

MAKING ART PUBLIC: MUSICALITY & THE CURATORIAL

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To Mavis and Jim – still listening

Strictly musical questions are no longer serious questions.
John Cage, "The Future of Music"

If you must have a language, let it be one whose quantity cannot be reduced to a single sound, one that moves without displacing, that describes without being written, that knows not the letter and yet is the spirit and has the spirit to be without recourse to visibility, that is made of time and not allowed by time, that knows neither childhood nor age, neither the tongues nor the teeth that gnaw at foreign languages, that give birth to itself, whose soul is everywhere and nowhere, that is free in its coupling. Air cut out of air.

Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body*

'The space between the words contains more reality than does the time it takes to read them.'
Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*



Fig.1: © Stephen Collins – www.stephencollinsillustration.com

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I once offered advice to award winners on the humble reckoning of acts, large and small, that make possible an achievement. There were, I suggested, the ‘contributor thanks’ to those who directly supported the project at hand; the ‘existential thanks’ for friends, family, and mentors; and the ‘hidden thanks’, whispered silently to those living and living-in-memory whose inspirational examples and models infuse the work. Even this list would not be sufficient, I suggested, to account for the myriad small graces that make the required work bearable, urgent, and necessary – from the childminder to the online library hosts, the friendly café staff, and university administrators. Whilst I name my debts to the following, suffice to say there are legions more unnamed of whom I am mindful and deeply grateful.

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I have approached this work after having had the honour and privilege to work with and to get to know composers, musicians, and artists in all sorts of ways over a number of decades. The words of Robert Ashley, then, sing from the heart my own feelings:

I became a musician as an alternative to scientist, civil servant, businessman, criminal – my qualifications for all of which I can document – because I wanted to make music, because music meant, when I was a child, an irrational sensual pleasure that I could not resist and, later, when I got into music as an adult, an irrational pleasure in making music with other musicians. No one who is not a musician can understand this pleasure.

My daily ambition remains to practise musically, and much of what I have learned has come from being touched by artists of remarkable integrity, honesty, sensibility, and humour.

In return for these manifold gifts, all I have to offer here are words. Carefully chosen words, hanging side-by-side, observing the rules of syntax – with occasional deviations – to make meaningful sense. From the first to the last, these words that are not my own are nevertheless *my* work, my argument, my deviations and responsibilities. This is not the place to rehearse all the sins of the letter (though their ink stains lie ahead). You, dear reader, spotless, can pass judgement. They are nevertheless my humble gift to you whose response is perhaps the true last word.

Abstract

This thesis concerns the conjoining of notions of curating and music, consolidated over the last two decades, and its significance both for the gallery arts and for musical practices. I approach this research in two ways. Firstly, I trace a path from the becoming-visible of the curator function in the 1960s to its professionalisation from 1987 within a critically reflexive paradigm, and finally to 'the curatorial' as a post-representational proposition since 2006. This describes a trajectory away from visual privilege towards processes that de-essentialise the visual and that reconsider issues of mediation more broadly. Secondly, I examine the process that distinguished the gallery arts from 'music' – beginning with the curatorial 'invention' of Sound Art from the late 1970s – in order to grasp the import of their cautious opening to musical practices over the past decade. My focus here is on the erosion of artistic autonomy as a foundational principle of curatorial practice. By following the methodical workings of John Cage beyond his erasure of music's autonomy – its audible difference from 'non-musical' sounds – I return to the philosophical concept of musicality and its implications for practices of mediation. This is complemented by three situated reflections, writing from within different projects that each concerned the relation between music, the gallery arts, and the curatorial. These include: the 'first opera production' in New York's Times Square as part of the Performa biennial; Ari Benjamin Meyers's *Kunsthalle for Music* at Rotterdam's Kunstinstituut Melly; and both the *Listening Space* and the curatorial adoption of musical principles at documenta14 in Athens. In different ways, these exemplify what I describe as the musicalisation of the curator function, and the composition of ways of being in time with others.

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Prelude

Theme

Words rise and fall, like empires. By the time I became Director of Oxford Contemporary Music (2001-03), it was no longer clear what music ‘was’ or what it might ‘become’. With digitisation had come the emergent possibility that the music of all times and all places could be simultaneously available. On the one hand, floating free of specific reference, this was liberating – it could be anything within reason that audiences, my board, funders, and an event’s economy might accept. From free improv by Derek Bailey with Tony Bevan to Gori Women’s Choir and Ensemble Kaboul, Moscow’s Studio for New Music and Isabel Ettenauer’s toy piano programme to Scanner’s laptop-processed reworking of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Eclisse*, in venues from nightclubs to concert halls, day centres and theatres to Modern Art Oxford – the possibilities seemed limitless.

On the other hand, the qualifier ‘contemporary’ raised the age-old stakes. Whilst the term awaited the freighting of its subsequent theoretical convoy, it nevertheless implied that whilst anything might be possible for ‘music’, not all music was equally appropriate, valid, or (critically) of its time.¹ What might be excluded? As Dai Griffiths wickedly put it to me then in a Q&A with his ‘After Modernism’ class at Oxford Brookes University: “Why no Robbie Williams? Why no country and western?”² I had also co-presented with Truck Records the post-rock group Meanwhile Back in Communist Russia alongside the poet Neil Rollinson and projections from David Lynch’s *The Elephant Man* at the Holywell Music Room (Europe’s first purpose-built public music venue); yet “what difference did this make,” he asked, “from the band’s customary appearances in the Zodiac [nightclub] or other gigging spaces?”

¹ Key texts in the ‘contemporary’ debate include: Agamben, “Contemporary?”; Foster, “Questionnaire”; Smith, “The Contemporaneity Question”; Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*; Smith, *Contemporary Composition*; Osborne, *Anywhere*; Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*; Cox and Lund, *Contemporary Condition*; and Ebeling, *There Is No Now*.

² One of my advisers at the time, Griffiths had been a founder member of the Critical Musicology group in Britain and one of the first UK musicologists to study and teach within a Music Department on popular musics, interests indicative of changes then taking place in musical thought and practice. Whilst building on the work of writers like Simon Frith, Philip Tagg, Richard Middleton, and Dave Laing, it was Griffiths along with others such as Allan Moore at Thames Valley, and Stan Hawkins and Sheila Whiteley at Salford that brought popular music into the music faculty itself. Email with Dai Griffiths, 21 Apr 2017.

Music made in self-conscious response to the fluidity of these times posed an acute problem, for – unlike with conventional genres – past models could not be used reliably to determine standards for current practices that refused to acknowledge their authority. Its genealogies were often multiple, undecided, non-determining. How, then, could it be described when it had not yet been heard? What might audiences expect? Words (and images) were essential, at least for promotion, but not sufficient.

It was in this context, as the meanings of ‘music’ began to proliferate, that its discourses acquired a prestige supplement. Around the mid-aughties my ears pricked up on hearing the term ‘curator’ being adopted as a synonym for ‘programmer’ or ‘producer’ of live music, as well as for DJs and others creating playlists – usually for online platforms – from vast databanks of ‘content’. Borrowed, loaned, or stolen from the visual arts, with the elevated status of those responsible for selecting works to be shown and with expertise in advocating for their value and significance, the term ‘curator’ seemed re-purposed to bestow its reflected lustre onto musical objects, these poor relations of the visual arts. The word sat uncomfortably, slipping on the tongue, too self-conscious and sounding phoney without a corresponding change in either musical practice or its public presentation.

The difference in resonance was marked: what rang true for these dreamers of dreams, if not aristocrats of visual labour with frequent flyer bonuses and fluency in theoretical concepts, rang hollow for music.³ Whilst visual artists featured not only across the culture platforms of the print and broadcast media but also increasingly on the financial pages as the art market broke records like an Olympic athlete on steroids, coverage of new and experimental music barely registered, and composers (even well-established ones) – with morbid irony – compared annual royalty payments that would barely cover an evening

³ One of my formative encounters was with Susie Allen and her team from Artwise Curators who persuaded Lloyds of London, the insurance market, to celebrate its maritime heritage both by re-exhibiting its treasury of commemorative silverware for Admiral Lord Nelson on his tercentenary and by commissioning the film-maker Peter Greenaway and composer David Lang to create *Writing on Water* (2005) with the London Sinfonietta, where I then worked. In addition to its illustrious audience, the budget exceeded the Sinfonietta’s own for projects multiple times over.

meal.⁴ Sponsorship of exhibitions and biennials was pouring in by the millions; it barely existed for new music.⁵

The contemporaneity of the new art – on the cusp of the moment – was vividly popular; ‘contemporary classical music’ (a noun phrase I dislike and tried to avoid) was habitually tied to institutional structures – concert halls, orchestras, and opera houses – with a seemingly unbreakable attachment to the *classical*, bound by audiences (their donations and ticket purchases) carrying a flame for music a century and more old, still struggling with music after it went ‘atonal’.⁶ Musical action of the day seemed more alive outside these hallowed spaces, at the festivals, clubs, and bars where ‘leftfield’, ‘underground’, and ‘alternative’ musicians were taking experimental approaches with commercial, vernacular, and other (formerly) traditional practices.

Where galleries of contemporary arts designed by starchitects were mushrooming and biennials opening by the month, attracting unprecedented visitor numbers, opportunities to present risk-taking and radical music were shrinking. Musical economics were more determined by familiarity, by celebrity and reference to known quantities. Whilst the ‘exhibitionary complex’ (as Tony Bennett called it) traded capital – cultural, financial and social – on the unique value of the individual auratic artwork, the price of extreme scarcity, the music industry was base jumping its way towards subscription streaming services of infinitely-replicable digital ‘products’.⁷

⁴ Around 2007, preparing for the London Sinfonietta’s 40th anniversary, the orchestra’s then Artistic Director – now Head of Classical Music at Southbank Centre – Gillian Moore proposed its future goal should be to place contemporary music at the heart of contemporary culture. A key example given, indicating music’s peripheral status, was the unwillingness or inability of the BBC’s flagship culture and ideas programmes, such as *Front Row* and *In Our Time*, to cover new music. Not only did its presenters appear uninformed of the field, developments in music beyond the commercial sphere were (and largely remain) thought to exist beyond the domain of public interest.

⁵ A typical example: having secured a meeting for the London Sinfonietta with an executive at a leading city insurance and finance company, the transactional condition of sponsorship was based on the number of other FTSE 250 executives from amongst our supporters and audiences that we could muster for drinks receptions around a performance. The relationship did not progress further.

⁶ For example, in its 2007-08 season the London Symphony Orchestra included short commissioned works from early career composers in their programmes by not advertising them, presenting them as surprise additions to avoid subscribers and occasional attenders leaving empty seats.

⁷ Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*.

No wonder that one of the most celebrated curators, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, listed the ‘curation’ of music playlists among the growing examples of the term’s commercial appropriation – along with ‘curating’ hotel decoration, and meals at chichi restaurants – as a euphemism for ‘expert selection’ within the service industries of consumer culture.⁸ And yet...was this *only* a cynical exercise, devaluing by inflation the currency of ‘real’ curating? Could there be more to it? After all, more galleries were ‘moving into’ performance (sometimes including live music), presenting Sound Art and musical installations, and even beginning to dedicate spaces for performance as part of new building programmes. In the bookshops of the ICA, Serpentine, Tate and Whitechapel Galleries, I found new literatures springing up on sound, noise, ‘non-cochlear art’, aurality, and listening, reviewed along with ‘exhibitions, installations, etc’ in the On Site section of *The Wire* – often the only music magazine on sale. Was music already being curated, but under another name?

I became fascinated by musicians who had become recognised for ‘non-musical’ practices in the art world, as well as artists and film-makers who also practised as musicians – figures like Michael Snow, Pauline Oliveros, Christian Marclay, Christina Kubisch, Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, Rashaad Newsome, Jennifer Walshe, Chris Newman, Yoko Ono, Brian Eno, Lina Lapelyte, Tarek Atoui, Claudia Molitor, Heiner Goebbels, and – of course – John Cage. Once I started listening out, meeting and working with many of them, it soon became clear that the apparent divide between artist and composer or musician was more a function of institutional differences, of the mediation of artistic practice, than some essential or categorical distinction. Artists (using the term inclusively) just had to negotiate these lines as best they could. Even in the ‘post-medium condition’, structural distinctions embedded in the institutions of art and music seemed firmly marked. Tuned into this, I produced a symposium at London’s Southbank Centre in 2011 to explore the issues.⁹

⁸ Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, 23. See also von Hantelmann, “Affluence and Choice”; and Balzer, *Curationism*.

⁹ *Scene and Heard: Music in a Visual Culture* featured speakers and panellists including: curators Sandra Naumann (*See This Sound* etc), Rebecca Shatwell (AV Festival), Limor Tomer (Metropolitan Museum, NYC, formerly at The Whitney), Richard Bernas (Tate, Music Projects), and Alastair Cameron (Arnolfini, Bristol); composers, artists and sound artist Louis Andriessen, Jennifer Walshe, Jim Aitchison, and Janek Schaefer; contemporary music and arts producers Thorbjorn Hansen (Wundergrund, Copenhagen) and John Kieffer (Sound and Music, formerly British Council). Third Ear Music, “Symposium documentation”.

I had collaborated with galleries in presenting live music from my time in Oxford onwards. The series I initiated with Modern Art Oxford became a regular feature of its programme.¹⁰ It even included a specially-commissioned work performed around a sculptural installation by Tracey Emin in the main galleries, and another night of performances riffing off an exhibition of Jim Lambie's work. For Spitalfields Festival (2010), I produced performances 'curated' by the composer and conductor James Weeks in an alternative space off Brick Lane, a commercial gallery, and at Whitechapel Gallery. Two years later, Jonathan Watkins – longstanding director and curator at Birmingham's IKON Gallery – generously invited the artist Sam Belinfante and me to co-curate a short programme of performances, films, photographic works, and installed videos from a series of commissions through which we paired artists and musicians. *The Voice and the Lens* was part festival, part exhibition, which we later redeveloped for Spitalfields Festival and the Whitechapel Gallery.¹¹

Working with galleries and with artists negotiating this thin line between visual arts and music, I became more curious about the differences of culture, expectations, economy, and discourse between these fields. For example, the politics and curatorial management of space – what was permissible, where, and when – were more marked in art spaces; the investment of time and expertise across the whole staff team was a joyful shock in working with the IKON in particular; and the perfectionist concern for finality, that everything be precisely as it should be *before* the public arrived for the private view and remain 'just so' for the duration of the exhibition, was also striking.

Seeing the catalogue for a forthcoming retrospective exhibition of Paik's work at Tate Liverpool in 2010, I contacted the curator about the gallery's plans to present his musical or performance works (and offering my services), but heard nothing back. A month after the exhibition opened, an email came from a curator in the education department inviting me to put together a performance at FACT – which was collaborating with the gallery to present

¹⁰ There had been precedents for music at the gallery going back to Judith Serota's work in the late 1960s (and predating the tenure of her brother, Nicholas Serota, as the gallery's director) based on a touring network she developed from her role as a music programmer at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery (conversation with the author). This had not continued as a regular feature of Oxford's programme, however.

¹¹ Belinfante and McKeon, *The Voice and the Lens*.

Paik's video works – as part of a symposium four weeks later. The timetable was tight and the budget small, but my musician and artist friends were game.

Our interest was piqued by the outrageous, subversive, sexual and ludicrous dimensions of his work, both teasing and barging open the door to a more permissive concept of artistic practice and simultaneously playing out in inverted form various Western fantasies of a South-East Asian male body. We weren't in a position to recreate Paik's works with any semblance of authenticity, nor did we feel that approach to be a viable proposition. But we *were* interested to take their example – especially his notorious collaborations with the cellist, artist, curatorial producer, and activist Charlotte Moorman – as a guide to explore the conditions available for making art and performance *now*, whilst staying short of the line that had Moorman arrested and tried for indecent exposure when performing her and Paik's *Opera Sextronique*. Our most outrageous proposal was to present a variation on his *Fluxus Champion Contest*, a pissing competition in which each participant whistles a national anthem for the duration of their urine stream – though the gallery quickly rejected this. Perhaps spooked, each further proposal was declined: the cutting of guitar strings was considered potentially dangerous; dragging a cello could damage the carpet; and a performance of Paik's *One for Violin Solo* was nixed for concern that splinters of the smashed instrument might injure the public.¹²

In Tate's exhibition itself, many of the artist's works were similarly neutered and defanged, with performance acts and participatory works reprised only through documentation or as the residue of object traces. Thus *Random Access*, lines of cassette tape fixed to the gallery wall, was presented for visual contemplation only, without the tape head originally provided for visitors to operate the sounds they contain. *Urmusik* (Primitive Music), an unlidged wooden crate with strings tensioned on its open end and a tin can resonator, was likewise shown sculpturally behind protective rope, unsounded and unplayable, a forlorn and crude remnant of livelier days. Despite Paik's influence on contemporary artists, the overall impression was of a mausoleum. The curators seemed content with domesticating Paik's

¹² In the end, the cellist and artist Anton Lukoszevics performed George Brecht's *Water Yam*. Holly Rogers gives an account of this in *Sounding the Gallery*.

early radical art by representing it only, treating it as a function of gallery conditions best expressed by Brian O’Doherty:

Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of “period” (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. Indeed the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion.¹³

First: Movement

To begin with, then, ‘music’ was courting the seemingly necessary lexical supplement of ‘curator’ whilst the discourse and practices of the gallery arts – in which the latter resided – rejected any such marriage. Rather than attempt to force this arrangement by arguing for a legitimate practice of music suited to curation, or a particular mode of curating appropriate to ‘music’, I have found it more productive to address the relationship symptomatically. Music has been *constitutively excluded* from the curator’s discourse, just as music has been concerned with the seemingly pragmatic tasks of ‘programming’, ‘production’ and ‘event management’ rather than the theoretically-informed mediation of the curator.¹⁴ The task of addressing how music and curation can be thought together and changed by that connection then becomes one of mobilising the relations between these two domains without treating them as opposites or determining one by the other.

This has several benefits. Firstly, it approaches the curator as an actor within and function of a *visual* paradigm, a mode of mediating and ‘making art public’ that cannot be translated simply in musical terms. Curation exemplifies the problem of mediation-as-representation. Secondly, it treats the discourse of curating not as a borrowed ‘essence’ for music, a substitute foundation, but as historically constructed and shifting. As the notion of curating has itself become weightless, lacking clear definition and applied to everyday activities from the production of news media to branding snacks and restaurants, practitioners in the gallery arts have begun to abandon the term. The loss of secure reference *for both music and curation*, thirdly, then requires a reconsideration of mediation as such. It inquires after

¹³ O’Doherty, *White Cube*, 15.

¹⁴ On the consequential lack of and need for a processual account of artistic value that accounts for the role of production, see Devereux “Discourse of Practice” and “Fruit or Vegetable”.

music and curation beyond the question of definition and spatial representation, opening towards issues of temporality and process.¹⁵ Lastly, this involves a displacement from music – conventionally understood as cultural forms of organised sound – to *musicality* (developed in chapter 6). This is articulated here as an effect of composing immanent relations between all elements of a situation: people, instruments, objects, conventions, sites, and so on.

I follow approaches treating the curator function in terms of performativity – usually invoking JL Austin and Judith Butler (chapter 7) – as in the writing of Maria Lind, Florian Malzacher, Joanna Warsza and others.¹⁶ For the ‘curatorial turn’ in performing arts, this involves ‘adapting “theatre-like” strategies and techniques to enable “reality-making” situations’.¹⁷ The medium – or rather, the discipline – affects the method: not ‘curating performing arts’, but performative curating.

This slippage from noun – curator – to verb – curate – has been strongly resisted by some, notably Alex Farquharson (currently Director of Tate Britain).¹⁸ A performative curating would be *constitutive*, he objected, enabling artworks to be recognised as such. As with the words in a speech act, their meaning (or significance) would not be guaranteed before the act of curation (or speech) but mobilised by it. Furthermore, Farquharson noted anxiously the critical dimension of performativity (after Butler), that it draws attention to the normative conventions of (exhibition) utterances – such as the proper context (nightclub or concert space, perhaps), the authority vested in the speaker, and her intention to signify – as functions of power addressed to viewers. Performative curating in this sense, as a reflexive practice, queers the voice, making its power structures *visible*. In the process of contesting the right to ‘curate’ or produce meaning, he worried, artworks and artists risked becoming subsumed by the exhibition’s syntax.

¹⁵ On the relation of music to the question of definition as a philosophical problem, see Bowie, “What is Music, Anyway?”.

¹⁶ Lind, *Performing the Curatorial*; and Malzacher and Warsza, *Performativity as Curatorial Strategy*. This also includes a feature interview with Catherine Wood, 42-54. The first texts using the discourse of curating for the performing arts include: *Frakcija* #55; and Husemann “Reality Check”. See also Clausen, “On Curating Performance Art”; Bishop “Performative Exhibitions”; and *ONCURATING* #15, *Performing the Exhibition*.

¹⁷ Davida et al, *Curating Live Arts*; and Sellar, “Curatorial Turn”.

¹⁸ Farquharson, “I Curate.”

A term with its own histories of use, performativity indeed conditions all attempts to mean, to interpret, to confer value, and to represent as contextual, contingent, vulnerable, subject to abuse, and so unstable. This affects both the statements of declared authorities, of those vested with legitimacy, *and* those critical voices seeking to make that and their own power visible. It is insufficient then to replace the power to enact with the opportunity to critique, for both – Farquharson and his perceived adversaries – concern claims to the right to speak. It is here that the introduction of ‘the curatorial’ not only as an adjective (as in ‘curatorial practice’) but as an adjectival noun emerges to acknowledge post-metaphysical (non-essentialist), post-critical (non-objectivist, non-universal), and post-representational (not seeking closure in verbal meaning) practices of mediation.

The curatorial in this sense (explored in chapter 4) is sensitive to another dimension of performativity – elaborated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick – that concerns the role of an utterance’s auditors. Listening (like reading) is not simply passive, a question of reconstituting the ‘intended’ meaning of the speaker (or writer, or exhibition-maker). Meaning, value, and affect become corollaries of the relations between all elements of an event *moving in time*. Rather than attempting to define ‘curating music’, then, I will approach the curatorial as a musicalisation of the curator function. When Tate Modern curator Catherine Wood describes the effect of performance (including music) in the gallery as akin to an anamorphic operation, something that moves at an oblique angle to its institutional practices, she hints at the uncanny disjunction that I aim to explore.¹⁹

The ‘public’ is not then an after-thought or secondary consideration in this relation of musicality and the curatorial. It is the site within which these take on material form. Taken as a plurality in Hannah Arendt’s sense, and so lacking a foundational definition, the public is approached as a key problematic of curating, as I show in chapters 2, 3, and 4.²⁰

Provisionally given as the third term of my title, this could equally have been rendered

¹⁹ Wood, “Artwork Enacted Through Time”, and “In Advance of the Broken Arm”.

²⁰ ‘Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.’ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 8. On the political quality of plurality and its distinction from ‘the social’, see 22-78.

serially as a syntactical sequence without prefixed order, without origin or destination: public making art; art public making; making public art; public art making; art making public. The multiple inflections of these articulations flow through each chapter.

Methodological Variations

Words rise and fall, like memories, into consciousness and the depths of discourse. Words have work to perform, stories to tell, things to do, people to see. To avoid replicating at the level of this text the problematics that I aim to address – of mediation, of representation – I cannot take words and their order for granted, as if transparent.

As I elaborate in chapters 2 and 4, the curator function as a visual operation has a dual framing function. It articulates the relation between *what* is to be seen and *how* its assembled parts can be understood within the field; and it marks the autonomous distinction between production and reception, objects and subjects, art and the social, as the field's *external* boundary. The argument that follows is then intentionally *not curated*. Its objects are not framed and delimited in order to be defined and organised by a determining theory or concept 'external' to their materialisation.

This necessitates a deviation from academic conventions through a multiplication and layering of methods rather than a departure. Instead of proceeding by establishing boundaries – adopting a framework, such as discourse analysis – as a heuristic to conceive, link, and interpret a given restricted set of materials – say, curators' texts on 'musical' exhibitions – I take a multimodal approach more typical of curatorial studies to probe the means by which different forms of knowledge are produced and interact.²¹ This includes text analysis, art history, musicology, music theory, philosophy (notably from Catherine Malabou and Jean-Luc Nancy), interviews, ethnography, and autoethnography. In treating the curatorial and musicality as a dynamic relation materialised through its public formation, I employ this hybrid combination of methods to keep in tension relationships

²¹ Wilson, "Curatorial Research".

between the particular and the universal, practice and theory, without privileging either term.²²

My approach is akin to what Reinhardt Kosselleck called *Begriffsgeschichte*, accounting for the introduction or recasting of concepts such as ‘the curator’, ‘institutional critique’, ‘alternative space’, ‘Performance Art’, ‘Sound Art’, ‘social aesthetics’, ‘antiocularcentrism’, ‘performative curating’, ‘New Institutionalism’, ‘the curatorial’ and ‘musicality’ alongside significant exhibitions and movements.²³ By default rather than by design, this leads to a focus on movements principally in New York and in Europe. Whilst I indicate the significant mutual influence between the Global North and Global South – and draw out the consequential and violent structuring of the distinction of ‘the West and the rest’ in chapter 9 – this geographic limitation registers the impossibility of any universalising drive in the narrative.

I do not claim to give the *origin* of these words and their uses. Where I do locate significant ‘first utterances’ this is not to found or establish their meaning but to contextualise them, to attempt to reconstruct them as speech acts with all their power effects and vulnerabilities, to listen in to the acts of their evocation. This will also involve drawing on theoretical accounts offered by protagonists in this process together with philosophical concepts and arguments contemporaneous with and influencing those positions. Terms are introduced here by historical agents seeking to understand changes in the art world, to delimit the field, and thereby to influence and ultimately to sanction and judge appropriate developments. I treat language as a material practice.

²² My approach resonates with others exploring the methodological implications of non-totalising accounts, of research aware of what is always excluded in the process of abstraction, of the impossibility of the disembodied ‘view from nowhere’, of the imbrication of the researcher in the research, and therefore of the need for non-hygienic, experimental, non-representational, performative and poetic approaches that resist ‘the desire and expectation for security’ (as John Law puts it) and that embrace the fluidity and mutability of experience. ‘How, then, might we imagine an academic way of writing that concerns itself with the quality of its own writing?’ Law, *After Method*, 12; Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*.

²³ Kosselleck, *Futures Past*. It also echoes Malabou’s practice of inhabiting the idiom of the philosophers whose concepts she engages (notably Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, Kant) as a means to recover key terms and their neglected potential.

Chapters 2 to 4 show the curator becoming visible as a discrete ‘figure’ against the ‘ground’ of museum display from the mid-1960s, and the professionalisation of the field from 1987 as a ‘reflexive’ discipline revealing its own operation. I pay particular attention to the articulation of multiple ‘crises’ within which the curator emerges and relate these to the tensions and inherent contradictions involved in attempts to address problems of visibility with visualist techniques. I examine the period between the curator’s coming to visibility and its functional establishment to recover aspects of what was occluded or remained a problem for the constitution of the field, especially artists’ independent practices addressing different publics directly, *uncurated*. These introduce potential and partial histories as resources for the elaboration of curatorial models that do not privilege vision and that open towards a more musical paradigm.

Chapter 5 acts as a pivot towards the problem that ‘music’ presented to curation, whilst Chapter 6 treats the condition of the curatorial from *within* the problem of music after ‘music’, and so provides a provisional conclusion. I first approach the invention of Sound Art, then, through similar methods of visualist critique, weaving together its exhibition histories, terminologies, and theoretical discourses to consider its relation to and distinction from music, with all its curatorial implications. I then introduce the notion of musicality as an alternative to critical visibility. By focusing on the later work of John Cage, I consider the future of ‘music’ *after* its opening to limitless possibility, after discarding the question of its essence – beyond even the sonic, the acoustic and aural – as a question of mediation reconsidered.

The last three chapters bring the research into the recent present, drawing on curatorial projects that in different ways draw musical practices and curatorial processes together. These are not case studies, at least in the conventional sense of models that ‘illustrate’ a theoretical position or that provide data upon which an explanatory framework is offered. As elaborated by Ragin and Becker, ‘cases’ are articulated by hierarchical distinctions of the universal and the particular, theory and practice.²⁴ In keeping with my aim to avoid

²⁴ Ragin and Becker, *What Is A Case?* I take Ragin’s distinction of ‘empirical units’ and ‘theoretical constructs’ as broadly equivalent to the particular and universal, whilst his categories of ‘specific’ and ‘general’ approaches correlates with practice and theory.

privileging either pole of these binaries, and as I argue that objective distance is a fallacy of representation, I have written ‘from within’ my experiences of the encounters these projects staged to avoid reproducing antinomies of subject and object, culture and nature, idea and material, value and fact. Simultaneously lending one ear to the encounter and another to its contingent histories and discourses, each chapter therefore features a descriptive account of a situation in the present tense, and sets up the occasion’s problematic, or better still, what it invites me to reflect upon as it relates musicality and the curatorial. I draw on relevant theories – and resonant words – that were either introduced by or chimed with the event.

My chapter on Performa, the ‘biennial of visual artists’ performance’, begins with the production of what was claimed as the first opera presented in Times Square. Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* was given both as itself and simultaneously as a found (or curated) object, a ‘Performance’ by the artist Robin Rhode. I take this doubled account as an opening to consider the relations between performance and experiences of time, including historicities of performance, performativity, Performance Art, and Performance Studies beginning with temporalities of ‘expectation’.

The *Kunsthalle for Music* stages directly the problematic of music, the curatorial, and the institution of art. Attending its initial exhibition, I was struck by the emphasis its composer Ari Benjamin Meyers gave to the task of ‘casting’ the ensemble that forms the core of the project, and its parallels with sculpture, theatre, and chance. His insistence that ‘music is not a medium’ seemed to demand a reckoning with Rosalind Krauss’s theorisation of the ‘post-medium condition’, and of the exhibition as a ‘post-medium medium’, whilst his adoption of the term *Kunsthalle* as an institutional guest necessitated a consideration of the relation of music to the gallery arts, and of the plurality of art forms to the concept ‘art’.

Lastly, documenta14 and its *Listening Space* brought the work of two composers – Jani Christou and Pauline Oliveros – into the heart of the curatorial enterprise of the world’s most celebrated programme of contemporary art. Its split-site form, balanced precariously between its ‘home’ in Kassel and its visiting status in Athens, seemed to match my unsteady experience of Oliveros’s *Extreme Slow Walk*. The curatorial decentering of the institution of

documenta in this way provided an unexpected return of many of the histories and themes explored throughout the thesis in tandem with a changing paradigm. I interweave within this 'self-critique' of art and of curatorial status a secret history of the movement and metamorphosis of thought.

Codetta

I have written this thesis mindful of the fundamental paradoxes it addresses and the problems of address (not least for the 'postal principle') that follow.²⁵ Understood as a mediating operation representing one thing for another, the curator function – like language – has no object. To work effectively, it is supposed to be unseen, transparent, and implies a fixed meaning anterior to its act. It remains difficult to approach directly, then, because it appears to change according to the moment and context of its articulation, and the particular 'material' being mediated. In adopting a *Begriffsgeschichte*, I aim both to give it a history and simultaneously to emphasise the temporality of mediation. By extension, whilst written over nearly seven years (2014-21), I consider this a work always in progress, even after its 'fixing' in print. I hope it provides readers – starting with myself – with food for thought and action that leaves it open to changing significance.

Secondly, then, I am aware of writing for readers with very different experiences, commitments, and expectations, including – I hope – unknown readers yet to come. For those familiar with curatorial theory and contemporary art history, the early chapters in particular may feel quite familiar, though I trust that they will discover unanticipated connections and ideas. Likewise, for anyone interested in Performance or Sound Art, chapters 7 and 5 respectively will no doubt cover *terra cognita*, though again you might find yourself treading cautiously on ground that seemed well trodden. My 'fellow' musicians and experimentalists might jump *in media res* with chapters 5 and 6, then work outwards ('forward' or 'backwards'); here, too, I hope you encounter things anew with listening eyes. Lastly, if you come to this as a cultural theorist, philosopher, or simply as a curious passerby, you might like to begin with the situated reflections and join me in meditating on each occasion and its potential. They are intended as worlds of their own, not self-enclosed and

²⁵ Derrida, *Post Card*.

hermetic but examples of moving through these waters without sure-footed ground.²⁶ In reading this, I invite you to recognise your own work both operating within the text and – performing it musically – pointing beyond it.

