Coming to terms with 'the curatorial' in *PLAY_an exhibition*

> ## Maaike Bakker

Subject Manager in Illustration at The Open Window Institute, Pretoria, South Africa.

maaikebakker00@gmail.com

> ## Jayne Crawshay-Hall

PhD candidate in Art History at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

jaynecrawshay@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article revisits observations pertaining to 'the curatorial' in order to come to terms with the informal exhibition setting and interactive thematic implementation of *PLAY_an exhibition* (2014). It is argued that curatorial insight can be addressed as a means to bridge the gap between the agenda of the curators as exhibition-makers, and the artists who present works that are autonomous objects. Contemporary curating assumes a multidimensional and interconnected role, linking objects, images, people, and discourses. The curatorial thus requires flexibility, making allowances for constant revision through active research – positing the exhibition as open-ended, transformative, and fluid. The contemporary curator is the instigator for mediation, assuming an interventionist role through continued interaction with the artists, their works on exhibition, and the curatorial agenda. In revisiting *PLAY* it has become evident that the curatorial cannot be predetermined, and plays out supplementary to all aspects of curating research. The contemporary curator is required to exercise a dynamic approach and revise the original agenda of both exhibition format and autonomous art object in order to enhance the intended experience. .

Keywords: *PLAY_an exhibition*, curatorial, curating research, processual installation, contemporary curating, informal space.

Introduction

Curatorial practice has been understood as the interplay between curating as exhibition-making and practices of curatorial research; however, O'Neil and Wilson (2015:12) recently introduced the notion of 'the curatorial'[1] in their book *Curating research*, which has been conceived as a practice that operates supplementary to curating as 'exhibition-making'. According to O'Neill and Wilson (2015:12), the notion of 'the curatorial' is understood as 'a mode of becoming – research-based, dialogical practices in which the processual and serendipitous overlap with speculative actions and open-ended forms of production'. The curatorial is argued to be insight brought about during, and in retrospect to, the culmination of these former mentioned curating processes, specifically referring to the appropriation of knowledge gained through practice-led curatorial investigations. O'Neill and Wilson (2015:12) argue that this insight should be addressed as a means to bridge the gap between the agenda of the curators as exhibition-makers, and the artists who present works that are self-sufficient, autonomous objects.

PLAY_an exhibition[2] (2014), installed at the Nirox Sculpture Park, was centred on the theme 'play,' and encouraged visitors to directly interact with the artworks on display. *PLAY* was curated by Maaike Bakker, Beathur Mgoza Baker, Jayne Crawshay-Hall, and Isabel Mertz. The exhibition was installed outdoors, an alternative setting to the neutrality of the white cube, and was open to the public for three months from October to December 2014, which also saw the change of season from spring to summer. The intention was to present an exhibition that would distract viewers from the formalities that so often feature when considering art by installing the artworks in a non-formal outdoors setting, in a manner that would encourage interaction between the viewer and the artwork. This article revisits observations pertaining to the curatorial in order to come to terms with the unconventional exhibition setting and thematic implementation of *PLAY*. The expropriation of knowledge gained through the curatorial, developed through the dialogic exchange between researching the exhibition and installing the exhibition, is revisited in order to further understand contemporary curatorial practices, which can be regarded as both processual and serendipitous. The curatorial is thus further explored in this article in an attempt to gain insight into the processes that prompted curatorial decisions that would enhance the viewers' experience of the art and the exhibition *PLAY*.

1. 'The curatorial' in its new usage refers to the conception within curatorial discourse that the curatorial is a new form of retrospective insight brought about as a result of reconsidering the entire curatorial process of an exhibition – namely research practice, exhibition-making and installation, and revision during the installation and curating processes. Balzer (2015:2) states, 'We now not only use curate as a verb, but also the adjective curatorial and the noun *curation*'. This is taken further to suggest *the curatorial* is a noun that implies not merely a description of the practice of exhibition-making, but rather that 'the curatorial' can be considered 'part of an attempt to define the field of curatorial cultural praxis in the broadest sense' (tranzit.hu 2015:237) where the curatorial refers to the culmination of knowledge informed by practice led investigation.

