approach

Many foundations and culture centres offer residency programs with diverse length and a set of working conditions emphasising the development of a site specific pieces. Recent remarkable phenomena are foundations or organisations that ask artists to pay for their residency. They charge rental fees for the studios and materials and offer production services exchange; mentoring press text, preparing an exhibition with none or limited technical support, an online representation and advertising. Printed material such as postcards, flyers, posters and publication of catalogues are of course not included. In the past, artists, who were selected to a residency, were invited to spend a period of time in a place where they could step out from their busy schedules and concentrate themselves totally in creating a new piece. Residencies were mostly in rural areas and the artists got the lodging and food for free and sometimes even budget for working material and travel fees.

This strange development became a fashion in large cities where the rent price went up.

Needless to mention, works developed in the old residency model had another character. This also connote with the shifts in terms, when words do not stand for what they used to. Why for

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33 i.e. in Stromereien Festival in Zürich it is the Tanz Haus Zürich. Tickets are sold in the office. There is a café and bar as a meeting point where the audience depart from and come back to.
the sake of communication are they not coining a new term for this new type of residency? Like Musac\textsuperscript{34} was coined for commercial music in elevators and shopping malls.

2.3 Durational approach

In the next sub capital I follow the transformation from curator to curator-producer and curator commissioner, and investigate the reasons for this new stance. There are long durational performances actions and events which stress over hours, days and even weeks. The durational social housing projects however is a model that can only exist as a long term process taking place over 5, 8 and even 12 years. The type of curator who is also commissioner and producer emerge from long durational projects. The durational projects refer to large scale projects commissioning various social actions and events in public space and do not necessary focus on performance art alone. In their book “Locating the producers, Durational approaches to public art” Paul O’Neill & Claire Doherty (eds.), explore how ‘durational’ processes in public art curating and commissioning have emerged as an alternative to nomadic, itinerant and short-term approaches in the recent years.\textsuperscript{35} It began as a curatorial dilemma which gradually came into focus during the first few years of Situations\textsuperscript{36}, by 2006, the curator-producer had emerged as the linchpin in negotiations between the artist and the place.\textsuperscript{37} according to O’Neil and Doherty the 21\textsuperscript{st} century curators producers are distinguished from the museum curators “by their active involvement in the production of the artwork, by their consideration of their need to work from an informed embedded position, and the responsibility to account for considerable expenditure of public funds on artworks that must be locally relevant but also internationally significant…” despite the rise of post graduate curatorial programs they found a “gap in methodological research on place-based commissioning, ”we identified evidence of longer-term, durational and cumulative approaches

\textsuperscript{34} The term Musac describes music that is being composed to create atmosphere in shopping malls elevators and waiting rooms music which is designed for places such as shopping malls elevators and waiting rooms. The aim was to differentiate it from other kind of music. Musac is often “really bad music” commercially produced music for public establishments such as dentist offices and grocery stores, etc.

\textsuperscript{35} Andrea Fraser made an interesting observation that the demands for community based project appeared to be related to a need by publicly funded organisations to satisfy the public service requirements of their funding agencies. in Doherty Claire (eds.), Situation Whitechapel gallery London 2009 p. 204

\textsuperscript{36} a programme engages in the production and critical analysis of artwork commissioned in response to specific local conditions since 2003

\textsuperscript{37} Paul O’Neill & Claire Doherty (eds.), Locating the producers, Durational approaches to public Art”, Proxenae Valiiz Amsterdam 2009 p.3
being adopted by curators producers which might be considered as a corrective to the itinerant model of the curator/artist.”

O’Neil and Doherty aim to show that “fundamental shift in thinking about the ‘time’ rather than simply the space of public art commissioning is required to effect change at the level of policy” and they suggest that “a spatio-temporal constellation of artworks and projects over time is the best solution to the “exhaustion of the site specific curatorial model”.” In their book they focus on five European projects: The Blue House Ijburg, the Nederlands (1999-2009); Trekroner Art Plan, Roskilde, Denmark (2001-Present); Creative Egremont, Cumbria UK (ongoing since 1999) and Edgware Road Project, London UK (2009-2011). I avoid writing about each of those projects; instead I will focus on the curatorial position, framework or structure of durational projects common to all:

1. Place based durational approach has a major common need -TIME!
2. Durational projects are process and not product oriented.
3. The unlimited open end of the process is employed as a mean of resisting the instrumentalisation of art.
4. Apply co-productive and socially – engaged modes of spatial operation.
5. Fighting private market housing by creating space for communities as part of urban renewal plan.
6. Some of the projects are being parts in a very early stage of the urban planning so their projects are imbedded in the neighbourhood’s plans.
7. Recording, document and archive their projects and creating a project archive.
8. Tend to work in networks.
9. Durational projects are initiated by organisations that rise and fall with the funding of the cultural ministry and other funding.

