Anabelle Lacroix

University of New South Wales | School of Art, Design and Architecture

l.lacroix@unsw.edu.au

Curating Public Programs After-Hours: methods for being together Otherwise

Keywords: Curating, Public Programming, Night, Time, Museum, Galleries, Community, Slowness, New Institutionalism, Critical Practice, Paracuratorial

Introduction

As museums have sought to diversify their audiences and institutional voices over recent decades, public programs have taken a central role within these institutions. Talks, workshops and performances that combine discursive, performative and artistic methods now accompany exhibitions and support knowledge production beyond the exhibition itself. These forms of public engagement and education were traditionally outside of curating, which is traditionally understood as a practice that is exhibition-based. This means that public programming as a field is debated, as is our understanding of this recent practice and its relationship to curating as a discipline as part of paracutorial activities (McDowell 2016). The term 'paracuratorial', meaning 'beside' or 'beyond' the curatorial, reinforces a hierarchical relationship of programs outside of the curatorial. Public programs are often nocturnal, taking place after-hours in order to attract a wider audience. Understanding the time-based nature of these programs is critical to understanding their potential. The temporal and social aspects of programming have also contributed to the creation of a hierarchy within the field that is commonly reflected in the departmental structure for organising daytime exhibitions and night-time programs. The evening is used by the museum sector to engage different audience segments, such as youth and young professionals. For example, museums 'Lates' have spread in institutions globally over recent years, with standard formats and branding such as 'Late', 'After-hours' or 'After Dark' (Choi et al. 2020). While evening programs have been the focus of studies on visitor services, museum metrics (O'Neil 2012, McLean 2004, 209), and marketing and economic strategy (Frey and Meier 2006), there has been limited consideration of the role of public programs within the curatorial field.

In this paper, I investigate night-time public programs by considering their relationship to time to illuminate their relationships with exhibitions and communities. In the first part of the paper, I introduce the transformation of the exhibition space by

public programs and how it contributes to the creation of new temporalities and independent knowledge production. I combine theoretical and practice-based research through the analysis of *Freedom of Sleep,* a project that I curated during the COVID-19 pandemic where public programs were organised before, during and after the exhibition over a year-long period, primarily at night. I show how time-based curatorial developments relating to public programming demonstrate a potential for after-hour events beyond what is currently understood in the paracuratorial literature. I draw on an understanding of curating as a time-based practice (Lind 2012, Van Bismark et al 2014, 2019, 83), as well as time's role in community boundary-keeping (Bastian 2014), to show that public programming is a critical curatorial practice that produces alternative time-zones for communities and independent knowledge production. Through the analysis of *Freedom of Sleep,* I draft curatorial methodologies for a public of the Otherwise, meaning different from the norm, to demonstrate the relevance of public programming in relation to institutional modes of knowledge production and engagement. Through an expansion of public program temporalities, I show that curatorial practice is being further transformed, with a reversing of the dominance of the exhibition in knowledge production and with the creation of new communities of practice among artists.

A turn to programming has transformed the exhibition space and curatorial temporalities

A shift to public programming in museums and galleries has transformed the exhibition space, creating a porosity between exhibitions and programs that is affecting curatorial practices overall. Organising talks and screenings, and releasing publications are now taken for granted as curatorial activities (Müller 2016, 286). Public programs have shifted from being auxiliary to exhibitions, to taking 'centre stage' in cultural institutions (McDowell 2016). This can be seen in the commissioning of the work *Round Table* by Mary Featherstone and Emily Floyd in the 2018 exhibition *Unfinished Business: Perspectives on Art and Feminism* (15 Dec 2017– 25 Mar 2018) at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), during which I was a public program curator. *Round Table* was a collaborative artwork between the artists and the curatorial team, and also a participatory space with a program by open-call that generated events that took place almost every day or night for the duration of the exhibition, attracting thousands of visitors. Through public programming and collaboration, the distinction between discursive, artistic and curatorial activities is made irrelevant. For curator Emily Pethick, the borders

between these activities have long ago been dismantled by socially engaged artists as well as through the practice of curators themselves (Pethick 2016, 297).