2. From now on referred to as *PLAY*, it included works by Beezy Bailey, Maaike Bakker and Nadine Minnaar, Wayne Barker, Lothar Böttcher, Milandi Coetzer, Wilma Cruise, Rivon Daniel, Guy du Toit, Herman de Klerk, Gordon Froud, Jonathan Freemantle and Rodan Kane Hart, Danelle Janse van Rensburg, Louise Dritzinger, Allen Laing, Jean Paul Lemmer, Givan Lötz, Skhumbuzo Makundla, MARTHA Collective, Gerald Machona, Collen Maswanganyi, MEGA BONANZA Collective, Isabel Mertz, Bantu Mtshiselwa, Louis Olivier, Sarel Petrus, Lorinda Pretorius, Mellaney Ruiters, Sean Slemon, Robert Slingsby, Karin Smith, Talita Swarts, Egon Tania, Hannalie Taute, Angus Taylor and Johan Nortjie, Nicolene van der Walt, Sybrand Wiechers, and Izanne Wiid.

The changing role of curatorial practice

It is unknown who organised the first art exhibition, and thus not possible to propose a concise history of curating practice (Balzer 2015:23), however curatorial practice has progressed quite significantly in recent years. The role of the contemporary curator has arguably become highlighted, and in some cases, equally important to that of the artist in the contemporary art industry. The curator's role, and the evolution of curationism[3] itself, has highlighted curatorial techniques as necessary in terms of understanding, presenting, and facilitating contemporary art practices. It is thus necessary to be able to trace the history of curating in order to differentiate how contemporary curating conflicts with previous understandings of the role of curating as exhibition-making, and how retrospective insight was integral to instigating this progression in curatorial practice.

The origin of the word 'curator' can be traced back to the Roman Empire, where *curatores* were bureaucrats made responsible to oversee certain departments of public works (Balzer 2015:24). According to David Balzer (2015:24), the title 'curator' was not only reserved for bureaucrats, but for guardians and tutors, caretakers and advisors under Roman law. Writer Erin Kissane (cited in Balzer 2015:24) dates the term back to a fourteenth-century poem by William Langland, *Piers Plowman,* who referred to '*curatoures*' as parish priests 'called to knowe [know] and to hele [heal] their parisshiens [parishioners]', conveying that by the Middle Ages, the Christian Church had also adopted the term. However, it is evident that from as early as the fifteenth century, a paradoxical role was attributed to the 'curator' (in this case the *curatoure*), highlighted here through the merging of contradictory roles such as bureaucrat and priest (Balzer 2015:24).

The Latin root of the word 'curator' is *cura* – which means 'care', and *curatore* – meaning 'caretaker' and shares the same Latin root as 'curious' – which comes into play during the sixteenth century obsession with curated *Cabinets of Curiosity*. This calls to mind the role of the curator in the context of the museum or collection where the curator observes an identity to care for and preserve objects within a collection. The museum curator cares for the objects, and it is the objects, and not the curator, which form the focus. The museum curator is subservient to the institution, the objects, artists, audiences, and markets (Balzer 2015:27). Later on, eighteenth and nineteenth century curators, also associated with the traditional figure of a museum minder, were considered 'tools of the state', according to Edward Fry[4] (in Balzer 2015:30) who maintains that the museum was a tool of the state, and that many museum collections developed because of political turmoil and imperialism.

3.   'Curationism', for Balzer (2015:2), is a play on the word *creationism*, as well as an attempt to 'poke fun' at the art world's tendency to adapt language as desired. Curationism refers to the general fixation with 'isms', which refers to the 'acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being'. Balzer implies, therefore, that in the contemporary world, all aspects belonging to a collection of sorts (from music playlists to art) can be considered 'curated'.