Many public art projects are closing due to lack of sponsorship. Several try to find a way to continue otherwise. Example for this is SKOR. Founded in 1999 in Amsterdam as a foundation for art and public domain, it is an internationally operating Dutch institution which advises, develops and creates art projects in relation to public spaces. SKOR was subsidized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and is housed in a former sewage purification building. It initiated projects such as social housing embedded in the city plan phase. Recently

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38 Ibid. p.4
39 Ibid. p.7
40 Ibid. p.11 Doherty uses here the term exhaustion from the Site specific model without explanation. “I relate the exhaustion to the exploitation of the term site specific which became popular in recent years.”
41 http://www.skor.nl/eng/
it is confronting shortage in their financial funding which followed several solidarity events to raise money which will enable them to buy their “Headquarter house” in Amsterdam.

2.4 Hit and run intervention approach

*Hit and run*\(^{42}\) in the context of site specific intervention and *for curatorial interventions*\(^{43}\) stands for performances, or self organised events with socio political critical intentions.

Curating *Hit and run* is usually not a choice among others, but the only way to be able to create in certain areas in the city where criticism is not wanted and art works are not permitted. A priority is given to *the place* and its charged socio political implications. *Hit and run* as a curatorial approach is already a statement and locates the event in a kind of anarchist and critical context.

Many of the *Hit and run* projects are taking place in sensitive urban area without legal permits and might be stopped by the authorities and the police at any given moment. In many cases they must be realised very fast. This influences their aesthetic, i.e using material that can be either easily dismantled and spirited away quickly or can stay at the place of the action and be destroyed or confiscated by the police.

The documentation of *Hit and run* projects is mostly rough, Dogma film like, unsteady camera, fast zooms with an underground or anarchist touch. Working without official legal permission highlights the criticality of the performance or the action. The risks and chances inherent in *Hit and run* collaborations ultimately give surprising shape to the final works.

Organisers use blogs and internet social platforms such as Facebook to spread the word and announce the locations and time of the action, but most of the projects avoid posting announcement and documentation on the web as part of their criticism. In some cases the events are not published beforehand and external audience is not invited to avoid crowded public from drawing attention to the location in order to prevent the police from coming and interrupting the action. In some cases direct confrontation with the authorities or interfering by the police is wished for as direct reaction to the act. Especially when the projects aim is to put

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\(^{42}\) *Hit and run* is a term used to describe when a car driver hit accidentally a pedestrian and escape instead of stopping the car and taking care of the injured person and taking her/him to the hospital and taking the responsibility for the accident.

\(^{43}\) “Curatorial interventions are not yet an extensively theorized or historized topic. We might say it engages exhibitionary histories with hope of transforming the ways displays are produced and the ways audiences related to them (Art Hits.2011) text from a conference on ‘Theater for the performing arts’ in “The Glossar der Interventionen”, by Friedrich von Borries, Christian Hiller, Daniel Kerber, Friederike Wegner und Anna-Lena Wenzel, Merve Verlag Berlin, 2012 p. 135 and describes exhibitions.
in question issues such as privatisation of the public realm and the power relations between
civil and police in public urban spaces. The organisation-producers-curators finance the event
through public funds and often are required to invest 50% of the total cost of the project against
support of the remaining 50%. The bureaucratic procedure of financing these projects involve
book keeping record that has to be completed after the project is over and which usually is
longer that the event itself. Some of the Hit and run projects are even more immediate and do
not even involve any production apparatus i.e. the flash mob.

I brought the example of durational projects because I believe that it is a model that enables a
profound working process in locations. Since I was working illegally at the memorial, I was
forced to use the Hit and run strategy. But as a matter of fact, a complex theme as the
commemoration of the holocaust can benefit from a durational process and mobility.

3. Chapter three - Practical curatorial project

The Holocaust is a sensitive topic. As an Israeli and a ‘third generation’ Jew, and a
performance artist I consider Holocaust memorials and “‘haunted sites’ of the Nazi past”44 as
charged places and dangerous zones for creating performances. Choosing the Holocaust
memorial as location for my project was a very challenging decision, complex and full of traps
on the one hand but very interesting and rewarding on the other.

