

A PRECARIOUS CONSTRUCT

The Commission as a Curatorial Mode of Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This article turns on a curatorial project that Trine Friis Sørensen conducted in relation to the Danish Radio Archive (the DR Archive) by commissioning two artists, Kajsa Dahlberg and Olof Olsson, to engage with the archive and produce artworks in relation to it. Focusing on the practice of commissioning rather than its outcome, the article proposes to consider commissioning as a curatorial mode of inquiry into the DR Archive and in turn asks *why* we commission, *how* the commission works and *what kind* of thinking the commission engenders. Drawing on Bruno Latour, Michel Foucault and in particular Jacques Derrida, this thinking with and through the practice of commissioning eventually prompts her to reinvigorate the obsolete notion of *curatorial care*.

KEYWORDS

Curating, Commission, Archive, Practice-led research, Care, the Curatorial

When I first visited a remote part of Danish Radio Archive (henceforth the DR Archive) located in the Copenhagen-suburb Søborg, I noticed a peculiar distribution of blue pieces of paper inserted between the approximately 180.000 shelved reel-to-reel tapes at intervals of $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 meter. The blue papers appeared to indicate a system of a sort, but there was no immediate explanation to be found. As it turned out, the blue papers were indeed a system, an ad-hoc solution conceived in the midst of a moving process some years back, when this part of DR's reel-to-reel tape archive was moved from the old Radio House on Rosenørns Allé in Copenhagen to its current and more spacious location in Søborg. On Rosenørns Allé, the ordering of the tapes had been determined not only by technical numbers and shelf numbers, but also by the dimensions of the various shelving systems that occupied every available square meter of the basement under the old Radio House. The shelves of the new compact archiving system in Søborg were, however, much longer than the shelves on Rosenørns Allé, so in

order to secure the order of the archive, the archivists came up with the idea of inserting these blue pieces of paper between the tapes to mark the point where one shelf ended and another began. These shelf sections – demarcated by blue papers – were subsequently labelled with the corresponding shelf numbers. Accordingly, the main function of the blue pieces of paper is to map out the former architecture of the archive, which effectively is superimposed onto this new location.

What we have here – this conjunction of place and order – lends itself rather emphatically to what Jacques Derrida terms the *topo-nomology* of the archive, that is to say, the intersection of the topological and the nomological, the place and the law; an indispensable principle of the archive according to Derrida.¹ The ordering of the archive is conditioned by its place – not only by the house in Søborg where it currently dwells but also, and crucially, by its previous domicile in Copenhagen. The structure of the DR Archive is, in other words, not one with itself but haunted, *heimge-sucht*, by its former domicile. According to Derrida, the structure of the archive is *spectral*² – here it would appear to be so twice over.

Between 2010-14, the DR Archive was the subject matter of the research project LARM³ of which I was part, and my way of addressing this archive was to commission two artists, Kajsa Dahlberg (SE) and Olof Olsson (SE/NL/DK), to engage with the archive and produce artworks in relation to it. On account of my commission, Dahlberg produced the video work *Fifty Minutes in Half an Hour* (2013), which was part of her solo exhibition, *This Time It's Political*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark, and Olsson produced the performance *DR P3. 1963-2013. 50 Years of Danish State Authorised Pop Radio* (2013), which he performed at a number of art and cultural institutions in Denmark and Sweden.⁴ Both Dahlberg's exhibition and Olsson's performance tour were realised in early 2013 and curated by me.⁵

While Dahlberg's exhibition and Olsson's performance tour mark the culmination of our engagement with the DR Archive, the focus of this article is not these final manifestations but rather the gesture that initiated the projects in the first place, namely, the act of commissioning and how it translates as a mode of inquiry. Because by commissioning Dahlberg and Olsson, I not only delegated the task of addressing the DR Archive to them, I also established a curatorial mode of inquiry into the archive. The purpose of this article is, in turn, to develop the act of commissioning as a mode of inquiry and propose how one might go about conducting research *through* curating – in other words, how the practice of curating

can be used as a vehicle for thinking.⁶ In what follows, I will address three fundamental questions concerning the commission as a curatorial mode of inquiry, namely, *why* we commission, *how* the commission works, and *what kind* of thinking the commission makes possible.

Despite its prevailing significance, the practice of commissioning has attracted very sparse critical attention over the years, and the few books on commissioning that I have come across do not address what it *means* to commission.⁷ As I will argue in more detail shortly, it is my claim that a commission responds to a *need*, because by commissioning Dahlberg and Olsson I delegate a particular task to them, and in doing so I acknowledge and designate a need for a certain kind of work to be done. In the case of the DR Archive, this need is a need for interpretation, because if we indeed consider the DR Archive along the lines of Derrida's understanding of the archive – like the blue papers in Søborg would appear to encourage – there is certainly a need to be reckoned with, a need for work to be done. To Derrida,⁸ an inheritance – in this case, the DR Archive – is never a *given* but always a *task*; a task of assuming, interpreting and radically transforming this inheritance that – like the blue papers – references something that is no longer there. The reason why we commission is, in other words, because there is a need for it.