Figure 1: 'Answering to Masculinity' presented by Reworked at *The Round Table*, an installation designed by Mary Featherstone and Emily Floyd in *Unfinished Business: Perspectives on art and feminism* 2018, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. Photograph: ACCA.

Symbolically, *Round Table* and its public programs were at the centre of the exhibition space, renegotiating the traditional hierarchies between exhibitions and programs at ACCA. This is particularly relevant as traditionally most public programs would take place in the foyer to have sufficient space for the audience. The recentering of public programming was further supported by the institutional practice at ACCA of having a public program curator rather than coordinator, which demonstrates that when developed within a curatorial framework, public programs at their best can perform the role of acting as a link between artists, the public and the institution. The curatorial methodology for commissioning *Round Table* and integrating public programming also responded to a feminist positioning of openness and collaboration in the curatorial framework of *Unfinished Business*. This is what curator and program director Sally Tallent calls integrated programming, an `integrated way of working [that] removes traditional silos and encourages collaboration and deeper understanding of skills across strands and departments' (Tallent 2022, 322). In this way, public programming is integrated into the curatorial

thinking of the exhibition and the curatorial is a time-based practice that encompasses both the exhibition and any other formats.

Public programs have also transformed curatorial practices through the integration of other voices and independent practice in the exhibition space, an aspect that is critical for understanding public programming at night. Public programs bring together audiences, experts and artists in various ways, bringing together voices that are external to the institution. For art historian Vanessa Joan Müller, public programs 'illuminate [an exhibition's] inherent system of references' (Müller 2016, 286). In doing so, public programming enlarges and diversifies the exhibition with perspectives other than those of the exhibition curators and the exhibition's own mechanisms of day-time knowledge production. At night, public programs inhabit another temporality and generate time-spaces for listening and discussion in the institution that are not otherwise possible during the day. As such, exhibitions are associated with the 'hegemony of linear narrative', which is an important exclusionary mechanism, with the linear perspective of time or 'homogeneous narratives that cover multiple and discordant pasts' seen, for example, in chronological displays (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Bastian 2014, 147). Time-based practices, both artistic and curatorial, such as public programs have challenged this dominant narrative. The temporality of public programs can support the creation of a new order from the traditional daytime exhibition.

Freedom of Sleep: rethinking the institution's rhythm
In addition to curatorial practice being situated in the politics of historical time in a museum, it is also at the intersection of socially constructed time, and of our own experience of time in the day to day. The replication of the museum's opening hours from corporate business hours demonstrates the normative mechanisms at play and the regimes of value that are echoed in dominant curatorial temporalities across day and night. In response to the normative temporalities and mechanisms of the museum, and our own changing relationship to time, leisure, and sleep in the neoliberal 24/7 society, I curated the project *Freedom of Sleep* at Fondation Fiminco in Paris in 2020–2021. Originating in my own experience of insomnia, with a sense of wakefulness at night, the project focused on rethinking life rhythms and reclaiming night-time by exploring desynchronisation between body and society.

Desynchronisation was extended to the curatorial project to test new methodologies for public programming that create alternative temporal communities and

independent knowledge production. It unfolded as a series of public programs between October 2020 and June 2021, before, during and after the exhibition. The extended 8-month project on site, including a month-long exhibition, inverted the relationship between exhibition and program, with programming occurring well beyond the temporal parameters of the exhibition. Traditionally an exhibition has a set of dates, with public programs confined within this period. With *Freedom of Sleep*, the exhibition appeared as one of the events in the program rather than being presented as the main focus. The temporality of the exhibition and its position within the curatorial discourse was inverted in this durational context, which also reversed the dominance of the modes of knowledge production.