4.   Edward F Fry was the associate curator at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

It was only during the twentieth century, specifically the 1960s, that the notion of the autonomous curator began to manifest in tandem to the conceptual art movement. The twentieth century curator can be seen as imbuing free agency into the role. Claude Lévi-Strauss's (cited in Balzer 2015:23) usage of the term *bricolage*[5] in ethnology is used to describe the figure of a custodian of objects. This can be considered similar to current understandings of the contemporary curator's role, where the Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur* engages actions such as selecting, categorising, theorising and observing, and attributing these actions to a practice of free-form science, similar to how an artist would 'improvis[e] with the odds and ends lying around in their studio'. According to Balzer (2015:39), the movement of art away from the art object in the 1960s encouraged the development of the figure of the curator as we currently know it: 'it was during this concentrated question of both art institutions and what they housed that, ironically, curators … underwent a reinvention'. The curator no longer acted as the custodian of the art object, but now became the instigator for mediation. As Balzer (2015:40) implies in his metaphor, curators no longer merely 'tend[ed] the ground, but secure[d], organise[d] and landscape[d] it'. The curator could now be considered an autonomous agent, and 'the curator's new position entailed duties of ringleader, translator, mediator, diplomat and gatekeeper' (Balzer 2015:40).

The twenty-first century curator emerged and was associated with fame, industriousness, and a public persona. The role of the curator became transdisciplinary, and included aspects previously reserved by the critic, the fine-art publisher, or the dealer. This multidisciplinary role was also usurped by artists, with the introduction of the artist-curator/curator-artist roles. Today, the contemporary curator is considered a 'creator' of exhibitions, where the curator's medium is the artworks themselves, installed in a manner that will incite further meaning. The role of the contemporary curator thus encompasses all aspects related to spectatorship, interactivity, and mediation, and maintains a cross-disciplinary approach to the practice. The contemporary curator holds a pluralistic role, and is responsible for exhibition research, facilitation, installation, and a provocation of interactivity to ensure that the exhibition maintains a certain open-endedness for audience engagement.

Kate Fowle (2015:153-171) argues, with regard to the pluralistic nature of curatorial research, that what is important and challenging when engaging contemporary curatorial techniques is that the curator needs to provide the tools to an audience, which can encourage them to take the initiative to 'ask questions and draw independent conclusions'. This perhaps marks the turn towards 'the curatorial' as a form of curating research. O'Neill (2012:1) describes the curatorial as a developmental

5. According to Balzer (2015:23), the term *bricolage* was proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French ethnologist who advanced a complex view of culture creation, stressing the fine art term to be used as a concept to describe a practice not unlike what we currently understand as curating. The Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur* was 'a tinkerer, an improviser working with what was to hand, cobbling together solutions to both practical and aesthetic problems' who strove for both aesthetic and intellectual solutions (Patrick Wilcken cited in Balzer 2015:23).

process, wherein the curator 'conceptualiz[es] ways in which art and its contexts [can be] understood'. Through engaging the curatorial, a form of practical curatorial research, the contemporary aim of curating multi-layered platforms of questioning, experience and production can be presented – 'platforms that fold sense, reference and meaning together rather than positing a fundamentally closed position between aesthetic and cognitive concerns in the art field' (O'Neill & Wilson 2015:18). Contemporary curating, which is described as 'driven by the desire to communicate' (Smith 2012:17) similar to artmaking, demands a different kind of thinking to the production of the autonomous art object, in that the act of curating sets out to 'convey value to art,' managed both through the installation, the conceptualisation, and the re-conceptualisation of an exhibition (O'Neill 2012:1). O'Neill and Wilson (2015:15) question the conception of heteronomous curatorial practice and argue that curating no longer entails merely researching and installing an exhibition under the guise of exhibition-maker, but that curatorial practice now includes 'co-production, collaboration and dialogical production practices,' which differentiates contemporary curating from previous understandings of the role of curating.

Conceptualising *PLAY*

The concept for *PLAY* encouraged artists to create artworks specific to the theme of play that would invite audience engagement. Hans Georg Gadamer (in Olivier 2002:242) discusses the idea of play in art – differentiating between 'pure play' and 'just play'. According to Olivier (2002:243), Gadamer's model of pure play has no pre-established rules to guide it – the player knows what play is, and that play is required to enact the game, but does not know exactly what goes into the play itself. The call for participation in *PLAY*, sent out to selected artists based on the curators' knowledge of their previous work produced, outlined the aim of the curators to provide a setting where it would be possible for the audience to forget that they are interacting with art pieces and rather engage with the participatory invitation of each work in the context to the curated exhibition. Keywords and phrases, such as 'recreation', 'freedom', 'amusement', 'memory' and 'the promise of the outdoors', were included in the invitation synopsis to inspire content pertaining to nostalgia, roots, and the reconsideration of old cultural categories of gameplay.