The article proceeds to unpack the politics of delegation and the workings of the commission, the latter by way of a simple diagram that plots out the relations established by the commission between archive, commissioner, artists, and artworks. I will also propose how the act of commissioning can be considered a mode of inquiry, and this explication engenders me to revisit the notion of *curatorial care*. Doubling as a mode of inquiry, the practice of commissioning prompts three different manifestations of curatorial care, namely as an analytical gesture, as a research aspiration and as a supplementary structure that designates the intricate relationship between curator and artist. The kind of thinking that the commission makes possible is, in other words, one that reinvigorates the notion of curatorial care and, as I argue towards the end of the article, performs a specific conception of *the curatorial*.

NEGOTIATING CURATORIAL RESEARCH

The focus of this article hinges on recent years' interest in the relationship between curating and research;⁹ an interest that has generated the notion of *the curatorial*, which, as Simon Sheikh summarizes, “is (...) not necessarily something that takes on the



The DR Archive, The Radio House, Rosenørns Allé, Copenhagen
Photo by Klavs Lund (May 2007)



The DR Archive, Søborg
Photo by Trine Friis Sørensen (January 2011)

form and eventual character of the exhibition, but something that employs the thinking involved in exhibition-making and researching.”¹⁰ Accordingly, for the purpose of this inquiry my interest in curating is not as a means to an exhibitionary end; this article does not gravitate towards the exhibition or any other curatorial form that marks the culmination of a curatorial process. Rather, the linchpin of this article is the practice of commissioning and its capacity to perform a certain kind of inquiry. Curatorial research is not a new phenomenon in itself; in fact, research is among the core tasks of the traditional museum curator according to Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, who also designate the tasks of safeguarding the heritage, enriching collections and displaying art to the public as fundamental curatorial functions.¹¹ However, on account of the changes that both the role of the curator and research in the humanities has undergone, it seems pertinent to ask what curatorial research can be today.

The curator has, famously, transformed from a discreet behind-the-scenes curator-as-carer¹² into someone who occupies an *auteur*-like role¹³ – particularly when it comes to the most distinct specimen of the curator since the 1990s: the independent curator.¹⁴ As for research in the humanities, practice has, in recent decades, been seeping into academia’s traditionally theory-based knowledge production, testifying to a tentative rehashing of academia’s epistemological tradition. There is of course nothing new in deriving knowledge from practice. Practical knowledge informs an infinite number of activities and procedures in society, but historically the embodied, practical, situation-specific knowledge of the craftsman has been segregated from the theoretical, context-independent knowledge of the scientist.¹⁵

What we are witnessing today is a negotiation of this divide between embodied and conceptual knowledge, suggesting that knowledge originating in or through practice may be put to work beyond its particular context. Following the lead of Arjun Appadurai¹⁶ by way of Mieke Bal, the task at hand is “to develop a dialogic sensibility that makes it possible to learn mutually from contact with different modes of doing research.”¹⁷ That is, to work the intensities and pursue the potentialities of these encounters – perhaps even to seek generalizable applications for knowledge generated through practice, in other words, to theorise. In recent decades, artistic research has become a prevalent and institutionalised example of such a mould-breaking activity in which the artist *through* his or her practice establishes a particular kind of questioning and enables a particular form of knowledge production.

The aim of this article is to propose how a curatorial practice likewise can engender a certain form of knowledge production. To this end this article hinges on the notion of practice-led research, which designates research endeavours that seek to advance knowledge about or within practice.¹⁸

A COMMISSION IN NEED IS A COMMISSION INDEED

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), a commission concerns “a particular task or duty” that someone is entrusted or charged with, and this particularity almost demands the kind of need that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies in her preface to the English translation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Here Spivak notes, “Although we customarily say that the text is autonomous and self-sufficient, there would be no justification for our activity [of interpretation] if we did not feel that the text *needed* interpretation.”¹⁹ Spivak is talking about a text, but might this observation not also apply to other things, archives for example, and especially an archive that, as it turns out, is haunted by its former domicile? Neither autonomous nor self-sufficient, the DR Archive comes across as a vestigial structure in dire need of interpretation.

Now, I would argue that all art commissions regardless of whether they concern archives, public spaces, exhibitions, public art collections or private ones respond to some sort of need and, furthermore, that they hinge on a presumption that the commissioned artwork can satisfy this need. Anne Pasternak has argued that most public art projects respond to a need, for example the need to uplift a public site,²⁰ which the artwork in turn is expected to fulfil. In fact, the *Per cent for art* programme,²¹ which requires public sector bodies to devote a small percentage of construction budgets to art commissions, is in a certain sense an institutionalisation of this need. But an exhibition curator may also recognise a need for a new work by a specific artist in order to realise a curatorial concept, and an art collector might equally discern in his or her collection (or in that of an art institution) a need owing to aesthetic, art historical, or pecuniary reasons. This need translates as a motivation or a drive, as an impulse to pursue a particular goal – namely that of satisfying the need – but this goal is, crucially, one that the commissioner cannot achieve without the help of someone else. To this end, the act of commissioning testifies to an ability to identify a need, and to delegate the task of responding to this need to someone else, and in the case of the DR Archive – this chunk of cultural heritage – the need for interpretation is nothing short of a responsibility that we, as inheritors, must assume.

