

# Lots of Shiny Junk at the Art Dump: The Sick and Unwilling Curator

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## Abstract

This text draws on the authors' shared experiences of growing alienation from the figure of the "contemporary curator", stemming from a wider concern with the rigour, ethics and radicality that become impossible with the pace of work they term "hyper-production" that has become almost completely normalised. This alienation is articulated through an enmeshment of desire and capacity—"won't" and "can't"—where "can't" is a matter of capacity, time and energy relating to competing responsibilities such as child care and the self-care of chronic illness. This question of capacity to work is explored through recent art and curating thinking—by Carolyn Lazard, Taranah Fazeli, Alyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue—that underscores the challenge posed to capitalist modes of labour by such a refusal, as well as a problematisation of "stamina", which draws on disability activism and advocacy via Catherine Hale and Susan Wendell. The text concludes with the articulation of a series of questions that attempt to glimpse other more "resilient", via

Nataša Petrešin

-Bachelez—forms of curating that might exist in opposition to the marathon-working "stamina" required of the normative "contemporary curator".

## Prologue: Francesca's dream

One night, a few years ago, the art patron and collector-cum-performance-artist Francesca von Habsburg had a vivid dream. She dreamed that she was at an "art dump", a large landfill into which she could throw artworks from her collection that she no longer wanted. Feeling overwhelmed by the enormous number of objects she had amassed, Von Habsburg decided that it was, in fact, time to dispose of almost everything in her collection. The only works she claimed still held her interest were the immaterial activities of the music and art collective Chicks on Speed. As Von Habsburg approached the "art dump", she felt a huge delight at finally being able to shed all the "shiny junk" she had collected over the years, so she enthusiastically jumped right in and looking up realised that she was not alone at the landfill. Struggling to climb out of the hole, and dodging the falling "shiny junk" while clambering out, Von Habsburg caught a glimpse of fellow collector François Pinault also dumping his "shiny junk". Next thing she knew, Charles Saatchi appeared on the horizon, followed by Luma Foundation's Maja

Hoffman and a host of other collectors, all there, “dumping” in relief.

We know the details of Von Habsburg’s dream, because it served as inspiration for a track by Chicks on Speed, the very collective whose work Francesca’s subconscious spared from being forever lost in the art dump. The dream, as paraphrased above, was told by Von Habsburg as an opening to the track that it inspired, titled *Art Dump*, and was performed collaboratively by Von Habsburg and Chicks on Speed at the opening party of the Australian Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale to an audience of bemused art insiders who laughed knowingly.<sup>[1]</sup> The perfect loop; a collector’s dream inspiring an artwork and then being performed by the dreamer herself makes for a fascinating artist–collector symbiosis, not unlike patronage models of earlier centuries, except that in this case the commissioner acquires kudos and a new type of stardom by also being on stage performing the work. We have in this timely critique, it appears, finally reached the phase of artists literally making collectors’ dreams come true.

## The Curator and Shiny Junk

While few curators share Von Habsburg’s problem of owning too much art, the sense of being overwhelmed by an endless proliferation of “shiny junk” is not unfamiliar. The pressure to produce, enable and bring into the world projects that feed the fast-moving art world conveyor belt and that ultimately end up in collections such as Von Habsburg’s—or result in a myriad of secondary outputs that ultimately feed such collections—can feel as stifling as owning too much art and wanting to dispose of some of it. Von Habsburg’s nightmarish distress at the never-ending supply of art illuminates the perspective from the other end of the supply chain (the moneyed one), while on the production side curators and artists equally struggle to figure out how (and whether) to try *to keep up* and continue to churn out projects at accelerated speeds in order to meet the constant need to supply the goods. If collectors are having nightmares about owning too much art, and if curators and artists feel overwhelmed by the hungry machine demanding more “shiny junk” at ever-increasing speeds and volumes, then what is it that is driving the monster machine of art fairs, exhibitions, biennials and auctions? Who is it all for? And why so fast, why so much of it?