Artists were encouraged to consider the technical aspect of the production of their artworks in a manner that would inspire viewers to be active participants in the reception of the work. Stern (2011:233) states that, in the case of art intended to be interactive, 'installations are not objects to be perceived, but relations to be

performed'. Interactive art, which has its roots in happenings, performance art, and fluxus, is considered a hybrid art form, where the interactive aspects should bridge conceptual rifts (Gingrich & Renaud 2012:250). Drawing on this relationship between art and play, each work included in the exhibition was installed in a manner that viewers could engage in a type of interactive play in order to further unfold meaning of the work itself in the context to the exhibition as a whole.

Traditionally, the curator within the role of 'exhibition-maker' establishes the exhibition as a platform to communicate ideas and concepts by carefully considering the combinations of artworks and artists selected for the show. O'Neill and Wilson (2015:15) state that such research is recognised as a prerogative of curators, and usually falls within the first task of the curator where the curator acts as researcher in order to initiate the exhibition. Curator Jens Hoffman (2015:11) outlines that, within the sphere of contemporary curating, the nature of an exhibition involves 'elements of staging and theatricality, and its viewing [is] likewise a performance'. The work (and thereby the exhibition) would gain meaning through the audience's active engagement with the artworks.

Deciphering how to display, install and curate meaning for *PLAY* meant negotiating the space between installing a practical and well presented exhibition (as exhibition-makers), and maintaining integrity to the artists' original intentions. In retrospect to the opening of *PLAY*, it became evident that audience engagement, dialogical practice, and the environment's seasonal metamorphosis would mean that the exhibition would remain in constant flux. Curatorial adjustments were made throughout the exhibition, based on the former mentioned factors, which avoided the exhibition being perceived as static.
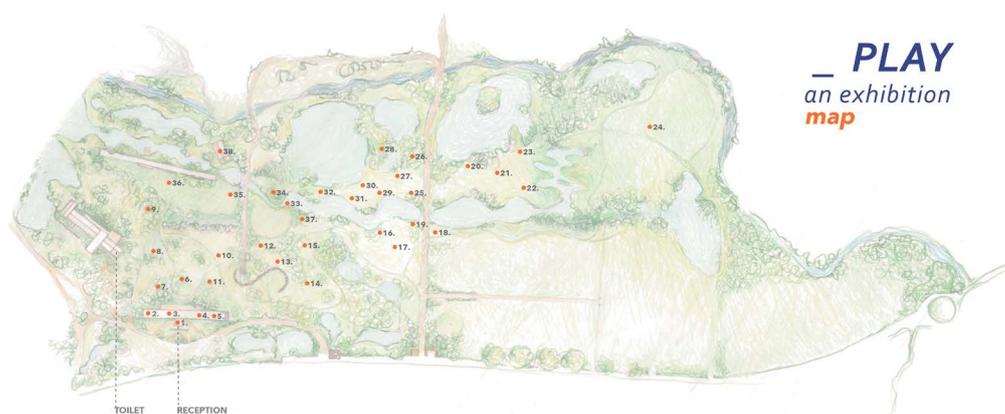
An interventionist curatorial conception

The Nirox Sculpture Park, a -hectare cultivated landscape forming part of the Nirox Foundation non-profit trust that was established for the benefit of the arts, was selected as the installation space for *PLAY*. The outdoors sculpture park can be considered an informal, social space in comparison with a white space, which is often associated with modern ideals of the role of art and art making, and for which navigating the space has been similarly likened to 'treading silently' (Hoffman 2015:11). The white cube, a heteronomous space imbued by the institution of art, is a formal, dedicated space, utilised for the consumption of art. Paula Maricola (2006:57) has previously questioned whether one could 'ever get beyond the

essential conversation of displaying works of art in conventional, dedicated spaces' as the implication is that spaces alternative to the white cube could frame an exhibition. Although the sculpture park is a dedicated art space, the park falls within the heritage site of the Cradle of Humankind,[6] which became integral to the conceptual component of the exhibition. The viewers were encouraged to explore and find the sculptures within the park, responding to the anthropological expeditions historically engaged within the heritage site.