3.1 The memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe

The memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin was designed by the American
architect Peter Eisenman and sculptor Richard Serra, who later withdrew from the project; it is
located in the heart of Berlin at the Cora-Berliner Str. 1, between Brandenburg gate and
Potsdamer Platz, and is the most important memorial of the holocaust in Germany. The
memorial is a field consisting of 2,711 concrete slabs, (stelae, die Stelen), 0,92 wide 2,30 long,
from ground till 5 meter high spread out over five acres in a sloping maze in memory of the six
million Jews killed in Germany’s extermination against the ethnic Jewish minority during
World War II. An information centre dedicated to stories of families and individual destinies of
holocaust victims is placed below the memorial. This links the memorial with the Holocaust. It

44 Whybrow Nocolas, Art and the city I.B Tauris, 2011 p.152
is managed by the Foundation for the memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. (Die Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas).
The monument was inaugurated on May 10, 2005 and is open to the public. In the first year there were more than 3.5 million visitors.

Eisenman’s intention was to create irritation, by using the tilted stelae in different heights and the sloppy ground. The people who enter the maze do not realise the inclined ground immediately but only when walking further in-between the column which gradually gets arbitrarily higher. In this way, Eisenman hopes to arouse sensations and feelings that connote with the rationality or irrationality of the Nazi time. One of his main intentions is evoking experience in an unsafe environment of frightening memory of being left alone in a “zone of instability” and undermines the individual “Illusion of being safe and secure” 45

Unfortunately, the memorial alone is not succeeding in creating the link to the Holocaust. The info centre helps to make this connection but is closed at nights and on Mondays. 46

Interesting debate was taking place around the memorial between 1989-99 before the parliament's decision of the chosen design and the construction of the monument. During this time there were several competitions for its design.

The debate about the role of the memorial and its design, forced politicians and opinion-makers to reflect on how Germany can best remember and commemorate the Holocaust.

The memorial was received with very diverse reactions. The president of the Jewish council in Germany, Paul Spiegel, said in the opening speech that for Jews, the memorials for the Holocaust are in the concentration camps sites. His critic on the memorial was that it honours the victims but does not refer to the motives and the method of the Nazis, and therefore depriving the question of why, and that it does not offer the confrontation with the guilt.

Spiegel expects the memorials to remind the crimes of the Nazi regime and the background of the genocide which is a reasonable wish, but I disagree with the notion that memorials have to stimulate confrontation with guilt. Instead of claiming individuals to develop national guilt it should promote a dynamic dialogue between people.

45 Liebs, Holger, Landes Zentrale von Politische Bildung, Berlin p. 131
46 If one visits the memorial at night time without knowing that it is the Holocaust memorial for the murdered Jews, the chances to miss link it to the Holocaust is big. The great Nr. of tourists during the day reduces the experience to an interesting physical sensation but do not succeed to transmit the horror of the holocaust. If a person’s first visit to the memorial is alone and in the night time, it is more likely that he will experience the sensations that Eisenman was aiming to evoke. And even than being alone in the memorial is more likely to stand in relation to the lonesome feeling of the individual in the mega city Berlin rather than addressed to the Holocaust.
Many find the Memorial too abstract and refrain from taking a precise position as memorial (Mahnmal) which should warn the German people from repeating the Holocaust or monument (Denkmal) to commemorate the victims and to comfort the Holocaust survivals. This distinction seemed to play a very big role in its reception and the critic on it. This formal and functional distinction seems to be at the center of the problem. In my opinion, the memorial is abstract and does not give either the true facts of genocide directly nor sends to the German people a clear message of warning from repeating it. I believe that if the monument would have fulfilled this aspect, in doing so it would have been less accessible and would have drawn fewer visitors.

This memorial is not only for German and Jews, but also or maybe even mostly for international visitors. Its main purpose is showing other countries that Germany officially commemorates and remembers.

Many visitors complain about the loose rules in the place. People are allowed to sit on the stelae and play hide and seek scream and laugh.

I find flexible rules which are sometimes ignored or intentionally violated very natural for an in-between private open public memorial. I find the memorial very interesting. It invites everyone to enter it in any time and offers a physical sensation but does not connote immediately to the Holocaust.

In my opinion the memorial succeeds to commemorate the Holocaust and promotes remembrance only if the people who visit it come with the intention to remember and commemorate. Entering it with playful or negative approach is also a way to remember.