THE POLITICS OF DELEGATION

In addition to designating what the commission entails, i.e. “a particular task or duty,” the OED definition of the commission also specifies how this particular task or duty is assigned to someone, and that is in the form of entrusting or charging. It goes without saying that entrusting someone with a task is different from the act of charging; entrusting implies confidence, it speaks to the importance of the task and suggests that the artist is particularly qualified to take on the task. Charging, on the other hand, is an order and in this capacity authoritative and decidedly restrictive; it instructs the artist to act in a prescribed manner and to execute a particular kind of work. As I will argue in the following, the art commission would appear to comprise both meanings, because like any kind of collaboration, the commission is conditioned by the relative positions and privileges of the people involved, making it a potentially complex negotiation of power relations. The commissioner surely operates from a position of authority by gatekeeping institutional and financial resources, but the realization of the commission relies entirely on the agency of the artist. Commissioning is, in other words, also a matter of delegating authority and thus empowering the artist to respond to a need that the commissioner cannot manage single-handedly.

Historically, the authority of the commissioner was, however, practically boundless: for many centuries, an artist's livelihood was entirely dependent on patronage, and artworks were primarily produced on commission. With the emergence of new social forms in the 19th century, the patronal relation gradually became less influential due to a growing art market and the introduction of a new group of intermediaries such as dealers, agents and critics, and later gallerists and curators.²² The relation between commissioner and artist has, in other words, become less lopsided and more complex over the years. Unsurprisingly, to this day, the commissioner continues to hold considerable sway: Already the act of initiation gives the commissioner the upper hand – I approach Dahlberg and Olsson – and I not only offer them an opportunity to work and show their work, but also access to an otherwise inaccessible archive, institutional frameworks, a research project, a budget and a fee, and my undivided curatorial attention. All of these things of course make up a desirable framework for an artist, but they also constitute a notable curatorial leverage.

I, on the other hand, also depend on the artists, first of all to accept the commissions and in a certain sense sanction the project, and second to realize the commissions. Unlike many commissioners,

I did not ask Dahlberg and Olsson for a concept or sketch beforehand because their approaches and choices in relation to the DR Archive also was a key aspect of the project. Besides, research in an archive is almost by definition a time-consuming affair and of course requires access to the archive, a privilege only granted to LARM researchers and students. So, in order to access the DR Archive, they would have to be formally associated with the project. Bureaucratic dictates aside, I was not only interested in the artworks that Dahlberg and Olsson would produce, but also in their processes with the DR Archive, the archival records they would seek out and the particular ways in which they would conduct these explorations. My commission of Dahlberg and Olsson was, in turn, based on their previous work as well as studio visits and preliminary conversations about the project, but nothing concrete as to the specific direction of their work with the DR Archive. In other words, in addition to charging them with a particular task, I also placed a great deal of trust in Dahlberg and Olsson, and by taking on the commissions, they came to condition my relation to the DR Archive and essentially define the project.

THE WORKINGS OF THE COMMISSION

In addition to the power relations negotiated by the commissioner-artist relationship, a host of context-related factors also condition the commission, for example the users and producers of the site in question, its physical conditions as well as political and regulatory issues, the budget, institutional procedures etc. While each of these factors may influence the commission in critical ways, I would like to focus my attention on the main components of the commission, namely DR Archive, commissioner/curator, artists and ensuing artworks, and particularly the constellation that they enter into on account of my commission. So, although the diagram below might appear to be a self-contained set of relations, it does of course not exist in a vacuum.

Now, just to be clear: In this diagram, I consider the commissioner and the curator to be one and the same person, because that is how things stand in my project. However, in the case of a public art commission these functions are often split between a board or a committee that selects and commissions the artist, and a curator who facilitates the artist's realisation of the commission. In such a case, the curator would in a certain sense also be commissioned to realise a specific task, which would require two interlinked diagrams. While such an explication exceeds the focus of this article, I would argue that the diagram has general usability beyond my commission of Dahlberg and Olsson.