In his piece *The Edinburgh Statement (Who Makes a Profit On Art, And Who Gains From It Honestly?)* (1975), the Yugoslav artist Raša Todosijević listed over two hundred entities and individuals that profit from the production and circulation of art, noting in the work’s subtitle his own entanglement by claiming that “[t]he author also wrote this text in order to profit from the good and the bad in art”. From manufacturers of materials used in artwork to “those supporting helpless and senile artists in order to get hold of their inheritance, profiting like gangsters”, Todosijević highlighted the multiple nodes within the art-making cycle that help propel the fast-paced production and circulation of art.<sup>[2]</sup> And where there is money to be made, the acceleration of production follows, squeezing out as much free or cheap labour as possible at each stage of the cycle.

Having been deeply embedded in the supply chain of art production since 2003 via our London-based non-profit art agency Electra, and having reached a point at which pressures to produce regular outputs for specified and always increasing audience numbers operated in direct opposition to our own desires and ethical considerations, we found ourselves in 2016 at a point when the two paradigms became irreconcilable.<sup>[3]</sup> The labour required to produce at the speed and frequency deemed successful by the metrics applied in public arts funding (increasingly entangled with the private sphere) were simply not compatible with our own belief in remunerating all those involved in the cycle of production of art projects as a baseline, never mind any desire for projects to be slowly careful and rigorous in their articulation and delivery. To continue to accept the paradigm of growth and expansion, one that was expected and normalised by the funding structures at the same

speed at which the sector was operating, would have compromised our own *raison d'être* beyond our own acceptable limits. The rapidly changing landscape in which quality is increasingly flattened through the uniformity of online media communications, always welcoming good-looking art images and prominent branding to place product above process, seemed like a losing battle.

But aside from ethics and desired ways of working, it became apparent that the speed and intensity of art production was contingent on the curator herself being able and willing to be present and visible; on having the capacity to invest affective labour into projects through attending events, nurturing relationships and, of course, working overtime in an increasingly entangled form of work-life with few discernible boundaries. As curator Helena Reckitt astutely noted in 2016, the shift from public to private funding sources has contributed to “a redefinition of curatorial care in which the affective labour of human contact and interaction have displaced conventional curatorial responsibilities of conservation and scholarship.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Curators who, along with artists, find themselves at the centre of the production cycle, are continuously negotiating the whirlwind of pressures to keep enabling, producing and releasing projects, knowing that to stop means to disappear, to lose one’s cultural capital. In this essay we ask what happens to the curator who doubts the merits of continuing to “feed the beast”, who stops because to keep going in this pressured way loses sense. Moreover, what happens to a curator who simply does not have the capacity, time or energy required to physically continue the endless production of “shiny junk”, where desire and capacity may be complexly interlinked. We draw here particularly on some recent work within disability studies/activism that attends to these questions in relation to chronic illness, a highly subjective perspective based on personal experience—bringing the notion of *stamina* into dialogue with the question of how to think through curating *otherwise*—and to attempt to widen the current discourse on reproductive labour within curating.<sup>[5]</sup>

## A “Ponzi” Scheme

It is hard to imagine this now, with the benefit of hindsight, but the sense of being allowed in, invited to curate something, listened to by more senior colleagues at the beginning of one’s career felt like a gift and a privilege. We have all been there—even if no budget was available, even if all we were offered were morsels of unpaid and uncredited “opportunities”. The chance to curate something felt like our passions, interests and our obscure knowledge were finally accepted, valued and allowed to exist in the world in a legitimate way. What had once perhaps been a fan-like bedroom obsession was now a recognised cultural output.<sup>[6]</sup> We were no longer just weird collectors of images, objects, films, sounds or seemingly useless information—we were not just fans of artists, thinkers or musicians—we were finally curators.

By the time a young curator realises that success in their line of work is inextricably linked to their willingness to overinvest time and energy, it is too late. A young curator’s readiness to attend, sometimes gatecrash, art parties, pay to attend biennials themselves, crash on people’s floors, lose sleep and take cheap early flights in the name of being *present* at “key” events, *is* their value. Their willingness to spend evenings at private views without being able to claim time off in lieu, or get safe transport home covered by the institution, *is* their currency—but it may simultaneously spell their downfall. A young curator’s value lies in performing what Angela McRobbie has termed “passionate work”; in being enthusiastically immersed in art world activity, of having their fingers on the pulse, in knowing the right people, knowing the gossip, knowing what emerging artists are working on, and being able to bring all this to an institution she is only tangentially linked to, often through internships, low-paid administrative assistant positions, or murky freelance affiliations.<sup>[7]</sup> As McRobbie observes “the figure of the ‘curator’ is typically immaculately dressed, well-spoken and with a pleasing personal style. To do well, at least

in the start-up years, candidates must have the right kind of personality, so there is an ironing out of ‘bad affect’ or surly grumpiness...”<sup>[8]</sup> One’s value lies in one’s willingness to bring these gems of ideas and funding like religious offerings to institutions whose operational structures are based precisely on sucking out this kind of enthusiasm for as long as possible.