²⁶ John T. Hamilton's remarks on the Greek terms for 'way' resonate here. 'The *hodos* is a road marked out upon the ground, which provides an enduring line that leads from starting point to destination', the royal highway from A to B, 'a securable artery' that shaped the terrain and 'maintained civil identity'. It is from this root that we find the clear *method* (*met-hodos*) that allows a thinker to travel assuredly from past experience to present circumstance. *Poros*, by contrast, was the way of water, the ocean's way, the troubling route taken by Odysseus past the Sirens' call and in the dreadful passage between the *perils* of Scylla and Charybdis (an etymological link also present in *experience* and *performance*). Beset by chance, by accidents of fate, this route relies more on improvisation, on spontaneity and cunning to avoid logical *aporia* at the limit (*peras*) or boundary (*peirar*) of legitimate knowledge. Is it any wonder that Hyginus's account of Cura – the curator's founding myth – famously opens with her crossing a body of water? Hamilton, *Security*, 93-94.

Seeing Ways of Seeing

We never just look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.
John Berger¹

The curator function became visible and was seen to act when ways of seeing were themselves put on display from the 1960s. The purportedly universal perspective was exposed both as a logical fallacy and as an operation of power, a political economy of visibility, as when artists invited viewers to look past, through and around exhibited artworks to the sites, discourses and conventions that structured what was given to be seen – practices recognisable by 1975 as ‘Institutional Critique’.²

Andrea Fraser, for example, acted the fictional role of a docent, a gallery guide drawing equal attention to the toilets, cloakroom, and shop, as well as to the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989). Her spiel then wove together found texts – from local history and State policies on class hygiene, health and business development, to the institution’s self-representation in reports, brochures and speeches – to reveal the Museum’s systems of display and neutral positioning, as if elevated above political and social issues.³

Similarly, Hans Haacke illustrated art historical techniques of attribution and provenance, and their integration with the market, by framing a series of texts tracing the ownership and rising exchange value of a work (*Seurat’s “Les Poseuses” (Small Version) 1888-1975*) in its passage from the artist’s studio to its first collector and ultimately becoming an investment firm’s financial asset.

In a more direct revealing of the curator and institutional mediation, administrative and management operations usually kept ‘behind the scenes’ could themselves be exhibited, as Michael Asher did by having the wall separating office from exhibition space removed (Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, 1974) and as Rirkrit Tiravanija instructed for his first

¹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 9.

² Ramsden, “On Practice”.

³ Fraser, *Museum Highlights*.

major installation, *Untitled (Still)* (303 Gallery, New York, 1992). Preferring ‘not to play this game’, Werner Hofmann – then director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle – declined Allan Kaprow’s similar proposal.⁴

It is important to note, however, that the curator’s exposure was not only a result of political and social critiques of its ‘neutral’ framing of art. Such objections were not new.⁵ The significance of the 1960s was not only the critique from ‘outside’ – of what and who was represented – but the immanent deconstruction of systems of representation from ‘within’. In this, the museum was an exemplar in a much broader examination of visual knowledge.⁶ The erotics and mastery of the gaze; the transcendental sublimation involved in the gallery’s ‘objective’ distance (not too far or details are missed, not too close or the bigger picture is lost) and eye-level verticality of display; the historicity of the archive, the collection, and the relation of objects presented to those which remain out of view, hidden or obscured; the status of the visual sign and its relation to language in the production of knowledge (*savoir*); and the disciplining role of power (*pouvoir*) in ordering objects for an observed and observant public: all of these have been subject to extensive critique within what Martin Jay dubbed ‘antiocularcentrism’.⁷ As vision lost its innocence and objectivity, the curatorial function’s blind spots became implicated in the distortions by which exhibitionary techniques had privileged ‘pure’, ‘naturalised’ or ‘unmediated’ sight.

This chapter situates the curator function within these visual problematics. The curator emerges as a creature of a crisis in the public production of knowledge predicated on the privileging of sight. To show the curator’s ambiguous appearance, I begin by focusing on a four-year period in New York, bracketed by two exhibitions curated by Kynaston McShine. *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum (1966) established Minimalism as an artistic movement and marks perhaps the earliest acknowledgement of the curator as quasi-artist. By the time of the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) first large-scale exhibition of Conceptual Art, *Information* (1970), the curator’s changed status was firmly marked. Whilst

⁴ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 118; Wood, “Broken Arm”, 126.

⁵ Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, chapter 3.

⁶ Bal, “Visual essentialism”.

⁷ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.

this geographical emphasis follows the discursive locus of this transformation, it is not intended to *centre* the discourse as the privilege of North American and European actors. Indeed, McShine's background complicates any such narrative, as I will show.

This was not simply a moment when charismatic individuals took on the role, but a shift in visual regime. Indeed, it is *as a function* that the position became visible – differentiated from the curator's 'invisible' traditional role – and that required accounts of its specificity and genealogy as the field professionalised. By reviewing the discursive construct of the curator, and especially its historiography, I then argue that the function was shaped by this ambivalent movement between invisibility and visibility as both 'ground' *and* 'figure', and so remained fundamentally 'ocularcentric' however much it gazed reflexively at its own mirrored form.

A crucial component of this articulation, then, is the *continuity* that it performs between the traditional 'behind-the-scenes' role and the 'centre-stage' position that the curator now occupied. This displaced the function's origin into a more distant past and sidestepped a reckoning with the more radical implications of its novel status. Its ongoing crises – such as a disturbing if not hubristic contestation with artists over the production of meaning (between the framing and the work), and an alignment if not integration with art dealers, collectors, and the market – could then be treated as matters of practice, not of structure.⁸ Continuity was essential to maintain the unity of the curator's field and discipline (chapter 4). As this expanded beyond the traditional categories of painting and sculpture into what Rosalind Krauss famously called 'the post-medium condition', the curator function now presided over a singular and increasingly generic category of autonomous art within its visualist paradigm (chapters 8).

To account for this unity of the curator subject, I draw on models and critiques offered both by practitioners in the field – Krauss in particular – and contemporaneous theories developed by Foucault and Derrida. My aim is not to establish 'once and for all' a definition of the curator function, but rather to historicise and contextualise it in order to show its

⁸ Bishop, "What is a Curator?"; Alloway, "Dim-Out".

novelty and to outline its inherent contradictions, contradictions that played out in the years leading to its professionalisation (chapter 3) and that have continued to trouble it and to provoke the search for alternative paradigms.

Setting the Scene: From Medium to Idea

Political, social, and economic critiques of representation may have become more compelling, connected, and vocal through the 1960s, but to grasp the particularity of the curator function's emergence I will attend to the structural logic that thrust it into the limelight. Following the development of Minimalist and then Conceptual Art practices, the coming-to-visibility of the curator appears as a corollary of the field's immanent contradictions exposed by artists. Writing a few years after founding the first course in 'Critical and Curatorial Studies' at the Whitney Independent Study Programme (ISP) in 1987, Hal Foster gave an influential account of this pivotal transition.⁹ I begin, then, by tracing the trajectory of this argument as an introduction to the discussion of *Primary Structures* and *Information* that follows.

Clement Greenberg – the doyen of American modernist art critics – had claimed the essence of painting, towards which the medium aspired, was its abstraction and *flatness*. Yet the picture plane as a 'pure surface' was constituted by the thickness of the frame that contained it and concealed its material depth. In defending Barnett Newman's Colour Field paintings, Greenberg argued that the material frame was no longer necessary, that even without it these 'do not merge with surrounding space' but 'preserve...their integrity and separate unity'.¹⁰ The physical frame could be discarded; painting's surrounding historical frameworks could not.

For many younger artists in the mid-1960s, the project of refining the mediums of visual art had not only run its course; the necessary relationship between their artworks and these framing ideas *about* art was no longer self-evident. Without its material boundary, a painting's materiality, its third dimension and separation from the gallery wall, was exposed.

⁹ Foster, *Return of the Real*, chapter 2; and Foster, "Interdependent Study".

¹⁰ Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting".

By drawing attention to this edge, or illuminating it as Dan Flavin did, they highlighted the work's 'objecthood' distinct from the transcendental logic of the flat picture plane on which it was suspended. The viewer could gaze at its material form or 'see' its significance, but not both simultaneously.¹¹ This was precisely the implication of Donald Judd's essay 'Specific Objects' (1965), a term he used to distinguish works that were 'neither painting nor sculpture'. With this separation of medium and art discourse, he noted, 'linear history ... unravelled somewhat'. The canonic order of art – its valuation of 'quality' predicated on the unquestionable merit of past exemplars – gave way to the perception of 'interest'.¹² Its authority increasingly relied on the precarity of speech acts, unsecured by Judd's self-defence that 'if someone says his work is art, it's art.'

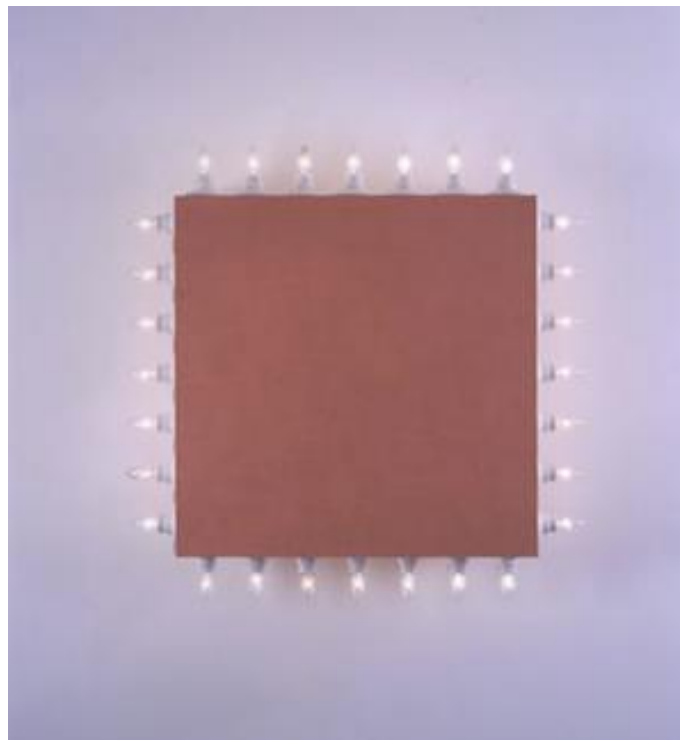


Fig. 2: Dan Flavin
icon v (1962)

Robert Morris followed a similar process with regard to sculpture. His first move, like Greenberg's, was to claim that a sculpture could retain its autonomous form through an

¹¹ This was the point Judd and Flavin disputed with Frank Stella in a February 1964 discussion linked to *Black, White and Gray*, regarded as the first Minimalist exhibition. Stella insisted his use of thick stretchers was incidental to his intention to "stress the surface of the canvas", such that "What you see, is what you see." Judd and Flavin argued they pointed to the works' impending objecthood. Meyer, *Minimalism*, 87-93.

¹² Judd, "Specific Objects". 'A work needs only to be interesting', he argued, though later insisted he meant only that the work should hold the interest of or captivate the viewer.

emphasis on 'shape', jumping off its plinth but remaining elevated by its discursive support.¹³ By fabricating objects much larger than the conventional 'human scale', the new sculpture then altered the condition of its reception. In contrast to the *idea* of sculpture, which was essentially timeless and fixed (even if shaped historically), viewers were obliged to move around the object, shifting perspective. Lacking the 'critical distance' that would enable them to perceive it in one glance, the experience was necessarily temporalised. It took longer to circumnavigate and observe the work than to comprehend its gestalt. In this 'expanded situation', he concluded, 'the concerns now are for more control of and/or cooperation of the entire situation.'¹⁴

Morris's use of recognisable geometric shapes emphasised a distinction between the formal idea and its material rendering. This echoed the underlying premiss of Richard Wollheim's 'Minimal Art' (1965), which designated the movement.¹⁵ Here, the British philosopher considered the *minimum* criteria for identifying a work of art as such. The essential element, he declared, was 'work, or manifest labor', which could itself be divided into production – even in its most 'drastically-reduced form' – and *a priori* 'decision-making', a distinction already implied by Greenberg when defending Newman's "zip" canvases.¹⁶ Mallarmé's "L'action restreinte" – his 'restricted action' of refusal, of deciding *not* to write, rendering his poem silent on the empty page – provided Wollheim's baseline.¹⁷ Indeed, this was one of the main objections raised satirically by the critic Michael Fried, along with the shift from aesthetic values predicated on 'quality' defined by the canon to the unsecured ground of 'interest': 'minimal works are readable as almost anything today – including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper'.¹⁸

Rather than resist this conceptual move, some more radical artists and critics embraced it. Writing a decade on from this tumultuous moment, Brian O'Doherty – *nom de plume* of the

¹³ Morris, *Continuous Project*, 1-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ Meyer, *Minimalism*, 142-50.

¹⁶ Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 86: "Newman's pictures look easy to copy, and maybe they really are. But they are far from easy to conceive, and their quality and meaning lie *almost entirely* in their conception" (emphasis added).

¹⁷ Meyer, *Minimalism*, 142-50. Cage's *4'33"* (1952) or *0'00"* (1962) could have provided more proximate cases.

¹⁸ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 148-172. For a later clarification, see Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws*, 2-10.

artist and activist administrator Patrick Ireland – emphasised just how it exposed ‘the ideology of the gallery space’, manifest in the emblematic ‘white cube’.¹⁹ This ‘unique chamber of esthetics’ was like a church, a courtroom, and an experimental laboratory rolled into one: a place of conviction, of judgement, and a space to advance knowledge. ‘In this context a standing ashtray becomes almost a sacred object, just as the firehose in a modern museum looks not like a firehose but an esthetic conundrum’, for ‘things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them.’ Tracing a history of art through the problem of their framing and how they were hung, he noted that as ‘the painting entered into a dialogue with the wall beyond it... the dealer and curator enter from the wings’.

Primary Structures

O’Doherty could have been describing the landmark large-scale group exhibition of Minimalist and other abstract sculpture, *Primary Structures*. His scathing observation that ‘a cliché of the age is to ejaculate over the space on entering a gallery’ echoed precisely the critic Barbara Rose’s exclamation that it was ‘one of the reasons it was so great to see [this large-scale work] in this space because, I mean, here is a space where this work could be accommodated.’²⁰

‘Entering from the wings’ was Kynaston McShine, the first person of colour to take a curating role at a major US art institution.²¹ As part of a milieu of younger artists and writers on art, he had begun conceiving the exhibition whilst working at the Museum of Modern Art alongside his then colleague, Lucy Lippard.²² For McShine, the separation between the

¹⁹ ‘In a peculiar reversal, the object introduced into the gallery “frames” the gallery and its laws.’ O’Doherty, *White Cube*, 15.

²⁰ Hoffmann, *Other Primary Structures*. The substantial new gallery spaces of the Albert A. List wing, completed only a few years earlier, featured high ceilings and vast white walls, making an impressive setting. The exhibition had been designed with them in mind, revealing them in a new way: ‘the galleries had “never looked like that before”’. Meyer, *Minimalism* 18.

²¹ Biographical information on McShine is spare, mainly available through obituaries (*New York Times*, *Artnet*) published after his death in 2018. Born in Trinidad to one of the Caribbean island’s leading families, he attended the prestigious Queen’s Royal College alongside the island’s white elite. He then studied philosophy – not art – at Dartmouth College, where a close friend was a son of the art collector and MoMA trustee, Celeste Bartos. After a year’s graduate work in English literature, he joined MoMA’s department of public information in 1959, going on to provide research and exhibition catalogue entries.

²² Whilst not credited in the exhibition catalogue, Lippard described her discussions with McShine in Obrist, *Brief History*, 201-202. On the background to the Jewish Museum and its openness to contemporary work, see Katz, *Exhibitionist*.

work's objecthood and the ideas it presented gave *Primary Structures* a split perspective. On the one hand, he emphasised the materiality of the encounter: 'The complex series of experiences generated by this work seem to defy reason and intuition. The interpretation of the visual phenomena remains unfixed and irreducible.' At the same time, whilst 'the meaning is elusive and relative' its seriousness was unquestionable. University educated, conscious of aesthetic theories of art, these artists made work that had 'become purposely more philosophical and conceptual in content'. Hilton Kramer, a leading conservative critic, wrote in his *New York Times* review: 'I cannot recall another exhibition of contemporary art that has, to the same extent, left me feeling so completely that I had not so much as encountered works of art as taken a course in them.' The artist's studio had become a study, as Lippard and John Chandler put it eighteen months later.²³



Fig.3: Kynaston McShine at the opening of *Primary Structures*

To see and to understand were no longer the same. Without the unspoken 'guarantees' offered by art history, new aesthetic models and theories were needed to complement the visual encounter. *Primary Structures* was not a curatorial thesis, but McShine nevertheless

²³ Lippard and Chandler, "Dematerialization".

aimed to indicate the sense of an international movement defining the contemporary moment – the latest style of the ‘new cool’ following on from the recent ‘hot’ trend of Pop – by gathering together both New York Minimalists and work from London’s ‘New Generation’ show (Whitechapel Gallery, 1965). It displayed the *Zeitgeist*, the look of a future-in-the-making inviting substantial media coverage and speculation – both for its interpretation and its market value.²⁴ This was not an established let alone a universal or ‘objective’ framework within which the exhibited works’ meaning could be comprehended and its value appraised, but was necessarily subjective, an intuition. The new art of the 1960s, then, began to affect the gallery’s mode of address and the curator’s work. The curator function was taking on an *active*, performative dimension. It became a verb: to curate.



Fig. 4: *Primary Structures*

²⁴ On Minimalism as a manifestation of the *Zeitgeist*, see Rose, “ABC Art”. Meyer, *Minimalism*, details the exhibition’s media coverage. MoMA had already pioneered commercial models of marketing, PR and networking strategies for modern art at its inception. Frank Crowninshield, publicist and director of *Vanity Fair*, had been appointed Secretary to the Board of Trustees. Lorente, *Museums of Contemporary Art*. The growing market interest in contemporary work was well captured by Allan Kaprow: “If artists were in hell in 1946, now [in 1964] they are in business.” Kaprow, *Blurring of Art and Life*, 47.

The show's potential interpretations were bounded by the specific works gathered together within its curatorial framing. For the sculptor Mark di Suvero, speaking at a panel discussion, it gave an uncanny echo of Judd's distinction between the Minimalist artist's conception of his work and its industrial fabrication. 'The whole show presents itself as a manufactured sense – a manufactured object.... But whether it's anonymous or not is, you know.... All work is anonymous that doesn't have any name.'²⁵ The exhibition presented its own gestalt, giving a sense of wholeness as a composition comprising other artists' work. The ambiguity between artists' and curators' practices is immediately apparent, a conflict that would define one of the main 'crises' of curating that followed.

Curating in Real Time

The Whitney Museum responded to the new art initially by bringing together art history majors and young artists through its Education Department. Run as a pilot in 1967, this became the ISP, providing 'an alternative to the educational establishment which had not yet accommodated itself to the times'.²⁶ As well as offering a means to explore critically the expanding field of art, it soon provided the impetus for the gallery to develop branches Downtown (from 1973) as a laboratory for artistic and curatorial experimentation, creating a bridge with the burgeoning alternative spaces movement (chapter 3). Crucially, it became a testing site for the intersection of theory and radical arts practices, moving from art history to an emphasis on museum studies in 1970, and dividing again in 1987 into the Curatorial and Critical Studies programme.²⁷

The temporalisation of viewers' encounters with artworks, emphasised by Morris, was also soon radicalised further. With the separation of artist's concept and its material fabrication came the potential for artists to have their work constructed on site by the curator and technical team, or even to apply their concept to the gallery space itself. For her 'numbers'

²⁵ The transcription was disturbed by a whistling sound on the recording, giving di Suvero's remark a significant lacuna. Jens Hoffmann felt licensed to document, partially restage and respond to McShine's show on just this basis with *Other Primary Structures* (Jewish Museum, 2014). This not only offered new insights 'into the works and art history, *but also the practice of the curator who first brought those particular pieces together.*' Emphasis added.

²⁶ Armstrong, "Foreword".

²⁷ Comer, "Art Must Hang".

exhibitions – named after the population of their host cities (557,087 in Seattle (1969), and 995,000 in Vancouver (1970)) – Lippard took instructions from many of the artists and made the work herself. In his *Artforum* review, Peter Plagens complained: ‘There is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists, a foreseeable extension of the current practice of a museum’s hiring a critic to “do” a show and the critic then asking the artists to “do” pieces for the show.’²⁸

Jennifer Licht’s *Spaces* (1969) also involved herself and the MoMA team working directly on the galleries to create an early model for installation art.²⁹ Riding the populist wave of the moon landings and the burgeoning environmental movement, these projects belonged ‘within a larger context of modern thought’ of space as ‘sensorial, social, ecological, extraterrestrial’.³⁰ Emphasis was placed on the viewer’s activation of the space, her timely presence and perception as constitutive of the work. In Michael Asher’s case there wasn’t anything to see as such – in fact, it was unlit. He had the ceiling lowered, the walls acoustically dampened and placed on rubber wedges to restrict the transfer of sounds from neighbouring areas, and a sine-tone generator concealed. As a form of institutional critical practice, he revealed the effects of an institution predicated on visibility by re-articulating the gallery’s ‘understanding of space as static, tactile, and formally structured’ through listening.³¹

At the Whitney, Marcia Tucker’s and Jim Monte’s *Anti-Illusion* (1969) similarly involved the fabrication of works on site. These included Morris’s use of soft materials that were shaped over time by the effects of gravity (chapter 9), displaying the processes through which works were made, as well as the composer-musicians Steve Reich and Philip Glass. ‘During its organization, we discovered that the normal curatorial procedures of seeing and then selecting or rejecting works to be included could not be followed.’³² Unable to review much

²⁸ Lippard, *Six Years*, 110-15.

²⁹ Peter Osborne locates the emergence of installation art from the 1980s as a combination of Minimalism’s phenomenology of space and the conceptual turn. *Conceptual Art*, 46.

³⁰ Licht, *Spaces*.

³¹ Kelly, *Gallery Sound*, 37-42.

³² Tucker and Monte, *Anti-Illusion*, 5.

of the work in advance, Tucker and Monte approached the show as an experimental form in which artistic creation and exhibition production often coincided:

There were two ways to curate exhibitions. One was didactic, the other investigative. The first was the gold standard: art historians organized exhibitions to share their expertise with the public, to show them what was worth looking at and how to look at it. The investigative model was rarely used because it meant organizing a show in order to learn something, moving full tilt ahead without really knowing what the result might be. It's what artists, if they are not hacks, do all the time: they work without knowledge of the outcome. Why not take a cue from them?³³

The further turn to Conceptual Art came with yet more radical implications. The museum and its exhibition form could be bypassed altogether. What mattered was simply the essence of the artist's concept and its public recognition as art. The *Xerox Book* (1968), a 'group show' organised by Seth Siegelaub, gave each of seven artists 25 pages, each page a simulacrum for a white gallery wall.³⁴ The catalogue could, in effect, replace the display of work, especially when artists made work that had no object but existed only as text, that was unseeable – existing as vapour or (ultrasonic) sound – or that was ephemeral, a gesture, or performative. For *5-31 January 1969*, featuring Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Wiener, Siegelaub's solution to the radically dematerialized and conceptual work was to present the artists' instructions, statements and provocations as documentation.³⁵ When there is no longer anything to show, the task became '*to make someone else aware that an artist had done anything at all.*'³⁶ The way these works became public could then itself be recognized as a personal 'style'. Jack Burnham regarded this as an open secret:

For over a year Siegelaub has been "gallery director" for the best of the conceptualists. His publications of calendars and catalogs are already collector's [*sic*] items. ... Siegelaub is obviously one of the best artists in his gallery, and in a sense his artists know it. They are subcontracting to his prime contract as data organizer.³⁷

³³ Tucker, *Short Life of Trouble*, 83.

³⁴ Siegelaub and Wendler, *Xerox Book*.

³⁵ Siegelaub, *5-31 January 1969*.

³⁶ Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 199.

³⁷ Burnham, "Real-Time Systems", 54.

There are many other examples, but the point I wish to emphasise is that the visibility of the curator function as a discrete role was not only due to the arrival of charismatic individuals such as Harald Szeemann, who as curator of documenta 5 (1972) is often credited as a preeminent example. It was a corollary of the separation of artworks and the ideas that constituted them as art, discursive structures that made visible the difference between which objects were art and which were not – a crucial point consequentially elaborated by Kosuth in 'Art after Philosophy' (1969).³⁸

Information

The separation of the artistic idea from material production, and in particular the treatment of the latter by the former, featured spectacularly in MoMA's next big exhibition of contemporary work, opening on 2 July 1970. *Information*, now regarded as the Museum's first foray into 'Conceptual art and related tendencies' and 'the first major museum show of so-called conceptual art in the United States', would also be its last major presentation of this work for many years.³⁹ In practice, it was another international group survey intended to indicate the direction the winds were blowing in a turbulent if not revolutionary artistic environment.⁴⁰ It also marked McShine's return after a brief spell as Acting Director at the Jewish Museum, and as with *Primary Structures* he intended the selection to be diverse yet representative both of significant trends within the gallery arts and of their connections with emerging ideas and practices in philosophy, politics, society, and culture.

In the four years since *Primary Structures*, the gallery system and the curatorial function had lost their innocence as the power of media – and of mechanisms of mediation – in determining what was seen, where and how it was seen and understood had become the subjects of intense scrutiny and a focus for artists and activists. *Information* would reveal MoMA as an instrument of power armed with techniques of display, requiring McShine to acknowledge both the non-neutrality of his position and his *active* curatorial role.

³⁸ Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy".

³⁹ Allan, "Understanding *Information*"; and Haacke, "Lessons Learned".

⁴⁰ Whilst Marshall McLuhan's influence dominated, the sprawling framework for the show also included: Buckminster Fuller; the I Ching; the Beatles; Lévi-Strauss; Cage; Marcuse; and Wittgenstein.

Latin American artists had in many respects led the way, responding in part to violent conditions of military rule; ‘neutrality’ was not an option.⁴¹ Aligned with the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements, many US artists were similarly turning their attention to analysing the museum, MoMA in particular. For example, the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC) – which included Lippard, and whose meetings Licht also attended – was founded in April 1969 after the unwillingness of its Director, Bates Lowry, to host a public forum on ‘The Museum’s Relationship to Artists and Society’. Siegelau, who regarded himself as a former dealer promoting art that ‘functions purely as information’, saw MoMA not only as a space for art but specifically as a place in which modern art was mythologised, exposed in the media, and therefore a prime target.⁴² Having announced their arrival by replacing Malevich’s *White on White* with their manifesto at MoMA in October, the Guerrilla Arts Action Group performed *Blood Bath* in the lobby on 18 November 1969. Disguised as members of the public, the artists staged an improvised ruckus, spilling two gallons of beef blood secreted under their clothes and releasing copies of a statement demanding ‘the immediate resignation of all the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees’, marking their financial interests in companies profiting from the war.⁴³ Nixon expanded the conflict – the ‘first televised war’ – into Cambodia on 29 April 1970; five days later, the Ohio National Guard killed four students at Kent State University; Art Strike then called for the closing of all New York’s museums and galleries on 22 May.⁴⁴

Supported by MoMA’s new Director, John Hightower, McShine did not avoid these controversies but rather invited several members of the AWC to participate, alongside a number of Argentinean and Brazilian artists.⁴⁵ Having turned from making systems-based art drawing on environmental conditions towards ‘real-time social systems’, Haacke

⁴¹ Lippard returned to New York in 1968 ‘more radical’ after meeting the Rosario Group and others in Argentina. Obrist, *Brief History*, 213-6.

⁴² Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art*, 47.

⁴³ Toche, *Guerrilla Art Action Group*.

⁴⁴ The AWC’s focus on Vietnam followed in the footsteps of the Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam (1965), which included an open letter to the *New York Times* and in 1967 initiated the Angry Arts Week, involving more than 600 artists.

⁴⁵ Latin American artists included: Group Frontera; Cildo Campos Meirelles; Helio Oiticica; Carlos d’Alessio; and Alejandro Puente. McShine’s commitment to a more progressive politics was reflected in his support in founding the Studio Museum in Harlem (1968) as a resource for the community and an independent site to show the work of Black artists, though it was also critiqued for its ‘white establishment orientation’ – Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 22.

presented his *MoMA Poll*, asking visitors to record whether they would vote for Nelson Rockefeller in his re-election campaign as Governor of New York that November after his unwillingness to denounce Nixon's Indochina policy. The artist kept its content secret until the evening before the exhibition opened; McShine and Hightower did not flinch, despite pressure from MoMA's Chair, Nelson's brother David Rockefeller. Within two years, Hightower was fired.⁴⁶

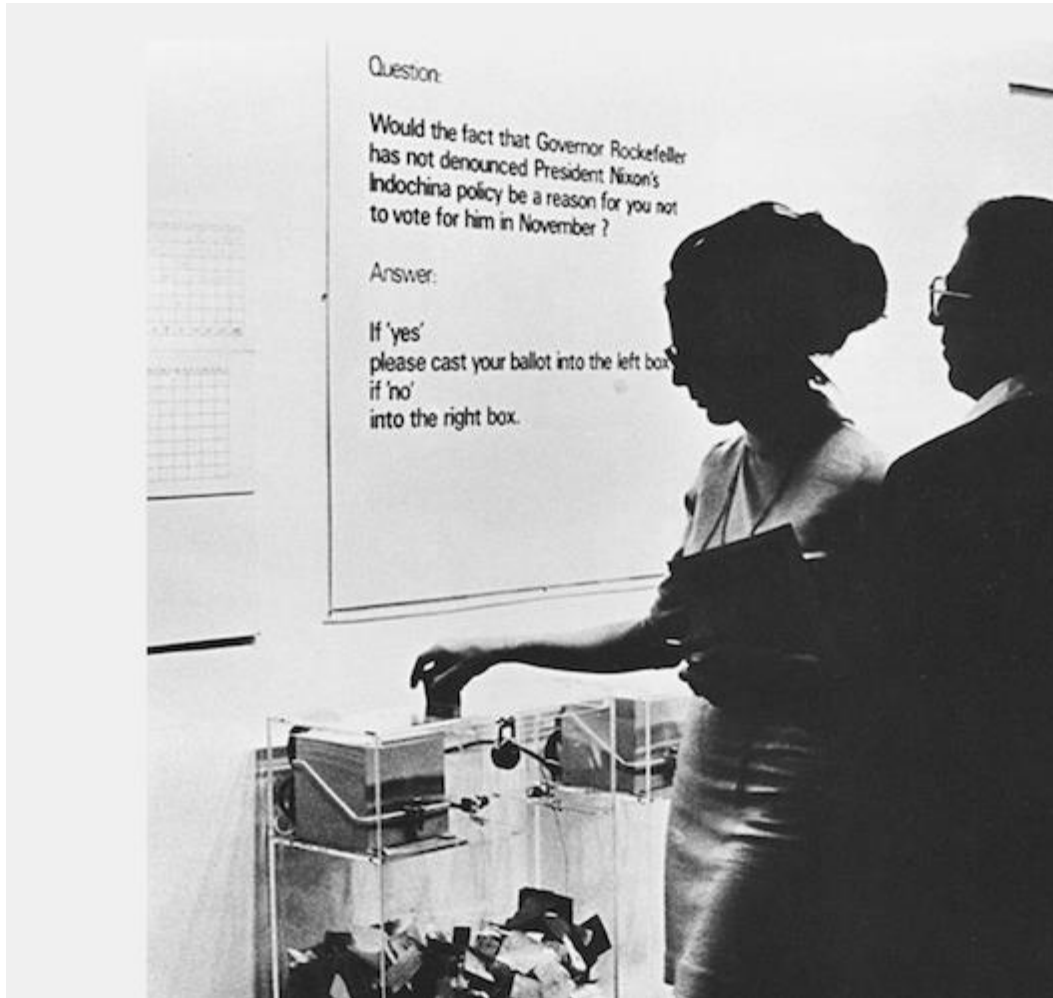


Fig.5: Hans Haacke, MoMA Poll

McShine gave particular credit to Lippard for providing information on many of the featured artists; indeed, her index cards of recent work ultimately became *Six Years: Dematerialization of the Art Object*, later described as 'a toolbox for generations of

⁴⁶ Haacke, *Working Conditions*, 225-7.

curators'.⁴⁷ More than this, he included her contribution in the exhibition catalogue alongside the artists, a wry nod perhaps to Plagens's review of her 'numbers' shows. Indeed, the catalogue doubled as a quasi-exhibition itself, following the example of Siegelau's *Xerox Book*: each artist – listed alphabetically – was given catalogue space to use as they wished, on cheap paper stock and using a typewriter font (following the Conceptual Art practice of removing any trace of the artist's 'hand'). McShine's own short text followed the artists' contributions, noting the 'unpredictable implications for the established systems' of the revolutionary shifts in art, in particular for collectors and art institutions. He concluded:

I have purposely made this text very short and general. INFORMATION will allow for a more careful and thorough analysis of all the aesthetic and social implications of the work. My essay is really in the galleries and in the whole of this volume.⁴⁸

The reader was then given two blank pages to 'provide your own text or images', supplemented by Warhol's quip that 'in the future everybody in the world will be world famous for fifteen minutes.'