The heritage site provided a framework for the curatorial conception of installing an exhibition that encouraged interaction, enquiry, and exploration. The audience was required to explore the sculpture park and 'discover' the artworks placed within the landscape. Liam Gillick (2015:26-7) discusses the notion of the 'complete curator' whom he argues to be a practitioner who has re-imagined the institution of curating by making use of revised curatorial structures used as a vehicle for forms of exchange. He argues that the exhibition is no longer limited to a conventional form (Gillick 2015:27). Traditionally, didactics have been used to frame the curatorial concept of the exhibition as a means to provide insight into the discourses researched. However, for Gillick (2015:28), the curatorial now extends beyond notions of formal research 'as research can become any reading and could include any work … which … gridded by didactics, does not reproduce more than the content with which it started'. The curatorial should now include active research achieved through the methodology of installing the exhibition itself, which also includes tracking engagement and encouraging exchange.

For *PLAY*, in an attempt to avoid limiting the viewer's experience of the exhibition by providing clear instructions for the exhibition, the only text outlining the exhibition came in the form of a map with the title of the exhibition included (Figure 1), which was available at the entrance to the sculpture park. The aim of providing a map was to incite feelings of exploration whilst viewers navigated the park so that they might experience sighting works in a similar sense to 'stumbling upon' hidden treasures. This map contained a list of the artworks, numbered according to a suggested order of viewing, but no clear 'path' was indicated. Ultimately, it was left to the viewers to decide whether to view the works in sequential order or not. The navigational technique aimed to encourage a sense of play in itself, as walking through the exhibition could be likened to a nostalgic account of a treasure hunt, the reward of which would be finding the artworks installed across the park. On reflection, the map was the key component on which the reception of the exhibition rested.

6. The Cradle of Humankind is a World Heritage Site. It is the world's richest hominin site and is home to almost half of the world's human ancestor fossils (The Cradle of Humankind 2015).

_ **PLAY**
an exhibition
map

01. **LORINDA PRETORIUS** - *Delude I* (2014)
02. **WAYNE BARKER** -
03. **GUY DU TOIT** - MAQUETTES
04. **MELLANEY RUITERS** - *Carousel "merry go round"* (2014)
05. **GERALD MACHONA** - *Untitled (six faces)* (2014)
06. **LOUIS OLIVIER** - *Rotating Totem* (2014)
07.**HANNALIE TAUTE** - *I dare you* (2014)
08. **ISABEL MERTZ** - *Aptitude test* (2014)
09. **BEEZY BAILEY** - *Lady Sky* (2014)
10. **COLLEN MASWANGANYI** - *Political Jenga* (2014)
11. **SYBRAND WIECHERS** - *My favourite toy* (2014)
12. **SAREL PETRUS** - *Riverbeds* (2014)
13. **NICOLENE VAN DER WALT** - *Reflecting* (2014)
14. **GUY DU TOIT** - *Ek hoor jou* (2014), *Hello* (2014), *I See you* (2014)
15. **KARIN SMITH** - *Play dog* (2014)
16. **DANÈLLE JANSE VAN RENSBURG** - *Seek and you shall find* (2014)

17. **IZANNE WIID** - *Mancala* (2014)
18. **LOUISE KRITZINGER** - *Speling* (2014)
19. **TALITA SWARTS** - *Wobbly boy* (2014)
20. **MILANDI COETZE** - *Sheltered* (2014)
21. **MEGA BONANZA (COLLECTIVE)** - *Pavement special* (2014)
22. **EGON TANJA** - *A middle-aged male, much like myself, standing in the pose of Degas' little ballerina* (2014)
23. **ROBERT SLINGSBY** - *Sympathetic resonance* (2010)
24. **MARTHA (COLLECTIVE)** - *Think about what you've done* (2014)
25. **SEAN SLEMON** - *Floating Tree* (2014)
26. **JONATHAN FREEMANTLE & RODAN KANE HART** - *Absolut(e) Reflection (IV)* (2014)
27. **GIVAN LÖTZ** - *Here lies the 121 variations for 6 paths through a square (no mirror images)* (2014)
28. **RIVON DANIEL** - *YO-YO* (2014)
29. **GORDON FROUD** - *Taxi* (2014)