But the insatiable energy for being such a catalyst may not be unending. What happens when a young curator withdraws their willingness to provide the free extras, when the goodwill and initial excitement wane, or simply when the penny drops that the extra time and energy invested do not necessarily lead to making a sustainable living? The enthusiasm to succeed, and the energy that fuels a young curator’s desire to invest their own unpaid time in order to create connections, which will, they hope, lead to curatorial roles and opportunities, may be limited and short-lived. This “hatching” phase may not last long, simply because it is not sustainable—though it may last longer than it ought to. The paradox is that a young curator may be only attractive at this early point, while fuelled by unpaid research, networking and late nights going to openings, parties, screenings, performances—acting as a scout for those more established curators in institutions who are (justifiably) less willing to subsidise the institution with their own time to such a degree any longer.

## The Canary in the Coalmine

If this cycle is unsustainable in the long run for those most able to navigate it, then what of those who have less capacity through other commitments that require their time and energy? To be able to provide curatorial care is a matter of privilege. One can only be a magnanimous curator in reverse proportion to any of the other caring responsibilities that may come to eclipse this time and energy. Only a small minority has the privilege of public, visible curatorial care. For those who care for their own health, physical and mental, or that of others—those who care for children, a partner, friend, parents, anyone in need of consistent care—that time invested is time taken away from caring visibly—caring curatorially. In other words, a curator is deemed as one who gives care in a very specific art context—to artists, patrons, funders—someone who has excess care to give.<sup>[9]</sup> What would it mean to expand understandings of curating, to acknowledge these other registers of care?

Any personal struggle involved is of course likely to be largely invisible, and ultimately without currency. Were this care to be turned outwards, towards artists and beyond, as Reckitt notes, then “deploying affective labour in order to maintain social relations is a key curatorial skill.”<sup>[10]</sup> But no matter how caring, devoted, responsible the personal care might be, that care does not count: wasted time and energy, as far as the art world is concerned. Moreover, time needed to attend to matters of (personal) care tends to increase with age, reinforcing the contemporary curator’s potentially limited shelf life. Although, the need to care for oneself and others in this way may be elastically pushed back by those with privilege whose needs are inevitably less, and/or have the means to outsource such labour: with enough class, enough whiteness, and other intersecting privileges, the burden of daily care can, in most cases, be left to others to bear, at least temporarily.

On a personal level, for each of us the breaking point was not only a matter of not *willing*, but also a matter of capacity, of other responsibilities: becoming a parent, becoming disabled, chronic illness. That is to say, having to deal with competing areas of care, time, energy. We would not for a moment suggest these, or any of the other myriad identities and effects that trouble the notion of the contemporary curator are equivalent to each other. Neither would we seek to erase the differences across the spectrum of experiences contained within either of these specific categories themselves (parenthood, chronic illness). We draw them together here because they share allied effects, notably in competing for care, time, energy or what we wish to go on to describe as a matter of *stamina*.<sup>[11]</sup> It may not be necessary for both the combination of ethical/political

concerns *and* such a physical or practical disbaring to occur for one to consider these existential questions of curating. But taken together in their complex intersecting, our respective situations may serve to diagnose the problems faced by all but the most able, enthusiastic, unfettered: those able to solely focus on the drive for curatorial *powering-through*.