McShine followed with 47 pages of photographs and reproductions, ranging from scenes of protest, images of the counterculture, news headlines from the war, computer data, iconic pictures of the moon landing and the Great Wall of China, and artists' documentation (such as Klein's *La Vide*, Pop collages, and two shots of Duchamp playing chess, with Cage and a female nude respectively).⁴⁹ Most controversially, he included *And Babies?*, a poster produced by the AWC with MoMA staff members showing piled corpses of Vietnamese civilians at Mỹ Lai, despite the Museum Board's disapproval.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Obrist, *Brief History*, 216. Lippard created a kind of instruction score for MoMA's librarians using chance procedures (citing Cage) to reveal, parody, and abstract the Museum's own classificatory and taxonomic systems of recording and documenting artists' information.

⁴⁸ McShine, *Information*, 141.

⁴⁹ The example for this was probably Steve Lawrence and Andrew Ullrick's *Newspaper*, featuring 'photographs of often seemingly unrelated images presented without comment' – Allan, 'Understanding *Information*', 146.

⁵⁰ The poster was the initial product of the Artists Poster Committee (a subgroup of the AWC), after an initial agreement by Arthur Drexler, MoMA's acting director, to collaborate on a poster against the Vietnam war. Drexler reneged after opposition from Bill Paley, the Museum's chairman (and founder and head of CBS) The APC responded by producing 50,000 copies and pasting them across the city. Ault, *Alternative Art*, 24-25.

Whilst some reviews of the exhibition were positive, most critics were brutal.⁵¹ Reflecting on the 'fall-out' nearly a year later, the artist Les Levine gave a more subtle and prophetic critique of its significance in the becoming-information of art: instead of existing to make art (as information) visible, artists' work had become data to make visible the system's function itself.⁵² The presentation of such a diverse body of work by over 150 artists meant that no individual artist stood out; works – like the ideas they embodied – became interchangeable.

Every movement previous, such as Pop, Colour Painting, always had its figures.... In 'Information', it was clear that the only outstanding figure was the curator. The curator in this situation becomes the artist. We have a 'Woodstock' situation at the Museum of Modern Art. All of these people are brought together to make this show under the authorship of the curator. The curator presents the media with a package.⁵³

As a consequence, the critical force of much of the work directed at MoMA was transformed into more data for the system, which would expand indefinitely, 'caus[ing] real-estate problems...economic problems, and...political problems. They'll have to bring in under-privileged groups, presenting the museum as a community cultural laboratory rather than a place setting aesthetic standards.' The Museum's power of making art myths was, Levine added pessimistically, stronger than any attempts to de-mythologise its workings. 'It becomes more powerful than it ever was before. It gets rid of the idea that there are ever going to be any further personal breakthroughs in art.'

At MoMA, the institution found other ways to address the apparent contradictions it found itself in – aside from defenestrating Hightower. Its *Projects* series (from spring 1971) – led by McShine, Licht and others – acted as an adjunct platform away from the main galleries for invited solo artist interventions in video art and other new media. A risk adjustment,

⁵¹ The strongest reaction came from John Giorno's *Dial-a-Poem*, pre-recorded texts available by phone both in the gallery and by calling in, including various revolutionary tracts from Che Guevara to Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver.

⁵² This reprised an argument developed in the manifesto of the Argentinean artist Eduardo Costa, artist-sociologist Roberto Jacoby, and philosopher Raúl Escari – 'A Media Art' (1966) – which aimed to reveal media distortion by intervening directly in the manipulation of information. The ability of news media not only to reflect but to determine 'reality' as an instrument of power could be demonstrated by publicising a fictitious event in order to document its production as a reality effect by the public system of information distribution. 'In this way it will be made clear that works of art are, in reality, pretexts to start up the apparatus of media.' Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 2-4.

⁵³ Les Levine, "information fall-out", 265.

inoculating its collections and temporary exhibitions, new developments could thus be tolerated, explored, and so 'properly understood in the context of the art history that informs their work either by influence or opposition.'⁵⁴

Historical movement could also be suspended. When MoMA revealed its expanded premises in 1984, McShine curated its opening exhibition, *An international survey of recent painting and sculpture*. The museum's privileged mediums were back, as its critics emphasized. Its white male artist heroes were too, catalysing the forming of the Guerrilla Girls, the anonymous feminist artist activist group.⁵⁵ The curator was unapologetic: this exhibition 'is meant to provide a framework, an eye, a lens for the scrutiny of current artistic ambitions. Those who see this exhibition will, one trusts, understand that art is about looking and not about reading or listening.'⁵⁶

Critical practices could also be historically incorporated, as Levine foresaw. Reflecting on *Information* from the safe distance of three decades, McShine distinguished the social, cultural, political, and technological upheavals from artists' primary concerns with art and the visual. Even when critiquing the institution, implicitly or explicitly, artists remained umbilically attached to the museum form. Aggression had turned into ambivalence. For *The Museum as Muse* (MoMA, 1999), he presented a conventional exhibition – organised by type to articulate a narrative – of artists' work representing, reflecting on, mimicking, or otherwise making visible the museum's operation, including that of curator. The catalogue also contributed to the burgeoning fields of curatorial studies and exhibition histories, with an anthology of artists' writing on museums alongside an extensive bibliography. Several of the artists featured had participated in *Information* or *Spaces*. Haacke, for example, was represented by *Seurat's "Les Poseuses"*; and Asher had MoMA print an inventory of all the paintings and sculptures it had deaccessioned, 'subtracted' from the collection, its secret history of works no longer considered of sufficient quality or interest. Nevertheless, the exhibition signalled a truce, and perhaps a victory of sorts for the institution as McShine's conclusion suggested:

⁵⁴ Storr, "History of Projects".

⁵⁵ Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*, 269-75.

⁵⁶ McShine, *International Survey*, 12.

It is a peculiar relationship of mutual interdependence, and one in which the curator ends up on a tightrope. Does he represent the artist to the institution or the institution to the artist? Is he an intermediary between the artist and the museum, or the museum's personification? Overall, the relationship between museum and artist is far less adversarial than it was a few decades ago; occasional disruptions aside, the status quo prevails. Museums are allowed to maintain their lofty functions, and artists are allowed to behave in the expected way, their transgressions against the museum being usually consistent with the romantic definition of the artist. Even so, this fascinating cohabitation and coexistence will probably always contain an element of wariness.⁵⁷

Yet perhaps the story does not end here, for the curator's presence – and McShine's in particular – was not only in his selection and commentary. The relationship between his visibility and invisibility was also made legible, as black on white. Whilst working on an earlier piece for *Projects*, Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler discovered that the gallery spaces were not uniformly neutral. Rather, 'the names of various shades of white used for exhibitions at MoMA included not just those of the manufactured paint...but also those of custom mixtures preferred by the curators who direct the house-painting staff (McShine White, Rubin White, Riva White)'. For *MoMA Whites*, their contribution to *The Museum as Muse*, they simply presented jars of these paints as specimens. If *Primary Structures* and *Information* had raised the question of curating as a *practice*, the curator's camouflage was now itself on display. Hiding was no longer an option.

Inside and Outside, Invisible and Visible, Ground and Figure: Signature and Voice

A profound irony of the critical project that rendered art as ideas within information systems was the phenomenal expansion of the sector it enabled. Media coverage of the new art ballooned. As Western states transitioned to service economies and air travel fuelled a boom in international tourism, new galleries (especially for modern and contemporary art), biennials, and public art projects flourished. The familiar roles of edifying public leisure time, regenerating and rebranding moribund cities and regions through competitive place-making, and endowing prestige and the glamour of 'progress' all served to inflate demand.⁵⁸ The value of work by living artists accommodated to the new 'credit

⁵⁷ McShine, *Museum as Muse*, 23.

⁵⁸ Schubert, *Curator's Egg*; and Lorente, *Museums*.

system' took off (Chapter 4), creating a 'futures market' for investor-collectors and for museums looking beyond the fixed supply, rarity, and stratospheric prices of Old Masters.

By the mid-1980s some curators were already gaining wider fame and demand for qualified professionals was growing. The conventional routes into the role, in particular the study of art history, no longer sufficed to account for the new art, let alone the latest work that continued to redefine and push the limits. The study programmes and professional courses that arrived and rapidly increased from 1987 met this growing interest. With new and expanded curricula, these in turn required and supported the emergence of a specialist literature, seeding a flowering of publications and journals on curating and providing many of the texts, documentation, archives, and platforms to investigate and establish the curator function.⁵⁹ Not only was the curator's specific expertise at issue; so were its distinguishing features. Professionalisation implied differentiation: from other forms of mediation (criticism, art history, art preserver, collector, arts administration, education and so on); from its institutional attachment, to account for the independent curator; from artists themselves; and from 'illegitimate' forms (whether in cuisine, experience design, or selecting music). It was also necessary to provide the function's history and genealogy. Ironically, this quasi-ontological operation – of defining what a curator *is* – risked reproducing precisely the visualist logic of identity and difference, and of a mythic or essential origin concealed 'behind' the surface of its contemporary form, that the neo-avant-garde artists of the 1960s had so robustly attacked.

Of particular interest, then, is the way that the curator was fashioned both as a descendent of *and* differentiated from its historical antecedents. In many respects it inherited this problematic from the new art's changing relation to history. It was no longer adequate simply to represent a modernist progress through time, adding rooms for each new period style. The curator was now bound by the reflexive awareness of the museum's mode of *producing* history, a history that was no longer singular and linear but multiple and fragmented.⁶⁰ I address this further in chapters 4, 7, and 9, but I focus here on the way the

⁵⁹ O'Neill, *Culture of Curating*.

⁶⁰ Lorente, *Museums*, 168; Crimp *Ruins*, especially "The Art of Exhibition" and "The Postmodern Museum".

historiography of the curator has been structured around its presence or absence from historical vision – its invisibility and visibility – as a prelude to theorising this paradigm.

The curator has been endowed with two histories of display, a dual parentage.⁶¹ The traditional model of the curator, hidden from public view, is broadly traced through the rise of the public museum in the later eighteenth century, with a pre-history following its etymology to earlier zoo keepers, church curates tending the souls of a parish, and ultimately to Roman procurators as officials responsible for public works.⁶² It became the curator's task to determine art as such, to make it knowable and endow it with historical narrative and purpose as a record of 'civilisation' setting the bar for a self-regulating citizenry 'to live up to'. Distinctions needed to be made visible, differences marked between: art and crafts; 'folk' arts or anthropological collections; industrial manufactures; originals and copies; innovations and derivatives; works of genius and works of mere mortals. Ancient, historical and modern works had to be understood in their period contexts if the story of art's march through history and its destiny was to be told.

Lacking the safe distance in time and space for a properly 'detached' historical perspective, living artists risked being brushed aside within such sweeping narratives. Ideal standards could be drawn from the dead or the unborn future, but the present remained ambiguously proximate. Old Masters and new were accommodated in separate quarters.⁶³ The role of art historical displays in providing virtuous models for practising and aspiring artists was disputed from the beginnings of the national museum. Likewise, the problem of evaluating recent works in relation to idealised standards was an ongoing challenge.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Green, *When Artists Curate*, 29-61.

⁶² Schubert, *Curator's Egg*; Paul, *First Modern Museums of Art*; Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*. It is precisely the *discontinuity* between the private collection and public museum that is marked by Crimp, *Ruins*, and McShine, *Muse*. Hyginus's fable of Cura, preceding the procurators by a century, acts as a mythical *Urtext* for both curator paradigms.

⁶³ The first recognised public exhibition space for living artists, at the Palais du Luxembourg from 1818, initially operated as a *musée purgatoire*, its works awaiting the sanctification of history, at which point they would transfer to the Louvre. Lorente, *Museums*.

⁶⁴ The challenge of incorporating contemporary work within the historical framework is exemplified by the *affaire Caillebotte* (1896), the French state's quandary in (partially) accepting on condition of display the bequest by the artist Gustave Caillebotte of 79 artworks, many of them by Impressionists at odds with the prevailing academic mores. *Ibid.*

Some artists began to take the showing of their work more actively into their own hands. Gustave Courbet provided an exemplary first instance. Rejected from the *Exposition Universelle*, his scandalous socialist politics and celebrations of female sexuality shielded from public view, he erected his *Pavillon du Réalisme* (1855) as a temporary exhibition structure nearby. In claiming artistic independence and appealing directly to the public, he provided a model for the Impressionists, who when consistently denied presentation by the Salon created their own *Société Anonyme Coopérative des Artistes Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs* to show their work. As artists took control of their exhibitions, ‘the gallery itself became understood as the frame for visual art, [and] artists began to innovate and invent display features within this expanded format.’⁶⁵ By this account, the exhibitionary works of Dada, Duchamp (notably his *Boîte-en-valise*, and the installations *1200 Sacks of Coal* and *Sixteen Miles of String*), and the Surrealists (especially the International Surrealist Exhibition, London 1936) figure as prominent precursors for experimental and playful practices of quasi-independent creative curators, innovating systems of display on the margins of and standing out from officially-authorized exhibition forms.⁶⁶

On the one hand, the curator’s institutional historiography cast the role as a scholar-archivist concerned for a museum collection’s care and preservation, and responsible for educating the public in the ways of art and how to look at it. On the other, it was a mirror reflection of artists’ work in authoring and making visible the space and context of its operation at the margins of institutional exhibition-making. The curator appears as both ‘figure’ and ‘ground’. Inside the museum, as the invisible hand of art history, the curator produces value by making differences visible; in full view, outside or quasi-independently of the institution, she reflexively displays the making of visible differences.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, 29.

⁶⁶ In addition to the growing number of monographs, biographies and autobiographies of curators from the 2000s, Obrist developed his canon in *Ways* and *Brief History*, echoing Bruce Altshuler’s *Salon to Biennial and Biennials and Beyond*, itself a model for his special edition of *Manifesta Journal #11*. Historic exhibitions have been re-presented (and collected), and shows about curators also staged such as *Harald Szeemann: Museum of Obsessions* (Getty Research Institute, 2018) and *Seth Siegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art* (Stedelijk, 2015–2016).

⁶⁷ Burnett “Invisible Curator”; O’Neill, *Culture of Curating*, 32-38.

Kate Fowle's synthesis of these positions is indicative, in particular tracing the shift from the patrician modernism of Alfred H. Barr, first director of MoMA (founded 1929), to her paradigmatic examples of Harald Szeemann and Walter Hopps.⁶⁸ Neither identified initially as curators, significantly, nor had they trained in art history.⁶⁹ Crucially, both gained their reputations in large part from historicising the avant-garde of Dada and Surrealism as precursors for the neo-avant-garde of Fluxus, Happenings, Conceptual Art, Pop, Post-Minimalism and Land Art, practices that pushed against the conventions of the gallery system. They also operated on the margins of institutional authority: Hopps's gonzo entrepreneurial experimentalism and Szeemann's 'structured chaos' enabled formerly transgressive work to be inscribed and regulated within the museum's art historical framework under the aegis of the curator's imprimatur, whilst expanding the boundaries to future aesthetic possibilities by innovating with exhibitionary forms and modes of public address.⁷⁰ In this model, the curator's in/visibility was mapped spatially as an operation that was both 'inside' and 'outside', a trusted risk-taker between the mainstream and more radical positions. Balanced precariously at the institution's edge, the freelance or guest curator could provide a prophylactic for its reputational risk with the new.⁷¹ In this way, 'Hopps, in retrospect, manages to come across as both consummate insider and quintessential outsider.'⁷²

⁶⁸ Fowle, "Who Cares?"; Kantor, *Alfred H Barr Jr.* See also Magali Arriola in *Manifesta Journal #8* (2009/10), 21: 'The curatorial profession's history can be said to have evolved from individual initiatives, or rather the initiatives of individuals who had left the art establishment and the institutional setting to create their own speculative curatorial agency.'

⁶⁹ Szeemann began as an actor, stage designer and painter, Hopps as a jazz promoter. Siegelau registered this shift in noting that he never used the term 'curator' because 'the dominant idea of the curator at the time [the 1960s] was basically someone who worked for a museum'. He only used it in retrospect when this definition had changed, in particular once the role was professionalised (O'Neill, *Culture of Curating*, 135-6 n.36). Lippard's *Six Years* likewise uses the phrase 'organized by' rather than 'curated'.

⁷⁰ Hopps installed his first major independent show, *Action* (1955), in the mothballed merry-go-round building on the Santa Monica Pier, complete with its mechanical music to which he added jazz tapes and a take on Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No.4*. Szeemann, meanwhile, courted scandal notably in *Happening and Fluxus* (Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970), with *Kuh*, his collaboration with Wolf Vostell to have a cow 'installed' in its readiness for calving, and his inclusion of Viennese Actionists' 'mimicking of sexual intercourse, urination and pulling apart a dead chicken...and investigation of orgies and rituals.' Hopps, *Dream Colony*; Green, "When Attitudes Become Form," 137-8; Holdar, "Doing Things Together."

⁷¹ Examples of this occupational hazard include: Marcia Tucker's firing from the Whitney (precipitating her founding of the New Museum); and Edward Fry's dismissal from the Guggenheim after supporting Haacke's *Shapolsky et al* exposing New York's slum landlords. Tucker, *short life*, 108-119; Haacke, *Working Conditions*, 56-61.

⁷² Obrist, *Brief History*, 10. Hopps straddled the worlds of radical art with liberal politics – as in his role with the Institute of Policy Studies, an anti-Vietnam war think tank, and his diplomatic function of organising the US contribution to the 1965 São Paulo Bienal (a year after the coup, and following briefing by the CIA).

Theorising the Curator Function

From painting to image, from image to text, from text to voice, a sort of imaginary pointer indicates, shows, fixes, locates, imposes a system of references, tries to stabilise a unique space. But why have we introduced the teacher's voice? Michel Foucault⁷³

This structure was not unremarked at the time of the curator's problematic emergence. In essays from the late 1960s and mid-1970s, Foucault and Derrida elaborated key aspects of this operation. To begin with, the separation of idea and artefact – as in Wollheim's definition of Minimalism – produced two divergent aesthetic positions. Where Frank Stella insisted that "what you see is what you see", LeWitt claimed that 'what the work of art looks like isn't too important'.⁷⁴ This difference trembles the gap between McShine's statements on *Primary Structures* – experiences of this work 'seem to defy reason and intuition' even whilst it had 'become purposely more philosophical and conceptual in content'. In both cases, it no longer spoke for itself.

Writing in January 1968, a few months after the death of René Magritte, Foucault addressed precisely this gap between the materiality of the visual sign (or mute object) and the conceptual structure of the (linguistic) idea in his essay, 'This Is Not A Pipe'. Here, he followed the implications of the artist's celebrated *La trahison des images* (1928-9) – often referred to by its legend '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' – and its lesser-known variation from *Aube à l'Antipode* (1966) in which the image of a pipe is suspended above the representation of an easel, standing on floorboards against a blank wall in classical perspective, supporting a framed sketch of the earlier work like 'a blackboard'. The 'lesson' of the 'pipe'-that-is-not-a-pipe was still being learned. Foucault explained its complex effect as an 'unravelling calligram', a text presented in the visual form of its signified. What the image signifies instantaneously, the text renders sequentially as reading, masking a temporal gap that enacts a 'double trap' whereby the image *contains* the text, or the text *determines* the image, always in hierarchy. The negation – this is *not* a pipe – decoupled text and image, laying bare the structure:

⁷³ Foucault, "This is not a Pipe."

⁷⁴ Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum* (Summer 1967), in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, 12-16.

Rigorous separation between linguistic signs and plastic elements: equivalence of resemblance and affirmation. These two principles constituted the tension in classical painting, because the second reintroduced discourse (affirmation exists only where there is speech) into an art form from which the linguistic element was rigorously excluded. Hence the fact that classical painting spoke – and spoke constantly – while constituting itself entirely outside language; hence the fact that it rested silently in a discursive space.⁷⁵

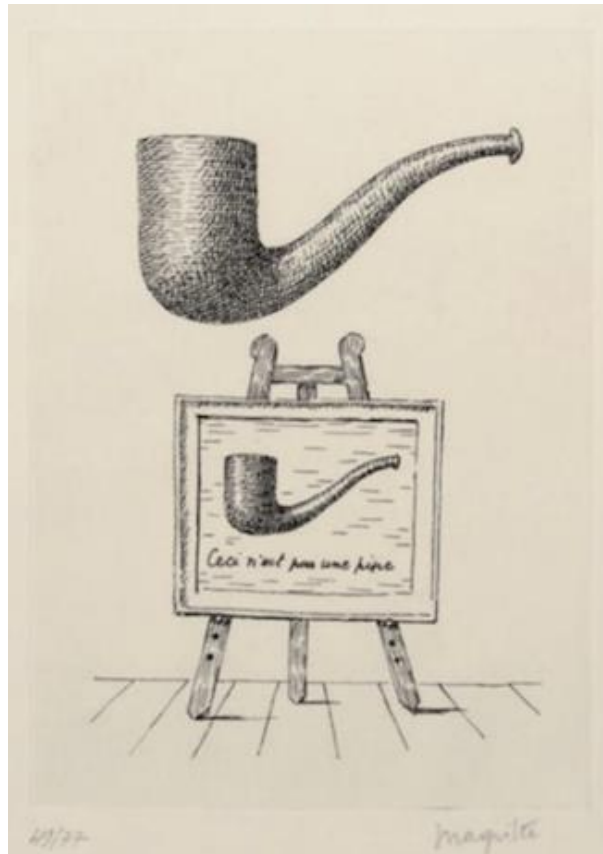


Fig.6 : René Magritte, *Les deux mystères* (from *Aube à l'Antipode*)

Isolated from its disembodied institutional setting, it is here that the curator's *voix* can be heard, a speech act between the negation of the material fact of a work by its concept ('this is not the artwork', Siegelau could have said, holding the *Xerox Book*), and the negation of interpretation by the dumb object ('the interpretation of the visual phenomena remains unfixed and irreducible', observed McShine). It is that *in* the 'discursive space' of the institutional frame that no longer speaks silently; exhibition-making, Szeemann claimed, was 'a linguistic act'.⁷⁶ This introduced a gap between the neutral, 'objective' tone of the

⁷⁵ Foucault, "Not A Pipe," 201-02.

⁷⁶ Jan Verwoert put this succinctly: 'To curate means to talk things into being, not just exhibitions or events but the very social relations out of which such manifestations emerge.' "Control I'm Here," 24.

museum and the necessarily subjective speech acts of the 'independent' curator requiring a different rhetorical position. As Tucker described in her passage from the Whitney to founding the New Museum in 1977, 'feminism also changed my writing style....I stopped writing with a disembodied voice of authority – I stopped saying "one must consider" and began to talk from a personal perspective.'⁷⁷

Where museum curation was seen (in the galleries) but not heard (its discourse is silent, or at least discretely out of view), the freelance curator from the late 1960s became more acousmatic, increasingly heard but not seen.⁷⁸ As Brian Kane has convincingly shown, the acousmatic refers not to the visibility of the speaker, but to the transparency or opacity of the transfer of knowledge.⁷⁹ The 'veil' of Pythagoras, 'behind' which he is supposed to have taught, acted metaphorically to distinguish a practice of demonstration – of making knowledge visible – and an embodied practice of discipline. For the latter, language itself was veiled rather than transparent to itself, with understanding conveyed through enigma, cypher, riddle, and ambiguity requiring curiosity and commitment from its adherents.

It is in this structural sense, I claim, that the accent in curatorial discourse shifted from one steeped in art history to one processing art theory. Certainly, the 'crisis' in art history became evident and increasingly emphatic from this point. Irving Lavin, for example, has described how theory was rather suspect for his older generation of art historians; only at the end of the 1950s, with calls for the discipline to become reflexive, was theory introduced, for 'in the absence of theory, art history had become myopic'.⁸⁰ Similarly, at a 2011 symposium, *The Crisis in Art History*, specialists reflected on four decades of 'crisis' in the discipline, concerned that 'the tail of contemporary art is now wagging the dog of art history'.⁸¹ Elizabeth Easton, Director of the Center for Curatorial Leadership, described the

⁷⁷ Tucker, *Short Life*, 88-89. See also Becker and Clifford, *Different Voices*; Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics"; and Kavanagh, *Museum Languages*.

⁷⁸ Bubaris, "Sound in museums".

⁷⁹ Kane, *Sound Unseen*, chapter 2.

⁸⁰ Lavin, "The Crisis of 'Art History'".

⁸¹ Rubin, "Defining the Crisis in Art History," 306. That the field was in trouble was signaled strongly by the early 1980s: the College Art Association's issue of *Art Journal* (1982) examined 'The Crisis in the Discipline', noting the significance of the 'expanded field' of art shifting decisively the 'definition of art inherited from the Renaissance'; whilst Hans Belting's *The End of the History of Art?* (1983) announced 'the collapse of the Vasarian metanarrative'.

changes in courses of study, such that ‘art history programs are exclusively academic, and curatorial studies are devoid of art history’.⁸²

The language of art theory itself is also significant. The dismal claim that the new art required obscure theoretical justification was an early trope of the conservative backlash. In *The Painted Word*, Tom Wolfe lampooned as a public fraud the system by which ideas provided cover for the self-flattery of an ‘elite’, whilst artists benefitted from sales and PR hoodwinked the populace to make a readymade success.⁸³ ‘Artspeak’ gained its own currency, its ironic inflection soon given a pejorative thrust and even its own signature as ‘Serotaspeak’ after the most high profile British curator of the time.⁸⁴

Yet for all the brouhaha over the new discourse’s opacity, the paradox remains that it coincided with a rapidly growing public interest in contemporary art. This pairing was neatly summarized by Tucker: ‘Ironically, at the moment of contemporary art’s greatest popularity, its criticism has become the subject of considerable abuse. Over and over again we hear....that art criticism has now receded into a deeper hermeticism, behind a *veil* of pompous jargon.’⁸⁵ It is more productive to ask why this language might have *contributed* to contemporary art’s appeal, without swallowing Wolfe’s contempt for popular opinion as being easily manipulated in a desire to remain fashionable.

As noted earlier, the new Continental philosophical movements in particular provided sustained critiques of the modern subject and of post-Enlightenment thought and its institutions as produced through techniques of ‘ocularcentrism’. They not only provided methods for analysing the public museum’s formation and its techniques of differentiation, of taxonomy and categorization, but also its function of producing governable self-rationalising subjects, a self-regulating yet socially-stratified citizenry – ‘observers’, in Jonathan Crary’s dual use of the term.⁸⁶ Rather than reproducing this structure, curatorial

⁸² See also Teresa Gleadowe’s analysis in Wade, *21st Century*.

⁸³ Wolfe, *Painted Word*, 50: ‘In short, the new order of things in the art world was: first you get the Word, and then you can see.’

⁸⁴ Atkins, *Artspeak*; Harris, *Necessity of Artspeak*; Harvey, “Serotaspeak”; Rule and Levine, “International Art English”.

⁸⁵ Tucker, “Foreword”, in Wallis, *Art After Modernism*, vii – emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

voices – with French accents – invited viewers to make the transition from observer to hermeneut.⁸⁷ Expertise was no longer contained exclusively in the authority of art's archive, but distributed across a horizon of competencies in which no single perspective was privileged. As knowledge of art history was no longer a prerequisite for judicious looking, artistic signs could instead be interpreted critically from an expansion of the field of visual culture more broadly, as popularized by Barthes' *Mythologies* and Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Indeed, theory itself no longer designated a philosophy of art which, as Derrida argued, by retaining its bounded categories of 'philosophy' and 'art' always produced circular (self-justifying) arguments in search of origins or ontological foundations. Rather, 'theory' indicated practices of creating thought and of thinking creatively.⁸⁸

Whilst the viewing public was now increasingly given co-responsibility for an exhibition's meaning, this was nevertheless supplementary to a continuation of the museum's art historical operation – as the examples of Hopps and Szeemann show. Indeed, this process of inscription can be understood – as di Suvero, Burnham, Levine and McShine himself indicated – as a form of curatorial 'authorship'. For whilst the voice remained embodied and so subjective, the curator's *signature* was, as Derrida has noted, detachable and therefore occupied a quasi-objective position between the curator and institution. Interpretation was flexible; the limits of what was to be interpreted were not.

In his essay 'What is an Author?' (1969), Foucault claimed that authors appear when texts require greater legitimation and regulation, when writers may transgress.⁸⁹ Unlike the proper name that is separable from a person's being – a symbolic 'entry into language' under the Name of the Father as Lacan put it – the author is bound to a singular body of work, circumscribing it from a textual field that was not limited. As such, it is *constructed*: a

⁸⁷ Tucker's exhibition *Bad Painting* (New Museum, 1978) is emblematic. Gathering work in which 'notions of beauty and classical good taste...were being thrown out the window...[and avoiding] conventions of high art... "Quality" simply didn't exist according to the old rules.... I wanted...to engage the public and encourage them to decide for themselves....' Tucker, *Short Life*, 128-129.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 17-36. In this context, we should recall the sub-genre of exhibitions curated by philosophers, notably: Lyotard (*Les Immatériaux*, 1985); Derrida (*Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, 1990-91); Kristeva (*Visions Capitales*, 1998); Latour (*Iconoclasm*, 2002, and *Making Things Public*, 2005); Simon Critchley (*Men With Balls: The Art of the World Cup*, 2010, apexart); as well as the work of theorist-curators like Krauss, Crimp, and Nicolas Bourriaud.

⁸⁹ Foucault, "What Is An Author?", *Aesthetics*, 221.

principle of selection pertains, separating out juvenilia, sketches, unfinished writings, correspondence, etcetera. It thus signifies texts of *constant* value, that are rationally *coherent*, stylistically *consistent*, and *contemporary* (historically determined). These could equally apply as qualities expected of the new exhibition-making.



Fig.7: Ben Langlands & Nikki Bell, *Curators' Signatures*, installation at CCA Kitakyushu, 2021

As a structure of containment, a signature device, the curator function follows the disturbing logic of the *parergon* that Derrida elaborated in *The Truth in Painting* (1976).⁹⁰ Teased out from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, this was like a *passepartout*, an apparent supplement to the *ergon*, the work, insisting precisely 'between that which is framed and that which is framing in the frame'. This boundary principle organizes, shapes, yet must remain apart both from that which it delimits 'like a figure on a ground', and from the milieu – 'the general text' or gallery space. For Kant, a frame enhanced the beauty of a painting only insofar as it endowed form; it should not draw attention to itself, especially through colour or gilding that might lure our gaze. The *parergon*, then, is that which cuts off the

⁹⁰ Derrida, *Truth*, 24; 37-82.

work, silences it, detaches it from its surroundings *by surrounding it* whilst simultaneously procuring our curiosity, bringing the work to speech through us.

Rosalind Krauss's writing on visibility provides a framework by which these two operations – the curator's voice and signature – can be thought together. Indeed, it is significant that, whilst once a follower of Greenberg, she became one of the most influential art theorists adopting post-structuralism.⁹¹ In *The Optical Unconscious* (1993) she developed a diagram of the visual field in terms resonant of the *parergon*.

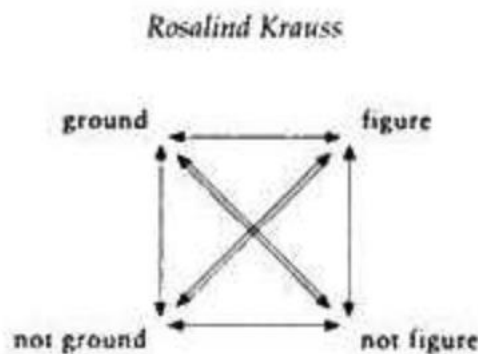


Fig.8: Krauss,
The Visual Field

Firstly, the distinction of figure and ground was the very basis for the production of difference itself, a specifically *visual* operation:

Figure versus ground, then. The fundamentals of perception. The opposition without which no vision at all: vision occurring precisely in the dimension of difference, of separation, of bounded objects emerging as apart from, in contrast to, the ambiance or ground within which they appear.⁹²

Secondly, modernism's visual logic was contained by these 'terms of visual perception' that it itself contained (like a *mise-en-abyme*). 'Thus *not-figure* versus *not-ground* as the statement of this containment.' This visibility was not that of empirical vision, but 'the structure of the visual field as such'. An identity with a centre, *x* marks the spot – of art, perhaps, with all its history. The structure could be *expanded*, but its form went unchanged.

⁹¹ Jay, "Returning the Gaze". Krauss, "Antivision".

⁹² Krauss, *Optical Unconscious*, 14.

In her essay 'Grids' (1979), she registered this form as 'walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech', a 'ghetto of autonomy'.⁹³ Its logic was infinitely elastic, 'extend[ing], in all directions, to infinity' and so always a fragment of a larger (virtual) whole. The frame could operate centripetally, turning inwards, concentrating on the 'surface of the work as something complete and internally organized...to make it the object of vision'. Or it could work centrifugally, infinitely mobile and extending spatially. The 'within-the-frame grids are generally more materialist in character...; while the beyond-the-frame examples often entail the dematerialization of the surface'.