A public of the Otherwise

The project aimed at engaging with the underslept, the shift workers, the insomniacs and the socially jetlagged who are left out of daytime museum hours. The exhibition could not be open to a wider audience during the pandemic; however, late night and all-night public programs facilitated the gathering of different publics, alternative communities and critical voices. With public programming, we can address different communities needs at different times of the day. Curating public programs thus opens up the possibility to create a public of the Otherwise—a space of resistance— in opposition to the dominant narratives and their temporalities in society and in curatorial practice. Meenakshi Thirukode's understanding of a public of the Otherwise as 'everchanging, improvisational via a constant juxtaposition of privileged bodies, alongside those who are marginalised, without reiterating a language that is binary' contributes to this perspective. Because the public of the Otherwise is politicised and unfixed, it is constantly being constituted in time and public programs allow for such renegotiations.

As time, rather than space,[1] plays an important role in community building and for understanding mechanisms of marginalisation and difference (Bastian 2014, 155), curating public programs as a time-based practice can be a way of intervening *into* time and its normative mechanisms, opening up ways of being together Otherwise. With *Freedom of Sleep,* I addressed the non-normative and timely body of the insomniacs and the underslept, as well as the wider night-time community. Taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, curfews and lockdowns limited this approach so the exhibition could not be open to the wider public at night. The night

---

[1] Be it physical or digital space.

as a space for shared time for community and independent knowledge production was further explored by opening the exhibition, in private, to a small group of writers of the association Young Art Critics on 30th of May 2021. The group spent the entire night in the exhibition to produce critical responses that were published and accessible both in the exhibition space and online as a resource.
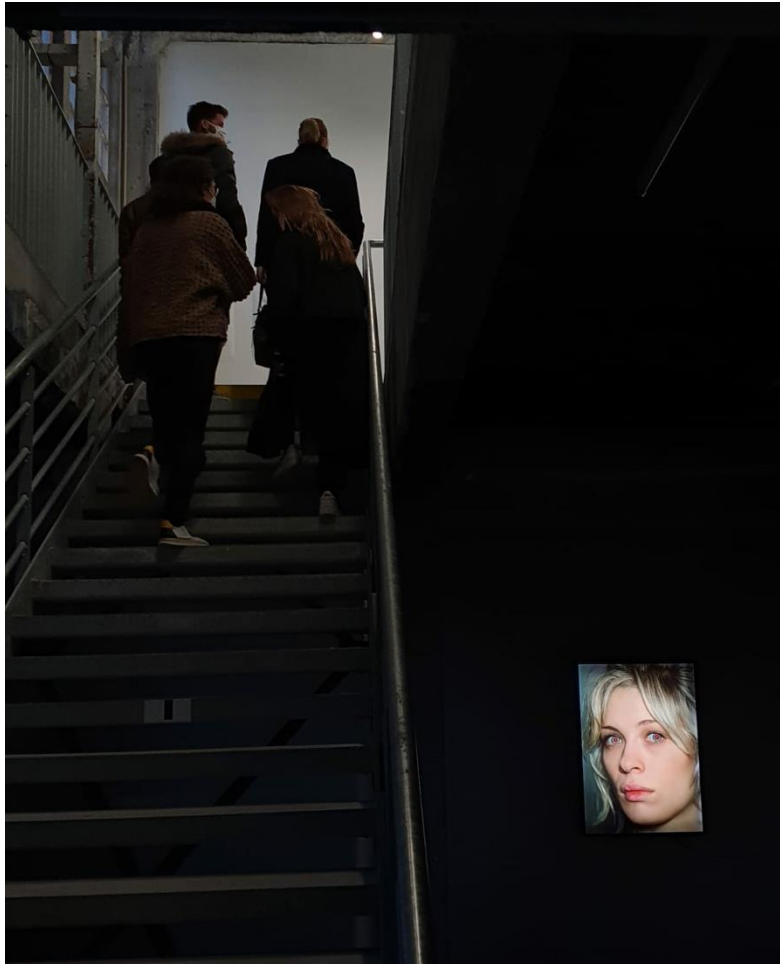

Figure 2: Members of the Young Art Critics association visiting the exhibition prior to starting their over-night writing session. Bottom left corner: Alona Rodeh, *Girl (From the Safe and Sound Posters series),* 2015, C-Print mounted on Plexiglass, LED lightbox, 100 x 70 x 8 cm.