In other words, you may find yourself chronically overworked (and underpaid) for a decade or two, pondering the ethics of continuing to service this cycle of hyper-production with increasing unease. But it may take your body's own revolt—by way of a lifelong auto-immune condition, for instance, that suddenly flares up more seriously and more chonically; or a series of years caring for the body of another and having to say “No” to late nights in the office, to openings near and far, to travel more widely—to produce the physical barrier to this way of working that yields a more embodied understanding of this general artworld *fuckery*.<sup>[12]</sup>

This, then, may be the point at which things start to unravel. For, indeed, there is a tipping point, a minimum level of insertion into the cycle of production, visibility, output, circulaton, below which one's name and face seem to recede from the collective conscious, which reveals the limits of inclusion. Marginal positions are perfectly palatable under the right circumstances, if they can produce the required outputs—essentially, if one has a willingness to pick up the master's tools and *work work work* with them and without fundamental questioning.<sup>[13]</sup> Like society more widely, it is a landscape of excess and scarcity. On the one hand, the curator who embraces the chain reaction of hyper-production, the serial biennial curator, the curator with three, four or even more job titles. On the other, the underperforming curator, the curator facing the risk of total disappearance, being asked “but what are you *working on?*”

As much as there may for some be a sense of “grieving” amidst this potential for loss, there may also be a sense of clarity, diagnosis even—in seeing the whole sorry cycle from these diametrically opposed perspectives. Being wrung out with exhaustion from years of not sleeping with a small infant is not necessarily the same kind of exhaustion as the already heterogeneous chronic fatigue of many chronic illnesses. Yet we would like to argue that the respective impacts, being *so tired* of the “shiny junk”, may be a shared alienation and distancing from a work economy that cannot value other forms of labour that interrupt the cycle of hyper-production. That is not to diminish other equally disrupting questions of access, but our focus here is on energy, *stamina* to continue the *work* of curating.

You may find yourself googling “auto-immunity as body's response to late capitalism” and stumbling on Carolyn Lazard's brilliant 2015 essay “How to be a person in the age of auto-immunity”.<sup>[14]</sup> Conversations that began around such questions of auto-immunity by Lazard and fellow artists Jesse Cohen and Bonnie Swencionis in 2013 would go on to form The Canaries, a larger loosely constituted group in NYC.<sup>[15]</sup> The *canary in the coalmine* in as much as “our auto-immune and other chronic health conditions warn of imbalances in the world at large.”<sup>[16]</sup> Members of The Canaries would also contribute to the exhibition project “Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism's Temporal Bullying”—curated by Taraneh Fazeli for Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in 2018 and subsequently touring in the US—a project that presents a succinct manifesto in its very title, enacted through an emphasis on multiple dialogic approaches.<sup>[17]</sup> Fazeli's long-term research project expands on this notion of the canary, of chronic illness as an explicit challenge to the logic of capitalism: “[g]rappling with the off-tempo infirm (or otherwise ‘disordered’) body that won't efficiently labor, Sick Time will consider illness as a form of knowledge of imbalances in the world writ large.”<sup>[18]</sup> In line with these understandings, we argue that the sick and unwilling curator is indeed such a *canary*, one that may in fact diagnose the *sickness* of curating itself.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Stamina Impairment

Known for bringing feminist discourse into relation to disability studies, in her 2001 essay “Unhealthy disabled: treating chronic illnesses as disability”, Susan Wendell explored the challenges that chronic illnesses pose to the social model of disability, focusing on the “phenomenology of impairment, rather than accepting a medical approach to it”.<sup>[20]</sup> For Wendell these challenges, as Fazeli’s title so succinctly evidences, are particularly profound in relation to the capacity to work:

*People will have to think differently about energy and commitment, pace and cooperation.*

*Implementing the accommodations of pace and scheduling needed by people with chronic illnesses may inconvenience a lot of other people in a group (although, given the general silence about limitations of energy, perhaps many more people will be relieved). Moreover, everyone knows that the people who commit the most time and energy to a group will usually acquire the most power to influence the group’s activities. In order for people with impaired energy to participate as equals, the relationships between time, energy, and power will have to be discussed openly and negotiated.*<sup>[21]</sup>