Taking this schematically, the curator's signature can be understood as the mark of containment and mortality, that which holds its lifeless mute objects together as a unit, an exhibition. The curator's voice, by contrast, vivifies, opens this structure to the multiplication of perspectives, interpretations, and meanings. As Foucault put it, 'the author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning....as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely.'

⁹³ Krauss, "Grids", borrowing from Elderfield, "Grids".

In and Out and In Again and...Again

It is becoming evident that the material presence of frames or even gallery spaces are no longer necessary for placing signs in the art context....Software is about experiencing without the mental cues of art history. Instead it is saying: "sense your responses when you perceive in a new way or interact with something or someone in an unusual situation". Jack Burnham¹

Two decades of radical upheaval, expansion and consolidation separate the emergence of the curator function and its professionalisation as a discrete role from 1987. It was artists themselves, working independently and collectively outside the recognised institutions – often explicitly to avoid any separate curatorial agency – whose initiative drove this proliferation that presented substantial challenges for establishing the profession. Whilst accounting for the curator's distinct expertise and history, it was also then necessary to develop discursive strategies (Chapter 4) and techniques to reintegrate novel and disparate practices *within* its field, including absorbing its own critiques 'from *without*'.

Before examining these approaches to integrating the curator's field, I will first explore this history, again focusing on New York, marking the significance of what was downplayed, denied, or excluded from this process. This will enable the contradictions haunting curatorial theory through its first decades to be grasped. Without official oversight, unregulated, artists were free to experiment and develop hybrid practices that could not easily be subsumed to a visualist construction and genealogy of the field, a field now claimed as definitive for all art (Chapter 8).² The constitution of publics in relation to these practices did not always conform to an orderly separation of roles or respect its founding principles of aesthetic autonomy. More troubling still, for many artists the process of making their work public became an extension of their own practice, rendering ambiguous the curator's distinct domain.

Is There No Alternative?

By the late 1960s, the curator was not only visible but also risked obsolescence. If the artworld was a media or information system – as Burnham, Levine, Siegelau, and other conceptualists maintained – then its institutional infrastructures became inessential. Official

¹ Burnham, *Software*, 12.

² Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*.

sanction by the gallery system was no longer a prerequisite; the process of making public, of being understood as art, could be sufficient. Conceptual Art was not dependent on galleries to display and contain it, but only on the felicity of its speech acts.³ The rapid ‘expansion’ of the art field was then not only a corollary of the apparently unlimited materials and modes with which artists’ concepts could be manifest; it also followed the proliferation of sites in which its performative utterances and gestures might be publicly recognized. Artists could represent themselves without need of curator-advocates, and the communicative act itself could become their artwork.

This was not exactly unprecedented. New York had several models for artist-led initiatives, such as SculptureCenter and the Abstract Expressionists Club. It was, however, the Judson Memorial Church’s combination of political activism and artistic licence, taking shape in the 1950s, that most closely anticipated the movement for artists’ self-determination a decade later.⁴ Issues of representation and experimental forms of public expression went together. The Church’s leaders organized for the civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, and peace movements, whilst the Judson Gallery (opened 1959) showed the first Happenings of Allan Kaprow, as well as environments, proto-installations, actions and performances by artists including Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Yoko Ono, and Carolee Schneemann. The Judson Poets Theater (1961) and Dance Theater (1962) likewise paved the way for the experimental practices of Off-Off-Broadway and postmodern dance respectively.⁵

The availability of large deindustrialized spaces for cheap rent in SoHo, deregulated in 1964 for use as artist studios, provided a stimulus and model for the repurposing of other emptied, abandoned or underused buildings for exhibitions and performances (as with Alanna Heiss’s Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 1971). George Maciunas and Fluxus artists had been among the first residents from the late 1950s, resisting their scheduled demolition by city planners. Independent galleries followed, notably Paula Cooper’s in 1968

³ Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*; “Art without Space”, with Siegelau, Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, and Wiener, in Lippard, *Six Years*.

⁴ Rosati and Staniszewski, *Alternative Histories*.

⁵ One of the first directors of the Judson Gallery was the poet Jon Hendricks, who with Jean Toche and associated friends later formed the Guerrilla Arts Action Group. See Moore, *Art Gangs*, 32.

as a space for musicians, film-makers, dancers and poets as well as gallery artists.⁶ This was distinct from the uptown cluster around 57th street as well as the Castelli Warehouse and others on the Upper East Side. Yet its ambivalent hybridity – between the commercial model allied to the large museums, and artist-led initiatives – already highlighted the precarity of the ‘alternative space movement’ between a counter-institutional model and a gateway for the market. By the 1980s, SoHo had over 200 galleries.

Many of the first independent artist groups and spaces were formed by those unrepresented by the institutions, artists not already on the ‘inside’. For many, the museum was fundamentally flawed and conservative. Women, Black, Latino, and Asian artists mobilized to counter their systematic exclusion, whilst others campaigned against the institutions’ ties to state power and to corporate and private interests.⁷ They were soon joined by a second wave of artist-led initiatives creating platforms for ‘expanded’ and radical forms of practice also struggling for visibility within the established frameworks: notably artists’ publishing, poetry and word art (Gain Ground, Center for Book Arts, Printed Matter, Franklin Furnace), video (The Kitchen), music and performance (Idea Warehouse), sound and new media (Harvestworks).

In these conditions, artists experimented with hybrid economies, unconventional resources, and non-hierarchical or anarchic organizational models – often explicitly rejecting the curatorial politics of inclusion and exclusion. ‘Accompanying was the desire to “break out of the frame,” to extend the boundaries and definitions of what was considered art, and to inevitably alter the established structure of the art world itself.’⁸

⁶ Musicians included Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and La Monte Young. Kelly, “Space Matters”. Richard Feigen’s gallery on Greene St also opened in 1968, giving the first solo shows for Joseph Beuys in the US, and for John Baldessari in New York; and Ivan Karp, formerly Leo Castelli’s assistant who had helped to introduce Warhol to the gallery system, opened OK Harris on West Broadway. Kostelanetz, *Artists’ SoHo*, 33-34.

⁷ These included: Artists and Writers Protest against the War in Vietnam (1965); the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (1968-69); Studio Museum in Harlem (1968); El Museo del Barrio (1969); El Taller (1969); American Indian Community House (1969); AWC (1969); Guerrilla Arts Action Group (1969); Women Artists in Revolution (1969); Women’s Interart Center (1969-70); Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee (1970); Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (1970); and Basement Workshop (1971). Ault, *Alternative Art New York*, 17-76; and Rosati, *Alternative Histories*, 93-386.

⁸ Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 5

Away from the official culture of the big institutions, artists could take the very fabric of the buildings they occupied as material for their work – not only as phenomenological spaces (as with emerging forms of installation art like the Light & Space movement) but as material sites into which they could intervene directly. At the artist-led space at 112 Greene St (1971) – owned and opened by Jeffrey Lew – artists worked on the building itself, although they were expected to return it to its previous condition. For example, Gordon Matta-Clark planted a cherry tree in the basement floor and applied gold leaf to the capitals of supporting columns; for his part, George Trakas cut an eight-foot hole through its floor.⁹

The frame of the building was no longer an enclosure making hard distinctions between spaces, inside and outside, but was open for transformation, porous. The doors remained unlocked, blurring notions of public and private space. Participation was inclusive, with no selection process other than personal recommendation. Artists working in Minimalist, Postminimalist, Conceptual and other modes of practice laboured alongside musicians, dancers, poets, and performers, collaborating, socializing, and miscegenating ideas. ‘Distinctions between art forms naturally began to break down.’¹⁰ It was anarchic and anti-curatorial. As Lew describes it, ‘There wasn’t really a first show because everybody just arrived. They would say, “Jeffrey, could I have a show here?” My answer would be “No!” but then of course they would have their show. They would just walk in and do it. That’s what I liked about it – the fact that there was no administration. None.’

The rough-hewn and degraded spaces available to artists did not work well for highly polished artworks but invited pieces that could engage the often distressed infrastructure and unconcealed arteries of plumbing and wiring. Such freedom to exploit the specific character of sites themselves was more widely adopted within Postminimal and process art, its profanity in stark contrast to what was permissible within the transcendental white cubes of art’s temples. It was understood as such, too. The artist Patrick Ireland – aka Brian O’Doherty – created work at 112, and also featured among the 78 participating artists in

⁹ Beck, “Alternative: Space”; and Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*.

¹⁰ Robyn Brentano in Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 38. In addition to artists ranging from Laurie Anderson and Louise Bourgeois to Chris Burden, Trisha Brown, the Philip Glass Ensemble and Grand Union Dance, curator Marcia Tucker also performed there as a member of a radical theatre group.

Rooms (1976). This exhibition, with which Alanna Heiss opened PS1 as an ‘anti-museum’ for artists, was a highlight of the year for the New York art scene, and confirmation that Postminimalism had not only arrived but become the ‘new look’, a kind of grubby chic, the ‘Apotheosis of Crummy Space’ according to *Artforum*’s cover article.¹¹ ‘Ironically, the very spaces from which the movement emerged were being reframed as aesthetic environments’, a choice or – worse still – a *style*.¹² As an aesthetic ‘opposed’ to the gallery system, it remained defined *by* it.

This lesson was not lost on feminists. In contrast to the hands-dirty former factories and industrial sites marked as sites of masculine heavy labour, some spaces – like the A.I.R. gallery (1972), established by and for women artists – were remade as miniaturised white cubes.¹³ The irony of an all-female exhibition programme in a replica of the museum’s transcendental environment was intentional, both a critical doubling and a demand for women artists to be recognised as the equals of their established white male counterparts. Whilst opening the gallery system to more inclusive approaches, this strategy nevertheless risked leaving its framing structures – separating inside from outside, defending art’s apolitical autonomy – fundamentally intact and so reinforcing its power.

Just as the alternatives’ spatial aesthetics were gradually re-framed – through opposition or critical identity – in relation to those of the established galleries, their organizational forms were also becoming institutionalised. It was one thing to oppose the market, but artists still had to eat. As Director of the recently-formed NEA’s Visual Arts Program from 1969 to 1976, Ireland played a key role in channelling funds to independent artists’ initiatives with small grants from 1972 (enabled by a significant budgetary expansion under Nixon).¹⁴ A year later, shortly after the World Trade Center’s completion, David Rockefeller and the New York State Council on the Arts backed Flory Barnett’s Lower Manhattan Cultural Council with a

¹¹ Foote, “Apotheosis of Crummy Space”. Recognising the value of Heiss’s project of repurposing abandoned buildings, the City’s authorities approached her with an offer of more spaces, including PS1, a public school that had closed in 1963. Heiss in Rosati, *Alternative Histories*, 62-66.

¹² Beck, “Alternative: Space,” 259-60.

¹³ A.I.R. was both a homophone for (Jane) Eyre, and an acronym for Artist-in-Residence, a reference to the 1964 zoning amendment allowing artists two floors as studios in SoHo buildings. Nairne, “Institutionalization of Dissent”.

¹⁴ Wallis, “Public Funding”; and Rosati, *Alternative Histories*. O’Doherty was also editor of *Art in America*, and is credited with coining the term ‘alternative space’ – Moore, *Art Gangs*, 47.

brief to promote the financial district as a cultural destination. By 1974, Ireland was able to provide more significant and regular funding, beginning with Alanna Heiss's urban space projects and 112 Greene St.

With funding came responsibilities. Grant recipients had to incorporate as non-profits complete with governance structures and regularized procedures. The Drawing Center shared several board members with MoMA, including the chairman. Artists Space, which also had board members from the Whitney, was one of many spaces that began operating as an R&D function, searching out new talent for the museums, dealers, and collectors.

Managing the finances also required systems of accountability for selecting artists, along with grant-writers, managers, and other forms of bureaucracy to mediate with NEA officials and corporate partners. In many cases, artists took on this role. As Brian Wallis notes, although the first college course in arts management ran from 1963 (at the New School for Social Research, New York), these expanded significantly from the mid-1970s alongside the professionalization of the alternative space movement. The curator function was not only a creative practice of artists; in many cases it was also an administrative one.¹⁵

Whilst funding enabled many organisations to expand and artists to take on more ambitious projects, it also made them more vulnerable to instrumentalization. The language of economic development, regeneration, entrepreneurship, skills training, community cohesion, access, and audience development began gaining currency. Some artists complained that budgets increasingly went on management and institutional costs rather than fees. Others were suspicious that the transparent procedures they were obliged to follow were not matched by the NEA's seemingly opaque decision-making. Above all, the spontaneity, improvisation, and freedom to experiment that had energized much of the work of the movement's early years was diluted by the imperative to contain risk.¹⁶

¹⁵ This tends to be overlooked in writing on the 'artist-as-curator', though artists played key roles in managing and establishing the practices of public art museums from their emergence in the eighteenth century. Green, *When Artists Curate*, 29-34.

¹⁶ 'For the first time, many artists had to explain what they were going to do before they did it, then do it.' Wallis, "Public Funding," 174.

Reflecting on the transition at 112 Greene St, Lew lamented: ‘Something special happened during the first three years, and after we got the grants it didn’t happen any more.’¹⁷

Reliance on public funding also came with a political cost. Activist art was deprioritized or neutralized. For example, the journal *Red-Herring* – produced by ‘Provisional Art & Language’ (a splinter group from New York Art & Language) – lost its grant after its first issue strongly criticised the NEA. The escalation of the Culture Wars under the Reagan and Bush presidencies provoked several crises, especially with work that challenged conservative sexual norms, ‘disrespected’ the flag and national icons, or campaigned against state policies on AIDS. The threat of or actual withdrawal of grants resulted in the closure of many organisations and the decision of others to conform. Much of the ‘alternative’ scene became self-regulating, dependent, and depoliticized. ‘Social control supplanted censorship.’¹⁸

For many, this process of incorporation and absorption demonstrated that there was ‘no outside’ to the field. The alternative could quickly become ‘alternative’, codified as a style; or it could act as if already mainstreamed by duplicating – critically or otherwise – its spatial organization or operational structures. The possibilities appeared binary: a difference from the museum, *outside*, defined in opposition; or a difference *within* the frame marked through the repetition of its form.

The historiography of the movement largely presents this as a dialectical cycle of resistance and conformism, of escape and reincorporation, expanding the institutionalised field. An archival impulse marked the scene already by the late 1970s. Established to collect, present, and preserve artists’ books and other textual practices that had flourished in the turn to Conceptual Art, Franklin Furnace soon began to gather documentation from performances and other ephemeral events. Jacki Apple, an artist active in the scene and a curator of artist readings (including performances) at Franklin, began planning an exhibition already by 1979, becoming *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969-1975* (New Museum,

¹⁷ Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 34.

¹⁸ Wallis, “Public Funding,” 177; Rachleff, “Do It Yourself”; Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 7.

1981).¹⁹ For her, creating new alternatives was a lost project; the challenge was now to critique and disrupt the commercial control and proliferation of image-making that characterized the new service economy.

In the mid-nineties, after the disappearance of most of the pioneering spaces and the apparent co-option or reintegration of the remainder, a more comprehensive retrospective was organized by Julie Ault, a co-founder of Group Material. *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement* (The Drawing Center, 1996) provided a detailed chronology and expanded archive, and resulted in a further publication covering the period 1965-1985.²⁰ Asking “where have the alternatives gone”, she also registered the end of an era, citing Mario Ontiveros as an example of the next wave: “This generation has grown up fully cognizant that there is not and never has been an outside. For many, constructing a different model to ‘the system’ or ‘the center’ was a problematic idea both in theory and practice.”

The professionalisation of the curator function provided a key mechanism for this homeostatic operation, the art institutions’ attempt to withstand and rationalize the blows to their authority. As Andrea Fraser has argued, its detachment from artists’ practices reinstated a framing structure of autonomy separating once more the artwork and viewing publics, stripping these practices of any political dimension of ideology critique.²¹ The material production of the work and the symbolic articulation of its meaning were once more marked off and curatorially conjoined.

¹⁹ In her catalogue introduction, Marcia Tucker affirmed the importance of this movement to the genesis of the New Museum, to its ‘continued function and constant redefinition as an extension of and alternative to other existing contemporary arts institutions.’ Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 3. This exhibition was preceded by *SoHo: Downtown Manhattan* (1976), presented in West Berlin by Akademie der Kunst – Kostelanetz, *SoHo*, 266).

²⁰ Ault, *Alternative Art*. By this time, MoMA had acquired the archive collections of both Franklin Furnace and PAD/D (Political Art Documentation and Distribution); it would soon absorb PS1, rebranded MoMA PS1, with Heiss joined by the curator Klaus Biesenbach.

²¹ ‘[The construction of] clear boundaries of professional competence and expertise [was part of a] tendency toward greater differentiation of practice and functions, and greater and sharper divisions of labour...especially between artists and curators. So while we may still see curators appropriating artistic strategies and artists appropriating curatorial strategies, that cross-appropriation and collaboration is now occurring within roles that are much more confined and institutionally defined.’ Comer, “Art Must Hang,” 35. See also Vidokle, “Art without Artists”; and Hutchinson, “The New Curation”.

For its advocates, the curator reinstated an essential ‘critical distance’ unavailable to the artist;²² yet from its inception as a distinct discipline it was also following the lessons of ‘the alternatives’ by exposing its own tools as a form of immanent critique. Miwon Kwon – the Whitney ISP’s exhibitions coordinator mediating between the Museum and its Downtown offshoot (1989-91) – describes how she and her fellow students became embroiled in challenging the Museum’s history and entanglements from within its structure.²³ Indeed this ambiguous position, critically engaged as if from ‘outside’ whilst simultaneously operating as an ‘insider’, an elastic and mobile structure accommodating the inflated artistic possibilities in the ‘expanded field’, comprised a founding tension within curatorial practice and its ongoing sense of a ‘crisis of institutional deregulation’.²⁴

It is essential to note, however, that the process of institutional and curatorial absorption remained incomplete. The frame was not fixed in advance, but constantly being reproduced and maintained. Alternatives did not need to operate ‘outside’ a closed system, but differently within a performative model – a possibility developed by the curatorial team for *Alternative Histories* (Exit Art, 2010).²⁵ Documenting the work of 140 groups, spaces, and organisations over 50 years since 1960, it described a dynamic rather than a dialectical process, an ongoing countercultural project to insist on the possibility of producing otherwise through ‘extra-institutional’ – not ‘anti-institutional’ – models. Drawing on the examples of groups like Colab, Group Material, and others from the 1980s onwards that had self-consciously sought alternative models to the alternative space, this emphasized strategies operating without fixed locations or identities: using temporary projects, one-night exhibitions, or durational work; becoming itinerant, inhabiting ‘non-sites’, virtual platforms or ‘conceptual venues’; blurring material histories with faux-curatorial fabrications; and exploring the gap between activism and art through direct action campaigns, workshops, discussions, screenings, tactical media and other forms of public engagement.²⁶

²² Alloway, “Dim-Out”.

²³ Kwon, “Reflections on the ISP”.

²⁴ Drabble, “Stop making Sense,” 36-69; Draxler, “Crisis as Form”; and Bunzl, *Lost Avant-Garde*.

²⁵ The curators were Jeanette Ingberman, Papo Colo, Lauren Rosati, and Herb Tam.

²⁶ Rosati, *Alternative Histories*, 41-43. On Colab, Group Material and other activist groups, see Moore, *Art Gangs*. Significantly, many members of Colab had participated in the Whitney ISP in the early to mid-1970s.

Such strategies were also indicative of a shift in the discourse of curation from the mid-aughties, and in particular of the project to elaborate ‘the curatorial’. These methods of mediation deviate from the differential model that, as Irit Rogoff notes, only ‘reinforce[s] the divisions between hegemonic and alternative activities’.²⁷ The relation of curatorial work to the institution, she argues, need not replicate a logic of inclusion or exclusion, an unchanging paradigm of accrual in which nothing is lost but that can expand infinitely. It could be thought instead as an ‘epistemological crisis’ shaped not by ‘competing interests but absent knowledges.... it is a question of the loss or the sacrifice of a way of thinking, as opposed to the cumulative proliferation of modes of operating.’ Maria Lind likewise situates the curatorial (‘curating in the expanded field’) beyond the question of art, the gallery’s walled perspective, the exhibition format, and education towards cross-disciplinary and social practices.²⁸

I turn now to ‘absent knowledges’ of the hybrid, social, and explicitly *anti*-curatorial aspects of artists’ practices precisely as a means to ‘lose’ or ‘sacrifice’ the curator function’s visualist ‘way of thinking’, its constitutive separation and articulation of inside from outside. Group Material – often cited as a model for the curatorial – provides my focus, with their emphasis on affecting the production of art as a social field, on seeking strangeness, disruptive juxtaposition, and misrecognition rather than the proliferation of identities. This involves situating their work in the wake of Conceptualism’s ‘linguistic turn’ and alongside Colab and other activist art collectives operating in downtown New York.²⁹

The Social Turn

One reason for moving out of the galleries is not to continue fine art to new heights of adventurism, but to completely alter that which is being presented, in addition to operating with a new (expanded) notion of audience. Mark Kleinberg³⁰

²⁷ Martinon, *The Curatorial*, 44.

²⁸ Lind, *Performing the Curatorial*, 11.

²⁹ Doug Ashford, “Group Material”. Significantly, he introduces the curatorial as ‘a question that came from art and artistic problems – from the formal, symbolic, and vibrant rethinking of visual language.’

³⁰ Kleinberg, “Conversation Pieces”.

With the shift in art's conception in the 1960s and 1970s from the gallery's spatial field to a 'dematerialised' and discursive operation came the question of how this discourse was produced, structured, and delimited. Bypassing the institutions did not automatically enable artists to escape the curator function's representational logic. Any sense of 'liberation' from the exhibitionary complex risked recapture by acceding to a concept of art that remained external to and separate from its particular manifestations. Such discourses had their own guardians, in particular those critics and historians at least implicitly concerned with reproducing their disciplinary authority, their professional right to judge and frame artworks in relation to the canonic order of a genealogy and their contemporary significance.

For those artists working independently and aiming to change the system of representation that had contained them, three key challenges presented themselves. Firstly, a mode of discourse was needed that was distinguished from the broader textuality of the cultural field. Whilst artefacts might no longer be visibly different from other material objects, the mode of public articulation – the form of speech act – could be distinct and produce other effects. Secondly, they required forms of distribution to make their work public, means of becoming culturally material that were not limited to the exhibition form. Most importantly, finally, they needed audiences. To avoid falling back on the same people that patronised the institutional galleries, a self-selecting group that implicitly represented 'the public' as such, these artists explored different notions of public space, identity, and of community. By making the public site of encounter the focus of artistic production, often drawing on approaches that were not predominantly visual, they could cut into the heart of the curator's privilege, leaving open possibilities for alternative curatorial paradigms.

In 'Art after Philosophy' (1969), Joseph Kosuth considered precisely the problem of distinguishing the *idea* of Art from an art-as-idea. The logical implication of the conceptual turn, for him, lay not in subsuming the conceptual work to an aesthetic theory that was *external* and thus applied to the artwork in its conceptual form – as one among many potentially dissimilar practices.³¹ When 'the idea becomes a machine to make art', as LeWitt expressed it, the criteria, historical models, and discourses of art became as 'secondary' as

³¹ Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy."

the idea's material form (like the *Xerox Book*). Instead, the aesthetic had to be immanent to the artwork itself. Kosuth's formula of 'Art as Idea as Idea' claimed the necessity of just such an absolute '*in-ness*', a tautological form, a structuring principle conferring its essential autonomy. Art's discourse would not be one among equals – each usually designated by an 'of', as in the sociology, history, theory *of* art – but a distinct materially discursive *praxis*.³²

Peter Osborne has argued that Kosuth's position failed because its propositional form only became legible by virtue of its re-insertion within art institutional frameworks, contrasting this with Lawrence Weiner's acceptance and embrace of the typographical *look* of his texts.³³ Kosuth's formulation is indeed ambiguous: 'If we continue our analogy of the forms art takes as being art's language one can realize then that a work of art is a kind of proposition presented *within the context of art* as a comment on art' (emphasis added). Here, art appears both as a form of language, an analytic (self-sufficient) proposition; and simultaneously framed inside art's discourse, a critical gesture doubling the museum's own autonomous function. Yet this ambiguity obscures the radical implications of Kosuth's move, which becomes clearer when examining the deconstruction of the museum as a signifying system.

Minimalist artists ruptured the 'silent' discourse that the museum as a framing structure applied to its artefacts to make them *meaningful* objects. Their works were material objects providing phenomenological encounters *dislocated* from the ideas that formed them, ideas that were themselves thus exposed and voiced as performative utterances (the curator function's commentary). Pop Artists, on the other hand, dismantled the ground on which the museum's discursive authority rested. Its supplementary signification reframed their found signs (like Warhol's rendering of Campbell's soup tins or Billy Al Bengston's chevrons) in "quotation marks" as 'meaningful signs' without referents that simply pointed to themselves pointing. By implication, the critical position was compromised by an infinite

³² See also Derrida, "Lemmata", the first part of "Parergon", *Truth in Painting*.

³³ Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, 26-34, and "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy".

regress, always referring to *another* discourse. These reified signs could themselves then be quoted, further de- and re-contextualised, rapidly (re-)appropriated by the wider culture.³⁴

Kosuth's immanent analytic logic attempted to evade such a recursive process and remove the requirement for any mediating curator's discourse. The task was to make artworks that produced their own autonomy, more like an algorithm, without prior framing or re-framing as 'art'. Such structuring structures could act as unresolved questions or paradoxes creating a torsion inhibiting the smooth functioning of the systems of representation within which they circulated. This would extend even – perhaps especially – to Conceptual Art's institutionalization as a style or movement. Writing retrospectively, Art & Language argued that 'if conceptual art as we understood it had a future it was not as conceptual art.'³⁵

In practice, Art & Language – with which Kosuth was aligned – insisted that 'only by means of some form of internality combined with some capacity for detail could death by curatorship be effectively resisted.' This 'internality' informed the self-referential structure of the *Index 01* (presented at documenta 5, 1972), a filed system of propositions on art together with wall diagrams indicating their relations. This was not just another work in a series comprising an exhibition, but a quasi-exhibition in itself making immanent the formal logic of its own production via discussions among the group's members.³⁶ The 'capacity for detail' then entailed a means of gaining specific material form, becoming public, 'a social world in which and into which the work could be uttered.'

Having met whilst teaching theory at Coventry School of Art, the model of the study group provided Art & Language with just such a social world through which they could *practise* art by conversation. Assemblies, gatherings and study groups were equally prevalent within the downtown arts scene. Alongside New York Art & Language, gathering at Kosuth's loft, Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC) formed initially to challenge the Whitney's plan

³⁴ Art school students forming bands, especially in Britain, used Pop strategies to signal an ironic detachment from mainstream commercial products. Ealing Art College alumnus Pete Townshend's use of the Union Jack and RAF roundel for The Who – wryly referencing Jasper Johns's flags and targets – set an early example. Roberts, *How Art Made*.

³⁵ Goldie and Schellekens, *Philosophy & Conceptual Art*, 266.

³⁶ Gilbert, "Art & Language".

to feature the Rockefeller family's collection as *Three Centuries of American Art* for its 1976 Biennial; within a year, about a hundred people were attending its weekly meetings at the Paula Cooper Gallery. In addition to picketing the Museum and abandoned plans for 'alternative street exhibitions', fifteen of the group's artist members and two historians met for a year to produce *An Anti-Catalog*. This was a critical response to the Biennial's curatorial ideology – notably its art representations of Native American, Black, female and working class people, and its neglect of them as artists – as exemplary of art's institutional culture.

In addition to challenging the art system's instrumentalization for private interests and corporate power, the *Anti-Catalog* also provides an advanced model of artists' critical curatorial work. It was independently produced and circulated; indeed, distribution networks were already widespread as artists turned to self-publishing as an alternative to the gallery system.³⁷ In an even more polemical form than McShine's *Information* catalogue, it also used techniques of collage, found objects, subversive appropriation, quotation, and self-reference alongside commentary in a form that was explicitly authored, designed and produced as an outcome of non-hierarchical collective work.³⁸

Significantly, whilst drawing on the legacy and energy of artist activist networks, AMCC's primary concern was not exclusively an 'internal' matter, an argument between artworld initiates. It instead sought a popular audience (inspired by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*). As artists who were themselves largely marginalised by or invisible to art's official institutions, they were not simply seeking entry or to expand art's audiences but to transform the means by which the public engaged. If the myth of a 'neutral', objective culture served to conceal the interests it served, it followed that a change in audience also necessitated a change in its

³⁷ Already by 1975, Maurizio Nannucci was able to present *Small Press Scene* (Zona, Florence), an exhibition featuring over 250 'small press magazines dedicated to experimental visual art, concrete poetry, architecture, and new music': Detterer and Nannucci, *Artist-Run Spaces*. In New York, Printed Matter and Franklin Furnace, both founded in 1976, focused on artists' books and self-publishing. Other similar models included *Audio Arts* (1973), which used cassette recording for interviews, dialogue, spoken word, and overlaps with an emerging 'sound art', employing its subcultural channels of exchange inspired by Joseph Beuys's argument for producing 'a social organism as a work of art'. Furlong, *Audio Arts*.

³⁸ Baranik et al, *anti-catalog*. These include: collages using historic illustrations of workers and slaves; Brecht's poem 'A Worker Reads History' alongside various photos as found objects; critical captions; as well as an exchange of correspondence with the Biennial's art historian curator. The publication's purpose and contents, printed in large type, served as its wrap-around cover. Wallach, "*An Anti-Catalog*".

structure of interpellation. As Lippard put it, ‘Activist artists tend to see art as a mutually stimulating dialogue, rather than as a specialized lesson in beauty or ideology coming from the top down.’³⁹ In contrast to political art representing social issues, activist art was directly involved, a *praxis* contingent on its interaction with different publics.⁴⁰ The terrain on which many artists could engage with diverse and non-specialist audiences would principally be defined by issues of location and the codes of mass culture: the contested notions of site and the legacies of Pop art. Within New York, this made itself felt in the shift in the late 1970s for some artists from a bohemian and rapidly gentrifying SoHo to the more economically depressed South Bronx and the Lower East Side.⁴¹

Among the most active of these artist groups was Colab (1977-1989), which gathered through the convergence of the study group (many were ISP fellows), radical politics, performance or ‘body art’, and the emergence of both accessible and relatively inexpensive production methods and new distribution networks for film, video, and cable TV. Aiming to avoid both the factional tensions pitting individual practice against collective work that split New York Art & Language in 1976, and the encroaching institutionalisation of alternative spaces, Colab modelled their collective projects on the rock band, its members taking active roles in the post-punk scene and its DIY modes of cultural production.⁴²

Influenced by structural film and experimental practices, they established the New Cinema for artists’ films and videos – following in the path of Anthology Film Archives – and used the versatility of moving image projection to explore other distribution sites, notably New York’s burgeoning club scene. Indeed, ‘underground’ had been adopted as an umbrella term for subcultural music from its use in the city’s experimental film field where it referred to basement screenings.⁴³ Producing moving image required collective work – though Colab’s decentralised and non-hierarchical model was unusual even here – and incorporated

³⁹ Lippard, “Trojan Horses”.

⁴⁰ ‘[The] sequential network paradigm of artist/artwork/gallery/audience severs any sense of responsibility or commitment to an audience, and political artists must seriously question whether it isn’t against their interests to perpetuate it.’ Rosler, “Thoughts on Audience”.

⁴¹ ‘Under the influences of music, politics, and Black and Hispanic culture, strange bedfellows met and mated. The East Village and the Lower East Side were and are still the principal centers of activity.’ Lippard, “Trojan Horses”, 355.

⁴² Moore, *Art Gangs*, 81; Little, “Colab Takes a Piece”.

⁴³ Gendron, *From Montmartre*, 259-61.

documentary, narrative fiction film (Jim Jarmusch was among those later achieving commercial success), as well as critical commentary. This was also the first generation of artists to have grown up with TV, including the broadcast of experimental work such as Paik's *Global Groove*; and links with the music scene were also manifestly a means of earning cash, especially once the club scene took off.⁴⁴

No Wave's first full public appearance came at Artists' Space on 11 March 1978, organised by Colab artists as a benefit gig for their *X Motion Magazine* (later becoming *BOMB*), bringing together and making visible many of the bands that would define the movement including James Chance (who 'physically attack[ed] the audience with slaps and punches') and the Contortions, Boris Policeband, The Erasers, DNA, Theoretical Girls, and Terminal.⁴⁵ Diego Cortez, one of the collective's leading members, played a key role along with Anya Phillips initially through their band the Esoterrorists (with the artist Duncan Smith), whose outrageous actions emphasised a fascination with revolutionary movements such as Baader Meinhof, the Red Army Faction, and Puerto Rican FALN.⁴⁶ Both were also linked to the founding of the Mudd Club with its owner Steve Mass and for introducing Brian Eno to the bands featured on the defining album *No New York*.⁴⁷

By late 1979, after the commercial failure of No Wave, Colab members' work began to diverge. Whilst some continued working with bands, others pursued their video and film-

⁴⁴ Conversation with John Sanborn, 18 December 2018. By the beginning of the '80s, every Downtown bar and club had its performance or film night, with a marketable emphasis on 'subversion'. As founder of the video lounge at Danceteria, he organised two nights' performances for Paik and Charlotte Moorman, which netted them \$5K each night (timely for the cellist, who by then needed treatment for cancer).

