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Introduction to *The Contemporary Art of Trusting Uncertainties and Unfolding Dialogues*

This book derives from a research process initiated by the artist Esther Shalev-Gerz in order to examine two concepts – trust and the unfolding of dialogue – *through* her practice, and to place emphasis on the possible interdependencies between trust and dialogue and to thus investigate what relations and potentialities they affect in the field of art.

Throughout her career, in tandem with the making of art, Esther Shalev-Gerz has insisted on regularly publishing. The multiplicity of existing publications, in which her ongoing concerns, artworks and processes are represented, provides an accumulative register stemming from the temporality of the exhibitionary and contextual circumstances in which her works are realized. However, for Shalev-Gerz the archive is never to be understood as stagnant, comprehensive or conclusive. It is also more than a mesh of the previous and the present. Her demand is that it must remain openable and unlockable to allow for other potentialities to be generated within its frame.

Whilst previous publications have been issued in relation to particular solo exhibitions or specific site-oriented projects, the 2010 publication, *Esther Shalev-Gerz* ensued from an alternative locus. It coincided with her first major career survey, *Esther Shalev-Gerz Ton image me regarde!?* at the Jeu de Paume, Paris. In bringing together ten previous works with one new commission, spectators - and importantly in terms of the book you are now reading, Shalev-Gerz herself - were provided, for the first time, with a means to reflect on selected works generated between 1986 and 2010, co-assembled in the same place at the same time. Shalev-Gerz's individual works are generated via commissioning processes that acknowledge and affirm her capacity to initially engage with and subsequently priorities, through the filter of her artistry, the complexities and demands of producing art amidst particular geographic, temporal, social, cultural and political situations. However, *Esther Shalev-Gerz Ton image me regarde!?* challenged any pre-supposition that Shalev-Gerz's works are fastened to their instigative conditions in ways that may limit their capacity to produce new meaning when shifted to another condition of being made public. For Shalev-Gerz herself, this exhibition catalyzed the potential for her to sensorially and conceptually experience her own works. Despite the nature of retrospection being correlative to the premise of having to look back, Shalev-Gerz reconceived several works for this exhibition, developed new modes of display for many of the others and inserted a new work. This required her to hone the role that editing, collage and suture play in her practice; a *dispositif*, which in her hands becomes one of de-familiarizing in order to produce a fissure - a spatiotemporal dynamic in which spectator meets artwork and catalyzes an additional dialogic circumstance to the layering of those that occurred within the processes of realising the displayed works.

In the case of a career survey, the multiplicities of such *spaces* being produced, across her oeuvre, also provided Shalev-Gerz with a unique situation to reflect on the perpetrative affects generated by inter-relations across and between works. The innumerable spatial-temporal dynamics at play provided a means to consider how the multiplicative affects of art works publicly co-joined in the field of representation could elude the pre-determinacy of the chronological and the archival as implicit to career surveys as exhibition-making. In the observation, critical analysis and re-production of her own work, the artist recognized that something may be at stake in her works, and their coming into being, that was not necessarily overlooked but perhaps more accurately described as having come to surface, through her own surveying.

The notion of trust surfaced, as a recurring condition of the dialogic encounters, between the mesh of people and institutions that the nature of her practice invokes relations to and between. In the act of commissioning Shalev-Gerz, institutions, participants and possibly even future spectators are most frequently co-engaged, with differing levels of attention or commitment to what may be seen as a speculative process: towards the unfolding of an artwork, one that does not pre-exist the dialogic relations that must be established for its production. Those dialogues themselves are generated and generative of other conditions, of which trust is a significant one.

Inter-personal communication is increasingly recognized and discussed within the field of Fine Art, including as a mode of practice in itself such as the shift towards *conversational art* within which the occurrence of a two-way or group conversation may itself be perceived as being the art; or conversation as a method incorporated by artists into the processes of development within their work including within participatory, co-participatory, collaborative and collective projects. The intentions, means and impacts of conversations instigated by artists as an element of art practice differ greatly. Such conversational frames may range from artists simply informing people of artistic intentionality to catalyzing and responding to participants' or subjects' thoughts, feelings and opinions, to generating collective decision-making systems through which others are encouraged to intervene in the control of the artist or de-regulate singular forms of authorship and to initiate platforms by which an artwork then performs further transaction with spectators.