In other words, truly including those with chronic illness implicitly challenges the basic structures of groups and organisations, and the way they work. In “Re-claiming Chronic Illness” (2018), lead researcher of the UK-based Chronic Illness Inclusion Project, Catherine Hale, proposes the term “stamina impairment” to summarise in one phrase one of the main effects experienced jointly in a range of chronic illnesses that impact energy and time through fatigue and pain.<sup>[22]</sup> Thus, in line with Wendell, producing a category that makes these diverse disabilities more legible as such, while eschewing their medical pathologisation in favour of a profoundly experiential phenomenon—one that could serve to shore up access to state welfare and other disability rights, where those with chronic illness are often overlooked or not adequately considered within existing frameworks. While *stamina impairment* is a tentative term in Hale’s paper (that would go on to be ultimately replaced with “energy-limiting” in later papers), we highlight the notion of *stamina* here in both its literal and metaphorical sense in the labour at the heart of curating. That is to say, while we understand Hale’s use as absolutely invested in the specificity of “energy-limiting” conditions, in the spirit of Wendell’s suggestion there may well be cause for multiple solidarities that extend beyond these. *Stamina impairment*, in this extended sense, may pose a challenge to the functioning of the contemporary curator from which she may not recover, literally, or, may have to begin to rethink the category of “curator” in light of understandings of its sickness. We would like to propose *stamina* as a key axis, a paradigm even, along which to challenge notions of the contemporary curator and her associated work—one that is here specifically derived from contemporary disability studies/activism but with wide-reaching implications, and potentially relatable for any curator who has questioned her willingness or capacity to *keep up*.

The notion of *stamina* and its rejection is implicitly central to Canadian artists Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell / FAG (Feminist Art Gallery) 2012 artwork *CAN’T/WON’T*, a four-part hand-crocheted multi-coloured tapestry, each part comprising one of the below slogans, infectious in their singular and combined simplicity:

*WE CAN’T COMPETE*

*WE WON’T COMPETE*

*WE CAN’T KEEP UP*

WE WON'T KEEP DOWN

Although created to be exhibited as a prop during an (ambivalent) invitation to speak at Tate Modern, and deployed in various other insitutional contexts, the work equally serves as a series of banners for street protest as much as a gallery object.<sup>[23]</sup> Logue and Mitchell propose the following questions to be asked: “[w]hy would you want to be a winner in this hierarchal structure?”; and “[h]ow do we both resist and reconcile our participation in this oppressive system?”<sup>[24]</sup> For Logue and Mitchell one answer is to be found in their ongoing FAG (Feminist Art Gallery) project, a gallery created in the garage in the garden of their Toronto home: “[w]e can’t compete so we won’t compete. Instead we will: collaborate, nurture, cultivate, feed, enable.”<sup>[25]</sup>

This enmeshing of capacity and desire speaks closely to us in relation to our own experiences—we *can’t* and *we won’t*—as both a complex effect, but also a potentially propulsive form of solidarity within and beyond ourselves. We will spend the final part of this text exploring the second set of statements: “we can’t keep up” and “we won’t keep down”. How may the sick and unwilling curator, like Logue and Mitchell, seek ways to hold space and resist this cycle? We foreground the articulation of the questions that we have begun to ask ourselves over specific remedies or prescriptions at this stage.

## Slow Institutions and Beyond

Perhaps the relationship to art and artists has not changed, perhaps the curatorial impulse is still there, but manifests differently somehow. Can the curator “step out” of the race, but still be a curator? Does curating necessitate the process of producing or can the curator still be of some use (to whom? where? how?) in other ways? How little visibility is enough and why, precisely, does visibility matter? Visible to whom? Visible for what purpose? Visibility that breeds further visibility, profile-boosting, invitations, curatorial gigs, that *chain reaction*, viable for some, disastrous for others. All of this needs new spaces and timelines, different modes of gathering, a paradigm shift.

This is where the labour involved in curating may take a turn and begin to operate in the realm of “the curatorial”, which, depending on how one understands it, could be imagined as an arena in which it is possible to rethink ways of being, working with others, thinking about methods and processes rather than outputs. Nina Möntmann has spoken of “the curatorial” as “a transdisciplinary method to activate and intervene into real-life context”, and with this approach in mind we wonder if “the curatorial” can intervene into the sickness of curating itself, as a way to resist the slippery self-destructive course that curating is on?<sup>[26]</sup> Can we hold space for *not doing*? How can we be simultaneously present to some extent but not always already producing? To participate in any *field*, one’s value system and logic need to be embedded in and adopt the value system of the *habitus*. Can one simultaneously maintain a critical distance and still be an active participant, or does too much questioning of the prevailing logic automatically place one on the outside, maladjusted and not adapting to the rules of the game?<sup>[27]</sup> Is this endless questioning and resistance the curatorial equivalent of antisocial behaviour, where one wishes to belong to a community, but continually bends or challenges its rules?