⁴⁵ A distinctive feature of the post-punk scene was the number of artists, film-makers, and photographers involved in founding and performing in bands. A brief list includes: Robin Crutchfield (DNA); Pat Place and James Nares (Contortions, with Place later forming the Bush Tetras); Gordon Stevenson (Teenage Jesus); Robert Appleton and Nina Canal (The Gynecologists); Barbara Ess (Daily Life; Theoretical Girls); and Robert Longo (Rhys Chatham Trio). Coley and Moore, *No Wave*, 136-142.

⁴⁶ This interest in revolution was not unique. Beuys had offered to show Baader Meinhof around Documenta 5; the 'Provisional' Art & Language that formed in the wake of the New York group's split took its name from the IRA; whilst Colab members Robin Winters and Coleen Fitzgibbon, under the moniker X & Y, performed *Take the Money and Run* at de Appel, Amsterdam, in which they robbed the audience, only making amends the following day. Warhol's *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* can likewise be taken as an early stylistic reference for the headshots of band members featuring in *No New York*, the album produced by Brian Eno.

⁴⁷ Coley and Moore, *No Wave*, 74. Eno disputes the claim. Judy Nylon also claims credit for the idea of the album: Liner notes, *New York Noise Vol.3*, 14. Similarly, Cortez's and Phillips's claims for proposing the Mudd Club is at odds with Bernard Gendron's account, which attributes the idea of the space as a 'disco for punks' to Mass – see Gendron, *From Montmartre*, chapter 13.

making.⁴⁸ Where Malcolm McLaren and others were ‘curating’ bands (like Bow Wow Wow) as fashion projects, emphasising post-Pop Art techniques of appropriation, it was the collective’s use of post-punk practices of presentation that became most significant for the social turn in curatorial practice and theory. For Colab artists also pioneered the No Wave Exhibition. Anti-curatorial and collectively produced, these channelled punk’s subversion of Pop aesthetics. As Alan Moore described them,

these shows were “organized” rather than curated, that is they were open to all comers...with minimal excision and rearrangement. To the artists, this was an important distinction, since it struck at curatorial privilege. This had been significantly expanded by the professionalization of alternative spaces.⁴⁹

Indeed, the punk programme of shock, minimalism, and amateurism can be traced directly in their (at times) borderline legality and signs of ‘pseudo-terroristic’ or revolutionary violence; withdrawal from artistic conventions, placing works by artists, found materials and contributions from all-comers on an equal plane; and DIY ‘salon style’ presentations for work that was often improvised using found or low-cost materials, with items jumbled and crammed together in an apparently indifferent display. At the same time, their critical interventions into media culture and social structures – honed as documentary film and video-makers – was also evident with exhibitions using irony, data, documentation, and political engagement to challenge the mainstream.

Beginning with The *Batman Show* (1979) – a nod to Pop that may have been ‘regressive’ for an artworld ‘dominated by conceptual and post-minimal art’, but that in its degraded form (as here) was in keeping with the post-punk music scene – these included exhibitions that bordered on the kitsch or theme party (such as the *Doctors and Dentists Show* and the *Dog Show*), and at others were more directly activist (e.g. the *Income and Wealth Show* and the *Manifesto Show*). ‘Most of the theme shows had a political bent to them. They were about money...not having it...not wanting it...wanting to do things without it...and not being represented’.⁵⁰ On New Year’s Eve 1979, Colab members and others broke into an

⁴⁸ Phillips managed the Contortions (whilst living with James Chance), whereas Cortez became a broker, dealer and later curator, briefly managing the band Beirut Slump before signalling the institutionalization of the scene with the defining exhibition *New York / New Wave* (PS1, 1981).

⁴⁹ Moore, *Art Gangs*, 93.

⁵⁰ Coleen Fitzgibbon, Interviewed by Shawn Cooper, in Times Square Show, “Making History”.

abandoned building at 125 Delancey Street to install the *Real Estate Show*. In the widely-publicised protests (including Joseph Beuys) that followed its forced closure by the authorities, the city granted the artists another building, which became ABC No Rio.⁵¹

More than displays, these 'shows' constituted other publics and alternative ways of being public, actively, and without repeating art's spatial politics of identity and difference.

The exhibition as guerrilla tactic, exemplified by the notoriety and practical success of the *Real Estate Show*, led directly to the *Times Square Show* (1980), hailed as "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s".⁵² Involving over 100 artists displaying work and presenting films, video, music and performances throughout and outside the four floors, basement and stairwells of a former 'massage parlour' (or brothel), the show ran non-stop for a month. Colab members took responsibility for different spaces, including: the Money, Love and Death Room; Fashion Lounge; TV Lounge; Portrait Gallery; and Souvenir Shop. This latter referenced Claes Oldenberg's *Ray Gun Store*, the artist's gallery-cum-thrift-store, whilst critiquing museum economics with low cost multiples such as Jenny Holzer's stacks of *Truisms* and Keith Haring's subversion of *Business Week* magazines collaged with gay porn. The show lacked wall labels, price lists or ready markers of authorship, presenting an improvised free-for-all channelling the energy of street art, activist artists, freaks and funk. It was an outlaw and outrageous combination of politics, power, sex, stimulants, and surrealism.

Many Colab members had had their eyes and ears tuned to Times Square, whether for its Kung Fu movie screenings, alternative lifestyles, or its diverse expressions of a racially-mixed public space (attracting young people from across the Boroughs), alien to most official

⁵¹ Documentation from the shows, including video from the *Real Estate Show* and others, is available at Colab, "Exhibition Documentation." Ann Messner later recalled the artists secreting oversized bolt cutters in a guitar case; whilst Diane Torr considered the initiative to have come from European artists amongst the group, who were familiar with legalised squatting in contrast to the illegality of the practice in the US. Becky Howland's iconic octopus imagery – a large-scale mural on the building's front, and for the exhibition poster – later became an inspirational precedent for Occupy and other anti-globalisation actions. Interviews conducted by Shawna Cooper, *ibid*.

⁵² Goldstein, "First Radical Art Show".

culture and art world habitués.⁵³ A large-scale event here provided a basis for expanding the group's impact, bypassing institutional structures to reach a broad and popular audience, collaborating with linked groups. Fashion Moda, with its ties to the graffiti, hip hop and break dance scenes provided one additional channel;⁵⁴ artists linked to ABC No Rio, the East Village club scene, and to White Columns (the legacy project space from 112 Greene Street) provided others. The building's landlord was persuaded that the show would increase its value, and by pooling resources together with a \$4K emergency grant from the Beard's Fund their licence for anarchic intervention was granted.⁵⁵



Fig.9: *The Times Square Show*

⁵³ It's perhaps significant that already in 1976 Lippard discussed the question of audience, and the distinction between the art world and popular taste, through a critique of Saul Ostrow's storefront installation off Times Square. Lippard, "This Is Art?"

⁵⁴ Stefan Eins, a Colab founder, with the artist Joe Lewis (and Hector Ortega, initially) renamed his storefront gallery when he relocated his Mercer Street space to the South Bronx. This pioneered multiculturalism – its information printed in Chinese, Russian, English, and Spanish – in an ethos of artistic inclusivity, aligned with the notion of a cultural continuum (itself often attributed to Lawrence Alloway's articulation of Pop Art).

⁵⁵ The Fund's administrator, Ellary Eddy, gives a riotous account of persuading his patroness, Sandra Payson (daughter of Joan Whitney Payson— founder of the Mets, and part of the Whitney family), likening the project to the Salon des Refusés. She exited her pre-show visit precipitously, shocked by suspended paper fans showing a photo of a man being fist-fucked – though creditably continued with the grant.

Much of the work was site-specific, challenging the area's power structures. Christy Rupp's 'rat' pieces channelled fears from the city's infestation. Peter Fend presented his first *NEWS ROOM*, a media critique citing the "decision-making entities" within a two-mile radius.⁵⁶ Many artists cast a skewed gaze at the sex industry and its male clientele, such as Cara Perlman and Jane Sherry's faux documentary *Topless*; Diane Torr's reading of pornographic texts, miming and wearing a strap-on; Ilona Granet's signs about sexual harassment of women; and Becky Howland's *Oil Rig Fountain*, an ejaculating machine in the men's room (reversing Duchamp's gesture with *Fountain*) designed – in the midst of the Iran hostage crisis – like an Arabian oil rig.⁵⁷

A party-like atmosphere prevailed, as when Jack Smith gave a rare appearance as Sinbad Glick in *Exotic Landlordism of the World*. Slide shows by Nan Goldin, participatory fashion shows, and David Wells and Wally Edwards's motorised James Brown dancing to 'There It Is' added to the fairground atmosphere. Jean-Michel Basquiat presented his early abstract painting, *Samo*-writing on the walls, performed in his post-punk duo Gray, sprayed paint over others' works, and emblazoned 'Free Sex' above the doorway (quickly over-sprayed). Fab 5 Freddy (Fred Brathwaite) introduced the graffiti artist Lee Quinones, who made a Fab 5 piece on the building's front. In short, there was no prevailing aesthetic, style, system or judgement, but a shameless heterodoxy of illicit, sleazy and tawdry pleasures, shadowed by critique.

The visiting public was equally mixed. Colab promoted the extravaganza hard, revelling in the bizarre and freakish atmosphere and its emphatic differences from official gallery culture. Artist Jane Dickson created an animated advertisement riffing on three-card monte, the huckster's favourite, for a giant Spectacolor digital display. Three TV trailers on Channel 5 featured a flamboyant Jack Smith, a multi-hued street crowd gathering for its 'exotic events' along 7th avenue, and a tout for hot goods ("want some cultured pearls? These pearls are really cultured!").⁵⁸ It was covered by the *Village Voice* (Richard Goldstein called it

⁵⁶ These included: *New York Times*; *Time-Life*; *NBC*, *CBS*, *BBC* and other TV companies; *AP*, *UPI* and other news agencies; United Nation press corps; *New York Daily News*; and three of the big 'Seven Sisters' oil companies – Exxon, Texaco and Mobil.

⁵⁷ Colab, "Photographic documentation."

⁵⁸ Colab, "Promotional videos".

“three chord art anyone can play”), and artists produced posters, placards and flyers, seducing diverse audiences “curious as to why this was billed as an art show”: tourists, workers, clients and customers for the area’s “film labs, porn shops, camera and fake antique stores, fast food joints, [and] burlesque houses”, the “theatre crowd, martial arts and porno movie-goers”, the “pimps, hustlers, pickpockets, prostitutes and con men” – as well as many from the art world. John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres created face casts on the street, bringing crews from the Bronx and drawing large crowds. As Tom Otterness, one of the lead organisers, put it, this was a desperate “drive to get out of the art world . . . to bring content back in and to bring in a kind of visual language that the average person could understand, read, and speak.”⁵⁹

The impact was emphatic, explosive, and global. It was the catalyst for *Wild Style*, Colab artist Charlie Ahearn’s film on the hip hop, graffiti and break dancing scenes, one of several expressions of the imminent popular, commercial and art-world interests in street art and culture. White Columns was emboldened to run Noise Fest, programmed by Thurston Moore, including Sonic Youth’s first performance. Invited to documenta 7 (1982), Fashion Moda ran a Store featuring T-shirts by Haring, Beuys, Holzer, Picasso, Rupp, and graffiti artists A-1 and Crash amongst others.

Yet such explosive success also dissipated much of the group’s collectivist focus. This would be Colab’s last big “fuck you” to the art world, which quickly absorbed its blows. Individual members and artists were celebrated, returning to authorial values at the expense of the whole; and much of the energy unbound was ambiguously redirected into artist clubs, where themed nights became the rage, and the frothy East Village scene with its ironic re-incorporation of Pop gestures, as at the FUN gallery. John Ahearn lamented, “I think it is disappointing that in a sense what it did was influence the art world rather than replace the art world or change the art world very much. In a sense, the art world found a place for it.”

⁵⁹ “Bypassing *Artforum* and a lot of the more difficult intellectual ideas of contemporary art, we were going to win our livelihood by winning people directly.” Tom Otterness in interviews, *op.cit.*

These were not the show's nor Colab's only legacies, however. It would also add significant heat to simmering notions of critical curating, the social turn, and the exhibition as an artist's medium, ideas that were bubbling in an artistic field already at boiling point.

Reviewing the show under the pseudonym 'Anne Ominous', Lucy Lippard remarked:

It is becoming clearer daily to more and more people that rather than the lucky few making art so unsuccessfully for the unlucky many, the artists' role may be to open up the making and distribution of art to everyone as an *exchange* rather than an imposition, with empathy rather than condescension as the bridge.⁶⁰

The precarity of this position was also manifest. The balance between critique and sly celebration – disgust or titillation – could easily shift depending on perspective, as the varied reception of feminist porn-based performances testified. Images of horrific violence might equally intimidate.

Re-contextualised for an artworld audience, curated and re-presented in an institution of high culture, these works risked reification and domestication. Indeed, this was begged repeatedly in a review of *Art and Social Change, USA* (Allen Memorial Art Museum, Ohio, 1983), noting the involvement of several artists from the Times Square extravaganza.⁶¹ Yet this exhibition is also significant for the term 'social aesthetics', inaugurated by its curator William Olander in his catalogue essay.⁶² By the end of the decade, this concept and framework was repurposed as a foundational problematic and paradigm within curatorial pedagogy.

Democratising Art and the Art of Democracy: Group Material

*GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO EXPLODE THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DICTATE WHAT ART IS, WHO ART IS FOR AND WHAT AN ART EXHIBITION CAN BE....OUR PROJECT IS CLEAR. WE INVITE EVERYONE TO QUESTION THE ENTIRE CULTURE WE HAVE TAKEN FOR GRANTED.*⁶³

⁶⁰ Lippard, "Sex and Death".

⁶¹ 'Can their revolutionary message of social protest survive when their work is co-opted by the art establishment?' Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Review". This exhibition secured William Olander his curatorial role at the New Museum: Hernando, "Fragmented Memory".

⁶² Dietcher, "Social Aesthetics". Lippard, Deitcher, and Craig Owens also contributed essays.

⁶³ *Group Material Manifesto* in Ault, *Show and Tell*, 22-23.

Group Material saw that politics happens at the site of representation itself, not just where information is transferred, but rather at the place we recognize ourselves; where we have the sense that we are ourselves; feel a stability that is held and recognized by others. Doug Ashford⁶⁴

Modelled in part on Colab's collectivist example, Group Material formed in autumn 1979 'to discuss and present socially engaged art'. Several founding members had recently graduated from Kosuth's class at New York's School of Visual Arts; others joined through friendship networks. The 'primary force' in bringing it together was Tim Rollins, who moved to the city in 1975 from the University of Maine specifically to study with Kosuth, inspired after reading 'Art After Philosophy'.⁶⁵ He was soon absorbed by the artist's work with Art & Language and their journal *The Fox*, becoming his assistant for three years, organizing his library, and mixing with this intellectual milieu ("Roland Barthes would come over for dinner"). This also brought him to the AMCC's meetings. He helped to produce An *Anti-Catalog* and later joined some of its members on a cultural exchange to China, where he was strongly influenced by examples of social clubs that brought different parts of the community together for cultural activities.⁶⁶ Alongside the art world, its commitments and quarrels, the energy and social mix of the music and club scenes were a key attraction for many of the group's members.⁶⁷

Whilst contending with the discipline and practice of collective work, together with a changing membership, Group Material acquired a storefront gallery on the Lower East Side in July 1980, riding the No Wave energy from *The Times Square Show*. Notes from early meetings – together with their manifesto – demonstrate a careful working through of precisely those issues engaged by Art & Language, AMCC, and Colab concerning language and autonomy, audience and community, the politics of public space, and the social

⁶⁴ Ashford, "Artwork is a Person," 224.

⁶⁵ Cahan, "Wonder Years"; and Berry, *Tim Rollins*, 237-47. Ault, another founder member, was Rollins's best friend from Maine and shared an apartment with him in New York along with Yolanda Hawkins, also a founding member. Rollins' then lover and friend from NYU, Patrick Brennan, joined along with Rollins's classmates.

⁶⁶ "When I returned from China was really when the idea to do Group Material started – I was very influenced by that experience." *Ibid.*, 242. Elsewhere, he cites an article – "Art for Whom?" in *Studio International* – on the social activist art practices of Conrad Atkinson and Margaret Harrison as inspirational: Rollins, "What Was To Be Done?"

⁶⁷ Rollins earned some additional money as a go-go dancer at Club Taboo, and from 1982 was in a relationship with Kate Pierson, singer and a founding member of the B-52s, until coming out as gay in the mid-1990s.

production of art. In contrast to Colab's loosely themed and heterogenous assemblages, "the interior design of our space and the displaying of art should be of optimal importance...determined by intellectualism, careful thought, and not taste, never taste". At the same time, learning from the *Shows*, "we should strive to make [it] fun." Based in a largely Hispanic neighbourhood, in a former social club, bilingual materials were produced in Spanish and English, whilst the political dimension of collective production was emphasized through "a more self-conscious voice of introduction".

The curatorial function was not abandoned but incorporated as artistic praxis. For example, the inaugural group show featured Liliana Dones's *Budgets*, anonymized accounts of individual members' finances, whilst their manifesto – distributed locally to introduce the group – emphasized also their non-arts employment in graphic design, teaching, waitressing, computing, as telephone operator, dancer, and electrician. Recognising the role of alternative spaces in processes of gentrification, they circulated advice on reducing rents, stating an intent to become actively involved in community organising and addressing issues such as education and sanitation, at the same time providing a space for recreation, a hub for creative expression. All-comers were invited to submit works for *The Salon of Election 1980* that November, which they followed with 'an exhibition of music in the form of a wild dance party' at which Rollins, Ault and others DJed with 'revolutionary hits' covering 'demonstrations of class, sexual, and racial consciousness'.⁶⁸

Group Material was soon planning talent shows, home movie screenings, and a block Christmas party in preparation for *The People's Show (Arroz con Mango)*, the presentation that came to exemplify the collective's initial work. Going door-to-door with two local kids, both Spanish-speaking, they invited all contributions of cherished objects, from wedding photos and other memorabilia to dolls, amateur artworks, souvenirs, and collections. Much like Kosuth's self-referencing form, the show's content and meaning was a contingent function of the local community's engagement; it was predicated on dialogue, as Lippard

⁶⁸ *Revolting Music* eventually ran on 7 March 1981 with tracks including: Aretha Franklin's 'Respect'; The Isley Brothers' 'Fight the Power'; 'I'm not Down' by The Clash; New York Dolls' 'Vietnamese Baby'; and Miles Davis' 'Mr Freedom X'. The film programme featured speeches by Martin Luther King Jr as well as Anti-War Demonstrations.

advocated; it engaged a sense of place, a working-class and largely Hispanic community, without determining its identity in advance but rather making this an unresolved product of the assembled display and its viewers' sensibilities; and it brought together diverse household riches without prejudice or privilege, activating its principal audience in an informal and convivial atmosphere (including a popular bingo night).⁶⁹

The pressure of running the gallery, organizing projects, and group management alongside day jobs and personal pressures soon proved too much, and barely a year after taking up the space they terminated the lease. Reduced to a core membership of Rollins, Ault, and Mundy McLaughlin, they announced a shift to project-based actions in public spaces, with a salutary description of the collective's predicament in a flyer circulated at an exhibition of alternative spaces. Having sought a space to 'resemble a "real" organized gallery' in order 'to be taken seriously', this had become a liability. They had unintentionally begun to replicate the institutionalizing form they wanted to avoid; the solution was to 'occupy the ultimate alternative space – that wall-less expanse that bars artists and their work from the crucial social concerns of the American public.'⁷⁰

With the addition of Doug Ashford, Group Material used its first NEA grant to rent advertising spaces on buses, replacing commercials with 29 artists' works variously addressing the independence of Puerto Rico, public education, and other political and social issues.⁷¹ Such interventions had close precedents, such as Colab's *All Color News* broadcasts, the muralists and graffiti artists, and Kosuth's use of billboards for *The Seventh Investigation* – making visible the systems of public information by repeating a text in different contexts. Yet here, the collective's praxis applied to the public domain was part of an early move towards tactical media that was soon developed and amplified by groups such as

⁶⁹ The flyer announcing the exhibition shows an empty frame with the legend 'your favorite art work here', and underneath the question "...but what is it supposed to mean?" It then explains: 'The answer to this and other similar, often posed questions will be answered by the very people who ask them....[The show] will be for and about [the community's] opinions, their ideas and feelings towards art, artwork and the people who make art.'

⁷⁰ "Caution! Alternative Space", distributed at *Uptown Downtown* (City Gallery, October 1981).

⁷¹ Rollins met Ashford – a former student of Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler – as a co-participant in the *Coney Island Show*.

REPOhistory, Critical Art Ensemble, and The Yes Men with strategies later celebrated in Naomi Klein's *No Logo*.

The immediate challenge for artists using symbolic space was not only power's dominance of the media and public realm, but the move by conservatives to fight their culture wars on precisely this terrain, often using those tactics developed by cultural activists to gain public visibility in the first place. Pat Buchanan, for a time Reagan's director of communications, argued that "Conservatives had best become interested in art if they wish to see civilization survive into the 21st century."⁷² Indeed, Group Material faced this assault directly. Release of their grant was delayed as Frank Hodsell – a Reagan administration appointment as head of the NEA – was concerned that their gallery's red walls signalled communist sympathies.⁷³



Fig.10: Group Material, *DA ZI BAOS* (1982)

In this context, the group focused increasingly on strategies of dialogue, constructive ambiguity, and affective collectivity. Turning to the example of 'democracy walls' that

⁷² Wallis, "Democracy and Cultural Activism", 9.

⁷³ Their community of artists and activists at times felt under siege. They collaborated with Gran Fury and ACT UP for *Aids and Democracy* (Dia Art Foundation, 1989) and the *AIDS Timeline* (University of California, 1989-90) – both organisations singled out for their presentation of prominent politicians and conservatives as AIDS criminals in a street-front display (New Museum, 1987) produced by William Olander (himself an ACT UP member). Andres Serrano, whom Julie Ault married in 1980, was another target in 1989 for his *Piss Christ*, when Senator Jesse Helms successfully campaigned to cut NEA funding.

Rollins encountered in China, for *DA ZI BAOS* (1982) they surreptitiously mounted striking posters on the boards covering an empty building in Union Square, alternating red and yellow backgrounds projecting found statements by specialists alongside members of the public on issues ranging from women's reproductive rights to the US conflict in El Salvador.

Invited to install a show at Artists Space in May 1982, they displayed a variety of pop culture materials – film posters, a T-shirt proclaiming the Polish 'Solidarność' emblem, newspaper cuttings and so on – equally with art works above a stream of common words to reveal the ideological operation of apparently everyday language when charged by association (as with an image of US sprinters giving the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics above the word 'sport'). *Primer (for Raymond Williams)* was their first exhibition to critically select and display found objects alongside artists' works without hierarchy, using juxtaposition as a structural principle. It was also their first show within an institution, albeit one faintly retaining the aura of the alternative, and the cultural theorist's *Keywords* therefore provided a logic – the sociology of language – to distinguish it from the gallery's regular programme. Group Material organised these signs to emphasise their ambiguity, their detachment from systems of reference within a constantly shifting textual field that also constituted both a reading *and a reader*. If conventional exhibition frameworks aimed to produce meaning transparently, without drawing overt attention to their own operation, this procedure rendered it visible, inviting viewers to question the structures that produce their (self-)understanding. It is here that we can begin to recognise the emerging definition of the exhibition as a *medium*, as a system that articulates relations between its constitutive works; and it is here that the group's work – collective, therefore anonymous, yet simultaneously authored – began to be recognised as a curatorial practice.

Following Reagan's re-election, Group Material was invited to create an installation for the Whitney Biennial. *Americana* (1985) was an exhibition within the larger programme, 'a *salon des refusés* of what has been significantly absent, excluded by curatorial business-as-usual attitudes, including populist art, works by artists of color, feminist practices, overtly political art, and everyday artifacts.'⁷⁴ Lodged in its own space off the museum lobby, it was

⁷⁴ Ault, *Show and Tell*, 91.

designed to critique both the Biennial from which it was spatially removed, and the broader culture – more specifically, of how both in their own ways represented American identity. The display drew significantly from the legacy of Pop as well as from artists' critical practices, engaging with the postmodern "political economy of the sign" whilst offering material resistance as an unsymbolised surplus.⁷⁵ Thus a brood of eagles (a found object, and works by Rigoberto Torres, Warhol, and Nancy Spero) referenced both the bloody record of imperial expansion *and* Broodthaers's museum doppelganger. A washer-drier served simultaneously as Minimalist white cube, symbol of the gendered domestic ideal, and of the white-washing of (art) history both literally and metaphorically. Theatrical lighting emphasised the presentation's staginess, whilst its heat hastened the illuminating decay of Wonderbread loaves. In counterpoint to a TV running continuously, a soundtrack warped the presentation's narrative weave, from Charles Ives's 'Old Folks Gathering' to Loretta Lynn's 'You're Gonna Reap What You Sow'.

In 1987, Ault recruited Felix Gonzalez-Torres whilst Rollins formally stepped aside to focus on the Kids Of Survival, a group he formed with young students at an austerity-wracked school in the South Bronx. Nevertheless, when the Dia Foundation approached, creating the space for the group's next major project, he temporarily rejoined. *Democracy* was in many ways a summation of their work. Designed as both an exploration and a demonstration of its theme in action, the programme was divided into four topics: education; politics and election; cultural participation; and AIDS – this last being a 'case study' for the very possibility of democracy worthy of its name within the current polity. Each involved a roundtable discussion – a study group – with invited specialists, a 'Town Hall' forum open to the general public with a panel of speakers, and an exhibition at Dia's Wooster Street gallery. Transcripts of the Town Halls, supplemented with commissioned essays, completed the project.

As Adair Rounthwaite demonstrates, *Democracy* was a key pivot in the institutionalization of social aesthetics.⁷⁶ Founded on the wealth of the Schlumberger oil business by Philippa

⁷⁵ Grace, "Spoils of the Sign".

⁷⁶ Rounthwaite, *Asking the Audience*. Group Material dedicated *Democracy* to the memory of William Olander, who died from AIDS-related causes in 1989.

de Menil, her art dealer husband Heiner Friedrich, and art historian Helen Winkler, the Dia Art Foundation faced a financial crisis in the wake of the early 1980s oil glut precipitating the appointment of a new board, management, and economic model. In the process, it transformed itself from a patron of artists' practices antithetical to museum display – such as Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* in remote western New Mexico, and La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's *Dream House* – to a public-facing institution. Charles Wright, Dia's new director, led this move, beginning in 1987 with a series of poetry readings together with Discussions in Contemporary Culture.

This latter was organized by his old schoolfriend Hal Foster – including, notably, a forum on 'Vision and Visuality', synchronous with Foster's inaugural Critical and Curatorial Studies programme at the Whitney ISP. The presentations were published by Bay Press, established by Thatcher Bailey, another of their friends from prosperous Seattle families.⁷⁷ Several contributors soon followed up with book-length studies, including Jonathan Crary (*Techniques of the Observer*, 1990), Rosalind Krauss (*The Optical Unconscious*, 1993), Martin Jay (*Downcast Eyes*, 1993), and Foster himself (*Return of the Real*, 1996), to which the collection of essays gathered by Douglas Crimp (*On the Museum's Ruins*, 1993) should be added.⁷⁸ Indeed, Jay later claimed that 'in hindsight, *Vision and Visuality* may be seen as the moment when the visual turn...really showed signs of turning into the academic juggernaut it was to become in the 1990s'.⁷⁹ The birth of the professional curator was aligned with the project to see more critically.

Crucially, Dia had reincorporated as a non-profit to become eligible for grants at a time when public funding was hitched to a conservative agenda that uncritically embraced private partnership. Corporate sponsorship of the arts blossomed in the 1980s – along with the art market – as symbolic capital, more detached from its material referents, became a smart investment, a high art gloss of philanthropy that could help deflect light penetrating

⁷⁷ Foster, *Vision and Visuality*. Rather than opposing a physiological understanding of vision with a visibility reflexively gazing at its own historical, social, linguistic and logical operations – of nature versus culture – he proposed that the terms signalled 'a difference within the visual' itself.

⁷⁸ One of the other panellists, Norman Bryson, had already published his argument in *Vision and Painting*, and helped to develop what would become the first visual studies programme in 1989, with Michael Ann Holly and Mieke Bal, at the University of Rochester; Krauss likewise built on her earlier essays such as "Antivision".

⁷⁹ Jay, "Cultural relativism".

to inner mechanisms and interests. Artists' turns to Pop, Minimalism and Conceptual art were readily accommodated within this empire of signs; value was now created by the activation of viewers. The image of 'the public' – as collective agent – invited to express its favour and interest, was increasingly becoming arbiter and legitimating power.⁸⁰ For Dia, Group Material's work held the promise of engaging constructively with this proposition, to expand art's audience and make visible the social dimension of progressive artists' practices. For the collective, Dia offered a means of scaling up (Rounthwaite describes it as a 'high budget activist art'), pragmatic benefits such as office space and the staff team's support, and – fundamentally – an opportunity to take "the spectacle of the exhibition and [turn] it into a series of social elevations...a situation".

The composition of the audience, and in particular the relative lack of Black, Hispanic and Asian participants, was a refrain of the Town Hall meetings. Whilst open to a broad public, the art-world setting was more accommodating for an audience familiar with its codes and rituals – predominantly white, well educated, and (relatively) privileged. It risked performing a strategic liberal concern, becoming an 'unmarked' frame through which a multi-coloured field could be painted – though as Gonzalez-Torres retorted, difference isn't always apparent on the skin.

As a place for looking, and for looking at looking, detached from the social in its sheltered autonomy, the gallery likewise emphasized uncomfortably its own practices of mediation whilst focusing on the media spectacle of 'democratic' life. A system of political representation was installed within the museum's representational economy. The notion of the 'Town Hall' meeting had become an idealised product selling nostalgia for a mythical image of representational democracy. Group Material's appropriation of the form suggested an ambivalence between ironic repetition – "this is how democracy is packaged to us, folks!" – and a performative optimism that such discussions might change opinions or lead to action.⁸¹ Of particular concern for many participants, then, was the *staging* of the

⁸⁰ 'Both changes in funding – the right-wing NEA backlash and the corporate model of viewers as consumers – revolve around an idea of the audience as constituting a kind of value, either in their spending power or in their electoral power'. Rounthwaite, *Asking the Audience*, 14.

⁸¹ Dietcher, "Social Aesthetics," 38-41.

events, with the implication that they were not only audiences but unwitting *actors* captured on recordings – rendered visible and fixed in time – performing for another as yet unseen ‘secondary’ audience.

This tension in *Democracy* – between representation *of* and representation *for* – was registered on a politics of the voice. The audience appears passive as an object of representation, a silent ground for the figured speakers; made legible by transcription, it is their future readers who are exhorted to act, to interpret and produce meaning. Yet as Rounthwaite shows, the Town Hall meetings also constituted a politics of listening, an affective site of encounter in the urgent present. It did not await its meaning-to-come, endowed by a benign curator-historian, but made its significance felt in the here-and-now. In a privatised public sphere dominated by systems of representation, it offered an encounter with another collectivity, an ‘unlikely public’ listening to others and to others’ listening.⁸² Within a process of polemics, a battle of ideas and wills that might seek territory and to command the room, the format simultaneously invited participants to suspend their judgements, to open themselves to others, and so risk being changed.

It is precisely this that Rounthwaite attends to, marking the difference between the audio recordings of the Town Hall meetings and their published transcriptions. Whilst the documentation of the forums had been a reasonable cause of anxiety for participants, its preservation in the archive offered a new sense of democracy in action.⁸³ The discussions were mobilised by *affect* – not only the arguments made, but specifically by the atmosphere transformed by listening and the embodied voice.

On the recordings, voices quiver with anger, bounce with amusement, and pause with hesitation. They imitate one another in tone, creating chains of similar vocal affect, but they also interrupt and break into one another, abruptly changing the

⁸² Labelle, *Sonic Agency*; Lacey, *Listening Publics*; Bassel, *Politics of Listening*; Back, *Art of Listening*; Bickford, *Dissonance of Democracy*; and Couldry, *Why Voice Matters*.