During the time I spent in the memorial I met people who did not know that this is a memorial for the Jews murdered in the Holocaust. And I guarantee that less than 50% of the visitors do not visit the info centre which links the abstract sculpture to the crimes of the Nazis. This is where, in my opinion, the memorial fails in fulfilling its duty.

The idea of remembrance and commemoration of a country can be represented by a static sculptured installation but remembering itself is neither a static nor a passive situation. Remembering is an active process. Remembering dark history is hard work and reminding others is even harder.

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48 I use the term semi public memorial because most of the visitors consider this area as a public area but it is actually fully private under the management of the “Denkmal Stiftung”.
In 1997 graffiti on the temporary fencing of the construction site of the memorial declared ‘The debate is the memorial’\textsuperscript{49} ‘However, it is, paradoxically, a ‘reverse embodiment inasmuch as the slogan would now read: ‘The memorial is the debate’. In other words, the sentiment expressed by the graffiti of keeping the debate alive, fluid and public has ended up being enshrined in Eisenman’s design in defiance of the graffiti’s obvious fear that no memorial site would be able to do this’\textsuperscript{50}. This position was stated by the influential ‘memorial guru’ James E. Young who recognised in the early stages of the debate that physical memorial threat remembrance and therefore should be erected in the first place;

’…we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory burden...The memorial operation remained self contained and detached from our daily lives’\textsuperscript{51}

According to Young memorials are so stable and massive that with the elusion that they are there forever, we can allow to forget that they exist,

“‘To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we became that much more forgetful’”\textsuperscript{52}

3.2 The in-between-ess of the memorial

This in-between private public space “thing” is a public space that is seemingly open to all people but in fact is completely private. I call it an in-between place because it is not clear to people that enter it whether it is public or private. Eisenman himself refused to set a sign which indicates the memorial and give information about it. This dichotomy is not at all unique for the memorial it is actually very common in the urban landscape due to the increasing process of privatisation.

The unique case of the Holocaust memorial of Eisenman is that the Holocaust Foundation purports to be the exclusive representative of the commemoration culture in Germany. This was also my motivation to work in this specific memorial at the first place. Despite of the constant presence of the security guards\textsuperscript{53} most of the people that I was interviewing were convinced that the memorial is a public place.

\textsuperscript{49} Till 2005: 161-8 in Whybrow Nocolas, Art and the city I.B Tauris, 2011 p. 147,
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid
\textsuperscript{51} Young, James E. The Texture of Memory, Yale University, 1993, introduction, p. 5.5
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
The ‘DO NOT’ at the memorial stelae field are written on plaque on the floor in German; Visitors enter at their own risk at all times. Climbing onto or hopping across the stelae is not permitted, noisy behaviour, smoking and drinking alcohol are also forbidden, it is not allowed to stand or lay on the Stelae, it is not allowed to ride through with bicycle and children under 12 are not allowed to enter the info centre. Most of the rules are being violated…people jump between the stelae, run between them, talk loud, eat there, take photos and shoot videos…the guards remind the people of the rules of the place. The memorial claims to be complete. Commentaries, participative and art projects of any kind are neither designated nor welcome.

On one hand I can respect this decision on the other as Young put it so well, “A finished monument would, in effect, finish memory itself”.  

4 Chapter four - The artists and their projects

There are many ways to become familiar with a certain place. Common working methods include; learning the history of the place, mapping it, spend time in the place and contact directly with the people who live in it or encounter it.

I invited three artists with different working methods in public sphere in order to present different ways to deal with the complexity of the memorial.

I decided to invite one Israeli, one German, and one international artist.

The visual artist and performer Moran Sanderovich was born 1980 in Israel. After various courses and training in the field of performance art and dance she graduated her studies at the School of Visual Theatre in Jerusalem (2009). Her performance "Human Nature" was invited to show at festivals in Israel, Estonia, Poland, Serbia and the Netherlands; and won the "best show" prize at the FIST Festival in Belgrade 2008. That same year she was awarded for her artistic achievement from the Mayor of Jerusalem. Since 2011 she is living in Berlin.

I invited her to adapt her existing performance Insight Skin (2008) because she created and premiered this piece in Jerusalem and because of the unique way in which she performs. This combination intensified her performance at the memorial.

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53 Most of the guards are surprisingly polite and informative but giving interview or being filmed or photographed in duty is forbidden.

54 Young, E. James, The Texture of Memory, Yale University 1993
In the performance she wears a sort of mutation like costume of silicon that makes her body look as an alien. Throughout the performance she struggles with the costume. In this performance she deals with the trauma of the body inherited by her parents and her society, trying to peel off her painful past realising that what she holds for a past is her present. *Insight Skin* deals with repressed memories that shape and transform the body.