The event was also a public program, akin to other emerging writers' programs in contemporary art institutions, such as *Writing in the Expanded Field* at ACCA, which was initiated in 2018 through a collaboration between myself, as curator of public programs, and writer Lucinda Strahan in the aftermath of *Unfinished Business*. In both projects, the exhibition was made available privately after hours for exercises of situated writing within the exhibition to support the production of a publication that is distinct from the official exhibition catalogue and thus significantly diversifies curatorial voices. In *Freedom of Sleep*, the writers were a public of the Otherwise,

being young and emerging, and occupying the hours when the exhibition was closed beyond traditional public programs hours. The association deliberately claimed the title Young Art Critics (YCA) in reference to the art critics association in France that delivers the official status of the Art Critic. YCA challenges the 'young' as being less valid and confronts the dominant narrative by creating opportunities for emerging writers and new voices to produce criticism.

Figure 3: A member of the Young Art Critics association writing inside one of the exhibition's installations: Danilo Correale, *No More Sleep No More*, 2015, HD video, beds, 240 min.

Changing pace, challenging institutional time-frames with public programs

In setting up a different rhythm of programs, *Freedom of Sleep* significantly changed the pace of the institution and its engagement with the public. This occurred due to the nocturnal and durational timeframe of programs. A first public program event coincided with White Night Paris on the 3rd of October 2020, with outdoor installations, projections and a series of concerts that were simultaneously broadcast on radio. Taking place ahead of the exhibition, the evening introduced the curatorial project's premise, starting with a roundtable discussion with artists and art historian Stéphanie Jamet, a specialist of sleep in modern and contemporary art. This event marked the launch of the curatorial project website, which hosted the recordings of the event as well as a publishing platform that grew over time with articles about

artists and other topics relevant to the exhibition. The website was developed with the double purpose of opening the curatorial process ahead of the exhibition through published research, as well as building an audience ahead of the exhibition. The curatorial project website located all public programs, beyond the logics of the temporary one-off event, which the contemporary art foundation website that hosted the exhibition could not support, as well as situating them thematically.

By creating a durational investigation, *Freedom of Sleep* challenged fast-paced production and encouraged audiences to engage multiple times with the project. Expanded by the situation of the pandemic, publishing was also considered a public program. During the 6 months prior to the exhibition, an online publication was gradually released as part of Liquid Architecture's journal *Disclaimer*. This was adapted from what would have been a physical program and served an initial purpose of engaging audiences with the content of the exhibition ahead of its opening, which 'illuminated its set of references'. Rather than being an alternative to physical presence, with online events at fixed times that were predominantly scheduled in the evening, the online publication engaged audiences in their own time – an important flexibility when work and home spaces collided during lockdown. The publication was staged with four releases over time, following the key conceptual threads in the exhibition under the headings 'Dissonance', 'Collapse', 'Release' and 'Awakening', which included four collections of text, video or sonic artwork that also allowed the audience to familiarise themselves with the practices of exhibited artists.

When public programming takes place beyond the temporal boundaries of the exhibition, it is generally before the opening of the exhibition, to contribute to its promotion and the development of discourse around the project, which was the case for *Unfinished Business* at ACCA. Post-exhibition programming rarely takes place, although it could provide time for reflection after the exhibition. This instead happens in private between the artists and curators. For *Freedom of Sleep*, public programs concluded in March 2022 with *Asynchronous Screening* at Composite in Melbourne, which presented video works from the exhibition in Paris as a basis for discussions with local artists in the project.[2] The event was framed as a *Freedom of Sleep* public program to maintain a critical space to discuss an exhibition and its content. In this way, the public programming strategy for *Freedom of Sleep* shifted traditional curatorial timeframes by breaking the synchrony between the exhibition and its

[2] This event was part of Liquid Architecture's program.

programs. This meant a radical slowing down of curatorial temporalities and modes of engagement with the public.