⁸³ ‘I understand the archive of participation neither as a place where ephemeral art can have its history unproblematically made permanent, nor as an insufficient locus structurally unable to capture an always-disappearing live art. Instead, the archive is an ongoing, material process, one that remains live in the sense that it is always in contact with a social field of power relations.’ Rounthwaite, *Asking the Audience*, 9. Group Material members themselves have been circumspect about approaching their own history, for example in refusing to allow recreations of their exhibitions, and in treating their archive as a living process of interpretation. Julie Ault, “Of Several Minds”.

tenor of a discussion. ... [Meanwhile] the transcript stands as an objectified form of content, discourse, and logos, with the white noise of vocal affect strained out. ... Simultaneously, vocally generated affect not only defied the institution's approach to the meetings as events...but also created an instability at the heart of the project's representational undertaking.⁸⁴

This is emphatically not to repeat a politics of the voice but to presage a politics and aesthetic of the ears and the vibrational body. Social aesthetics was not reduced to a curatorial representation, but engaged as a 'dynamic materiality'.⁸⁵ Indeed, 'affect not only is key to understanding the agency of the audience in *Democracy*', Rounthwaite concludes, 'but is also essential to understanding participatory art *qua* art....It follows that the aesthetic of these works is defined as a process inseparable from the social field.'

Group Material's work was, of course, by no means the only artists' practice concerned with the social, with engaging communities considered 'outside' the artworld, and with dialogue and discourse as constitutively intersubjective. Nevertheless, it is indicative that their work was more than coincident with the first courses in curation. Hal Foster had been on the grant panel for the NEA that supported the Town Hall events, just as he was closely connected to Dia. The dancer, choreographer, film-maker and artist Yvonne Rainer, a core leader on the ISP's studio programme, proposed Group Material to the Foundation when invited to join a panel (including Szeemann) advising on artists to present. She located the significance and value of the project precisely in its articulation of social context as a function of display:

The various modernist attempts to overturn these [representational] values – from dada to pop to minimalism – failed, not in the objects they produced, but at the site of their *exhibition*, which invariably focused – as most exhibitions continue to do – on the singular object alienated from its social context.⁸⁶

The curator's role in the process of constituting publics was equally front and centre in Grenoble, France, where the Centre National d'Art Contemporain – known as Le Magasin – had opened in 1986 as one of the *grand travaux* initiated by President Mitterand. Jacques

⁸⁴ Rounthwaite, *Asking the Audience*, 22-23.

⁸⁵ bell hooks, "Coming to Voice".

⁸⁶ Wallis, *Democracy*, xviii. Group Material is also listed amongst the artists leading seminars at the ISP, in the 1993 brochure celebrating its first 25 years.

Guillot, who led the project, initiated a training programme combining exhibition-making, public programming, and education designed for ‘*médiateurs*’ (not ‘curators’).⁸⁷ The ISP provided one model; the other was Pontus Hultén’s Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques (IHEAP, 1985), itself inspired by both the ISP and Black Mountain College. It brought together artists and exhibition makers, encouraging collaboration, discussion, and a platform to experiment. ‘Powerful ideas reconsidering the exhibition as a medium were in the air’.⁸⁸ The theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, one of IHEAP’s first students, was amongst those attending the first graduation show, *19&&* (1988), whose leading figures included Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, and Pierre Joseph. Citing Felix Gonzalez-Torres as a key precursor, Bourriaud claimed for these artist-curators a new paradigm: ‘relational aesthetics’.

It is no accident that the professionalization of curating in the 1990s coincided with the re-inscription of these disparate practices under the banner of the ‘social turn’, relational aesthetics, participatory art and their approximate synonyms: ‘socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art, and...social practice.’⁸⁹ By the end of the 1990s, curatorial studies – and exemplary models of celebrated independent curators (including Bourriaud) – had established the field as a creative practice. The framing function shifted its emphasis: not only making visible its objects, it was also concerned with producing subjects, a move from differentiating *spatial* identities to figuring *social* ones.

This Janus-headed position was fraught on at least two fronts, both exemplified in Group Material’s work. Firstly, as artists established their own praxes of making art public, the role risked becoming either altogether redundant or an ironic doubling that might neutralise the criticality of this gesture by placing its dynamic processes within more secure representational frameworks. At least since Warhol’s exhibition *Raid the Icebox* (1969), museums had invited artists to guest curate exhibitions, often as a means of displaying –

⁸⁷ On the history of Le Magasin, Alessandrini, Gablier, and Nabeyrat, “École du Magasin (1987-2016)”.

⁸⁸ Zolghadr, “Getting Started”.

⁸⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 1.

and thereby inscribing – a willingness to incorporate gentle acts of subversion.⁹⁰ With the ‘social turn’ making communities and viewers co-producers of the aesthetic encounter, however, this proved increasingly problematic as the institution’s authority – its excess of prior knowledge to that of its publics – became something of a liability.

Secondly, the curator’s specific expertise was further eroded. With the turn to conceptualism came both a dizzying array of possibilities for artistic practice (addressing fields from AIDS and education to democracy itself) and a diversification of theoretical paradigms by which to account for them. The ‘de-skilling’ of artists’ methods precipitated an ambiguous re-skilling of curatorial knowledge. It is not surprising, then, to find Kwon describing the ‘daunting’ scope of the ISP’s reading lists, incorporating ‘semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, cultural studies, gay and lesbian theory, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, feminism, contemporary film theory, deconstruction, neo-Marxism, and post-colonial theories – to mention only few of the most readily nameable discourses’.⁹¹ As a public-facing role, curators were now additionally expected to ‘be at once aestheticians, diplomats, economists, critics, historians, politicians, audience developers, and promoters’.⁹²

Curatorial pedagogy faced its own crisis of what, precisely, its specialist skills comprised, rendering its terminology vulnerable to co-option by market specialists outside the art field as a signature function for ‘expert’, ‘artisanal’, or ‘hand-picked’ selection; and its professional ethics exposed to the dictates of ‘new public management’ techniques with

⁹⁰ Warhol refused to discriminate and display but only to present taxonomically, in piles, *all* of the museum’s objects – its hatboxes, gilt-framed paintings, auction catalogues, Windsor chairs, mixed statuary, and so on, marking the gap between the museum’s additive function of gathering and accumulating, and the curator’s subtractive function of selecting and marking significant differences. Green, *When Artists Curate*, 44-50. The National Gallery, London, initiated its programme *The Artist’s Eye* in the late 1970s, whilst MoMA’s *Artist’s Choice* series began in 1989. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 120-31. From the 1980s philosophers were also invited, and from the late 1990s celebrities like Steve Martin and Pharrell Williams came in on the act.

⁹¹ Kwon, “Reflections,” 55. Contrast this with the conventional role, defined by Obrist as preserving works within a museum’s collection, the selection and acquisition of new work for exhibition, contributing to art history, and organising the display of artworks; Obrist, *Ways of Curating*.

⁹² Brenson, “The Curator’s Moment,” 17. Similarly Birchall “Introduction,” 4: ‘The contemporary art curator is no longer an expert on a particular period, instead the curator is an anthropologist, a reporter, a sociologist, an epistemologist, an author, an NGO representative or an observer of the internet.’

their emphasis on ‘transparency’ and quantitative ‘performance indicators’.⁹³ By the early 2010s, some practitioners were abandoning the term for more neutral and pragmatic labels such as ‘producer’, ‘exhibition-maker’, or ‘facilitator’.⁹⁴ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Director of dOCUMENTA 13, was more emphatic: “I would never use the word “curator” to define myself, and I didn’t call anybody who worked on dOCUMENTA (13) a curator.... I actually tried to liquidate this word, “curator.” I always say “directed,”a more humble, modest term.”⁹⁵ Others, echoing its deflation, have claimed that curators ‘became self-delusional main characters’ now increasingly irrelevant to the operation of the art system.⁹⁶

The project of theorizing ‘the curatorial’ – distinct from the curator function – emerged in this context to reconsider the praxis of art’s public mediation without recourse to the separation of an inside and outside, mute object and discourse, artwork and viewer, aesthetics and politics. This paradigm of ‘edging disciplines’ makes a virtue of the way curating ‘never coheres into a disciplinary narrative and needs other disciplines in order to articulate and justify itself’. It operates paradoxically instead through ‘broken comprehension, ambivalent competence, unhinged knowledge, unsystematic skill, arbitrary proficiency, accidental mastery and casual expertise’.⁹⁷ In Maria Lind’s terms, the curatorial is not *a* method but rather ‘the next step almost, a kind of meta-methodology’.⁹⁸

Group Material’s work is significant for the history of curatorial work, then, precisely because of its slippage across registers of representation and performance. Staged and documented, it could be invoked as an exemplary model of critical representation, of exposing the political economies and ideologies of systems of representation. As an affective, listening mode of social production, by contrast, resisting its archival sedimentation in a history of social aesthetics, its practices have opened the way to notions of the curatorial, the production of public situations as ‘events of knowledge’. The individual

⁹³ McTavish, “End of the Professions”.

⁹⁴ Examples include Hiller, *The Producers*; and O’Neill and Doherty, *Locating the Producers*.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Talking Contemporary*, 43.

⁹⁶ See Beuendorf, “Curators are ‘Self-Delusional’ and ‘Irrelevant’”; also Balzer, *Curatorialism*.

⁹⁷ Martinon, “Edging Disciplines”; and Lind, “Introduction”, *Performing the Curatorial*.

⁹⁸ Smith, *Talking Contemporary*, 321.

curator as a discrete, specialist actor gives way here to a collaborative enterprise of aesthetically-oriented mediation.

Curatorial Relations

Curatorship is arguably the big new job of our times.... In an age saturated of new artefacts and information, it is perhaps the curator, the connection maker, who is the new storyteller, the meta-author. Brian Eno, 1992¹

The newly singularised role of the curator is inseparable from changes in artistic production that took place during the years 1968-1972.... These are the years of a power-struggle, not simply for control of a space, but for a control of meaning. Claire Bishop²

What exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself be the artwork. Suzanne Lacy³

In the second chapter I showed how the curator function emerged from the 1960s as an authorial 'signature' binding together artworks that no longer conformed to essentialised 'conditions' of painting and sculpture, *and* as a quasi-independent embodied 'voice' inviting viewers to interpret and make meaningful their encounters with exhibited work. I then accounted for the expansion of the gallery arts through the assimilation of much of the alternative space movements via the identification of 'style', by figuring it as an 'outside' to be incorporated back 'inside' the institution, and in tying grant funding to self-regulating and institutionalising processes. This remained constitutively incomplete, I argued, in particular with respect of turns to 'social aesthetics' – understood as an immanent self-actualising production occurring at the site of public encounter – and artists' independent curatorial practices.

I now examine how attempts to assimilate these within a visualist framework of representation predicated on mediation – of 'making art public' – failed and so compelled the post-representational project of 'the curatorial', a project that I claim has strong affinities with musicality reconceived (chapter 6).

I approach this in two broad phases. In the first and most elaborate part, I reconstruct in outline the structure articulating the field. Concerned with the relationship between what is

¹ Roberts, *How Art Made Pop*, 134. Having featured in the opening of Le Magasin, Grenoble, in 1986, Eno may have grasped early the significance of the emerging professionalisation of the field.

² Bishop, "What is a Curator?"

³ Suzanne Lacy, cited in Kwon, *One Space After Another*, 105.

proper to contemporary art, and so with its *internal* organisation, then also with its form of public address – its *external* relation – I claim this structure appears in two variants: critical (or reflexive) curating and relational aesthetics. I begin with Hal Foster’s *Return of the Real* (1996), conceived when he was the first Director of Critical and Curatorial Studies at the Whitney ISP from 1987;⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Esthétique relationelle* (1998) then provides its counterpart, associated with the founding course for *médiateurs* at Le Magasin. I draw on Catherine Malabou’s work both to show how these positions are intimately connected, despite their perceived opposition, and why the structure failed, notably in their combination through the ‘New Institutionalism’.

Secondly, whilst introducing the theoretical project of ‘the curatorial’ historically as a response to this crisis, my aim is not to present it as a negation of the representational framework – and so defined by relation to it – but as an attempt to re-address both its founding premises and to adapt to the practical and historical implications of artists’ turns to the social as the site of co-production. For the former, I situate the curatorial alongside Malabou’s recuperation of the notion of epigenesis in Kant – significantly, from the *Critique of Judgement* – to register a turn from a spatial to a temporal paradigm that changes the nature of (curatorial) mediation. The historicity, trajectory, and heterogenous genealogies of the social turn then, finally, connects the latter with the narrative of chapter 3 to demonstrate the curatorial as a form of post-praxis emerging alongside and in the interstices of the ‘official’ structure outlined earlier.⁵

Doubled Vision

Like the artworks it was entrusted to represent, the curator function was birthed under the sign of judgement. Curating was neither innocent nor all the same. The establishment of ‘critical and curatorial studies’ concerned the appraising of *both* different art practices *and* the ways these could be ‘made public’, a framework that also underpinned the field’s

⁴ Foster, *Return of the Real*. The book was dedicated to Ron Clark, head of the ISP, and to his friends from Seattle: Charles Wright, director of Dia Art Foundation 1986-1994; and Thatcher Bailey, founder of Bay Press.

⁵ Unlike the various traditions of praxis (including those of psychoanalysis, existentialism, pragmatism, and strands of analytic philosophy) that address the gap between Being and knowing – or theory and practice, subject and object, value and fact, freedom and necessity – as *constitutive*, unresolved and so a project to be closed, a post-praxis would be thoughtful action that does *not* take this gap as foundational. See Sartre, *Search for a Method*; Bernstein, *Praxis and Action*; and Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*.

emergent historiography and canonization (chapter 2). The tension between this self-reflexivity and self-regard can be felt in the consequential *mise-en-abîme* of ‘representing representation’, of signifying order through the ordering of signs.

Distinctions were needed from both artists’ curatorial practices and ‘curating’ menus or playlists. Whilst active and creative, the role also necessarily (or at least rhetorically) deferred to the artists represented. These intersected with the issue of laying bare the curator’s devices, of vigilance at attempts to (re-)naturalise the construction of ways of seeing. The curator function appeared here as a double hinge bringing together what it also kept constitutively apart: theories of art and the material works that exemplified them; and artistic practices with their own autonomous history and the lived worlds of contemporary publics encountering them. Schematically, the ‘internal’ border presented ideas about art (universals) to circumscribe artworks (particulars), whilst the ‘external’ border screened art from ‘the Real’.

The first point to emphasise is that these ‘internal’ and ‘external’ perspectives are connected as part of the same operation. Like a *subject*, the process of maintaining the integrity of the body of art with its identity necessarily establishes a relationship with its constitutive ‘outside’, a mediated world differing from the self. As with all temporal beings, this implied a self-understanding configured from its (art) historical past and a self-consciousness of its contemporary historicity.

This was an urgent necessity by the late 1980s when curating was professionalised. After all, it was the curator who was tasked with relating the museum’s collection to the latest work, and vice versa. The Minimalist turn had fractured the gallery’s walk through time; as Donald Judd put it, ‘linear history [had] unravelled somewhat’. An unbroken continuous history of what I will call ‘the subject Art’ could only be maintained by disavowing the paradigm shift in art-making since the 1960s;⁶ to re-establish the subject, a *discontinuous* account was needed.

⁶ Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Two influential treatments of this rupture were published in English in the early 1980s, each with substantial implications both for the emerging profession of curator and the museum's authority. Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* argued, in effect, that the art institution – and by extension, its curators – had been *too* successful.⁷ It had absorbed its own critiques by historicising artists' revolutionary praxis from the decades around the First World War – notably Futurism, Dada, Russian Constructivism, and Surrealism – conclusively reinforcing art's autonomous distinction from the social. The neutralisation of these gestures blunted any critical force they may have possessed as well as any attempt to reprise their radicality by the 'neo-avant-garde' from the 1950s. The possibility of institutionalised art's critical relation to its own time was nullified. The museum's continuation – its business-as-usual operation – merely displayed the hegemony of its own ideological function.

In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, by contrast, Arthur Danto began developing his thesis of 'the end of art'.⁸ With Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, the age of *visual* difference from everyday objects – and hence any purely aesthetic distinction – was over. The category 'art' was not abolished; what was finished was the possibility of any singular narrative or theory of art that might *a priori* contain all its examples, especially any theory predicated on sensory response. The ontological task for artists' work now, he argued, was to exhibit a relation to their own condition *qua* art, an 'aboutness' or self-positing quality of exemplification that necessarily distinguished them from 'commonplace' things that were neither reflexive nor insistent on their interpretation as art. The break signalled by Minimalism and Pop was final. The curator's task of making differences manifestly visible was nullified and effaced; instead, viewers needed to be lured and activated to redeem an ontological difference that was lying in wait, anticipated *in potentia*. Not only did this attitude implicitly alter retrospectively the condition of earlier artworks and their display; for the latest work, the museum was now potentially redundant (chapter 3).⁹

⁷ Bürger, *Avant-Garde*. Its first edition, in German, was published in 1974.

⁸ Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*; "End of Art"; *After the End of Art*; "A Philosophical Defense"; and "Art Criticism".

⁹ Danto insisted that his approach did not rely on the 'Institutional Theory of Art', the notion that objects became art because of the performative status of the museum's utterance. He only later acknowledged Kosuth's important precedence for his argument, proposing even that 'Art After Philosophy' "may indeed itself be a work of art". He did not, however, draw the same radical conclusions about the artist's relation to the institution and to the curator. Danto, *After the End of Art*, 14.

I will examine these positions further when considering respectively the arguments developed by Foster – contra Bürger – and Bourriaud – aligned with Danto. For both, however, it was a *curatorial* imperative to articulate an ‘internal’ relation of art to its own history as a precondition of its ‘external’ relation to the naturalised historicity of its own social context. Only by establishing its self-relation could art address its present.

Foster was explicit. His primary concern was ‘the coordination of diachronic (or historical) and synchronic (or social) axes in art and theory’. Mapping the field, grid-like, the ‘vertical’ axis investigated ‘the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium’, whilst the ‘horizontal’ axis indicated ‘a move from medium-specific to discourse-specific practice’.¹⁰ In this way, he combined analyses seeking to unify the proliferating modes of art through the 1970s: either as indexical forms, mute autonomous signs – severed from painting and sculpture’s interpretive conventions – that registered physical traces of the artist’s absent presence (Krauss); or as allegorical techniques such as citation, appropriation, and interpolation that used one signifying practice to ‘speak’ through another not to ‘restore an original meaning’ but to supplement, to double or replace it (Craig Owens). In my terms by extension, the curator function’s *signature* authorized the material relation of artworks to their disciplinary history; its *voice* engaged a contemporary public regarding its meaning.¹¹ Significantly, both models marked a failure of systems of representation reflexively *within or through systems of representation*: one (via Minimalism) following the immanent loss of medium specificity to mute ‘objecthood’; the other (via Pop) corresponding to a lapsarian alienation within language and a consequential felt loss of reality.

In this account, the art field now *represented the failure of systems of representation*, relating to its constitutive ‘outside’ in which this failure was omnipresent but not ‘visible’.

¹⁰ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 199.

¹¹ Krauss, “Notes on the Index”; Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse”. The index in this sense is exemplary as a signature function – “the artist was here” – and its structural homology at the level of the auteur-curated exhibition is given implicitly by Krauss: works signified only collectively through the syntax of their display, like ‘the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones’. By contrast, Owens observed not only that allegory derived from ‘*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak’ – voicing one thing through another – but that its postmodern form was characterised by its mode of address, which shifted ‘from a third- to a second-person’ form of interpellation. The spectator was made aware of her own reading, her responsibility for the errancy of meaning, its potential always to go awry.

Art could then function as a form of ideology critique, a position Foster developed from Benjamin Buchloh (who succeeded him at the Critical and Curatorial Studies programme).¹² The crisis of representation could only be registered first by *reconnecting* contemporary work with its earlier forms, procuring the necessary distance required to *disconnect* from – to denaturalise and de-centre – ‘the real’ of the present. The curator’s discourse implicitly alienated viewers from any ideological transparency of their own gaze, from taking for granted what they saw. They were interpellated to see how contemporary ways of seeing were constructed.

This doubled vision was crucial for Foster and at the heart of his departure from Bürger, for whom avant-garde artists were privileged with clear-sighted attacks on the ideology of aesthetic autonomy. Art’s history from the Enlightenment, Bürger argued, involved a dialectic between institutional processes abstracting art from its contemporary political economy opposed by progressive artists’ desire to reunite art and social life. This account was, Foster claimed, too linear and self-aware.¹³ The convergence of ‘art and life’ was a fantasy, an impossible dream of resolving the *foundational* problem of mediation, of seeking to make sense of experience through symbolic practices that were constitutively separate from their material referents (chapter 9). Indeed, this problem had become an endemic crisis within ‘late modern’ societies of the Global North. Far from an empty repetition of the gestures of the ‘heroic’ avant-garde, then, the neo-avant-garde critically doubled their attacks on representational systems. The new art did not ‘become’ or represent reality so much as it demonstrated the contemporary moment could not be represented to itself; no pure vision was possible, and no mirror relation existed for art to speculate on its own significance. What remained, critically, was to *make visible* this impossibility.

¹² Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures”.

¹³ ‘Although Bürger insists that this development is uneven and contradictory, he still narrates it as an *evolution*.’ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 9. For Bürger’s defence of dialectical reason, see *Avant-Garde* 19: ‘One should not assume, therefore, that all categories (and what they comprehend) pass through an even development. Such an evolutionist view would eradicate what is contradictory in historical processes and replace it with the idea that development is linear progress.’

Schematically, Foster read Bürger's narrative of the avant-garde through Fredric Jameson's notion of the cultural turn and his history of the political economy of the sign.¹⁴ Here, the break in modernist historicity – manifest with the neo-avant-garde – had its own history, a history of *further* abstraction. Jameson followed the periodization proposed by Ernest Mandel whose tripartite sequence of market, monopoly, and globalized capitalism offered parallels respectively with realism, modernism, and postmodernism.¹⁵ The first phase corresponded to the structure of the sign, a preliminary reification whereby the binary unit of signifier and signified (arbitrary linguistic fragment and conceptual image) 'seemed to entertain unproblematical relations with its referent'. A further fragmentation inherent to the exchange principle – the monetary equivalence of one thing with another – led to the abstraction of the sign, obscuring the previously transparent function of representation by marking its quasi-autonomy from the referent. Words and images (and artworks) marked their distance from the realities they seemed to represent (chapter 7). The postmodernist rupture then signalled a decisive reification of the sign itself, unbinding the signifier from the signified. 'Now reference and reality disappear altogether, and even meaning – the signified – is problematized. We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that...ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existent texts'.

Whilst Bürger's account corresponded to the first two moments, by Foster's analysis he failed to grasp the significance of the third, when narrative history became entangled by its own production. In postmodernism, historiography became allegorical: fragmentary, partial, the overlaying of one text with another. Unable to represent events with transparent objectivity and troubled by the widening gap between its own textuality and the material subjects to which it referred, the writing of history – especially 'critical' history – became precarious.¹⁶ Just as the identity of the subject was now decentred, always shifting, so the

¹⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism and Cultural Turn*. Foster also draws on Baudrillard, "Precession of Simulacra". Both Jameson and Baudrillard featured in Foster *Anti-Aesthetic*.

¹⁵ Mandel, *Late Capitalism*.

¹⁶ 'The allegorical...can be minimally formulated as the question posed to thinking by the awareness of incommensurable distances within its object of thought.... Allegorical interpretation is then first and foremost an interpretive operation which begins by acknowledging the impossibility of interpretation in the older sense, and by including that impossibility in its own provisional or even aleatory movements.' Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 168.

reader's invocation of the text would also be unfixed, fundamentally relational – 'for the newer allegory is horizontal rather than vertical', as Jameson put it.

The neo-avant-garde's significance then had two dimensions or vectors, correlating to the curator function's signature and voice: a critical investigation of the production of signs; and a 'quasi-anthropological art' of the social turn. Whilst the latter was more ambiguous for Foster, as I will show, the former offered the potential to reconfigure critically the relation between art's 'inside' and 'outside'. Exhibiting its mechanisms of producing meaning by reflexively addressing its own archive of symbolic forms and signifying gestures, artworks denied the innocent or rapt gaze that might disclose another, transcendent reality 'behind' the image. Art's difference from the everyday did not provide a passage to enlightenment or (self-)revelation, but catalysed a reflexive *disillusionment*.

Buchloh indicated the risks of the curator function simply overlaying artists' theoretically-sophisticated practices with a (re-)naturalised discourse, making clear sense of works that denied that possibility. 'That almost seems to have become the curator's primary role: to function as an agent who offers exposure and potential prominence – in exchange for obtaining a moment of actual practice that is about to be transformed into myth.'¹⁷ This was too defeatist for Foster, for whom the possibility of a critical curating was therefore an imperative. It was essential to counter the 'cynical reason' that was not only reconciled with the ideology of representation and thus art's abstraction from 'the real' but complicit in its spectacular celebration of the power of images. The simulacra and 'commodity sculptures' of artists such as Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach reflected a tendency 'to treat all practices (artistic, social, and otherwise) as detached signifiers to be manipulated, ahistorical conventions to be consumed.'

Artist and patron alike tended to regard art in terms of prestige signs and investment portfolios, and both tended to operate under a conventionalist ethos that treats almost everything as a commodity-sign for exchange. The political economy is overseen by a professional-managerial elite, "yuppies" as they were called in the middle 1980s, "symbolic analysts" as they were called in the early 1990s.¹⁸

¹⁷ Buchloh, "Since realism there was...".

¹⁸ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 122. After the Robert and Ethel Scull auction of work by Rauschenberg, Johns and Pop artists in 1973 – the first US auction selling only contemporary work – 'art was no longer "such a fine,

This was 'an art world in which, without much irony, an art dealer could be presented as a master of deconstruction, a stockbroker could assume the mantle of Duchamp, and an investment banker could cite institution critique as his formative influence.'¹⁹

By contrast, Foster articulated the curator function more like a psychoanalyst who could address with sufficient detachment the co-ordinated and fractured relationships between the subject Art to its past, and with the social world from which it remained necessarily apart.²⁰ Indeed, whilst the analysand could not be self-identical or self-present, it could be critically modelled 'vertically' after the psychoanalytic paradigm of 'deferred action', whereby an 'event is only registered through another that recodes it'; and 'horizontally' by the notion of *parallax*, 'the apparent displacement of an object caused by actual movement of its observer'.²¹

Nor was this accidental. Jameson borrowed from Lacan's elaboration of 'schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning'. It was the corrosion and collapse of this structure – constitutive of historiography as of autobiography – by the apparent arbitrary

tony, cultured thing [according to the collector]...Suddenly people are bidding wildly like it was a commodity.'" By 1976, the curator and NEA visual art programme founder Henry Geldzahler positively portrayed a scene in which stockbrokers and artists were becoming indistinguishable. With the shift in artistic values from 'quality' to 'interest', the task of selection for exhibition 'fell gradually to art dealers and museum curators, vastly enhancing their power beyond the task of simply arranging shows.' Marquis, *Pop Revolution*, 176-177.

¹⁹ These refer respectively to Mary Boone, Jeff Koons, and Jeffrey Dietch. The merging of advertising and collectors is also recognisable here in a figure like Charles Saatchi, whose first art collection was of Minimalist art, whilst his concept for advertising Silk Cut was appropriated from Lucio Fontana's cut canvases (an artist whose work he owned) – Buck, *Moving Targets*, 126-9.

²⁰ *Return of the Real*, 28: 'I need to foreground an assumption already at work in this text: that history, in particular modernist history, is often conceived...on the model of the individual subject, indeed *as a subject*. ...But this modelling of history continues in contemporary criticism even when it assumes the death of the subject, for often the subject only returns at the level of ideology....As is clear from my treatment of the art institution as a subject capable of repression and resistance, I am as guilty of this vice as the next critic, but rather than give it up I want to make it a virtue....why not apply the most sophisticated model of the subject, the psychoanalytic one, and do so in a manifest way?'

²¹ *Return of the Real*, xii. Similarly, 207: 'There is no simple *now*:...there is no timely transition between the modern and the postmodern. In a sense each comes...too early or too late, and our consciousness of each is premature or after the fact. In this regard modernism and postmodernism must be seen together, *in parallax*..., by which I mean that our framings of the two depend on our position in the present *and* that this position is defined in such framings.'

movement 'from signifier to signifier' that became properly *traumatic*. History abides with grammar, lawful composition; in a word: order. 'If we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.'

Art now displayed a *compulsion to repeat* that expanded the field. This repetitive circular movement of the drive, Lacan claimed, revolved around an unsymbolizable Real beyond any representational regime. The opticality of this problematic provided its grounding framework. 'Such analogies between psychoanalytic discourse and visual art are worth little if nothing mediates the two, but here both the theory and the art relate repetition and the real to visibility and the gaze.' Perception of self, of art, was constitutively mediated, *screened*; in Lacan's vertiginous phrasing, the unconscious – of the individual, of art – was 'structured like a language'.²² Art now registered this uncanny sensation of a reality that was both de-realised and viscerally intimate, registered notably by the *trompe l'oeil* and 'traumatic illusionism' of surrealist artists, critical doublings of appropriation art, and the obscene, monstrous and excremental productions of abject art with its emotional extremes of horror and despair or fatigue and exhausted indifference. 'This shift in conception – from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma – may be definitive in contemporary art, let alone in contemporary theory.'²³

Transforming the subject Art

Foster's traumatic paradigm denied the possibility of any *immediate* relationship between inside and outside, screened by the curator function. This model was itself untimely, however; the field of neuropsychiatry – applying neurology to the insights of psychoanalysis – emerging in the 1980s brought to light *a different psychic economy* with consequential ramifications for the subject Art. The analysis of individuals suffering *posttraumatic stress*

²² *Ibid.*, 138, 140: 'The meaning of [the screen] is obscure. I understand it to refer to the cultural reserve of which each image is one instance. Call it the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture, this screen *mediates* the object-gaze *for* the subject, but it also *protects* the subject *from* this object-gaze.'

²³ *Ibid.*, 146.

disorder (PTSD) elaborated an opening of structures for (self-)representation, corporeal understanding, social and political bodies to a different – more *musical* – regime of causality. By sketching briefly the difference between theories of trauma and PTSD, guided by Malabou's *The New Wounded*, I want both to indicate the implications for constituting art as a 'subject', introducing a framework that will establish the connection of Foster with Bourriaud, and to anticipate the homologous structural shift from the curator function to the curatorial.

Freud's theory concerned precisely how subjects retain their self-identity over time, or through history, by organising the relation between an (autonomous) inside and outside. The cognitive mechanisms producing this distinction then generated their own distortions. The homeostatic function involved a process of cathexis, a means of relating externalised objects and events to a 'self' by attaching nervous energy to processes of symbolic representation. This screening process of representation required its own quantum of energy, however, and as this could *not* be definitively represented to itself nor located to another cause it was instead attached as a *self*-representation, an inside of the inside. This constituted the psychic apparatus of the drive: 'the function of the libido is thus to unify a *field*.'²⁴ In this way, every exogenous stimulus was made significant, *meaningful*, by recourse to the structure of self-production: 'surplus' energy required for representation could be redirected, affectively bound to personal narrative and the subject's relation to its object. It was 'the hermeneutic adventure of psychic energy'.

For psychoanalysis, the psyche – as an imaginary construct – was therefore imperishable. Any traumatic event – an unassimilable encounter – could always seek resolution by working backwards in time, regressing to a prior state (such as childhood) mediated by fantasy. The material accident became significant; chance became necessity, *symptomal*, through this process of symbolic production – hence Freud's famous slips and fascination with wordplay.²⁵ It was precisely the interplay between the 'synchronous' process of binding

²⁴ Malabou, *New Wounded*, 36.

²⁵ Malabou shows that the Greek *symptoma* 'is situated at the intersection of the accident and hermeneutics (93): it is a *meaningful accident*.' *Ibid.*, 86. 'The soldering of external events and lived experience gives the event itself *historical* value: thanks to this process, it is integrated into the history of the subject and can never be isolated from it.'

events and the 'diachronic' relation to memory in the production of self-narrative that constituted the subject's resilience.²⁶ By extension, the psychoanalyst-curator could always recuperate art's self-narrative from its fragments.

Crucially, this dual system of representation also could not imagine its own absence or negation. It could, however – as Foster emphasised – indicate the gap screening self-identity from perception as a cut, a wound, a trauma. Indeed it was the originary possibility of this non-coincidence – of the unsymbolizable event, severing any self-relation – that constituted the castration complex, an anxious structure *anticipating* separation (chapter 7). Trauma was, then, the cause of estrangement that saw itself coming. This expectant system, what Lacan called the 'horizon of the encounter', not only troubled but ultimately *guaranteed* the subject's (and the subject Art's) integrity.