The fact that Moran Sanderovich comes from the performing arts and performs mostly in theatre and gallery spaces, rather than in public domains, add to her performance at the memorial a frame of fragility that made her appearance even more reliable.

The reaction of the visitors to her performance was very diverse. Some people followed her breathless. A group of Israeli tourists showed interest about the metaphor and the intentions of the performer. Others were horrified and disgusted. One woman was complaining about dishonouring the memorial.
Nina Möntmann suggests in relation to site specificity, the term ‘discourse-specific’ describing the discourse around the understanding of the term as Mary Kelley formulates it, every kind of site specific work demands previous knowledge of the place, therefore a basic part of this praxis is mapping. Mapping describes subjective cartography which usually focuses on one theme and demands analysing one or more aspects of the place which stands in the middle of the piece.55 ‘discourse-specific’ is in a way the working method of performer-producer and actionist Birgit Auf der Lauer (MA, 1981) she is working on performative and participatory projects located in artistic urban and spatial research. She transfers through performance, drawing, video and mapping the research into material. In August 2012 she received a scholarship for the art education program of the "NGBK". Since the fall of 2011 she operates with colleagues and Kreuzberg-Museum the "Kanu Club zur Erforschung der Stadt". (Canoe Club for the Exploration of the City).
I invited her because of her talent to interpret historical research, mapping and interviews material, into a mosaic of poetic texts.
Birgit Auf der Lauer use Mapping in her work as a main method. Her project, Erinnerung² / Commemoration² was a text in which she recapitulates the 17 of June 2012 where she spent a day in the memorial, collecting impressions and talking with people.
In a night tour she goes through the memorial and throws light (double meaning) on different aspects of the memorial. Her text is a mixture of facts about the architectonic structure, the

55 Möntmann Nina, Kunst als Sozialer Raum, Walther König, Köln, 2002 p.48
collective memory of the holocaust, impression of the visitors that she collected and stories made up by her rich fantasy.

We were re-shooting Birgit Auf der Lauer’s guided night tour in order to achieve more stable shots.

Valeria Schwarz is a Berlin-based independent curator, artist and cultural manager. I invited her due to her rich experience in intervention work in public space. She studied Art History at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina and Visual Arts at the University of Salamanca, Spain. In 2007 she moved to Berlin to assist video artist Julian Rosefeldt and to work as a director of Invaliden1 gallery. Between 2008 and 2009 she assisted Japanese performer Tatsumi Orimoto and organized in the frame of his Berlin’s exhibition a panel discussion at the Goethe Institute:

As curator, she develops independent projects as well as institutional ones. In 2009 she created *i Collective* together with international artists, a horizontal decentralized platform of multidisciplinary artists working on different points of the world. With "Small questions to large places" "Kleine Fragen für große Orte" Valeria Schwarz explores the boundaries between the terms monument (Denkmal) and memorial (Mahnmal). She raises the visitor’s awareness to the conventions and behaviour codes evoked by the memorial. As a kind of guardian of site specific consciousness and in a very respectful friendly way Maik Kerner, a performer who dressed up as a security guard, asks the visitors for their opinion about the rules of the memorial while discussing with them whether their behaviour within this semi-public place is appropriate to the place or not. Her inquiry regarding the rules in the memorial and the presence of guards was an actual issue throughout the whole project, emphasising the public private in-between of the memorial. All three artists have developed projects which raise meaningful questions about the memorial and about their understanding of commemoration.
Photo 6 Maik Kerner in "Small questions to large places" by Valeria Schwarz

Photo 7 Maik Kerner in "Small questions to large places" by Valeria Schwarz

Photo 8 Maik Kerner in "Small questions to large places" by Valeria Schwarz
4.1 Working methods and Hit and run curatorial approach

Since the Holocaust Foundation does not give filming permit for art projects at the memorial, I had to use the *Hit and run* curatorial approach. I took in account that the actions could be interrupted by the guards at any given moment. All projects were documented.

Some *Hit and run* projects refrain from confronting the institution others try to provoke a dialogue with the institution. I wanted to go back to the “scene of crime” and locate the Master presentation and exam at the information centre, below the memorial. This was a very daring move. I contacted the memorial association and asked them to host my Master presentation. My request was approved and I was offered a seminar room. The Master presentation was planned for August 1, 2012 in a non public screening for examiners, students and the artists. I was asked to bring the files which I wish to screen on Monday July 30, two days before the presentation. The presentation itself was planned as *Hit and run*, which means that I was planning to give them a censored video documentation file of all three projects but talk about the original projects, describe how we were asked to leave the memorial during the performance of Moran Sanderovich, and discuss the *in-between* problematic aspects of the memorial.