However, in principle dialogue is not the same as conversation. In conversation we may choose to completely ignore, speak over or listen poorly to a conversational party. Conversation may be random or scheduled; have a pre-determined subject, or allow for the matters at mouth to start at one point and meander but end there again, or indeed to end somewhere far from its beginning. It may be unexpected and momentary between strangers; the rambling between friends or foes, each party opining their own individual thought processes within a given subject and allowing or disallowing interruption to shift the shape and subject or it may be a scheduled conversation about a discrete subject with pre-established temporal parameters. Nevertheless, co-recognition is not inherent to conversation in the ways that it may be seen to be a predicative value within - and for the production of - dialogue. Conversation is not necessarily instituted on the same values of multi-perspectival awareness - self-awareness and awareness of other, awareness of self with other, awareness of other with self - that may be seen to be inherent to the conditionality of dialogue and its relational dynamics of co-attentiveness.

When at dialogue we are expected to keenly, consciously and hyper-presently *think-sense-speak-listen*, not only to each other but to ourselves with other: observing and reflecting on ones own assumptions, pre-determined thoughts and gaining consciousness of what may

divide us, how those divisions condition us and in what sense differences instigate self, whilst at the same time respectfully acknowledging that difference has different ways of thinking, doing and being. Dialogue's credence may be seen to lie in its capacity to embrace conflictual and non-conflictual difference between subjects, beliefs and perspectives and to provide a spatial-temporal encounter within which also lies, in its emphasis on a perceived capacity for a respectful transaction of subjectivities to occur, the instituting of a *sensed* equality between those at dialogue.

As a concept trust, like dialogue, is dependent on relations. The conditions by which trust - or perhaps more accurately trustworthiness (the perceptive quality on which the coming into being of trust is dependent) – may exist are relational as in between two people or multiple groups of people; between people and an institution or a service; or between individuals, multiple parties, factions and institutions. Trust is not necessarily experiential in that we may support, advocate, argue and fight for a principle, an amenity, a person and a people based on our perceived trust in them despite never having had any personal relation to them, or indeed any intention, desire or need to do so. There may be a general expectation that trust is also a condition by which ambiguity may be countered, the possibility for misunderstandings to be delineated, and differing perspectives cohesed through making a pact or contract, or adhering to a promise. However, it can also be argued that it is in fact more trusting, more demonstrable of perceived trustworthiness, to be engaged in relations that move forward and support uncertainty with alterations in agreements become agreeable, changes influenced by temporal conditions and processual circumstance being accepted, or roles and responsibilities and expectations being re-prioritized or altered. Such trust results in modes of elasticity that re-constellate pre-determined or pre-supposed relations. The flexibility to change one's mind, to improve one's initial thinking, to re-direct one's experience, to admit to having made mistakes - and to respond to the potentiality of knowledge previously unknown - may require consistent dialogue between the parties involved, and yet still be generative or sustaining of trustworthiness. Trust exists where there are no guarantees.

As she remarks in an interview published here with Jacqueline Rose, Shalev-Gerz has long been concerned with the possibilities of artistic practice as research. To her artistic research is both a contribution to our public understanding of the world, but also an inquiry into what the actual processes of the production of knowledge are capable of in terms of their potential to stimulate public meaning through artistic practice and its relations to the field of art and its publics. As Shalev-Gerz states the recognition of artistic practice to research has reached a certain point of legitimacy and visibility, including within academia but for which there are antecedents throughout the history of art. The notion of subjects as publics is fundamental to the ways in which Shalev-Gerz seeks to: destabilize categorization of who is perceived to be knowledgeable; cultivate possibilities for how knowledgeability may be represented and concurrently push the exhibitionary frameworks of art to assert their relations to knowledge - not as a displayable *fait accompli*, but as a co-productive locus for access to the generation of knowledge and its sharing.

A Professor in Fine Art at the Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Shalev-Gerz was successful in 2010 with a bid to the Swedish Research Council for artistic research funding. Her proposition was to investigate something that she had been confronted by in convening her career survey: the possible interfaces between notions of trust and the unfolding of dialogue. Often the invitee, she became the inviter. Shalev-Gerz chose two people—myself, an artist with a curatorial practice and the philosopher Stefanie Baumann—with long-term

relationships to her work and the film theorist Annika Wik, who was new to working with the artist. Together, we became co-researchers from 2010 until 2013.

This anthology is one of several productions authored through the auspices of this research project, *Trust and the Unfolding of Dialogue*. It differs from previous publications on Shalev-Gerz's work in that it assembles both new and previous writings that seek to place nuanced emphasis specifically on the foci of two inter-related paradigms—trust and the unfolding of dialogue—through the practice of Esther Shalev-Gerz.