Malabou notes that psychoanalysis 'is, above all, a theory of conflict' established in proximity to the First World War, and claims that determinations of psychopathology are 'always contemporaneous with a certain state of a certain age of war'.²⁷ Analysing soldiers displaying mental suffering, Freud insisted their neuroses were not brain injuries but disturbances to the meaningful system of self-production, failures in cathecting representations. Examining legions of Vietnam War veterans, neuropsychiatrists recognised the material impact of brain injuries themselves. Returnees were not simply scarred by the loss of the reality principle, agents of and/or witnesses to unspeakable horror through a pulverised language; they displayed a loss of affect, an emotional deficit that marked them as *changed subjects*.

Malabou names this formative power of the brain *cerebrality* in contrast with Freud's designation of *sexuality* as the psychic economy of representation determined by the pleasure principle. Here, neurological plasticity *shapes and is shaped* by subjectivity. The

²⁶ Malabou cites Boris Cyrulnik (183): 'Resilience thus appears as "both a synchronic and a diachronic process" that brings "developmental biological forces into articulation with a social context in order to create a self-representation that makes possible the historicization of the subject".' The axiological terms can be found earlier in Lacan's account of Freud's insistence on a distinction between perception and signifying consciousness – see Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 45-46.

²⁷ Malabou, *New Wounded*, xvi-xvii.

emotional brain is not a medium for surplus energy producing a self-representation, and affect does not cede priority to signification; rather, it regulates the relation between inside and outside as a continuous self-modelling constitutive of auto-affectation. This self is not virtual; it is embodied, not only in the brain and the mind's eye but distributed across all the modalities of sensory knowledge. With cerebrality, the brain does not gaze at itself. We do not see ourselves thinking. Instead, the self persists as self-narrative, from moment to moment: 'you are the music while the music lasts.'²⁸

The production of self as a performative and ongoing process rather than as a fixed representation signals a distinct regime of events. Freud insisted on the sublimation of an affective to a symbolic economy, whereby the contingent event triggers the reawakening of earlier, unconscious memories. Accidents signified because their possibility was already foreseen. Cerebrality, by contrast, does not privilege systems of representation – a screen pre-establishing the separation of symbolic order and material reality – but acknowledges the metamorphic power of contingent events through an affective economy without anticipatory form.

[It] insists upon the unexpected and irreducible character of the traumatic event, which even if it recalls past trauma, cannot do so without *profoundly modifying the vision and content of the past itself*....[S]uch an event introduces an *inauthenticity*, a *facticity* within psychic life....Accordingly, a *new subject* enters the scene in order to assume this past that never took place.²⁹

Malabou refers to the military psychiatrist Claude Barrois's displacement of the Oedipus myth by the Orpheus myth. The victims of contemporary trauma return not from childhood, but from hell. In this opening of a 'relation between biology and the social' that is not prefigured within a representational schema, wounds are *political*. The signals that Foster identified with 'abject art' and 'traumatic realism' – emotional withdrawal, distancing,

²⁸ Antonio Damasio, cited in *ibid.*, 44. Adding to Lacan's triad of Real-Symbolic-Imaginary, Malabou proposes this regime as the Material: 'the sense of an affective economy that solicits itself *without seeing itself*'.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 151-2. Malabou insists that regression and the maintenance of the subject it affords, both essential to Freud, are rejected here: 'this very continuity is what will be called into question within contemporary neurological debate'.

indifference, coolness, neuropathy – were not only effects of war but also of social conflict.³⁰

The subject Art's history no longer guaranteed its integrity. The archival past of its collections was not a reliable framework for interpretation but could be falsified, mythologised, overdetermined. Malabou insists: 'The dissimulation of the reason for the event is the new form of the event. The increasingly radical effacement of the distinction between accident and crime, between disastrous incidents and war, the multiform presence of the absence of any responsible instance or author makes *the natural catastrophe of contemporary politics* into a daily occurrence....*The enemy, today, is hermeneutics.*'³¹ It is precisely here that the curatorial – in contrast to the curator function – opens the subject Art to its being changed by contingent events, events in which affects are not subordinated to symbolic meaning.

It is indicative that, writing two decades later, Foster remains troubled by the same structural problem of representing the impossibility of representing the Real.³² In particular, he laments the dissolution of criticality and theory, their disavowal as predicated on dubious judgement, unwarranted authority, and scepticism of critical distance. He nevertheless insists on its possibility, advocating 'interventionist models in which critique is explicitly positioned as immanent'. Here, criticality *was* the public sphere in operation, even whilst (echoing Malabou) this ideal and idealistic space has been 'overwhelmed by the publicity of mass media, not to mention the management of political opinion'. The felt loss of the possibility of a truly democratic space then provided the context and impetus for recent participatory art that merely and insufficiently 'foreground[s] discursivity and sociability above all else.' The horizon for art had changed, he concluded, acknowledging that the model of deferred action may not be enough either: 'such actuality cannot be fixed on a traumatic view of the past; that is, even as it calls up past art, it must also open onto future work.'³³

³⁰ The definition of PTSD was expanded in 1994 to include any traumatic event 'experienced in the mode of fear, impotence, or horror'.

³¹ Malabou, *New Wounded*, 155.

³² Foster, *Bad New Days*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 140.

Encountering *Relational Aesthetics*

Foster's primary target in critiquing practices of 'discursivity and sociability' was the curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud, whose *Esthétique relationnelle* had framed much of the debate about social practice art.³⁴ In emphasising a lack of criticality in this theory, its displacement of conflict by a politics of consent readymade for absorption by the art institution as culture industry, he followed a line of argument developed by Claire Bishop in 2004.³⁵

The dates are significant because a shared source connecting Bourriaud's and Foster's theoretical models was lost in translation. Relational aesthetics leaned heavily on Louis Althusser's late writing on the philosophy of the encounter, published in English in 2006, which – like Foster's sources – owed significant debts to Lacan's seminar 'Tuché and Automaton'.³⁶ This set out two models of causality sharing the same structural problematic – as Malabou patiently demonstrates – that I correlate with the curator function.

I have shown that Foster's dual perspective was predicated on the articulation of an inside and outside to the curatorial field marked respectively by reflexive and unreflexive failures of representation after modernism. A fractured, divided subject Art returned to the symbols and gestures of its past in order to make publicly visible contemporary means of manufacturing 'reality'. Contingent events of an increasingly unstable external environment were absorbed and made meaningful through art's critical return to its history.

Bourriaud inverted the process but, I argue, maintained the framework. Social relations became both the subject and object of art, transfigured – in Danto's term – through 'aesthetic praxis' and so equally distinct from the everyday. These staged, intersubjective encounters found their necessity – made *artistic* sense – through this contingent contact with the site of public display. Art's outside was internalised, transposed.

³⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.

³⁵ Bishop, "Antagonism". She followed this with "The Social Turn", and ultimately at book-length with *Artificial Hells*.

³⁶ Althusser, "Materialism of the Encounter"; Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 53-64.

Art was neither a transcendental nor an historical concept, Bourriaud claimed. Its being was determined neither outside of time (ontogenetic) nor by its stylistic evolution (phylogenetic). Acknowledging Danto's claim that the singular thread of art history was irrevocably cut, not to be re-knotted, he found in Althusser an argument for each work creating its own historical necessity as a *retroactive effect*. 'Relational art is not the revival of any movement, nor is it the comeback of any style....Its basic claim – the sphere of human relations as artwork venue – has no prior example in art history, even if it appears, after the fact, as the obvious backdrop of all aesthetic praxis.'³⁷ Not only did he take this as an absolution of the need for historical justification; this theory of contingent events removed the modernist burden of responsibility to the historical future too. If art could no longer make or keep promises to times to come, a message in a bottle, its task could simply be one of 'learning to inhabit the world in a better way' by creating situations of encounter.³⁸ Artists needed not to represent traumatised subjectivities, but to invent new inter-relational ones.

As I have shown, the Freudian system prioritised meaning produced immanently to the psyche over the causal value of the external event. The necessary recourse to historical memory gave symptoms their efficient cause, whilst the chance occurrence was only an arbitrary trigger. Lacan's theory of trauma, however, demonstrated its ambivalence by effectively reversing the poles of this sequence. The 'encounter with the Real' – as *tuché* – was structuring: it could not itself be symbolised but motivated the *automaton* of repetitive behaviour. The terms derive from Aristotle's *Physics*, denoting respectively 'fortune' – pure contingency – and 'that which happens on its own'. As Malabou shows, machinic repetition can be as blind as chance, and the unexpected can signal purposiveness, as augury. The event setting the machinery of self-representation in motion thereby gains a novel significance, and it is here that Lacan located his famous *objet petit a*, or 'partial object', beginning – in his following seminar – with 'the gaze'.

³⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 44.

³⁸ 'It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows,' 45.

In his closing remarks on this causal regime, he also noted its resonance with pre-Socratic philosophy that claimed the coming into being of the world itself – creation *ex nihilo* – in a *clinamen*, an ‘inclination’, a motivated deviation from functional habit. Epicurus offered the metaphor of atoms raining in parallel, untouched until the catalytic accident of an ‘infinitesimal swerve’ by one initiated a collision, what Althusser – following two years of clinical treatment after strangling his wife H  l  ne – designated a ‘materialism of the encounter’. Tracing this line of thought through Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau, he resituated the Marxian tradition to redeem it from its idealist, teleological form. Empirical history demonstrated that capitalism was *not destined* to fail through its own contradictions, but its transformation *will have become necessary* when the conditions allow for a revolutionary accident to take hold.³⁹ For Althusser, Darwin’s lesson of evolution as a series of unforeseeable events enabling particular variations to establish themselves thus applied to history also.⁴⁰ The lawfulness of an event did not precede it, the rules given in advance; it was a corollary of the stabilisation of the encounter.

This was precisely the attraction of the model for Bourriaud, whose theory translated this structure for the condition of art from the 1990s, and in particular the rise of social aesthetics.⁴¹ ‘Form’ was not a fixed set of relations but a dynamic process, *formation*, the becoming-lawful of an encounter through its recognition *as legitimate* when the elements comprising its whole constitute a ‘sense’ that ‘holds good’.⁴² More specifically, the visual space of the encounter required the coming-together of differences, of unknowable subjectivities: ‘Our persuasion...is that form only assumes its texture (and only acquires a real existence) when it introduces human interactions....artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousness.’ This mode of exchange was not that of the

³⁹ ‘Instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies.’ Althusser, “Materialism of the Encounter”, 193-4.

⁴⁰ ‘This shows that...although there is no Meaning to history (an End which transcends it, from its origin to its term), there can be meaning *in* history, since this meaning emerges from an encounter that was real, and really felicitous’, *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴¹ ‘Relational aesthetics is part of a materialistic tradition....defined in a noteworthy way by Louis Althusser...as a “materialism of the encounter”, or random materialism.’ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 18. Althusser’s importance for Bourriaud is even more marked in his more recent book, *The Exform*.

⁴² ‘Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.’ *Relational Aesthetics*, 21.

Medusan, reifying and critical logic of *le regard des autres* (from Sartre), but was constituted by an ethics of the face (from Lévinas), symbolising ‘the responsibility we have towards others’. Its goal would be to seduce from the habitual, to incline the viewer’s gaze by ‘summoning her to dialogue’.

Bourriaud borrowed Lacan’s theory of the gaze (supplementing Danto’s claims for the production of artistic vision) as that which provokes desire, setting in motion the psychic economy and therefore the production of the subject: ‘It’s the spellbinding para-hypnotic process of the aesthetic way of looking that crystallises around it the different ingredients of subjectivity.’⁴³ ‘Aesthetic *partial objects*’ make relations significant by operating as ‘semiotic segments’, from which he identified affinities with widespread related practices of relational artists: sampling, recycling, and recontextualising – what he termed *postproduction*.⁴⁴ This was not simply a continuation of appropriation art, the purloining of signs, but the repurposing – within an aesthetic space marked by the legacies of painting and sculpture – of *systems* of signifying: cultural forms such as sharing a meal (exemplified in Rirkit Tiravanija’s work) or holding a conversation, as so many social readymades.⁴⁵ These conventions could be re-articulated, their semiotic relations transfigured by analogy with computer programming and video editing technologies. The artist’s work shifted from conception of material production to curating framing situations reconstituting social processes and the ways they produce meaning. Thus ‘the exhibition has become the basic unit from which it is possible to conceive of relationships between art and ideology ushered in by technologies, to the detriment of the individual work.’

Viewers were conceived not (only) as actors on the gallery’s stage. Rather, in parallel with digital technologies’ user controls – fast forward, rewind, shuffling, remixing – that effaced distinctions between reception and production, they had a new agency. ‘This culture of use implies a profound transformation of the status of the work of art:...it now functions as an

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁴ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*.

⁴⁵ ‘One of the virtual properties of the image is its power of *linkage*...: flags, logos, icons, signs, all produce empathy and sharing, and all generate *bond*. Art (practices stemming from painting and sculpture which come across in the form of an exhibition) turns out to be particularly suitable when it comes to expressing this hands-on civilisation, because it *tightens the space of relations*.’ *Relational Aesthetics*, 15.

active agent, a musical score, an unfolding scenario.⁴⁶ Bourriaud figured the artist-curator, then, not as a composer of fixed notations but as a DJ, a ‘semionaut’ who ‘produce[s] original pathways through signs’, who frames the making of meaning by anticipating the situation’s potential combinatorial relations.

As Claire Bishop and others soon pointed out, this happy state was not as benign as the theory suggested, yet the model of criticality she shared with Foster was equally troubled. I will return to this in addressing the implications of artists’ social practices, but provisionally want to register the symmetry between the two positions. On the one hand, art was incommensurable with the social Real whose distorting representational ideologies it made visible by recourse to the meaningful archive of its own past practices; on the other, the social was transfigured as art and made newly meaningful as an arena for semiotic play by inclined contact with the exhibition’s public site of display. What pointed ‘vertically’ (diachronically) ‘inside’ then ‘horizontally’ (synchronously) ‘outside’ for Foster became for Bourriaud the eventual movement of a (social) transubstantiation from outside to ‘inside’ affording an ‘upward’ or ‘retroactive’ (de-instrumentalised) sublimation of their signifying conventions. *Inside out, or outside in*. Both take the dual perspective of the curator function. Their primary difference in this respect lies in the relation of curator and artist. In the reflexive paradigm, the curator reinforces (invisibly) individual artists’ critical repetitions, or steps aside for the artist as guest curator to enact a process of institutional critique at the level of the exhibition. In the relational model, the artist’s situation is conceived as an exhibition, making the (visible) curator a co-conspirator. The former underlined the signature; the latter amplified the voice.

I will approach the tensions between these approaches initially by considering relational aesthetics through Malabou’s reading of Althusser’s materialism of the encounter.⁴⁷ My aim is not simply to repeat the critiques offered by Bishop and others, but to recover its structural problematic. In this way, I show that attempts to reconcile the two – in the New Institutionalism – failed because what had been an ‘external’ relation (of art and the social

⁴⁶ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 20. Significantly, this argument was anticipated by the sociologist of music Antoine Hennion in “The Musicalisation of the Visual Arts”.

⁴⁷ Malabou, “Whither Materialism?”.

Real) was treated as an 'internal' *representational* distinction (of theory mediating practice). The curatorial can then be appreciated as a project to reconfigure the framework by which artistic and social production become coextensive.

New Materialism, New Institutionalism, and the Curatorial

Nothing. Void. Lack. In the immanence of the event, there could be no outside, no transcendent position, no critical distance. No representation. Althusser insisted on foreclosing any residual idealism, any predetermining idea, concept or teleology, by stressing the central proposition of his theory in terms of the paradoxical presence of an originary absence: that '*there has always-already been nothing*'.⁴⁸ Thinking the becoming of difference from within materialism itself, the emergence of significance – a *material* fact – nevertheless involved an expectant structure, one that Malabou analysed in Lacan's *tuché* and *automaton*. The primacy of the screen, like O'Doherty's depiction of the gallery 'white cube', functions as a structure of inscription, rendering everything that touches or enters it significant.⁴⁹

Malabou dwells on the model of Darwin invoked by Althusser to indicate the form of material difference he was proposing for history in general. The void in evolutionary theory has no ontology – negative or positive – but operates as a morphological condition, a constant variability, a generative *plasticity*.⁵⁰ It is the accident of natural selection that gives to form an orientation that makes durable specimens (the pattern figured by visible difference – from the Latin *specere*, to look) of contingent examples. Whilst such environmental curation lacks intentionality or intelligent design, however, the application of this structure to historical materialism gives its events a social destiny, the founding error of "social Darwinism". Indeed, Malabou emphasises that whilst 'in nature there is an automatic and blind equilibrium between identity and difference,...in the social order, there

⁴⁸ Althusser, "Materialism of the Encounter", 189 – paraphrasing Lacan's summary of this determining void as 'not-nothing'.

⁴⁹ For Danto, it was not the white cube but art theory that transfigured: 'Art is the kind of thing that depends for its existence upon theories; without theories of art, black paint *is* just black paint and nothing more.' *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 135.

⁵⁰ Plasticity is Malabou's core concept, recovered from her reading of Hegel undertaken for her doctoral work under Derrida – Malabou, *Future of Hegel*.

is always a predominance of identity over difference'.⁵¹ The norms governing selection incline towards values of the dominant class. As conceived by Althusser, the lack from which significant difference emerges is insufficiently lacking.

Bourriaud obscured this problem – of which Althusser was aware – by giving artist-curators precedence in determining the forms through which social relations may be articulated aesthetically. *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* are normative texts, setting out criteria by which to appreciate and value artists' social practices. The unspoken in the void from which these encounters are fabricated is, then, *not not-political*. The aesthetic space he claimed for the visibility of relational art does not lack instrumental function but represents and so reproduces it. He adopted the exhibition as an *ideal* structure within which social forms become visible, without accounting for the lessons of institutional critique that displayed the museum's ideology itself at work. It was a system of representation without self-relation. Bishop's retort was therefore accurate: Bourriaud's insistence on the (anticipatory) social *form* of these works overdetermined their specific *content*; and the *quality* of relations produced therefore became subordinate, obscuring the ways in which the ludic character of situations supposedly distinct (aesthetically) from means-end rationality could themselves be re-purposed by their institutional hosts. Theory dictated practice.

In blurring the role of artist and curator, relational aesthetics also then enhanced the latter's status. This in turn enabled galleries to absorb sites of encounter as opportunities for participation, to value and market the difference accorded social habits by their recontextualization, becoming a primary means by which they adapted to the experience economy. As experimental forms of playful and open-ended interaction, exhibitions were drained of criticality. The curator James Voorhies claims the loss of critique is now widespread:

If it looks like everyday life, then how is one to discern its critical attitude? Indeed, social practice promises something, but more often than not its products are limited to dilettante sociological experiments that in the end have the potential to leave

⁵¹ Malabou, "Whither Materialism", 52. This is also a lesson of Annie Coombes' classic essay, "National and Cultural Identities".

spectators with little more than a day's worth of entertainment. It is precisely this entertainment value that capital has colonized, transforming the spectator into a consumer of experience. This is what the industry of contemporary art...has siphoned from the remains of the criticality that relational art once possessed.⁵²

This need to locate and rearticulate a *critical difference* for artists' social practices became emblematic of the New Institutionalism. Interviewed in 2013, a decade after adapting the term to indicate 'the reformed and experimental art institution', the curator Jonas Ekeberg described its dual origin in 'neo-conceptual and social practices' that had transformed the field, and in artists' increasingly political and activist work.⁵³ The rapid expansion in contemporary art museums from the 1990s had coincided with the social turn and Bourriaud's influential theorisation, requiring a new kind of organisation not predicated on the demands of exhibiting painting and sculpture alone but capable of working with artists to create public *situations*.⁵⁴ At the same time, the ability of institutions to repurpose participation and co-opt critique – together with an increasingly unstable and disturbing political and economic context – demanded different approaches with a renewed spirit of criticality.

The contemporaneous parallel growth of biennials and new forms of public art had both expanded the forms of institution and created the conditions for further experimentation with project models. In this environment, the boundaries designating exhibitions from other forms of producing publics – through discussion, forum, workshop, residency, research, performance, pedagogy – eroded, as did those distinguishing artists, curators, and artist-curators. Indeed it was at this time, in the early- to mid-aughties, that the notion of a performative curating became thematic, figuring practices that reflexively addressed their own production. As New Institutionalism gave a name to the constellation of issues and set an agenda for practice, curating itself could be reflexively thematised within a relational

⁵² Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood*.

⁵³ Ekeberg, "snapped out of the air". It was first adopted from the social sciences for Ekeberg, *New Institutionalism*.

⁵⁴ The notion of art as the production of situations, and its role in New Institutionalism, features prominently in the writing of Claire Doherty: '[It is] in the gap between conventional exhibition-making and 'performative curating' that we locate the dilemma of New Institutionalism: how to respond to artistic practice without prescribing the visitors' responses, and how to create a programme which allows for a diversity of events, exhibitions and projects, without privileging the social over the visual.' "The institution is dead!". See also Doherty, "Exhibition as Situation"; *From Studio to Situations*; and *SITUATION*.

aesthetics paradigm. Shows such as Per Hüttner's *I Am A Curator* invited visitors to select, organise and display from a collection of artworks at London's Chisenhale Gallery (2003). Others included *Your Show Here* at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2002), and *Curator for One Day* at the Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst (2008).⁵⁵

From the outset, the terminology of New Institutionalism and the practices it signalled were controversial. For many, it indicated a disturbing hubris on the part of curators usurping the role of artists. For others, the term sounded too proximate to notions of New Public Management, the politically-inspired incorporation of organisational techniques, frameworks and strategies from for-profit commercial bodies by publicly-funded institutions.⁵⁶ Much of the initiative for experimental approaches had come from the medium- and smaller-scale galleries often in 'relative peripheries'. Less freighted by organizational weight, history, collection, financial and political influence, these mostly European institutions found themselves vulnerable to incentivised pressures on state and grant funding: to diversify and increase audiences; spread risk by recalibrating and expanding finances through corporate sponsorship, earned income, and private giving; introduce business expertise and links to high net worth individuals within governance bodies; and to complement social policies, for example around lifelong education, public health, and social regeneration.⁵⁷ Ekeberg also noted a growing polarisation of the field, with the increasing impact of art fairs and dealer-led initiatives off-setting a rise in artist-led, often anti-capitalist and non-curated projects and spaces. By 2007, the discourse of New

⁵⁵ Green, *When Artists Curate*. *I Am A Curator* is also covered extensively by Drabble, "Stop Making Sense". More recently, the Essl Museum invited Facebook users to 'like' images of its collection, presenting *Like It* (2013) based on the most popular works.

⁵⁶ For example, Bishop critiqued the application of relational aesthetics to the production of museums' amenities 'such as the bar (Jorge Pardo at K21, Düsseldorf; Michael Lin at the Palais de Tokyo; Liam Gillick at the Whitechapel Art Gallery) or reading lounge (Apolonija Šušteršič at Kunstverein Munich, or the changing "Le Salon" program at the Palais de Tokyo), and in turn present these as works of art. An effect of this insistent promotion of these ideas of artist-as-designer, function over contemplation, and open-endedness over aesthetic resolution is often ultimately to enhance the status of the curator, who gains credit for stage-managing the overall laboratory experience.' "Antagonism", 53.

⁵⁷ Lind, "Relative Periphery". By 2005, responding to that year's Frieze Art Fair in London, she wrote and gathered contributions for a speculative quasi-manifesto – *European Cultural Policies 2015: A Report with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe* – seeking remedies for a situation in which 'Art is almost completely instrumentalized, regardless of whether its financing is private or public.' See also Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood*.

Institutionalism had been largely abandoned, historicised within four years and critiqued by almost all of those first identified with it.⁵⁸

At this point we reach the limits of New Institutionalism. New Institutionalism is all about believing in the institution's ability to change, not about leaving the institution.... On the one hand, you have the negation of the curator and of the institution as you find it in parts of the neo-bohemian and activist art scene. On the other hand you have the professionalization of it, in curatorial programs all over Europe. Neither of this gives me much hope, to be honest.⁵⁹

As this movement began to collapse under its own contradictions, the task became how to make art public – or how the public make art – without replicating its underlying structures. How could relations of art to itself (the institution) and to the social (critical real) be approached without insisting in advance on the (curator function's) boundary distinctions? 'The curatorial' emerged at this time to address this problematic.

Given its contested history of borders and bordering, it is perhaps fitting that the European Union should have supported the international network comprising the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp), which set out to investigate the boundary-making practices of the art field. Its three-year research project, *Transform* (2005-08), explored the history of and future potential for institutional critique in the wake of museums' institutionalisation of critique. One of the first programmes to rethink the issue of institutionalising, this was near-contemporaneous with the parallel discourse on the future for 'alternative spaces', of how an alternative to the alternative might be enacted (chapter 3).⁶⁰ If there could be no 'outside' of the system without reproducing its binaries – of inside and outside, identity and difference, aesthetic autonomy and social reality, theory and practice – then a dynamic, temporalized model was needed to disturb the processes by which institutions reproduce their form.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Kolb and Flückiger, "Writing New Institutionalism"; and Möntmann, "Rise and Fall".

⁵⁹ Ekeberg, "snapped out of the air", 23.

⁶⁰ Raunig and Ray, *Reinventing Institutional Critique*; Rand, *Alternative Thinking / Alternative Spaces*; and O'Neill, Steeds, and Wilson, *How Institutions Think*. In the latter, Binna Choi and Annette Krauss refer to a 'wave of international forums dealing with the 'institution'', detailing six further symposiums and seminars in the preceding 18 months alone.

⁶¹ One of the themes emerging from this discourse has been that of 'slow curating' or 'durational' approaches to production, often as a counter to the status-signalling 'nomadic' temporary and project-based curating of biennials and similar place-making practices. O'Neill and Doherty, *Locating the Producers*.

Alongside terms proffered such as ‘institutional experimentalism’ and ‘relational institutionalism’, Gerald Raunig proposed ‘instituent practices’ whose ‘actualization of the future in a present becoming is not the opposite of institution....it does not oppose the institution, but it does flee from institutionalization and structuralization.’⁶² Others addressed the issue as a yet more fundamental question of the institute’s homeostatic function. By making visible relations always-already meaningful, the museum could absorb any critique by returning it to the aesthetic as a problem of symbolic practices and their historical significance. The fate of artworks exposing the exhibitionary complex had demonstrated the *mutually constitutive relation* between instituting and critique as such: the curator function’s double perspective.

Instituent practices needed to change a modernist model of critique and its disinterested observer for an understanding of *criticality*. Rather than circumscribing or delimiting its field, the curatorial task would involve producing its own lawfulness without recourse to an autonomous category and without separating symbolic from material practices.⁶³ In a special edition – on critique – of eipcp’s web journal (2006), *transversal*, Irit Rogoff introduced ‘the curatorial’ in an extended reflection on ‘embodied criticality’:

For some time now we have been differentiating between ‘curating’, the practice of putting on exhibitions and the various professional expertises it involves, and ‘the curatorial’, the possibility of framing those activities through...principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense ‘the curatorial’ is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might not have been able to predict.[It is] a *cross-disciplinary field without any relation to a master discipline, put[ting] entities in a relation of movement to one another.*⁶⁴

Whilst ‘the curatorial’ was swaddled here in its infancy by scare quotes, Rogoff gave it legs through the metaphor of ‘smuggling’ as a surreptitious movement across borders, against bordering, with all its political and migratory connotations. Furthermore, by suspending the

⁶² Raunig, “Instituent Practices”.

⁶³ Beech, “Structure, Subject, Art”; Raunig, “What is Critique?; and *Oncurating 9*.

⁶⁴ Rogoff, ““Smuggling””, emphasis added (see chapter 6).

identity of the knowledge it produced, it was only in the moment of its *public* sharing that curatorial work could take form, with profound implications for art, the aesthetic, and the traditions of critical thought since Kant. Likewise, this re-conception of instituent practices indicates the broader significance of the social turn as a trans-individual, collective and relational project. I turn now briefly to the former – once more with Malabou as guide – in order to prepare the way for a final reconsideration of the history and theoretical construction of social aesthetics. How can the curatorial – ‘putting entities in a relation of movement to one another’ – be practised without privileging ‘art’ or ‘public’ as *a priori* (and bounded) concepts? How might these be approached without representing and mediating an ‘outside’ for an ‘inside’ or vice versa? What is at stake is the foundational question of the aesthetic.

In *Before Tomorrow*, Malabou revisited Kant’s approach to aesthetic judgement from within the terms of his problematic of establishing foundations for (public) reason that would reconcile the mind-body dualism, inner (self-)knowledge and outer reality.⁶⁵ The various returns to Kant occasioned by our ‘post-critical’ society tended, she notes, towards the material or the ideal poles of his famous ‘synthetic *a priori*’, only to relinquish the transcendental as an impossibility. The ‘categories’ of reason – the conditions of possibility for objective knowledge, such as space and time – were either regarded as ‘preformed’, a quasi-divine gift, and so ahistorical, preceding the subject absolutely; or ‘innate’, a product of evolutionary adaptation, and so an accident or epiphenomenon of biological inheritance.

If preformed, the transcendental categories are autonomous, preceding any empirical knowledge and so dividing the subject within a metaphysics of the self – ordained mind mastering the material body. Yet as Malabou demonstrates, the genetic alternative has also proven wanting. Humans not only share most of their genes with other life forms; the genius of the species is *not biologically determined*. A large proportion of the genome is non-coded, such that experience and environment – relational differences – affect genetic inscription itself.⁶⁶ Significant aspects of heredity are reversible. Subjects are not merely

⁶⁵ Malabou, *Before Tomorrow*.

⁶⁶ ‘The brain is no more a subject than the world is an object. The epigenetic development of the brain affects the totality of the real.’ Malabou, *Before Tomorrow*, 150.

‘expressions’ of the phylogenetic model, a product of evolutionary progress; the new cannot be explained or legitimated by recourse to the past (*pace* Foster). The cultural is neither reducible to nor irreducible from the biological. This lies at the heart of the ‘new materialism’.

To account for the miraculous double origin of subject and reason, Malabou recovers from Kant the concept of *epigenesis*.⁶⁷ The prefix *epi*, meaning ‘above’ as in “above genesis” or “over genesis”, is often mistakenly given as ‘after’, ‘a development that follows a first genesis, a first source’. The geological meaning is more precise, whereby an epicentre occurs as a *surface effect* projected vertically upwards from the hypocentre – the focus of an earthquake – underground. In this sense, epigenesis is not secondary but occurs *at the point of contact*. Rather than approaching the event of individualisation as expressions of the phenotype (as correspondingly Bourriaud related the situation of art, already determined by its staging of visibility), instituted by the genus, this origin is instead *contingent* – from the Latin “to touch, to befall”, a relation or contact without *a priori*.⁶⁸ A curatorial approach accordingly considers the production of context not as a frame but as ‘an event that is not only deliberately created as the process of curating is under way, but also occurs spontaneously and without agency’.⁶⁹

The origin *is* the lack of origin. The contingent surface event – the contact and co-production of art and public – produces its own necessity. Moreover, it was in ‘the question life poses to thought’ that Kant developed in the *Critique of Judgement* that this became thematic. The aesthetic categories of the Beautiful and the Sublime were ‘self-forming and self-norming’ modes of experience. In this formative treatment of the aesthetic, epigenesis appeared in the motif of *purposiveness* – not a teleology (‘without purpose’, of course), but

⁶⁷ Kant introduced the idea in paragraph 27 of the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* in response to critiques of the first that focused precisely on the gap between (the universality of) the pure concepts of the understanding and (the particular) relations of objects to subjective experience. ‘The figure of “epigenesis” enables Kant to account for the fact that the engendering of the categories and the engendering of the system are not separable and that the whole that they form develops “like an animal body.”’ *Before Tomorrow*, chapter 1.

⁶⁸ See also Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*.

⁶⁹ Aneta Szyłak in Martinon, *Curatorial*, 12, echoing Martinon’s similar presentation (25): ‘The curatorial is this first gift, a gift *before* the subject/object or curator/viewer relation, *prior to* any contractual determination, and therefore *before* politeness.’

a movement that causes the legitimacy of its own vector. Purposiveness is ‘the meaning of the fortuitous existence of meaning’, the ‘lawfulness of the contingent’, the ‘opening of a hermeneutic event in the heart of the biological.’

Improvising between creative discipline (hypocentre) and the moment of encounter (epicentre), the in-between – the curatorial movement – of autopoiesis is decisive.

Epigenesis is ‘an adventure of the subject’, a musical opening to becoming otherwise.⁷⁰

Curatorial work must be understood, then, within the simultaneous co-production of both the particular subject Art and a public body.

Curatorial implications of social aesthetics

This lesson was not new. It can be traced through the bodies of artists’ work excluded from the field or marginalised by the institution of the curator function. I reprise this briefly here not to define social aesthetics but to recover its implications for the curatorial as a post-representational process of mediation.⁷¹ Its historiography and theoretical accounts trace a decisive shift from representational to dialogical modes of address, from the curator’s voice to a curatorial lending of an ear.