30. **LOTHAR BÖTTCHER** - *Cosmic Ignition #2* (2014)
31. **WILMA CRUISE** - *Monkey Business* (2014)
32. **MAAIKE BAKKER & NADINE MINNAAR** - */|\ / | / \ | \ / | * (2014)
33. **HERMAN DE KLERK** - *Untitled (AC motors V2)* (2014)
34. **ALLEN LAING** - *Teleaphistic-synaesthetic apparatus* (2014)
35. **ANGUS TAYLOR & JOHANN NORTJIE** - *PLAY - re-treated* (2014)
36. **JEAN PAUL LEMMER** - *The Whistling machine* (2014)
37. **BLOW YOUR SCULPTURE** - *A collaborative sculptural glass project*
38. **CHRISS AGHANA NWOBU**- photo exhibition & installation *'Waiting to be born'* (2014)
& FILM SCREENINGS BY:
REHEMA CHACHAGE - *'Beautifully decorated'* (2014)
JONATHAN FREEMANTLE & HANNAH LOEWENTHAL - *'Mountain'* (2014)
ABDOUL- GANIOU DERMANI - *'Virutelle Kommunikation'* (2013)
& *'Everyday objects that hide human faces'* (2013)
NELISIWE XABA & MOCKE J VAN VUUREN - *'Uncles & Angels'* (2012)

FIGURE **Nº 1** ‹

PLAY an exhibition map, 2014. Printed on A2 cartridge paper and handed out on arrival at the sculpture park.

Beyond the viewers locating each work within the exhibition, the audience was invited to become an active participant to each artwork included on the exhibition, instead of merely acting as passive viewers. The works were thus installed in a way that they would be foregrounded against the landscape, whilst simultaneously appearing integrated within it, to highlight their accessibility. As the landscape had become such an integral component within *PLAY*, it was necessary to consider the change the landscape would undergo when installing and curating the works in order to stage an authentic interactive art experience. The works installed needed to appear integrated within the landscape and foregrounded to highlight their accessibility. It became evident that an open view across the landscape in October could become an obscured view in December as the foliage became fuller with the warmer weather. Responding to the change of season by shifting the placement of certain works highlighted the interventionist role the curators assumed through their revisions of the installation between winter and summer.

Placing Beezy Bailey's piece, *Lady Sky* (seen originally in Figure 2 and a month later in Figure 3) required attention with regard to this expected transformation. On the artist's instructions, *Lady Sky* required a tree tall enough to form the skirt

FIGURE **Nº 2** ‹

Beezy Bailey, *Lady Sky*, 2014 – pictured mid-September. Bronze, Edition 2/8. Photograph courtesy Carla Crafford.

FIGURE **Nº 3**   ‹

Beezy Bailey, *Lady Sky*, 2014 – pictured early November. Bronze, Edition 2/8.
Photograph courtesy Carla Crafford.

to her four-and-a-half metre high legs, yet as the summer progressed, the 'skirt' of the tree would become fuller, concealing large parts of the work intended for viewing. The work thus needed to be shifted forward to ensure that one could still see the legs of the work, which was pivotal to the impact of its playfulness. As the ability of the curators to maintain the initial installation and control the transformation of the exhibition was limited, the progression of time and its effect on the installation had to be constantly revised and reconsidered. Simon Sheikh (2015:33) refers to the curatorial as research with non-canonical form, where the curatorial itself can be posited as a form of research that does not necessarily take on the eventual character of the exhibition, but rather something that 'employs [the] thinking involved in exhibition-making and researching' and the research aspect should be understood in terms of 'excavation, (re)evaluation and contextualisation'. In a similar tone, the revision and re-evaluation of certain works installed at *PLAY* enhance the curators' ability to maintain the curatorial agenda for an interactive exhibition.

Cathleen Chafee (in Smith 2012:114) questions to what extent exhibiting a work can change it. Sarel Petrus' *Riverbeds* (Figure 4) formed an interesting study in terms of its installation and exploring to what extent using different display conventions could alter the perception of a work. Petrus' work presents a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Chinese Zen Garden. *Riverbeds* comprises a number of bronze cast sculptures that can be interchanged in order to personalise the organisation of the viewer's own garden. The interchangeable bronze components were required to be presented in a manner that would clearly communicate to the audience that they could be moved, touched, used, or left out. Petrus' initial intention was to present each component on formal plinths, usually used in a white cube context (Figure 5). Through curatorial re-evaluation, it became evident that, although using plinths is a conventional mode of sculptural display in traditional spaces, within the informal outdoors exhibition space, the plinths read as foreign, rigid, and disengaging. The artist and curators had to negotiate the final installation in order to arrive at a shared solution between the artist's original intention for the work and the curatorial agenda. As an outcome, the plinths were removed, and a section of the grassy landscape was cleared to reveal the earth, which was used to demarcate where the bronze components could be freely (re)placed and (re)moved. This installation appeared less static and more suitable to the outdoor setting and encouraged the audience to activate the artwork.