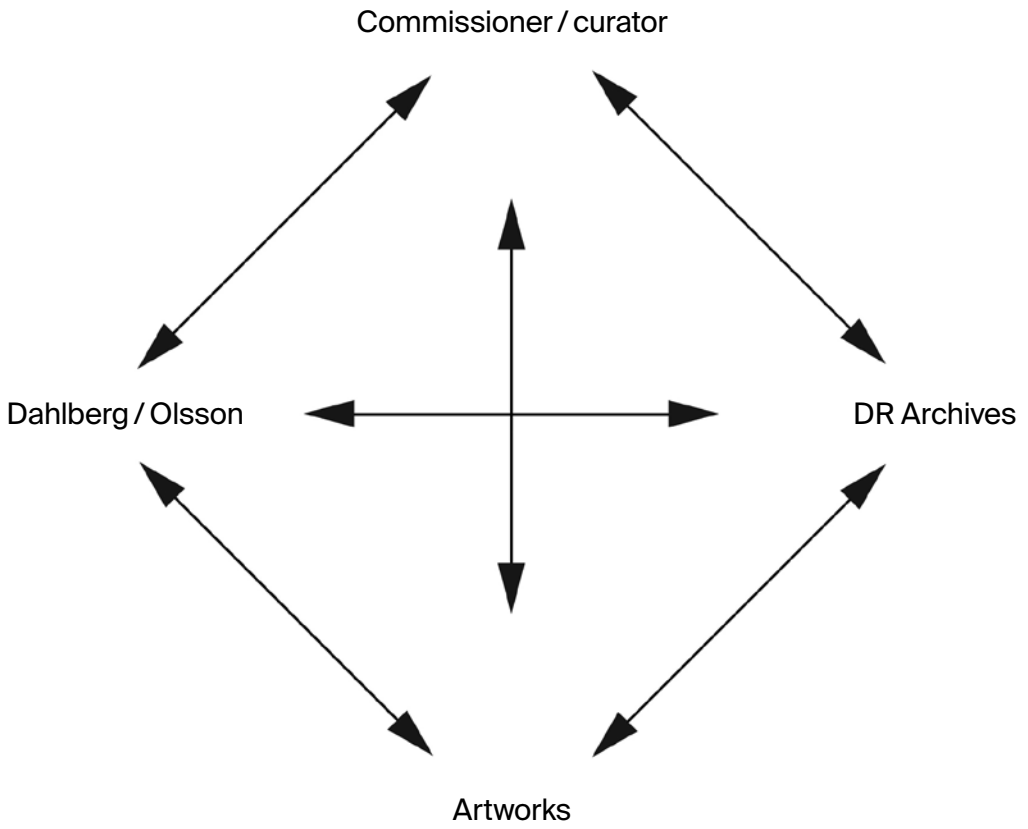


Diagram of the commission

Let me explain the diagram: As I have just argued, the commission is conditioned by a need that I – the commissioner – identify in the DR Archive, a need that I, it would appear, am unable to satisfy on my own but that registers with me as a compulsion to act and settle this disturbance. I, in turn, commission Dahlberg and Olsson to engage with the DR Archive, and as I have already discussed, the politics of this assignment are intricate, to say the least. Due to the specificity of the task, my act of commissioning already instigates the relation between the DR Archive and the artists, and they, in turn, actualise this relation through their engagement with the archive. The artworks at the bottom of the diagram are already prefigured by Dahlberg and Olsson's acceptance of the commission, which constitutes a promise to produce artworks and realise the commissions. The artists' relation to the artworks is, in turn, crucially a process of figuring something out and in doing so substantiating a pledge. To this end, the position of the artworks in the diagram designates both the *promise* of artworks and the artworks as actually *realised* in exhibition or performance tour.

It goes without saying that as commissioner and curator, my relation to the artworks differs from that of the artists. Strictly speaking, it pertains to realising the artworks in Dahlberg's exhibition and Olsson's performance tour as well as to my interpretation of them. Because no matter how I facilitate the conception and production of the artworks, it is, of course, processed through the artists (the curator-artists-artworks relation). Our respective processes come together in Dahlberg's exhibition and Olsson's performance tour, but how we get there, and how we interpret these realisations are inevitably different as indicated by our different relations to the artworks in the diagram. The relation between the artworks and the DR Archive is also forged by the act of commissioning in the sense that the artworks respond to the need that the commission actualizes. The question is, of course, whether the artworks really are able to satisfy this need. Whether they truly can meet their supposed purpose and, once and for all, settle the matters that prompted the commission in the first place. Or might the commission promise too much? Do we, the artists and myself, really know what we are getting ourselves into when we commit ourselves to the DR Archive by way of the commission? Keeping in mind the inscrutable distribution of the DR archive, it would appear that we do not know what this thing called the DR Archive is, and therefore cannot truly understand what it demands of us. So how can we ever make good on our promise?²³ I will return to this question towards the end of the article.

Other than laying out the positions and immediate relations brought about by the commission, the diagram also brings to light a number of indirect relations owing to the commission. All positions are, as a consequence, also perspectives to engage through and to be affected by; for example, the artworks provide me with new points of entry to the DR Archive, just as the DR Archive for me becomes a gateway to the artists' work. The artists provide me with new perspectives on the DR Archive, and I, moreover, become a go-between in the artists' relation to the DR Archive – something that proved especially important as the matter of copyright turned out to be much more complicated than expected with regards to the DR Archive. When it comes to determining the relations that the act of commissioning puts in place, the diagram is, in other words, a very useful device – at least in principle.