*Hit and run* in public space are in their nature unpredictable.

One of the risks of performing in public spaces in north European countries such as Berlin is the unpredictability of the weather. The live action was planed to take place in 17th and Moran Sanderovich and Valeria Schwarz, 18th, 2012. Due to a very stormy weather we were forced to postpone the live action to Saturday 22th 23.30 for Birgit Auf der Lauer’s night guided tour and Monday 23th for the other two projects by Moran Sanderovich 12-14 pm and Valeria Schwarz14-16 pm.

4.2 The Memorial Foundation withdraws from our agreement

Lacking signed certificates, verbal agreements are quite common for “*Hit and run*” projects and are fine as long as the hosting space respects the agreement.

The illegal video shooting had serious consequences. On July 24 I received mail from the info centre pedagogue Regina Schulz, asking me to withdraw my plan to present my project in the
information centre.\(^{56}\) I immediately answered by E-Mail\(^{57}\) for a personal meeting. At this meeting I tried to convince her, the security guard and another representative from the memorial foundation that shooting without a permit was a naive act as I was sure that the memorial field was public space and the info centre private and therefore I did ask for permission for the Master presentation but not for the projects. Another argument was that I did not presume I needed permission since my presentation at the info centre is private not open to the public screening. After all, millions of tourists are shooting photos and videos and place them on the Internet which is the most public screening ever, and no one prevents them from shooting.

In order to be able to screen the documentation film at the info centre, we cut out any incriminating videos sequences, i.e. showing the guards asking us to leave the memorial.

In the morning of Monday 30 July I showed the video in a meeting with Regina Schultz and Felicity Borzym who is in charge of the memorial association press and public relations. Mrs. Borzym made it clear that even if she found the project interesting she can not make any compromises. The association forbids any sort of art projects at the memorial.\(^{58}\)

The way that the foundation reacted to the project pointed out that the *Hit and run* model, and working without permits, became merely a trigger which exposed a much more controversial issue - the *in-between-ess* of the memorial and the stiff attitude toward open discourse. The last moment cancellation forced relocating of the Master presentation I had to find an alternative space. This called for crucial decisions. What kind of presentation space fits for the project?

\(^{56}\) See Appendix no. 2

\(^{57}\) See Appendix no. 3

\(^{58}\) Mail von Felicity Borzym, Press and Public Relations Memorial Foundation. Dear Ms. Meron, Please excuse our last minute cancellation as to the possibility of presenting your work in the seminar room in the place of information. I am very sorry that the cancellation is made at such short notice, but unfortunately I am only now back in the house. I also ask for your patience and understanding your particular professors that we can not agree to the presentation, we object art projects in the Stelae Holocaust field. There is particular interest from the side of the survivors to not allow art projects. It is repeatedly emphasized by the survivors that everyone should find his interpretation. we are therefore following this request.
4.3 Master presentation- “Beyond commemoration” / “Jenseits des Gedenkens”

As the Holocaust foundation made it clear that public screening of the video material can cause my arrest, it was clear to me that the presentation can not be just in any space but a space that promotes subversive art and activism, and focuses on social and political issues.
I have chosen “OKK”, “The Critical Organ Art” / “Das Organ Kritischer Kunst”, a project space that focuses on controversial art, at the interface between politics, protest and activism based in Wedding, Berlin, and run by Zorka Lednarova and Pablo Hermann. The relocation immediately called for new curatorial decisions.
A new date for a semi public preview screening was set for Friday September 14, 2012.

The concept for the OKK 29 space was presenting the 30 min. censored version of all three projects, which we have edited to fit the presentation in the info centre.
For the new constellation, I presented the 30 min. censored versions of all three projects, which we have edited to fit the presentation in the info centre, and parallel to that, a full version of Moran’s performance (30 min.) using the raw footage of one camera in order to deliver her performance as authentic as possible. This version was screened in loop on a separate monitor after the video presentation to juxtapose the “cosmetic” version.
Relocating of the videos away from the Memorial into a subversive art space in one of the “downtown” immigrant areas of Berlin, where many Turks and Arabs live, defined a new setup for the art project.