In rethinking curatorial temporalities, I expanded on the New Institutionalism movement that aimed at reconfiguring the institution from the inside in the early 2000s. New Institutionalism challenged exhibitions as mechanisms of exclusion and difference through a shift from exhibition to programming, with experimental laboratories and events in 'many kinds of activities and formats including socially engaged projects, TV radio, Journal etc.' (Voorhies 2011, 100). This was used to develop new curatorial and institutional strategies to address structural critiques of the art institution, towards the representation and participation of diverse identities and artistic practices, as seen in the practice of curators such as Charles Esche, Maria Lind or Emily Pethick. This renewal was developed by rethinking mechanisms of knowledge production to create a museum as a democratically organised 'space for action allowing for a shared multi-voice practice' (Kold and Flückiger, 2014). As institutional temporalities reveal considerations of diversity and inclusion (Bastian 2014, 155), public programming mechanisms of New Institutionalism highlight the connection between time, community, diversity and criticism and the curatorial processes that might join them.

The reconfiguration of hegemonic curatorial methods for knowledge production in New Institutionalism was facilitated by the new temporality given by public programming techniques. As critic and theorist Claire Doherty notes, 'New Institutionalism is characterised by the rhetoric of the temporary – transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness (Doherty 2006, np). However, the creation of different temporalities, or multiple other temporalities of difference is not enough as 'types of temporal rhythms intersect with practices of communal boundary-keeping' (Bastian 2014, 151). For humanities scholar Michelle Bastian, it is rhythm that can enact change rather than anti-chronologies. The timing of public programming can be used in this way as a curatorial method. In *Freedom of Sleep*, I expanded on this method by focusing on the rhythm of the relationship between the exhibition, the program and the institution by experimenting with a desynchronous curatorial practice, meaning a curatorial practice outside of dominant curatorial temporalities. This was done by occupying the after-hours at night and by duration, with the expansion of public programs over the period of a year. The public programs were desynchronous from the exhibition duration and opening hours. Using public programming as a tool for engagement and constitution of knowledge *with* the public

also played an important role in New Institutionalism's processes to challenge ideological canons. Experimenting with the time-bound nature of programming allows the development of tools for criticism, for reconfiguring and rethinking the institution and the way in which it produces knowledge and engages with audiences.

Otherwise communities of practice

In *Freedom of Seep*, the curation of public programs was also realised with another community in mind than the public: a community of practice. The desynchronisation between the exhibition and its programs created a community of practice among artists in the project, and with other researchers and practitioners across disciplines over time through other events in the program, such as talks and a cross-disciplinary roundtable symposium. *The Night. From sleepless nights to waking dreams: a subversive space-time?* was convened with the Brain Space Laboratory at the Institut d'Art Contemporain Villleurbanne and invited scientists, anthropologists, philosophers and artists to discuss the potential of desynchronisation between bodies and society, as was explored in the exhibition. This also led to future collaborations.[3]

The community of practice around Freedom of Sleep was also facilitated by the opportunity for artists to stage the development of their work. Traditionally, public programs feature additional practices to expand on the exhibition content, aside from when artists in the exhibition give a performance. In *Freedom of Sleep*, artists such as Amosphère, and the duo Sonia Leber and David Chesworth, who presented existing artworks in the first public program for White Night, were later commissioned for a larger-scale project that was presented in the exhibition. Such porosity between the exhibition and the public program demonstrates an approach to integrated programming as part of the curatorial field. Holding an event in a public context at a stage when the curation of the exhibition was unfixed, six months prior to its opening, opened the curatorial process. The roundtable discussion also facilitated curatorial development in conversation with the public. In this way, public programming was situated as a critical practice, which for historian Janet Marstine is an ethical museological practice that has the legacy of both institutional critique and socially engaged practice, 'as a driver of ethical and organisational change within the museums' (Marstine 2017).

---

[3] For example, collaboration took place between artist Johanna Rocard, Méryll Ampe and philosopher and critic Florian Gaité after the project. For more information on the symposium visit the Laboratory's webpage for Station 19: http://www.laboratoireespacecerveau.eu/index.php?id=796&L=2

By slowing down the exhibition project timeframe, the curation of public programs for *Freedom of Sleep* allowed the development of relationships with artists over a longer period than what is traditionally allocated, with the discussion of multiple projects, and included the opportunity to reflect back on the process of the project. This was the case with the participation of Leber and Chesworth in *Asynchronous Screening* (the public program that took place after the exhibition). Further, the desynchronous method of public programming contributed to the rethinking rhythms discourse with the exhibition, both thematically at night and in practice.