PRECARIOUS THINGS

Earlier, I speculated that the act of commissioning would appear to suggest that I, in the capacity of commissioner, am unable to handle the task of engaging with the DR Archive single-handedly. Rather than testifying to incapacity on my part, I would argue that we practically never take on any such problems on our own. Of course, not everyone resorts to literally asking someone else to join the inquiry, as I have done here, but do we not always gather around a problem a number of relevant and concerned parties that can help identify and discuss the matter in question? Do we not negotiate, complicate and dispute our problems with others, regardless of whether they are present in the flesh or just virtually there, in the form of their writings? Assembling such inquisitive get-togethers is how Bruno Latour proposes that we deal with matters that prove non-factual and uncertain, or *matters of concern*,²⁴ and taken together, the gathering and the matter of concern translate as an analytical gesture, or what Latour terms a *thing*.

Drawing on the etymological root of the word thing, which designates archaic (and some modern) assemblies, Latour argues, “the *Ding* designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions.”²⁵ What I would like to do here is to consider the commission as an analytical gesture along the lines of Latour's thing. In addition to Latour's thing, there is, however, already another *thing* at work on these pages, namely Derrida's thing, an unnameable and undecidable thing, which, for that reason, Derrida also refers to as spectre, ghost or spirit.²⁶ Derrida's thing is not *a* thing but *some* thing, and this thing haunts us and demands a response. Derrida's thing is

a trace of something that once was – much like the DR Archive, as I demonstrated earlier. So, while I propose to consider the commission as an analytical gesture along the lines of Latour's thing, the matter of concern around which we gather, the DR Archive, is undeniably more of a Derridian thing.

To assemble is, according to Latour, the task of the critic,²⁷ a task that, in the case of the commission, would belong to the curator. I assemble by selecting and commissioning Dahlberg and Olsson to engage with a matter of concern – the DR Archive – that we, in turn, engage with in multifarious ways without necessarily being able to come to terms with it.²⁸ Conducting such inquiries is, however, a rather assiduous undertaking. Latour argues that the critic (or the curator in this case) is someone “for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution.”²⁹ Latour, however, does not elaborate any further on the functions of this care and caution, but since he has introduced the notion of a matter of concern – an altogether precarious construct – it would appear that there is a *need* for care. In the essay “Personal Support: How to Care?,” Jan Verwoert argues that care precisely is conditioned by a need on the part of the person, we care about, that is, “the power to care comes to us *from someone else*”³⁰ – or, as would be the case here, from something else.

Now, although the commission might appear rather sturdy judging by the diagram above, it is, as it happens, a fragile construction. By resorting to a diagram one is always in danger of oversimplifying a particular set of circumstances; in fact, this diagram is a simplification of the practice of commissioning, and *in practice* the relations of this constellation were not as assertive and resilient as they might appear on paper. We are, after all, dealing with a matter of concern here, and like most curatorial processes there were a number of challenges and issues to work through in order to realise the commissions. Practically everything I did throughout the processes with Dahlberg and Olsson translates as caring for the relations depicted in the diagram, for example, obtaining a three month residency in Copenhagen for Dahlberg, securing exhibition and performance venues, hosting the relation to the DR Archive and its archivist, discussing ideas and processes with the artists, negotiating copyright issues for Olsson's performance, fundraising, installing Dahlberg's show, accompanying Olsson on his performance tour etc. All of these efforts were of course directed towards realizing the commissions and hereby responding to the archive's need for interpretation, which means that by tending to

the realisation of the artworks, I was ultimately caring for a matter of concern beyond the artworks, namely the DR Archive.³¹ Or, put differently, caring for Latour's thing and hereby facilitating the realisation of the commissions also translates as caring for Derrida's thing. Now, the notion of care entered this discussion as a constitutive function of Latour's thing – an analytical gesture on which I am modelling the commission as a mode of inquiry – but this manoeuvre also poses an ineluctable problem. Because, when it comes to the curator-artist relationship, the notion of care and the need that it responds to are profoundly contested, as I will outline in the following.

REINVIGORATING CURATORIAL CARE

The curator is both etymologically and historically linked to a notion of caring. The Latin *cura* designates care, solicitude, carefulness, thought and concern,³² and the main function of the traditional curator was precisely to care for art objects in museum collections. The kind of curator that care is associated with was someone who worked “with collections out of sight of the public” in contrast to today's curator, who occupies “a more central position on a much broader stage.”³³ Heinich and Pollak argue that this new position of the curator has emerged on account of a redistribution and redefinition of the traditional functions of the curator. What used to be the lowest ranking function of the traditional curator – that of displaying art to the public – has become the most prominent one.³⁴ In short, today *exhibition making* is the fulcrum of the curator's work, in turn making curatorial care – or at least a particular kind of curatorial care – obsolete.