Central to the project's development has been the dialogic interweaving and entwining of the researchers' trajectories at a series of seminars and research meetings as a group of four, or three, or two or indeed individually. These occurred throughout the process including when key opportunities arose for the testing of thought, such as when in 2012 the Musée cantonal des Beaux Arts delivered an additional retrospective, *Esther Shalev-Gerz. Entre l'écoute et la parole/Between Listening and Speaking*. Shalev-Gerz's research was in part conducted through the realization of a new art work *Describing Labor*, commissioned by the Wolfsonian Collection at Florida International University, Miami and the publication ends with two essays derived from *Describing Labor*.

Shalev-Gerz is an artist to whom people often return and several writers, philosophers, thinkers and curators have sustained relations to her work when thinking through what is at stake in their own concerns. The work of these and others outside of the appointed research team has provided many platforms for thought that have influenced this publication. It seemed appropriate, within the scope of this publication as an anthology to re-iterate specific existing texts, commission new writing by those who have written previously on Shalev-Gerz and to invite others to write who had not yet done so and to collectively publish these alongside texts by the project's co-researchers.

Jacques Rancière agreed to the republication of his text, *The Work of the Image*ⁱⁱ. Rancière's text provided an overview of Shalev-Gerz's practice which has been important to her understanding of her own work and fore-fronted a series of concerns across a number of works, and thus his surveying of her practice pre-empted Shalev-Gerz's. Rancière would return to Shalev-Gerz's practice and to write on *Describing Labor* and his essay, *The Age of Labor*ⁱⁱⁱ is also printed here following from its inclusion in the exhibition's catalogue. Between these two writings, Rancière himself became a participant in Shalev-Gerz's work, *D'eux*, commissioned by the Jeu de Paume in 2010 and unusually, as most participants are recruited by local representatives, at the invitation of the artist herself. Her invitation resulted in an exchange in which this philosopher and was representationally incorporated into an artwork and dialogically placed in exchange with a younger philosopher, Rola Younes; both sited into an exchange with each other but also with art as knowledgability.

Lisa le Feuvre consented to the re-publication of her 2005 essay, *Spaces of Perception*^{iv} on Shalev-Gerz's *Daedul(us)*, in which she discusses the mesh of communication and exchange mechanisms at play in the work's development but also in its public presentation. Le Feuvre reveals how accords were established not only between the artist and participants, but how these were layered in ways that produced multiplied demonstrations of complicity between participants as their unanimity resulted in a discourse between private and public and urban and domestic that lies at the heart of a neighborhood in Inner-North Dublin most often represented otherwise, as a space of contestation.

James E. Young's essay *Spaces for Deep Memory: Esther Shalev-Gerz and the First Counter-monuments*^v examines how Shalev-Gerz has sustained discourse across thirty years of practice from her first permanent work, *Oil On Stone*, sited in Tel Hai, Israel in 1983 to the seminal *Monument Against Fascism, War, and Violence—and for Peace and Human Rights* created collaboratively with Jochen Gerz in Hamburg-Harburg, Germany (1986–1993) and her installation *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz 1945–2005*. Young reveals how the complexity of relations between memory and monumentality, testimony and witnessing, and experience and articulation are, for Shalev-Gerz always to be considered through emphasis being placed on the significance of human agency and acknowledgement, as opposed to ignoring, of the problematics of representation and articulation in terms of any negotiation of how political and cultural conflict and the holocaust may be memorialised.

Georges Didi-Huberman also considers *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz 1945–2005* in his extended essay, *The “Blanc Soucis” of our History*^{vi} first published, in an annotated version, in the catalogue accompanying Shalev-Gerz's 2012 retrospective in Lausanne. He engages with the premise of silence, within Shalev-Gerz's work, as being affective and discusses how the spatial-temporal *dispositifs* and modalities of speech and listening she applies within her works, also negotiate the ethical complexities of representing testimony.

Through the analysis of several works Stefanie Baumann's writing, *Approaching trust and the unfolding dialogue* examines how trust and dialogue are affected by Shalev-Gerz's working methods and how their impacts are also depicted in her actual installations. Baumann's text informs how we can consider the consistent dedication of Shalev-Gerz to the restlessness of identity and its constructions. Baumann draws attention to the role of fissures or breaches in how Shalev-Gerz installs her works as correlative to the potentialities of being in the flux of *becoming*, with which the artist is concerned. Moreover, Baumann also discusses the formation of equality of knowledgeability within Shalev-Gerz's works and how the artist supports participants to resist simplified depictions of categorization, by self or other, through ensuring that their representation includes them at thought, offering avowal and articulating concerns, not only of self-concern but of societal stake.