Although the agenda was to instigate participation, this level of participation was in some instances under-estimated. In the case of the MEGA BONANZA[7] collective's *Pavement special* (2014; Figures 6 and 7), the level of participation exceeded the

7.   Mega Bonanza is an art collective consisting of Maaike Bakker, Werner Burger, PJ Kotze and Nina Torr. As such, Maaike Bakker, as curator, art participator and collective member on the exhibition, had to negotiate between three roles in participating in PLAY.

FIGURE **Nº 4** ‹

Sarel Petrus, *Riverbeds*, 2014 – the curatorial installation of the piece. Wood, sand, bronze. Dimensions variable.

FIGURE **Nº 5** ‹

Sarel Petrus, *Riverbeds*, 2014 – the artist's intended installation for the piece. Wood, sand, bronze. Dimensions variable.

FIGURE **Nº 6**

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MEGA BONANZA, *Pavement special*, 2014. PVA painted masonite bricks. Dimensions variable.

initial expectation of both the artists and the curators. Acknowledging the possibility inherent within the work often altered the rhetoric of the artwork. MEGA BONANZA underestimated the level of uninhibited participation by the audience with their engagement with *Pavement special*. The predetermined arrangement of painted bricks that formed a pattern of positive and negative space became disrupted as the audience began participating by rearranging the originally intended composition of the piece by building new patterns and forms with the bricks (seen in Figure 7). In this instance, the curatorial agenda overpowered the artists' intentions, however through the curatorial, both the artist collective and curators reconsidered the rhetoric of the piece as it became increasingly evident that the audience had responded to the dialogue encouraging active engagement. Through the introduction of a curatorial agenda, it becomes evident that exhibiting a work in a specific context can also change a work to some extent.

Managing participation with the works installed in PLAY was far more complex than originally expected and it became necessary for the curators to differentiate between welcome and unwelcome participation. Selecting the outdoors exhibition space was vital for encouraging viewer participation; however the outdoors also became

Installation shot of Nirox Sculpture Park, conveying the impact of the audience engagement to re-arrange MEGA BONANZA's *Pavement special*, 2014.

problematic as managing the park's wildlife and subsequent interaction with artworks on show, an almost impossible task, resulted in damage caused to valuable work. On entering contractual agreements with the artists, it was highlighted that neither Nirox nor the curators would assume responsibility for any damage to the works caused as a result of the elements, natural surroundings, or animal life within the park. Special mention was made to all artists that monkeys, zebras and various other wildlife indigenous to the park qualified as risk factors that needed to be considered when creating and installing their works. Works that required some protection from the elements would be installed at the pavilion, a space that was neither strictly indoors nor outdoors. However, the anticipated intervention with the work by the monkeys

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Wayne Barker, *Monkey makes the world go round*, 2007. Paper mâché and found objects. Dimensions variable.

inhabiting the park far exceeded the expectation of the curators and staff at Nirox, and it became evident that the pavilion and Nirox staff present there during working hours could not fully discourage animal interference as it remains fully accessible at all times. In response to the curators' advice to consider these risks, the participating artist Wayne Barker re-titled an existing work for installation in the exhibition – *Monkey's make the world go round* (2007; Figure 8). The reconsidered title allowed for a space of play, which ultimately responded to the curators' lack of control in this informal exhibition space. Regrettably, Barker's work did become subject to damage by the monkeys. The inability to control all the conditions for the outdoor exhibition became increasingly apparent, and it became necessary for the curators to revise the exhibition content in accordance to the park's inherent risks.