It would, in other words, appear to be almost regressive to reclaim caring as a curatorial attribute; Charles Esche has even noted that we, in principle, ought to come up with a different name than curator.³⁵ But perhaps we should not disregard the etymological implications of the curator too hastily. To care for something or someone does not have to be a tedious custodial type of caring, it can also be an aspirational mode of inquisitiveness, as this passage from an interview with Michel Foucault testifies to:

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatised in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity, futility. The word, however, pleases me. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes ‘concern’; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us;

a certain relentlessness to break up the familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things, a fervour to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential.³⁶

It is of course no small task to aspire to Foucault's suggestions on this matter. He reinvigorates the obsolete etymological association between curiosity, care and concern, which infuses the notion of care with an altogether different attitude. He speaks about "the care one takes for what exists and could exist," and "a certain relentlessness to break up the familiarities and to regard otherwise the same thing."³⁷ What we have here is, in other words, a passionate and persistent kind of care; one that seeks out new paths, cultivates possibilities, and reconfigures what we already know – all of this with a certain measure of tenacity. It is indeed an intriguing attitude that Foucault evokes, one that desires to "know more, and better, and something else,"³⁸ as he recounts a little earlier in the same interview. As it happens, in the company of curiosity and concern, care becomes a truly desirable research attitude – not least when inquiring by way of practice, and a curatorial one at that. Foucault, it would seem, enables us to reconceptualise the curator-as-carer as someone who cares and cares to operate differently.

But one thing is attitude and research aspirations, another is the function of curatorial care in relation to the artist, who, according to Boris Buden, would appear to have replaced the artwork as the primary receiver of curatorial care.³⁹ This shift complicates matters considerably as it raises the somewhat controversial question: are artists really in need of a curator's care? Do we not, rather, consider the artistic practice as self-sufficient? My answers to both these questions are yes: yes, the artist is in need of a curator's care, and yes, the artistic practice is self-sufficient. But how can curatorial care both be needed and unnecessary at the same time? Neither Latour's analytical gesture nor Foucault's aspirational attitude can grasp this confounding *modus operandi* of caring, but the question of a conditioning need is also non-controversial in both these cases: Latour's matter of concern is intrinsically in need of perusal and analysis, and Foucault's inquisitive research attitude could be said to respond to a perpetual need of just about any field of study. So, in the case of the curator–artist relationship, my suggestion is this: might we consider the workings of curatorial care along the lines of how Derrida devises his confounding, double-edged concept of the supplement?⁴⁰ Not in

order to designate every single curatorial action that I performed in relation to the artists but rather to identify the structural workings of this relationship.

To be needed and unnecessary at the same time does undeniably come across as conflicting attributes, but that is exactly how Derrida's supplement works. The concept is basically a combination of the two different meanings of a supplement, namely on the one hand something that compensates incompleteness, and on the other hand something that adds to completeness. In combination, these significations are however far from simple. Much like an appendix to a book, Derrida's supplement substitutes incompleteness by being added as an external adjunct to something that purportedly already is complete in itself. Derrida writes, "the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills to the brim [*comble*], it is as if one fills [*comble*] a void."⁴¹ That is to say, there is an inadequacy, a lack or indeed a need that the supplement can compensate but, crucially, never fulfil, which means that the supplement in a certain sense replaces one deficiency with another. The supplement is, however, also and at the same time superfluous; it "adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *zenith* [*le comble*] of presence," as Derrida puts it.⁴² In this sense, the supplement cannot add anything, because it is added to something that seemingly is self-sufficient and complete. Or, more plainly put, modelled on Derrida's supplement, my curatorial care is simultaneously too little and too much. When the supplement compensates incompleteness, it is always insufficient and leaves behind a new incompleteness – a new need for care, so to speak – and when it is added to something that (purportedly) is self-sufficient, it can add nothing but spills over and enriches the artists' practices from the outside. That these two meanings coincide in the concept of the supplement is indeed perplexing, and while one may become "discreetly vague before the other" or even effaced,⁴³ it means that my curatorial care only will be added to the artists' practices as an exterior presence if their practices have an insufficiency that my care can compensate. Derrida's supplement truly works in mysterious ways – even Derrida himself admits that it almost is inconceivable to reason.⁴⁴ Modelled on Derrida's supplement, my curatorial care forms part without being part of the artists' practices, it belongs without belonging, and it is needed and unnecessary at one and the same time. That is to say, my curatorial care has the peculiar status of a much-needed spare part that at the same time is excessive and hence dispensable.

FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

What we have here is, in other words, three different kinds of curatorial care that designate three key components of my commission of Dahlberg and Olsson. First, an assiduous analytical practice that tends to a matter of concern as per Latour by facilitating the realisation of the commissions, which means that my care ultimately is directed at something beyond the artwork, here the DR Archive. Second, an inquisitive research attitude that cultivates “what exists and could exist”, as Foucault would have it – an aspiration that would appear to be especially pivotal when endeavouring to conduct research by way of practice – and finally, a supplementary curatorial care for the artist modelled on Derrida’s supplement. A care that ties the artist and the curator together in a confounding relationship: one that does not deny that an artist’s practice is self-sufficient, but maintains that it always is open to something other than itself, and, as it happens, affected by it.