Unfortunately, a technical problem accrued and the video was screened in delay. That caused that Nina Möntmann, the external examiner had to leave without watching the version of Moran Sanderovich’s confronted by the security guards which is a crucial part of the project.
If I will show the project in the future, out of the context of my Master presentation, I will screen each project on a separate monitor including Moran Sanderovich’s original raw material version. Another part that was cancelled due to the technical problem was the last part in which I planed for feedback and question from the audience. Nevertheless, the feedback of the audience who came to the Master presentation was positive.
Since the exam took place directly after the screening, by the time that it finished most of the people left and I did not have the chance to receive direct feedback from the audience.
The one that stayed had very different critics, discussing which project they liked the most and commenting on the the artistic and curatorial choices.
5 Chapter five – Reflection

5.1 Reception, evaluation and conclusion

According to the way that my work was received by the representatives of the Holocaust memorial foundation, I realised that my project opened an issue which they prefer to keep close.

The project became more critical when I was forced to work without permits and document the actions illegally. And when as a result of the last moment cancellation of my presentation at the info centre, I was forced to find an alternative place.

My curatorial project does not aim to provoke, but rather criticise the form that Germany has chosen as it’s national symbol of the commemoration culture in Germany. Even though it was rejected by the Holocaust foundation, the reception of my project was very positive.

Birgit Auf der Lauer, had no audience, but the visitors/tourists present there, saw the performance of Moran Sanderovich and the intervention of Valeria Schwartz by Maik Kerner and were showing great interest in the projects.

In order not to raise the suspicion of the security people and to ensure that the actions take place in the memorial’s every day /night milieu, no ”additional” public was invited to the live actions and performance, nevertheless the guards noticed the actions and reacted to each project differently. As I suspected Birgit Auf der Lauer and Valeria Schwarz raised a small interest from the guards and were not interrupted, but the performance of Moran which was appearing in a costume which looks as a bizarre mutation promptly raised the attention of the guards which asked us to leave immediately the area of the memorial. I was insisting that I have a video shooting permit in order to gain more time. The third guard threatened us that he will call the police if we do not leave the area at once.
Photo 9, 10 Moran Sanderovich is forced to leave the Holocaust Memorial while performing Insight Skin
The Holocaust foundation welcomed at first the project and later on rejected it. The artists did *Hit and run* projects at the Holocaust memorial, and I tried to present the documentation at the info centre as a continuation of this curatorial model. The presentation itself was planned as *Hit and run* and was prevented. Being “kicked out” from the info centre was a natural and logical continuation of being “kicked out” from the Holocaust memorial and served my practical and theoretic work, providing a proof that the politics of the Holocaust foundation toward art projects are stiff and hermetic. 

Before my master presentation, I did a private home screening to colleagues and friends. The feedback of the guests, reflecting on the project and on the videos and discussing different aspects of the project was a very important stage in the working process.

The feedback of the audience, professors, mentors and external examiner who came to the Master presentation was positive. People had very different critics, discussing which project they liked the most and the artistic and curatorial choices. Unfortunately I had my examination directly after the screening and by the time that the exam was finished most of the people left, I did not have the chance to receive direct feedback from the audience.

One of the main criticisms against the memorial is that it does not invite to any discourse. Its “cold grammar” does not promote action to arise on the culture of memory but I do not believe that this was Eisenman’s intention when he designed it. The 2,711 concrete blocks (stelae) of this memorial are not able to look to the people in the eyes, act, react or lead a dialogue, and this is exactly the effect that Eisenman’s wanted to provoke, the feeling of being left alone small and hopeless even at a time when the memorial is full of people, this is the reason that the pathways are narrow, to prevent people from walking side by side. Art projects aiming to provoke other than that can and should be taking place elsewhere.

Why did I as well as many other artists⁵⁹, explicitly chose to perform at the Holocaust memorial? Because it is a tourist site located in the most central location in Berlin? Because it became a symbol for a comfortable, photogenic, commemoration and offers an interesting discourse? I am not sure about other artists; but what I wish to criticize is not the foundation’s

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⁵⁹ i.e. the artist Monika Oechsler that I just by chance found out will produce next week a video film at the memorial which is exactly the opposite of my project “The concept follows the architects notion of silence, anonymity and the experience of the individual when engaging with the space and the movement through it”
decision to forbid art projects in the memorial. The Artist has the right to prevent external art projects from taking place at the memorial, and I do agree that the effort to consider all the art projects that are proposed is too big, but I rather dispute the decision to declare it as the National Holocaust memorial of Germany.

The remains of the Holocaust are to be found in every corner of Berlin, in many other places in Germany and its echo reverberates in other countries in Europe.