Annika Wik's *Sharing Stories* is unusual as an essay on Shalev-Gerz's work, in that it includes, amidst her consideration of how trust and dialogue are made manifest by the artist. From the perspective of a film theorist and film theory's concerns with the spectator, Wik reveals the impact of two viewings of *White-Out* - having taken place with years of distance between them - on the subjectivity of the writer. Wik identifies the methods by which transitions and transactions of subjectivities, of participants and spectators

On the commissioning in 2009 of a new chapter of Shalev-Gerz's *Les Portraits des histoires* by The Public in Sandwell, UK Jacqueline Rose and Esther Shalev-Gerz began a dialogue, which they resumed for this book, although in the intervening years Rose had continued to write intermittently write on the artist. As a psychoanalytic thinker Rose recognized the importance of her and Shalev-Gerz co-considering the dynamics of speaking, listening, consciousness and the unconscious and its relations to collective memory but also to societal amnesia, which are important instigators for Shalev-Gerz. This interview is wide-ranging and provides an opportunity for the reader to gain access to Shalev-Gerz's thinking in her own words and on her own terms.

In my own writing, *Notes on Trust*, I have given focus to what may initially appear as anomalous moments within several works by Shalev-Gerz or their processes of production. In this text, I allude to how these images, whilst potentially read as fragments or micro-details, may also be seen to be at the crux of what is at stake within the work in broader terms. I aim to suggest that in Shalev-Gerz's works there is a depth of imagery, which constantly emanates from an axis of trust and dialogue.

Andrea Phillips accepted an invitation to travel to Miami to view *Describing Labor* and her text, *Art-Work* mines how Shalev-Gerz and the staff of Wolfsonian Institute came to interrogate labor and its depiction, not simply through its own collection of propaganda, artifact, art and design and its correlatives in representations of the worker, but through the mesh of labor – human and institutional – through which the work was created. Phillips examines the dynamics of what the labor involved in this project and the exhibition may produced may mean in terms of the contemporary status of labor in relation to contemporary art and the institutional forces that interface with artists and thus inform the 'making of work'.

The essays in this anthology close with Jacques Rancière's *The Age of Labor*, also focusing on *Describing Labor* and the historic contexts of labor, which inform the collecting that becomes archived and displayed at the Wolfsonian Institute. Rancière sheds light not only on how Esther Shalev-Gerz re-focuses attention on pictorial amnesia of the worker but also how she implicates the politics of description in the search for representation in ways which render the object as non-autonomous and rather as implicated in the social frame of inter-relations.

This book brings together writing that acknowledges that the art of Esther Shalev-Gerz is predicated not on the conversational but on the dialogic. It reveals that the ethos of the dialogic, as affective in determining emphasis - via an interplay of cognizance, emotionality and the sensorial – on the constructions of difference and self. I could argue that some aspects of this are already known about Shalev-Gerz, her sensibility and her working methods. However, whilst this publication explicitly addresses the role of dialogue via her practice it does not concentrate on this as a singularity. This book is also a response to the paucity of current discourse regarding the interfaces of dialogue with trust, and it suggests that these notions may be considered as co-relative to art's capacity to author doubt and uncertainty and to confirm how those conditions may generate further possibilities and potentialities. Through the artworks and methods of Esther Shalev-Gerz, this book seeks to provide a platform to begin a debate on trust and dialogue and provide a beginning to think through the relativity of these two concepts and their conditions when characterized by, and as, art.

ⁱ Gili, Marta, Ed. *Esther Shalev-Gerz*, Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2010

ⁱⁱ First published in Shalev-Gerz, Esther. *MenschenDinge/The Human Aspect of Objects*, Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchen, Weimar: 2006

ⁱⁱⁱ First published in Abess, Matthew and Lamonaca, *Esther Shalev-Gerz: Describing Labour*, Miami: Wolfsonian-Florida International University, 2012

^{iv} First published in Burns, Liz, Ed. *Daedal(us)*. Dublin: Fire Station Artists' Studio, 2003

^v First published in Schweizer, Nicole Ed. *Esther Shalev-Gerz*, jrp|ringier and Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne. Zurich: 2012

^{vi} First published in Schweizer, Nicole Ed. *Esther Shalev-Gerz*, jrp|ringier and Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne. Zurich: 2012