Louise Kritzinger's *Speling* (2014; Figure 9), similarly questioned to what extent the audience would engage and participate. After the installation, before the opening, the sculpture park's zebra disrupted the work, damaging its composition. Measuring to what extent the elements, park life and audience would transform and disrupt the work was conceptually intended by the artist. The artist's intention was for the

Louise Kritzinger, *Speling*, 2014. Sand, painted enamel, wood and steel. Dimensions variable.

work to degrade gradually; however, for the opening, Kritzinger preferred to present the piece in its original full form and to allow deterioration only on the opening weekend. It became apparent within the first few days that the elements, the park's animal life, and the audience would lead to the destruction of the work far sooner than originally intended, and that this could not be controlled by the curators or the artist. It became evident through curatorial insight that within the expanded conception of the curated exhibition, the exhibition could not be contained as static.

Despite many of the works foregrounding the notion of play through the audience's direct physical engagement, other works presented the theme of play purely through conceptual reconsideration, taking inspiration from Gadamer's conception of play as 'spectatorial participation'. This encourages the audience to immerse themselves into thinking about that which cannot be fully controlled and which could change all previous knowledge of an art object (Davey 2007). A collaborative work by Angus Taylor and Johan Nortje, *Play_retreated* (Figure 10), was the reconceptualisation of a previous work installed by Taylor – the original sculpture presented at the Winter Sculpture Fair 2014 (Figure 11). Throughout the exhibition the work tantalised the audience, poking further fun at the fame of artist Guy du Toit[8] whose leitmotif

8. Guy du Toit was Angus Taylor's lecturer in sculpture at the University of Pretoria during Taylor's BAFA studies.

FIGURE **Nº 10** ‹

Angus Taylor and Johann Nortjie, *Play_re-treated*, 2014. Plaster, burlap and hessian over rammed earth, thatch and Belfast granite sculpture. Dimensions variable, height approximately 5000mm.

'bunnies' became the inspiration for the price tag for *Play_retreated*: 'Price – R 0.00 *the bunnies belong to Guy du Toit*'. In accessing *Play_retreated*, the transformation of the subject matter of the piece underlines the theme of play as the rammed-earth[9] 'male thinker' was covered by plaster of Paris, hessian burlap and dried straw, a seemingly undeveloped, impermanent and 'child-craft' medium for such a large-scale installation to become a reclining hybrid between a thinking man and a rabbit. The larger-than-life art piece, reconsidered through medium and transformed subject matter, became a research activity in itself, exploring to what extent the curatorial, the exhibition as form, and the artist's agenda could be used as a vehicle to re-address perceptions of a work.

9. Angus Taylor has become well known in the South African art industry for making use of rammed-earth as a medium, a site-specific, and thus culturally imbued, medium for sculpture.

Figure 11 Angus Taylor, *Morphic resonance*, 2014. Rammed earth, thatch, Belfast granite. Dimensions variable, height approximately 5000mm.

CONCLUSION

The new curatorial rhetoric, in the expanded sense, places emphasis on informal spaces, audience interaction and an open-ended and collaborative style of curating (Rugoff 1999). According to Sheikh (2015:34), the curatorial can be seen as 'cultural research understood as experimenting with various forms of public address and congregation'. Contemporary curatorial practice thus requires flexibility and a constant focus on revision through active research – positing the exhibition as open-ended, transformative, and fluid. In revisiting observations pertaining to *PLAY*, it has become evident that curating is multidimensional, and plays a role in linking objects, images, processes, people, and discourses; however the curatorial cannot be contained, and plays out supplementary to all aspects of curating research, agenda, and the autonomous art object. As such, the curatorial can be used to bridge the gap between the exhibition-makers and the rhetoric of the art object in order to enhance the viewer's experience, but this aspect cannot be fully contained or planned by the curators. Contemporary curating requires what Smith (2012:252) calls 'a flexible platform building practice', which provokes experimentation in order to avoid static

concepts of curating attributed to exhibition making alone. Informal exhibition settings, such as the outdoors, prove that tailored solutions can be implemented in an attempt to extend curatorial possibilities. Often the curator is required to exercise a dynamic approach and, such as in the case of *PLAY*, needs to revise the original agenda of both the exhibition form and the individual art object, in order to enhance the intended art experience. Elements that remain outside of the curator's control must in some instances be embraced in order to acknowledge possibility and curatorial progression.

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