The inscrutable logic of Derrida’s supplement also offers an answer to the question that I left hanging earlier about whether the commissioned artworks indeed can satisfy the need that they respond to, and the answer is, unsurprisingly, no – and here is why: no matter the ingeniousness of Dahlberg and Olsson’s artworks they cannot possibly meet the archive’s perpetual need for interpretation. As suspected earlier, the commission does indeed promise too much: We cannot be done with the archive because we cannot truly know it, but every act of interpretation inscribes itself in the archive,⁴⁵ which means that the artworks transform the archive and, not least, its need for interpretation. At the same time, the archive, however, also defies such designation. There is, according to Derrida, a strong desire for archival self-sufficiency and synchrony, a compulsion to gather together and coordinate the archive as an ideal configuration notwithstanding that the archive inherently is incomplete. Derrida calls this illusion of an ordered unity *consignation*,⁴⁶ and up against this defining feature of the archive the artworks cannot add anything. There is, to paraphrase and simplify Derrida’s own explanation, no void to be filled because it is already full, and for that reason the artworks are a surplus that certainly enriches the archive but strictly speaking are adjunctive and superfluous. The intended purpose of the commissioned artworks is, in other words, one that cannot be met. There will always be a new need to tend to, in fact, the commissioned artworks engender this new need, and that, I would argue, is also the case when art collections or public spaces occasion a commission. As should be clear by now, this perplexing inadequacy of the commission

does, however, not make it a futile endeavour, but on the contrary a most urgent one, especially in the case of an archive.

At the beginning of this article, I briefly introduced a general notion of *the curatorial*⁴⁷ posed by Sheikh in order to indicate the direction of this inquiry. But, as it happens, the line of reasoning that this article has produced not only hinges on a general notion of the curatorial, it performs a rather specific one. Unlike most other commentators,⁴⁸ Irit Rogoff decidedly distinguishes the curatorial from the activity of curating, something she has pointed out on several occasions.⁴⁹ The difference is fleshed out with particular clarity in a preface co-authored by Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon to the book *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. Here, Rogoff and Martinon explain that in contrast to curating, which can be said to deliver a promise of an exhibition, for example, and hence of redemption to come,⁵⁰ the curatorial opens up a space of theoretical reflection and speculation that upsets the process of fulfilling this promise.⁵¹ They argue that the curatorial “explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge.”⁵² The act of commissioning precisely takes place on such a stage set-up, and on the previous pages I have offered a way to open it up to thinking. This propensity towards the curatorial is not a covert denunciation of curating on my part – my practice as a curator is after all the impetus and driving force behind this article. But faced, as I am, with an archive, the finality of curating and the redemption that it offers seem to suggest that we can in fact come to terms with the archive and lay the past to rest, and that is not an option if we again look to Derrida. Locking the door and turning away from the archive would be detrimental; as Derrida puts it, “we know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work.”⁵³ The curatorial, on the other hand, is an on-going activity that does not seek cessation but has acknowledged that the exhibition or any other momentary coming together of knowledges merely is a stopover in a process, as Rogoff has noted,⁵⁴ or, if we stay with Derrida: that the meaning always is deferred. The notion of the curatorial would, in other words, appear to be a crucial perspective when addressing an archive through curating.

1. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.
2. *Ibid.* 84.
3. Funded by The National Programme for Research Infrastructure, the interdisciplinary research project LARM developed a digital research infrastructure to facilitate researchers' access to the Danish radiophonic cultural heritage. The project also comprised a number of humanistic research projects into the DR Archive. For further information, see LARM, "About LARM" LARM Audio Research Archive, accessed July 20, 2016, <https://larm.sites.ku.dk/about-larm/>. This article is based on my PhD thesis *We Can (Not) Work It Out: A Curatorial Inquiry into the Danish Radio Archive* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2015).
4. The performance premiered at Studio 4 at the DR Concert House in Copenhagen on January 10, 2013, and during the remainder of the month Olsson visited Viborg Kunsthall, Esbjerg Art Museum, Horsens Art Museum, Kunsthall Nord, Krognos Hus (SE), Sorø Art Museum, Krabbesholm Højskole and The Culture Yard, Elsinore.
5. For analyses of Olsson's performance and one of the works in Dahlberg's exhibition, see Trine Friis Sørensen, "Historically Speaking – on Temporalities and Documents in a Performance by Olof Olsson," in *Maska – Performing Arts Journal* 30, issue 172-174 (2015): 148-157, and Trine Friis Sørensen, "Judith Shakespeare – Undead or Alive? On Kajsa Dahlberg's Artist Book *A Room of One's Own / A Thousand Libraries*," in *Notes on Location 1,2*, ed. Nanna Stjernholm Jepsen, Signe Kahr Sørensen, and Eller med a, (Copenhagen: Eller med a, 2016), 76-85.
6. Just to be clear, I differentiate between the specific act of commissioning and the broad and diverse activity of curating, which also includes commissioning. While my focus here is commissioning, it does, however, not make much sense to scrutinize it in isolation as I necessarily facilitate the commission of Dahlberg and Olsson through my curatorial practice.
7. *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art*, ed. Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010) is concerned with durational processes in the context of public art commissions, and Louisa Buck and Daniel McClean, *Commissioning Contemporary Art. A Handbook for Curators, Collectors, and Artists* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012) provides a comprehensive introduction to the history and practices of commissioning, but none of the publications engage specifically with the implications of commissioning.
8. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 67.
9. Cf. *Curating Research*, ed. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and de Appel, 2015).
10. Simon Sheikh, "Towards the Exhibition as Research," in *Curating Research*, ed. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and de Appel, 2015): 33-34.
11. Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 235.
12. Cf. Paul O'Neill, *The Culture Of Curating And The Curating Of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2012), 9.
13. Cf. Heinich and Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur."
14. Cf. Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curatorial Criticality – On the Role of Freelance Curators in the Field of Contemporary Art," *Oncurating.org*, no. 9 (2011): 19-23.
15. Mikkel Bogh and Frederik Tygstrup, "Working the Interface: New Encounters between Art and Academia," in *Investigação Em Arte E Design: Fendas No Método E Na Criação*, ed. José Quaresma, Fernando Paulo Rosa Dias and Juan Carlos Ramos Guadix (Lisboa: Edição CIEBA, 2010), 103.
16. Cf. Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 8-13.
17. Mieke Bal, "Research Practice: New Words on Cold Cases," in *What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, ed. Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 209.
18. According to Creativity and Cognition Studios (CCS) at University of Technology Sydney, practice-led research "is concerned with the nature of practice and is directed towards generating new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice (...). Such research includes practice as an integral part of its method..." Cf. CCS, "Differences between Practice-Based and Practice-Led Research", <http://www.creativityandcognition.com/research/practice-based-research/differences-between-practice-based-and-practice-led-research/>, accessed August 3, 2016.
19. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), xcvi.
20. Anne Pasternak, "The Why: Foreword," in *Creative Time*, ed. Ruth A. Peltason (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 11.
21. Buck and McClean, *Commissioning Contemporary Art*, 43-44.
22. Cf. Buck and McClean, *op.cit.*, 22, and Jonathan Harris, *Art History: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 229.
23. This rumination is in part based on Leonard Lawlor's account of the logic of the promise in *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 217-221.
24. Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA and Karlsruhe: MIT Press and ZKM, 2005), 6.
25. *Ibid.*, 13.
26. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 5.
27. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," in *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 246.
28. Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik," 5.
29. Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?": 246.

30. Jan Verwoert, "Personal Support: How to Care?" in *Support Structures*, ed. Celine Condorelli (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), 165.
31. Simon Sheikh has made a similar suggestion in a recent article in which he suggests that we must "expand our notion of care" and consider a curator's care as "a taking care of the world." That is, a care that goes beyond the traditional stumping ground of the curator and tends to the world at large. Cf. Simon Sheikh, "Curation and Futurity," in *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?*, ed. Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press), 157.
32. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879) <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059>.
33. O'Neill, *The Culture Of Curating*, 9.
34. Heinrich and Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur," 235. In a recent article, Helena Reckitt highlights a new curatorial skill that has proven indispensable for the curator of late, namely that of "deploying affective labour in order to maintain social relations", which she identifies as a redefinition of curatorial care. Helena Reckitt, "Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction," in *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 8.
35. Charles Esche, "Beti Zerovc Interviews Charles Esche," in *Modest Proposals*, ed. Serkan Ozkaya (Istanbul: Baglam Publishing, 2005), 57.
36. Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 305.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. Boris Buden, "The Wine Was Very Good: On the Task of the Curator," *MJ: Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 10 (2010): 7.
40. Boris Groys has made a similar suggestion stating that "curating acts like a supplement or a 'pharmacon' (in Derrida's usage)." Developing his argument, Groys, however, pursues the notion of the pharmacon and the word curator's etymological tie to curing. Boris Groys, "On the Curatorship," in *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 46.
41. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 157.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 158.
44. *Ibid.*, 171.
45. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 67.
46. *Ibid.*, 3.
47. Sheikh, "Towards the Exhibition as Research," 33-34.
48. Cf. Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 63-66; Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction," in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, ed. Maria Lind (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 9-20; *Curating Research*, ed. O'Neill and Wilson, 11-23; and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial: A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck," in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. Jörn Schaffaff, Thomas Weski, and Beatrice von Bismarck (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 22-38.
49. Cf. Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling - An Embodied Criticality [sic]," *Transversal*, August 2006. Accessed October 31 2016. <http://eipcp.net/dlfiles/rogoff-smuggling>, and Irit Rogoff, "Curating/Curatorial: A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck," 22-38. In 2006, Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon founded the PhD research program Curatorial/Knowledge, which pivots on Rogoff's distinction between curating and the curatorial, see <http://ck.kein.org/>.
50. Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Preface," in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), ix.
51. *Ibid.*, ix-x.
52. *Ibid.*, ix.
53. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 120.
54. Rogoff, "Curating/Curatorial," 27.