In her essay “For Slow Institutions”, curator and writer Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez offers a succinct, yet wide-ranging account of the historical development of arts and cultural institutions with the coterminous elimination of indigenous cultures and the Atlantic slave trade, emerging inherently entangled at the birth of the Anthropocene and resulting in sustained ecological plunder and environmental crisis.<sup>[28]</sup> The text looks towards Fred Moten’s proposal to *slow down* in tandem with Isabelle Stengers’ notion of *slow science*. Although

“marathon” events are not entirely new, the apparent permanence of London’s “Serpentine Marathon”—brought to the capital by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2006, a curator famous for little sleep, sits metaphorically at the pinnacle of the art world’s aversion to such notions of *slowing down*—pointed to here is emblematic of the rapacious desires still very much at the heart of cultural production.<sup>[29]</sup> If the desired speed of cultural production comes from a term whose dictionary definition spells “an activity that takes a long time and makes you very tired”, it is hard to see a way out of the current pace of work, although we would simultaneously argue that slowing down is a glaring necessity, much like the wider notion of *degrowth*.<sup>[30]</sup> Most importantly, though, these strategies require a level of solidarity, of critical mass. They require breaking out of the mind-set of self-sacrifice: in other words, everyone must leave the office at 5pm *together*. Of course there’s always the question of *who can afford to slow down*, to opt for less visibility, though, as Wendell foregrounds, this ought to become a “question of time, energy, and power [...] to be discussed openly and negotiated”, not forgetting that it is not merely those who can afford to slow down who may need to.<sup>[31]</sup> In other words, *stamina* is a privilege and slowing down will mean some people *giving up their privilege*. In her text, Petrešin-Bachelez goes further into notions of sustainability, *resilience*, taking that term in opposition to its co-option by neoliberal business-speak: “Resilience encompasses reciprocal dependence and the finding of one’s political and socio-ecological place in a world that is out of balance and that creates increasingly disadvantageous living conditions.”<sup>[32]</sup>

Curating, which relies on enthusiasm, willingness and capacity to invest excess unpaid time, is surely short-term, unsustainable, not so much a practice at all, in as much as a practice needs sustenance and *resilience* in this inherently entangled profoundly ecological sense. Perhaps, in terms of curatorial labour, *resilience* may be understood as the antonym of, or antidote to, the demand for *stamina*.

To be a curator is to be embedded in a system and to abide by its rules. Whatever we may think of the term “outsider artist”, the practice of art-making can happen independently of institutions. The practice remains, and gains momentum over time, even if not met with critical acclaim, money or kudos. But a curator’s “oeuvre” is less easy to develop independently, outside of existing structures. There is no “outsider curator”, because curating is a networked, highly co-dependent process and relies on being fully embedded in the *habitus*. Without a venue, without regular budget and without opportunities to offer artists, what does the curator who is set apart have to give anyone? A curator’s “power” is deeply entwined in their social and cultural capital, with institutions, funding structures, audiences and the promise of “spreading the word”, ensuring visibility. Even at grassroots level, with little reliance on mainstream structures, curating is still relational and does not exist without being embedded in complex forms of exchange, with “reciprocal dependence” at its very basis as Petrešin-Bachelez has it.<sup>[33]</sup>

Expressing the curator’s predicament in relation to the artist is not intended to undermine the equivalent, or perhaps even greater, levels of pressure for visibility and production experienced by artists in this regard. But, simply put, a curator without a significant project or affiliation is like a chef without a kitchen: out of work, arguably no longer a curator. As well as underlining the extent to which curatorial work is hybrid and interlaced with institutional bureaucracy, we suggest a need to refine and reclaim curatorial practices. Moreover, we may wish to claim them as separate and distinct from institutions and hierarchies of power; as practices that exist in their own right in ongoing ways regardless of visible outputs and “shiny junk”. *Resilient practices* that encompass different rhythms and energies in their very form.