Figure 4: Alona Rodeh, *The New Moon in the Old Moon's Arms*, 2021, on-site installation with UV filters on the windows of Fondation Fiminco, accompanied with a guided tour performance. With the support of Berlin Senate for Culture and Europe, Goethe Institute Paris, Neustart Kultur 20/21 Stiftung Kunstfonds, Bonn and Cité internationale des Arts, Paris. Photo credit: Martin Argyroglo

Conclusion

In investigating night-time public programs, *Freedom of Sleep* highlights the interconnection between curatorial methods, temporal practices, criticism and communities. Challenging dominant temporal practices by stepping out of hegemonic institutional practices through rhythm can provide critical potential toward the curatorial, expanding on New Institutional practices. The method of public programming in *Freedom of Sleep* reconfigured institutional rhythms, challenging

synchronic time between the exhibition and its program and elongating curatorial timeframes that changed the pace of the institution. This method also challenged synchronic time in reconsidering an engagement with both audiences and artists that is non-linear and durational, with repeat engagements for constituting publics and communities. *Freedom of Sleep* created alternative time-zones to the traditional mode of knowledge delivery and experience in cultural institutions. This included the creation of a community of practice around the curatorial project that generated new collaboration and supported curatorial research *with* the public as a critical practice. Public programming was used to stage curatorial work over time as part of one curatorial system. It generated slower, and durational modes of engagement that may be fragmentary — drafting methods for being together Otherwise, by rhythming Otherwise and hosting audiences *in* and *out* of time.

References

BASTIAN, M. (2014). Time and community: A scoping study. *Time & Society*, *23*(2), 137–166

CHOI, A., BERRIDGE, G., & KIM, C. (2020). The Urban Museum as a Creative Tourism Attraction: London Museum Lates Visitor Motivation. *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland), 12(22), 9382.

DOHERTY, C. (2006). 'New Institutionalism and the Exhibition as Situation', Protections Reader, Kunsthaus Graz.

FREY, Bruno S., and MEIER S. "The economics of museums." *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture* 1 (2006): 1017-1047.

GJERDINGEN, S. C. (2018). *Night at the museum: reflections on Museum 'Lates' and their millennial visitors,* Master thesis, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo 2018.

HOOPER-GREENHILL, E. (1992). *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. London; New York: Routledge.

KOLD, L. and FLÜCKIGER, G. (2014). 'New Institutionalism Revisited'. *(New) Institution(alism)*, ON Curating Journal, retrieved 27/01/2021.

LIND, M. (2012). *Performing the curatorial: within and beyond art*, Sternberg Press, Berlin.

MARSTINE, J. (2017). Critical practice: artists, museums, ethics. Routledge.

MCDOWELL, T. (2016). "The Post-Occupational Condition," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 16, no. 1 (2016): 22-24.

MCLEAN, K. (2004) "Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue" in Anderson, Gail. *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift.* Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.

MÜLLER, V. J. (2016). 'Relays' in Hoffmann, J. *Exhibitionist : journal on exhibition making : the first six years*. The Exhibitionist.

PETHICK, E. (2016). 'The Dog that Barked at the Elephant in the Room', in Hoffmann, J. *Exhibitionist : journal on exhibition making : the first six years*. The Exhibitionist.

TALLENT. S. (2022). "Experiments in integrated programming". O., & Marstine, J. Curating art. Routledge. P322

VON BISMARCK, B. FRANK, R. MEYER-KRAHMER, B. SCHAFAFF, J. WESKI, T. (2014). *Timing: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

VON BISMARCK, B. RIKE, F. (2019). "Curatorial Anachronics". *Of(f) our times: Curatorial anachronous* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

VOORHIES, J. (2011). *New institutionalism*. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art.