I have come to the conclusion that there is a place for a project which aims to deal seriously with the remembrance of the Holocaust, offering an alternative approach to the existing remembrance methods, a project that calls for artists to develop performance, action and intervention and that challenges with new ways to remember, a project that reminds! Such a project should not be an ensemble of static monuments and already existing commemorating public sculpture. But rather a flexible project free to take place everywhere, in Berlin and Germany where crimes against Jews took place. Away from Eisenmans ‘complete’ famous touristy memorial.

My second conclusion is that the Hit and run model fits perfectly for the memorial and emphasises the problematic of in-between semi public/private places. But in order to make the project meaningful, it has to be exposed and mediated to a larger audience, and therefore will benefit from being a durational project supported by a significant discourse.

The scope of this work requires not only a curator but also a producer. This brings me back to the curator-producer-commissioner.

5.2 From Performing to curating, producing, fundraising and commissioning

Budgets enable curators and artists to create and produce more professional and meaningful works in the public realm.

It seems that I have made a very harsh critic on the curator-producer-commissioner. Diminishing the curator and crowning the producer. I realise the organic way the producer came to be. I wish to link between the importance of the curator-producer-commissioner and my work in the public realm. To my observation the Productional turn helps professionalizing the field of site specific action and performance, by emphasising the great importance of commissioning the artists.

I recognise in the working conditions of many site specific or public art festivals and events, a kind of modern slavery of actionists and performance artists who work with no budget,
especially in big cities. This attitude should not be tolerated and can be overcome only if artists will insist to “get paid” and demand more transparency in the field.

To summarise, I find the curatorial approach of the producer and the Production Turn a positive development if implemented wisely.

5.3 Future work

Simultaneously to the work on my Master thesis and practical project I profusely wrote applications to foundations for funding to cover the financial expenses of the project. One of the most meaningful understanding during my research is that the Hit and run model is maybe the only way to create art at the Eisenmann’s memorial but it could be that this memorial or memorials in general are not the optimal choice for this kind of project in the first place.

My question shifted from, “which artists and projects should I invite” to “how to commission them? And from “what curatorial model I should use in the memorial to “where” and in what discourse I wish to create it? and to which audience-public? Who are my partners for this discourse?

There are three possibilities to deal with this project; the first is to close it as a Master project. The second is continuing to create and curate Hit and run projects in the memorial in order to expose the project, taking in account that I might be arrested which “comes with the territory”, and its anyhow Hit and run strategy to get publicity. The third option to re-produce this project to curate, produce and commission artists to create performances, actions or interventions in various places and sites in Europe, where remembering the Holocaust is confronted, and to expose and mediate the project to a larger public.

Parallel to the Master presentation I shall apply for funding to continue to produce this project after the Master Ends.

Most of the foundations do not support projects which are already produced and presented in an exhibition context retroactively; therefore, I declare this event as a preview.

I believe that it has a great potential to get to the public consciousness and change the way people look at commemorations.

I find that the most important thing in curatorial work is the mediation of art and the discourse around it.
I believe that one way to create a discourse around the Holocaust in a way that will not create tiredness or antagonism is through action and not stone even though stone is more sustainable than LIVE art. The *Hit and run* intervention model is very unique and the docu-political artistic result is very strong. Nevertheless, it does not always satisfy my artistic standards.

To sum up, it is not easy to choose a curatorial method for performance and action and intervention in public space. The best curatorial strategy is starting to produce a project, and let *the place and situation* decide for the method and then apply all means to make it meaningful and effective.

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, the curator of the current 13 Documenta in Kassel stated that “The only thing of any importance is to find a way to be autonomous selves”

I believe that the hardest task of curators in our days is to be free and autonomous.

A curator who choose to create and produce *Hit and run project* in the public realm as a curatorial strategy and as a institution critic, have to confront the financial and production difficulties on the one hand, but has the chance to create a project that will have effect beyond the art context, and be meaningful to people out of galleries and museums spaces.
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Sehr geehrte Frau Meron,


Sehr geehrte Frau Schulz,


mit freundlichen Grüßen, Dovrat Meron
7  List of photos

All photos by Paul Holdsworth and Daniela Garcia del Pomar

Photo 1-3: Insight Skin by Moran Sanderovich
Photo 4-5: Erinnerung by Birgit Auf der Lauer
Photo 6-8: Maik Kerner in "Small questions to large places" by Valeria Schwarz
Photo 9-10: Moran Sanderovich is forced to leave the Holocaust Memorial while performing Insight Skin

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