While recent years have brought a renewed fixation with the notion of refusal, of dropping out as an artistic strategy, this has rarely been proposed as a curatorial strategy for exactly all the reasons outlined above. Rather than looking for our own exit strategies, we would like to propose to instead look for ways to resist the hyper-production that could work *in solidarity* with artists, to resist these pressures *together*. As Andrew Berardini puts



it in his meditation on the *unprofessional artist*, “to resist the efficiency of their gears with the softness of our humanity”—an inference echoed in the title of the excellent congress “Humans of the Institution”.<sup>[34]</sup> We could look towards and take strength from the smaller grassroots institutions that diffract power outwards to many artists and stakeholders, who do the endless reproductive labour of maintenance and advocacy, organisations that seem to offer alternatives to the model of singular curatorial authorship, the *thesis exhibition* etc.<sup>[35]</sup> We also look to more divergent forms of *institutions*, taking social material, the congregation, the meeting, the group as the basis of curatorial formats, or to re-iterate the words of Logue and Mitchell, that “collaborate, nurture, cultivate, feed, enable”.<sup>[36]</sup> We do not for a moment suggest that we have been able to propose concrete strategies here. Rather it has been our intention to articulate our own struggle to continue to conceptualise ourselves as curators and to plant some seeds of resistance to this hyper-production in the belief that that there is a growing desire for other ways of working with heterogeneous relationships to time, energy and capacity.

## Footnotes

1. For a video of the performance, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Psav6qc9VrM> (accessed 2020-06-29).
2. In 2012 the artist Milica Tomić performed a reworked version of Raša Todosijević’s 1975 *Edinburgh Statement—a list of 200 “profiteers” from the art-making process*. The work, *The Pančevo Statement*, was originally commissioned by Jelena Vesić and performed in Serbian in Pančevo, Serbia. The work was further updated, providing a feminist reworking of the original text, while also including newer professions profiting from art production, in a new version entitled *The Nottingham Statement* (2016), and was performed in English at the opening of the “Monuments Should Not Be Trusted” exhibition, curated by Lina Džuverović, on 15 January 2016 at Nottingham Contemporary. Available at <https://jegensentevens.nl/2018/04/who-makes-a-profit-on-art-and-who-gains-from-it-honestly/> (accessed 2020-01-12).
3. See Džuverović, Lina and Revell, Irene. “We falter with feminist conviction”. *OnCurating*. Issue 29. May 2016. Available at <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/we-falter-with-feminist-conviction.html#.XSzXtpNKgWp> (accessed 2019-07-21).
4. [Reckitt, Helena](#). “Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction”. *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. Vol. 5. No. 1. 2016. p. 25.
5. Curator Laura Raicovich talks of producing/curating “otherwise” during *Red Discussion 2*, by Artist Nada Prlja, a conversation at the opening of the North Macedonian Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2019. Participants in the discussion included Charles Esche, Maurizio Lazzarato, Vlad Morariu, Chantal Mouffe, Laura Raicovich and Artan Sadiku.
6. See Grant, Catherine. “Fans of Feminism. Re-writing Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art”. *Oxford Art Journal*. Vol. 34. Issue 2. 2011. pp. 265–286.
7. In “Be Creative” (2015) Angela McRobbie introduces the term “passionate work” to describe the “gender effect of post-Fordism”, indicating work that McRobbie claims is a predominantly feminised creative

version of emotional labour, performed by “highly enthusiastic and uncomplaining” young women, working through the night to complete a fashion collection, a film, or in our case engage in curatorial networking, or write funding proposals.

8. McRobbie, Angela. “Is passionate work a neoliberal delusion?”. *Open Democracy*. 22 April 2015. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/is-passionate-work-neoliberal-delusion/> (accessed 2019-07-02).
9. Although at a certain level a curator may acquire a team of assistant curators, requiring care in as much as their own curatorial output requires the labour, affective and otherwise, of others to sustain it.
10. Reckitt, “Support Acts”, p. 8.
11. Our use of “stamina” here is extended on from Catherine Hale’s notion of *stamina impairment* in her discussion paper “Reclaiming ‘Chronic Illness’”. Center for Welfare Reform. 2018. Available at <https://inclusionproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/reclaiming-chronic-illness-discussion-paper.pdf> (accessed 2019-07-20).
12. At the time of writing this text, “what is this fuckery?” was the catch-phrase of the eleven-year-old child of one of the authors, which seems to orient itself with ease into numerous art world contexts.
13. With obvious reference to Audre Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984.
14. Lazard, Carolyn. “How to be a Person in the Age of Auto-Immunity”. Available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55c40d69e4b0a45eb985d566/t/58cebc9dc534a59fbd98c2/1489943709737/HowtobeAPersonintheAgeofAutoimmunity+%281%29.pdf> (accessed 2019-07-21).
15. See <http://wearecanaries.com/> (accessed 2019-07-21).
16. *Ibid.*
17. One outcome of the exhibition project is The Canaries’ *Notes for the Waiting Room* anthology. Available at [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57798de320099e9ea5949651/t/59cd301ccd39c3e808dtedf3/1506619444570/NFTWR\\_LincoV5.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57798de320099e9ea5949651/t/59cd301ccd39c3e808dtedf3/1506619444570/NFTWR_LincoV5.pdf) (accessed 2020-01-12).
18. Fazeli, Taraneh. “Notes for ‘Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time: Against Capitalism’s Temporal Bullying’ in conversation with the Canaries”. *Temporary*. 26 May 2016. Available at <http://temporaryartreview.com/notes-for-sick-time-sleepy-time-crip-time-against-capitalisms-temporal-bullying-in-conversation-with-the-canaries/> (accessed 2020-01-12).
19. While we are focused here on the curator’s capacity for curatorial labour, we wish to note the work of curator Amanda Cachia, who has written extensively at the intersection of curatorial studies and disability studies, on topics such as *disabling the museum*. Beyond curating specifically, another important resource is artist Eva Eggerman’s *CRIP Magazine* project, see <http://cripmagazine.evaeggermann.com/>, and in the UK, the recent “Access Docs for Artists”, developed during a residency at Wysing Arts Centre, see <https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/>.
20. Wendell, Susan. “Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities”. *Hypatia*. Vol. 16. No. 4. Autumn 1990. Feminism and Disability issue. Part 1. pp. 17-33.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Hale, Catherine. “Reclaiming Chronic Illness: An introduction to the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project”. Centre for Welfare Reform. 2012. Available at <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/617/reclaiming-chronic-illness.pdf> (accessed 2020-01-12).
23. This context is described in more detail in an interview with the artists: Latimer, Joanne. “The Feminist Art Gallery fights back with fabric: The anti-gallery is everything the art world isn’t, namely non-

- discriminatory". *Macleans*. 4 July 2012. Available at <https://www.macleans.ca/culture/feminist-art-gallery-fights-back-with-fabric/> (accessed 2020-01-12).
24. See <https://accessgallery.ca/event/cantwont> (accessed 2020-01-12).
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. "Curating: Conflict and Mediation" was a talk by Nina Möntmann held on 16 November 2017 in Oslo, as part of "Curating the social: Meet me at the empty centre", organised by the PRAKSIS residency programme and with Norsk Kuratorforening (The Norwegian Association of Curators) and curator and writer Natasha Marie Llorens..
  27. Here we turn to Pierre Bourdieu's well-known terminology of *field* and *habitus* and his metaphor of the sports game in which participation necessitates internalising the rules and the game. See Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 1993.
  28. Petrešin-Bachelez, Nataša. "For Slow Institutions". *E-flux Journal*. # 85, October 2017. Available at <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/> (accessed 2019-07-21).
  29. Petrešin-Bachelez's impulse is not alone. Among others, London curator Emma Gradin is researching *deceleration as curatorial paradigm*.
  30. Entry "marathon" in *Cambridge Dictionary*. Available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/marathon> (accessed 2020-06-18).
  31. Wendell, "Unhealthy Disabled".
  32. Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions".
  33. *Ibid.*
  34. "Humans of the Institution" was a three-day gathering organised by Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Zihlerl, convened by Curatorial Practice, Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen, and Frontier Imaginaries, presented at the Veem House for Performance in Amsterdam on 25-27 November 2017. For more information, see <http://humansoftheinstitution.works/> (accessed 2019-07-21).
  35. In London this includes organisations such as LUX, distributor of artists' moving images, or LADA, advocate of live art, and younger organisations such as not/nowhere.
  36. Examples from London, again, include grassroots initiatives like Collective Creativity, a collaborative collective project that creates space that is explicitly inclusive of—and created for and by—people of different sexualities and genders, by and for people of colour; or the Feminist Duration Reading Group, initiated by curator Helena Reckitt in 2015, meeting regularly in a combination of institutional and non-institutional spaces.