Foster noted that artists’ turns to the social and the political – what he described, parodying Kosuth, as ‘quasi-ethnographic fieldwork’ – came as a response to a growing sense of crisis and the felt limitations of ‘the textualist model of culture’.⁷² For many, it was insufficient only to show the ideology at work in state and other cultural representations of the ‘AIDS crisis, invasive disease and death, systemic poverty and crime, [or]the destroyed welfare state’, or the production of consumer desire; yet a more activist approach risked an over-

⁷⁰ Malabou, *Before Tomorrow*, 94. Epigenetic self-production is, she suggests, like ‘the impact of music and its instrumental performance’, a metaphor she uses repeatedly, borrowing it from Jablonka and Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*. In their elaboration of the analogy, they emphasise the impact of recording technologies on the trans-generational transmission of music, a cultural order separable from but acting alongside the ‘genetic’ inheritance of the score, affecting its status as the ‘original’ through its recoding and reproduction in performance practices as expressions of the work.

⁷¹ Contributors to *The Curatorial* started ‘from the premise that the representational model with which this relationship [of bodies to what does not belong to the body] has traditionally been thought is no longer valid.’ Martinon, *Curatorial*, 6. I also note the significance given by Maria Lind to the various forms of social aesthetics shortly prior to developing her own discourse on the curatorial – see “The Collaborative Turn”, reproduced in *Selected Writing*, 177-204.

⁷² Foster, *Return of the Real*, chapter 6; Joseph Kosuth, “Artist as Anthropologist”.

identification with the Other, he argued. It compromised the maintenance of a proper critical distance, a necessary distinction despite its problematic articulation.⁷³ Marginalised and vulnerable groups might be exposed within a representational regime, publicly displayed, whilst the curator accumulated cultural capital.⁷⁴ Moreover, taking initiative from the social domain frayed art's connections with its (visual) past: 'Today, as artists follow horizontal lines of working, the vertical lines sometimes appear to be lost.'

This account, as with Bourriaud's, obscured the historicity of the social turn – marked by the watershed of 1989 – that addressed the traumatic political consequences of attempts to *represent* the community. As Blake Stimson and Greg Sholette argued, modernity and postmodernity were scarred by a series of failed attempts to picture, imagine, and conceptualise the public body.⁷⁵ No adequate collective counterpart to 'enlightened' reason had been figured, only its assumption and perversion in colonial, nationalist, ideological, and neoliberal forms: neither the universal community – the one class, one language, one nation – nor the community of ones sufficed. Its contradictions were amplified by the Cold War and the polarised tropes of socialist realism, national 'character', or individual genius. The task of enacting alternative forms of community were then taken up on the cultural plane, they asserted, especially by the counterculture and New Left. This dynamic had energised the alternative space movement and artists' continuing activist engagement directly with the public domain and its problematic framings. 'This means neither picturing social form nor doing battle in the realm of representation, but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression.'

This shift from addressing the public sphere as a question of representation to a temporalized process of performance also provided the narrative arc for Miwon Kwon's account of 'site specificity', of artists' work beyond the museum's walls from the 1960s.⁷⁶

⁷³ 'And what does critical distance guarantee? Has this notion become somewhat mythical, acritical, a form of magical protection, a purity ritual of its own? Is such distance still desirable, let alone possible?' He concluded by stating (in an echo of Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism) that 'critical distance cannot be foregone and it must be rethought' *Return of the Real*, 203 and 225.

⁷⁴ 'In these cases the institution may shadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star.' Foster, *Return of the Real*, 198.

⁷⁵ Stimson and Sholette, *Collectivism After Modernism*.

⁷⁶ Kwon, *One Place After Another*. Building on her doctoral studies under Hal Foster, this also followed the narrative line of Phillips, "Public Constructions".

She traced a trajectory from strategies maintaining a privileged separation of the aesthetic and the social, notably 'Plop Art' – 'public artworks' indifferent to their surroundings, imagining virtual white walls – and projects of urban design or beautification; to practices engaging with public spaces as sites of representation structured by power, in the manner of institutional critique. It was the perceived inadequacy of interventions treating the articulation of urban space as an effect of representation – exemplified by the fallout from the enforced removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from Manhattan's Federal Plaza – that led to a greater concentration on the *social and discursive production* of art's site-specificity.⁷⁷

A requirement for community engagement as a mechanism for *mediating* between artists and social bodies became conventional as the potential for art in defining public space – without conflict – caught the imagination of state actors competing for media attention, resources, and consumer demand for the leisure economy. The use of public opinion to temper artists' critical instincts was also replicated with urban regeneration policies sanctioning artists to work directly with marginalised and 'under-represented' groups, in parallel and often overlapping with activist practices and New Genre Public Art (Suzanne Lacy's term for artists' projects of community empowerment). In this context, artists' work in 'giving visibility' to or representing communities was easily compromised and instrumentalized. Identities were too often instituted *for* participants, not *by* them. For Kwon, this shifted the responsibility for curatorial mediation – whether by curators or artists themselves – towards engaging publics without defining or representing them in advance around 'a single point of commonality...whether a genetic trait, a set of social concerns, or a geographical territory'.⁷⁸ Such a 'collective artistic praxis' could not be based on a shared discourse, a common tongue, but operated at the limits where language might be naturalised to define a singular identity or purpose.

⁷⁷ In appearing to privilege his own critique of New York's Federal Plaza, cutting across this highly controlled 'public' space with a curving 12'x120' steel-plate wall to make visible the ideology of its social divisions, exclusions, and fragmentation, Serra diminished the value of the views and spatial practices of the site's actual users. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 71-83 and Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 150-86.

⁷⁸ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 153. Her framework was developed from Jean-Luc Nancy's instituent paradigm of the 'inoperative community', a gathering with "no common being, but...being *in* common." Nancy, *Inoperative Community*.

It involves a provisional group, produced as a function of specific circumstances instigated by an artist and/or a cultural institution, aware of the effects of these circumstances on the very conditions of the interaction, performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modelling or working-out of a collective social process. Here, a coherent representation of the group's identity is always out of grasp.

Setting aside the distinct parallels with audiences for many experimental music events, this implied that agency is distributed beyond the curator function or the artist's will; outcomes could not be directed or figured in advance but were necessarily multiple and fluid. As Suzi Gablik and Grant Kester noted, such a performative collectivity need not privilege the (curator's) voice as a discourse that evades the production of identity and difference, but could be approached as a 'connective aesthetics' or 'dialogic art' in which *listening* enables a space of encounter.⁷⁹ Less concerned with marking critical differences or pathologizing identity within an agonistic notion of public space, this mode of engagement acknowledged more consensual and affective polyphonic forms of intersubjectivity across pluralities of individual subjects (in Hannah Arendt's sense).⁸⁰

Both Gablik and Kester drew on models of the self and of social exchange that registered the limitations of paradigms privileging visual, textual, and representational knowledge, echoing recent articulations of the curatorial as a material, social form.⁸¹ After all, as Kate Lacey noted, 'the move from the ear to the eye in public affairs [involved] a *dislocation*... from embodied physical space to the disembodied, abstracted and imagined community.'⁸² In this sense, the curatorial can be understood as a project to reconnect not primarily with (visual) art's history but with a public mode of experience that refused to abstract knowledge – aesthetic or otherwise – from its social manifestation.

Indeed, this auditory turn was marked by and has grown since the late 1990s, providing a prelude and counterpoint to the emergence of Sound Studies – and the growing

⁷⁹ Gablik, "Connective Aesthetics". Kester, *Conversation Pieces*. Another ISP fellow, Kester first developed his argument in "The art of listening".

⁸⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*. Her articulation of the *polis* is given as an epigraph to Part IV of Martinon, *The Curatorial*.

⁸¹ Gronemeyer, *Curatorial Complex*. Similarly, 'the curatorial is this polis, always transient, incomplete, and thus necessarily controversial.' Martinon, *Curatorial*, 11-12.

⁸² Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 160.

prominence of Sound Art – from the early 2000s.⁸³ In contrast with linguistic models of communication mediating separate domains of production (inscription, vocal) and reception (reading, hearing), these emphasised the *active* role of listening. For example, in Gemma Corradi Fiumara’s ‘philosophy of listening’ adopted by Kester, it has a ‘maieutic’ function as the midwife to thought. Listening towards another makes us ‘participant[s] in the nascent thought of the person who is talking’, a reciprocal possibility that opens towards a potential for metamorphosis. ‘In our concern for listening a demand for change is made upon us – indeed, almost a demand for a mutation.’⁸⁴

These approaches to social aesthetics and their corresponding potential for the curatorial also necessitated a fundamental reconsideration of art history and theory. Durational, contextually contingent, multi-sensory, and constituted through public participation, these practices were not only or even primarily products of movements in the visual arts, but also – at least *retroactively* – connected with performative, temporal, activist, and community arts. Kester acknowledged this, albeit hesitantly, for ‘dialogical works are not just visual but aural and tactile as well’.⁸⁵ For others, notably Claire Bishop, these alternative lineages – with the notable absence of music – nevertheless reproduced the problems of critical distance that troubled Foster, deferring such works to their apotheosis within *visual* practices and their documentation for ‘secondary audiences’ (chapter 7).⁸⁶ Taking Italian Futurism, early Soviet Proletkult and Parisian Dada as key antecedents, she noted that ‘collectively they suggest that the pre-history of recent developments in contemporary art lies in the domain of theatre and performance rather than in histories of painting or the ready-made.’ Such a distancing and textualization of participatory art would enable it to be

⁸³ An acquaintance of Cage and associated artists, Gablik found resonant support for her position in David Michael Levin’s *The Listening Self and Modernity* and *The Hegemony of Vision*, his anti-ocularcentric anthology. Other significant turns to the auditory from this time include: Ihde, *Listening and Voice*; Docherty, *After Theory*; Bull and Back, *Auditory Culture Reader*; Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures and Reason and Resonance*; Mowitt, *Sounds*; Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*; LaBelle, *Sonic Agency*; and Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.

⁸⁴ Fiumara, *Other Side of Language*, 165.

⁸⁵ “What is gained, and what is lost, in defining something called ‘dialogical’ art? Am I imposing fixity on a cultural practice whose goal is to challenge categorical stasis?....Even as I try to define [it], I find it slipping from my grasp as it blurs into grassroots theater, collaborative mural production, and community activism.” Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 188.

⁸⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 41. Such a critical extension of the aesthetic field could draw on political philosophy, theatre history, performance studies, cultural policy, and methods closer to social science, ‘ways of analysing art that are no longer linked solely to visibility’.

more readily distinguished from social work, Bishop insisted, maintaining in tension the crucial difference between the aesthetic and the political.

Her formulation returns us once more to the curator function's dual perspective, even if the 'vertical' dimension has been expanded (and historically distanced) to less obviously visual modes of art. The curatorial does not.⁸⁷ It is for precisely this reason, I argue, that adding 'music' to the curator's field or bringing 'curation' into practices of music as a synonym for programming or producing fails to address the underlying *structure* of the curator function (chapter 5). As Shannon Jackson has convincingly demonstrated, theatre and performance – and music, I would add – do *not* so easily sustain the distinction between artistic production and its relation to the social field.⁸⁸ Many artists' works – notably involved in institutional critique – were not simply 'theatrical' in Michael Fried's terms, but drew directly on their experience and knowledge of theatrical models (such as Allan Sekula, Andrea Fraser, and William Pope.L). Postdramatic theatre and experimental performance also exposed their own props, their ensembles of 'extras' and supporting casts.⁸⁹ The social was not 'outside' the field of art, but always already too present within it, 'exposing the exteriority that interiority requires'.

The supporting work of care – the curatorial in its broadest sense – was not simply embodied by the creative curator, Jackson asserted, but like so much care work often involved hidden, gendered, and classed labour exemplified in the 'sanitation aesthetics' and maintenance pieces performed by Mierle Laderman Ukeles.⁹⁰ In recognising the contribution of performance to the social aesthetics of contemporary art, 'the de-autonomizing of the artistic event [could] itself [become] an artful gesture....It is to make art from, not despite, contingency.'

⁸⁷ 'The curatorial seeps and bleeds into many different fields and practices. Some complain that this is a problem. I would argue that, on the contrary, the protean guises of 'the curatorial' are precisely what give it its power and potential. It is also what makes it quintessentially of our time and, inevitably, a difficult thing to define.' Martinon, *Curatorial*, 3.

⁸⁸ Jackson, *Social Works*.

⁸⁹ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*.

⁹⁰ When her photographs and documentation of parenting and domestic work toured in exhibitions whilst she remained tied to the home, Ukeles turned these expressions of motherhood and housewifery into performances that could travel – such as cleaning the gallery, a reverse readymade (in Duchamp's sense) converting the art 'work' into 'work' as art.

The curatorial similarly concerns processes of making manifest such practices of care, what Jean-Paul Martinon calls 'the spacing of concern for the other'. This necessarily involves a shift from the curator function's double perspective:

Curating exposes *first* a concern for the exhibition, the artist, the curator and above all for the objects on display *and then* for the other or the audience....Curating is indeed above all self-preservation....Unlike curating, the curatorial spaces its concern for the other as the bodies of the artist(s), viewer(s), curator(s) move in the exhibition space. There is no moral code of conduct here.⁹¹

Curatorial improvisation is not opposed to the visual or visuality as its other or exteriority, but aims to withhold processes of boundary making. It is *in-disciplined*, *un-ruly*. By putting elements – artistic practice, objects, sites, ideas, bodies, publics – in motion without an orbital centre or hierarchy, it invites variations to occur through contrapuntal relations. It takes time, necessarily, and it is this above all that makes the curatorial a *musical* methodology (chapter 6).

I have shown that the curator function was predicated on theories of representation, a framework that conditioned newly-designated practices of Sound Art (chapter 5) and Performance Art (chapter 7) but that excluded musical practices. The structure's contradictions instigated a turning to the curatorial, emerging from the mid-aughties in the wake (in both senses) of the New Institutionalism. This paradigm is not new or 'post'. It does not dialectically sublimate the curator function nor claim its own alternative genealogy. Rather, it recovers unfigured possibilities from within historical representations that remain constitutively incomplete, the gestated but unborn. It does not *represent* time but like music is constantly coming into being – *in* time – with others.

⁹¹ Martinon, *Curatorial*, 27.

Sound Art, Not ‘Music’

Ironically, an obstacle for sound art is the diversity of artists who create it. It is a polyglot art form with works from visual artists, musicians, poets, instrument builders, machinists, pilots and who knows whom else. This is a tribute to its authenticity. No one can quite pin it down. But there are politicians who make exclusions, like “musicians cannot make sound art”. Charlie Morrow¹

Sound art. I find it a useful term....Nevertheless, perhaps the term was pragmatically conjured up for/by museum curators to account for sound’s acceptance into their world. Annea Lockwood²

Part of sound art’s paradox is that it remains a genre whose works tend to resist categorization – a classification for the unclassifiable. Alan Licht³

Until very recently, music has been strikingly – symptomatically, I claim – absent from the literature on curating, especially so in texts on the gallery arts. When it was mentioned, it was usually alongside other egregious examples of ‘curating’ used as a synonym for ‘expert selection’ *outside* the art field, a prestige signifier of hand-picked items within a consumer culture offering seemingly endless choice. Thus, for example, Hans Ulrich Obrist includes ‘musicians and DJs...curat[ing] music festivals, radio shows and playlists’ together with ‘hotels’ décor schemes and book collections...curated by stylists [and] a celebrity chef...described as the curator of the food trucks in New York’s High Line park.’⁴ Even in texts on the curatorial and live arts curation, music has been conspicuously missing.⁵

This situation has begun to change only very recently, and marginally, as I set out here. Whilst this is welcome, the story of how and why music has been occluded remains largely untold and needs to be grasped to account for the significance of this opening. To appreciate this, it is necessary to turn to the equivocal emergence of Sound Art as a gallery

¹ Morrow, “Three Hats”.

² Annea Lockwood cited by Licht, *Sound Art Revisited*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴ Obrist *Ways of Curating*; Balzer, *Curatorialism*, 76: ‘The music festival is perhaps the celebrity curator’s most salient provenance.’

⁵ Sellar, “Curatorial Turn”, opens with the question: ‘Could the curation of theater, dance, and performance become a catalyst for the rejuvenation and development of those forms in the twenty-first century?’ In their introduction to the anthology *Cultures of the Curatorial* (8), the editors Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski define the curatorial *almost* exhaustively as: ‘a field of overlapping and intertwining activities, tasks and roles that formerly were divided and more clearly attributed to different professions, institutions and disciplines. These include the professions of artists, curators, museum educators, publishers, scholars, critics and theoreticians; the institutions of museums and exhibition spaces, galleries, art and culture magazines, publishing houses, press companies, and art academies or schools; and the disciplines of art, dance, theatre, film, design, and architecture, with their related academic research areas.’

practice in its 'post-medium' condition, contemporaneous with the consolidation of the curator function. I will initially trace the history of art exhibitions and other programmes featuring sound in the Global North through to its conceptualisation from 1979. I then turn to theoretical models of Sound Art that followed in relation both to curatorial thought and to practices of exhibitionary programmes into the last decade. This will help in understanding how recent turns to music curation might be approached as a late addition to the gallery's expanding field, a separate 'parallel' movement 'within' self-consciously under-theorised or at least marginal (if not 'backward') musical practices, or – and this is my wager – as the corollary of a shift from the visualist paradigm of the curator function to the curatorial.

Ambiguous Sound

David Stubbs has noted the profound marginalisation of contemporary experimental and avant-garde musics in comparison with the gallery arts, even whilst the latter have for some decades provided a home for some practitioners 'to cross a bridge into the more prestigious, visual realms' under the guise of Sound Art.⁶ Even so, Sound Art 'still feels nascent and crying out for further development and exposure'. For Stubbs, this is a result of its experiential character making it more difficult to possess, and so limiting its assimilation to the art market. This may indeed be part of the story; yet the rising fascination for sound in galleries and the varied strategies now available for selling 'live art' suggests a further dynamic at play. After all, collectors such as the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation have been acquiring sound works for several years, and the museum is no stranger both to experiential and durational works, as in video, film, choreographic, and performance art.

The unease – and, often, popularity – with which sound has entered the gallery begs further questions. On what conditions might musicians 'cross a bridge' into the visual arts? What chasm or danger divides the two? What might be foregone and what gained in such a passage? More troubling, perhaps: what might have been smuggled in? On the one hand,

⁶ Stubbs, *Fear of Music*. A similar refrain can be heard in the interviews gathered in Lane and Carlyle, *Sound arts now*.

Sound Art precipitated ‘a newfound critique of visibility itself’, as the editors of the *Journal of Visual Culture* noted in a special issue on ‘Sonic Arts and Audio Cultures’ (2011), addressing the increased visibility of Sound Art exhibitions and installations; on the other, it was unclear whether this critique issued immanently *within* visual art or was imported into its sites of representation.⁷ Whilst ‘the history of sound art...has been in existence for only 100 years’, they claimed, the field ‘is too young, and the discourse too undeveloped, to propose a singular methodological approach.’ It is sound’s ambivalence for the visual arts, its residual musicality haunting the curator function, that needs to be explored.

The ‘latecomer’ theory does not explain why Performance Art, also commonly traced to a Futurist foundation – Marinetti’s *Manifesto*, rather than Russolo’s *Art of Noises* – has been accommodated in galleries and collections with considerably greater success. Its first histories emerged at the end of the 1970s and its theorisation took hold especially from the 1990s, but so too did accounts of noise and sound in the ‘visual’ arts. In fact, institutional engagement with sound works was arguably *more* established by then than was performance. It is the persistent marginality of sound and especially of music within curatorial discourse – its *edginess* – that is significant.

Combining the lists of group shows themed around sound, Sound Art, or sound and visual art – excluding solo features – compiled respectively by Seth Cluett and Laura Maes, there were at least 39 exhibitions across Europe and North America by 1979, the year RoseLee Goldberg’s history of ‘Live Art’ appeared (see chapter 7).⁸ Indeed, where that was written explicitly to ‘make visible’ a history of artists’ performance so that museums might recognise the medium’s validity, stage these works in exhibition, and collect their documentation, sound was already a common feature of gallery practices. Surfaces vibrated, material bodies resonated and concealed mechanisms sprang to form Kinetic Art and ‘sound sculpture’.⁹ Pop Art shows routinely used the new mass music as a ‘jukebox modernism’ to disturb the gallery’s supposedly silent equilibrium, alternatively posing a

⁷ Schedel and Uroskie, “Sonic Arts and Audio Cultures”.

⁸ Cluett, “Loud Speaker”; and Maes, “Sounding Sound Art”. For a looser record, see Joy and Homes, “Sound Art Exhibitions Database”.

⁹ See for example Grayson, *Sound Sculpture*, which also included an LP release.

detached and ironic sense of 'cool'.¹⁰ The image-making and artefactual culture (especially vinyl records and their sleeves) of popular musics – itself driven in no small part by Art School graduates cutting out and pasting in – was used as a resource by a growing number of artists.¹¹ Artists' film and video was hardly silent; indeed, in its combination of sound and image, early video technology and its manipulation was closer to contemporary tape music practices, enabling a number of musicians – not least, Nam June Paik and Steina Vasulka – to cross over into the visual arts.¹² Happenings and performance works – text based or more corporeal and gestural – embraced sound, song, and the materiality of language.¹³ Radical radio provided another medium to check the pulse of the times as galleries turned towards younger and alternative publics.¹⁴ At the periphery, Fluxus events and even experimental music featured in gallery programmes alongside exhibitions of graphic and other musical notations.¹⁵ The museum had never been successfully silenced (as Oprah might put it) but was *already* producing meaningful sounds, a realisation that artists amplified from the 1960s by turning to sound as material and a medium, especially in acts of institutional critique and in turning to the phenomenology of aesthetic encounters.¹⁶

Cluett describes three phases in this process of recognising and incorporating the role of sound within museums.¹⁷ After the outlying *Exhibition of Music and Art* at the Milwaukee Art Institute (1954), there was a drip drip of shows from 1966 to 1972, turning into a steady trickle that by 1979 began to leak substantially, with ten or more group exhibitions annually

¹⁰ Mednicov, *Jukebox Modernism*.

¹¹ On artists' use of records, see: Celant, *Record as Artwork*; Block and Glasmeier, *Broken Music*; and Schoonmaker, *The Record*. On the role of art school-trained musicians in the development of pop, see Roberts, *How Art Made Pop*.

¹² Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery*.

¹³ Kostelanetz, "Audio Art". See also Banes, *Subversive Expectations*.

¹⁴ Klaus Schöning founded the Studio Akustische Kunst in 1963 at Westdeutsche Rundfunk, Cologne. For gallery shows, see for example: Meyer, *Audio*; and Augaitis and Lander, *Radio Rethink*.

¹⁵ For example, Steve Reich and Philip Glass featured in *Anti-Illusion* (1969) at the Whitney, which also presented *Performances: Four Evenings, Four Days* (1976) including: sound works by composers Laura Dean and Noa Āin; performances with music by Nancy Lewis and Richard Peck, by Robert Morgan, and by Jana Haimsohn; songs by Connie Beck, Julia Heyward, and by Terry Allen; and (musical) storytelling by Laurie Anderson. Meanwhile, John Cage's *Renga* and *Apartment House 1776* were presented by MoMA as part of their Projects series (1977), 'directed' by Bernice Rose, Curator of Drawings. On the presentation of Fluxus artists, especially after Harald Szeemann's *Happenings & Fluxus* (Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970), see Higgins, "Dead Mannequin Walking".

¹⁶ Kelly, *Gallery Sound*. See also Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*.

¹⁷ Cluett, "Ephemeral, Immersive, Invasive".

from 1982 flooding to twenty or more from 1998. Maes shows this doubling again to between 40 and 50 shows annually from the later 2000s.

The first exhibitions dedicated to sound in the visual arts emerged from the 1960s just as galleries became noisier and as rejections of the 'purely visual' for more temporal, performative and embodied practices expanded the field. At this point, an exchange of ideas and mutual interest flowed between visual artists, experimental composers and performance-makers, reflected in the relaxed inclusion of diverse practitioners within group shows and gallery projects. *Sound Sculpture* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, for example, featured resonant objects that blurred the lines of sculptural projects – such as Harry Bertoia's – and instrumentariums designed to extend the sonic and percussive range of music, like that of Harry Partch.

It was not uncommon by the mid-seventies for experimental musicians – like those linked to the Scratch Orchestra in the UK – to hold adjunct teaching posts in art schools, which were often more welcoming than music departments and conservatoires.¹⁸ Many ran performing ensembles and introduced students to radical music, with composers linked closely to visual artists – such as John Cage – often featuring in curricula. In this collegiate atmosphere, the art journal *Studio International* invited Michael Nyman as a contributor – not long after publishing his pioneering introduction to *Experimental Music* – dedicating its Nov/Dec 1976 edition to 'Art & Experimental Music'.¹⁹ Earlier that year, the Music Gallery opened its doors in Toronto.²⁰ The distinction separating 'visual' from 'non-visual' artists was not yet significantly marked.

¹⁸ Personal communications with John Tilbury (2 Feb 2018) and Julie Ault (14 Dec 2018). See also Michael Nyman, "Music". In the UK, he notes, this included Cornelius Cardew at Maidstone, John Tilbury at South West Essex Tech, then Kingston, Falmouth and Portsmouth, Gavin Bryars at Leicester, and Michael Parsons again at Plymouth. This embrace of experimental music would effectively cease in the UK by the end of the 1970s as the new Conservative government sought to rein in art school 'anarchism'.

¹⁹ *Studio International* 192/984, Nov/Dec 1976. This featured interviews with George Brecht, Morton Feldman, Tom Phillips, and Steve Reich, alongside contributions by Gavin Bryars – on Duchamp's music – Paul Burwell and David Toop, Brian Eno, Cornelius Cardew, Germano Celant on his exhibition of artists' records, Jeffrey Steele on collaborative work at Portsmouth College, and Nyman himself on "Hearing/Seeing".

²⁰ Music Gallery, "History".

This began to shift by the decade's end, making a break with 'music' that would become constitutive of much of the discourse around 'sound'. A key impetus for this came from the substantial body of gallery artists' work using sound that had accumulated, not least in the spaces alternative to and interstices of the museum system, which curators felt compelled to acknowledge and to order. New York's Artists Space led the way with *A Sound Selection: Audio Works by Artists* (1978), just as the gallery was in transition from experimental outsider to institutional surrogate.²¹ Featuring eighty artists, the diversity of work represented indicated that the use of sound was secondary to their practice rather than – with few exceptions – a primary (and so unifying) medium. "Unlike film, video and performance", the gallery's director Helene Winer concluded, "sound has not become a distinct phenomena [*sic*]...and has not developed its own critical language."

MoMA soon followed with *Sound Art* (1979) – 'one of today's *newest* directions in art' – curated by Barbara London, whose title established the term's use even whilst the three featured women artists included two self-identifying composers.²² Extending visual practices into the aural domain, 'Sound Art' was 'more closely allied to art than to music, and...usually presented in the museum, gallery, or alternative space.'

That same year saw a symposium at Legenfeld Castle, Germany, 'Sound as a Medium of Visual Art', as preparation for René Block's extensive exhibition *Für Augen und Ohren* (Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1980). Considering himself a 'conductor' or 'producer' rather than a 'curator', he emphasised works that treated both eyes *and* ears, whether from artists' – and composers' – interests in synaesthesia, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or new sound production technologies facilitating intermedial arts practices.²³ Drawing on a long history of

²¹ Rosen, *Sound Selection*. In its early years from 1974 the gallery had already featured Liz Phillips' 'sound structures' as well as Laurie Anderson's and Michael Brewster's first solo shows.

²² 'Museum Exhibition Features Works Incorporating Sound', MoMA press release no.42, 1979. Alan Licht marks this as the first operational use of the term 'sound art'. The three artists were: Maggi Payne (composer, flautist and video artist), Julia Heyward (multi-media and performance artist), and Connie Beckley (artist, composer and performer). In an interview and presentation for Independent Curators International (6 April 2021), Barbara London noted the use of the term helped to legitimate it for the museums, which at that time increasingly sought to emphasise the *visual* nature of their collections and exhibition programmes. Independent Curators International, "Barbara London".

²³ Block, *Für Augen und Ohren*. Musicians and composers featured included: George Brecht, Earle Brown, John Cage, Dick Higgins, Mauricio Kagel, Walter Marchetti, Phill Niblock, Nam June Paik, Harry Partch, Erik Satie, Dieter Schnebel, Laurie Spiegel, David Tudor, and David Behrman. The following year, curator Ursula Block –

artists' fascination with multi-sensory experience and transpositions of musical and sounding practices into apparently non-acoustic media – from Symbolist poetry to Kandinsky, Schwitters' *Ursonate* to Tinguely's machinic sculptures – Suzanne Delehanty's *Soundings* (Neuberger Museum, New York, 1981) likewise situated the contemporary trend for sound in art within the move away from visual essentialism.²⁴ 'The entrance of sound, both heard and unheard, into the plastic arts heralded nothing less than a new beginning....the once discrete, static relation among artist, art object and viewer began to quiver and resound.'

In the process of its institutional recognition by museums and galleries, 'sound' was thus pictured as a further – and relatively novel – medium available to artists extending beyond the 'purely visual', and could on occasion sympathetically embrace those composers moving away from the 'purely aural' domain of music. It needs to be emphasised, however, that this shift was conducted *within* the domain of the visual, as an expansion beyond optical privilege.²⁵ Curators' concerns were not for an 'expanded field of music', but for incorporating sounding works within a 'post-medium condition' that was increasingly understood as constitutive of art as such. 'Sound' was therefore not an 'other' to the visual – that, increasingly, would become the role of 'music' within gallery art discourse – but drew attention to the ways that artists made meaning visible across the senses. It was this distinction of the visual *with* sound and sound *without* music that would take hold from the 1990s.²⁶

René's partner – founded the record store-cum-storefront gallery gelbe MUSIK in Berlin, following in the wake of Rolf Langebartels' Galerie Gianozzo, the first to regularly present sound installations.

²⁴ Delehanty, *Soundings*. Again, alongside painters, sculptors and performance artists, the exhibition featured Fluxus-linked musicians and artists and experimental musicians and performers, from Alison Knowles and Alvin Lucier, to Laurie Anderson and Meredith Monk, as well as extensive installations by Max Neuhaus and a presentation of Erik Satie's *Vexations*. For a more recent take on Delehanty's thesis, see Shaw-Miller, *Visible Deeds of Music*.

²⁵ In a similar way, WJT Mitchell and Mieke Bal later noted that Visual Culture Studies embraced other sensory modalities beyond the optical, whilst remaining focused fundamentally on the *visual* production of knowledge. See Mitchell, 'Showing seeing' and "There Are No Visual Media"; and Bal, "Visual essentialism".

²⁶ The emergence of Sound Studies as a 'parallel construct' to Visual Culture Studies in the early 2000s can be understood in similar terms. This was explicit in Jonathan Sterne's formulation, berating those who would construct sound as an 'other' to the visual, an 'auricularcentrism' presenting a set of binary oppositions to visuality based on a distinction of the spirit from the letter, of an immediate, primary revelation from a mediated and secondary transmission. This 'audio-visual litany' posited the sonic domain as: spherical and temporal in contrast with visuality's linear and spatial horizontality; immersive, embodied and subjective rather than perspectival, distanced, and objectively detached; and giving access to interior bodies, not only surfaces reflecting light to sight. By this account, Sound Studies accepted the foundational problematics of

One of the ironies in this project, however, was that the reference texts and historical examples available to early theorists and curators of the field came predominantly from musicians, composers, and music theorists. The passage to defining a new art of sound would, paradoxically, come by way of ideas of noise, silence and aurality extending primarily from composers who were themselves registering a shift in the significance of ‘music’ to its own ‘post-medium condition’, one that did not privilege visibility (chapter 6). Despite continued policing by some music theorists, institutions, and composers, the distinction between ‘musical’ and ‘extramusical’ sounds had in practice collapsed. Cage had claimed already in 1954 that ‘anything goes’, a position he emphatically and consequentially elaborated in his lecture ‘The Future of Music’ (1974).²⁷ Inspired by his example, R Murray Schafer introduced his influential 1977 work on acoustic ecology, *The Soundscape*, by noting how composers’ expanded use of percussion and noise-makers, of chance procedures, of recorded sounds, and of electronically-generated synthetic sounds had ‘exploded’ conventional definitions of music. Instead,

all sounds [now] belong to a continuous field of possibilities lying *within the comprehensive dominion of music*. Behold the new orchestra: the sonic universe! And the musicians: anyone and anything that sounds!²⁸

The term ‘sonic arts’ already had a hold within radical music, especially from sound synthesis, live electronics, and other systems-based technologically-assisted work. Ramon Sender and Pauline Oliveros began their *Sonics* series of experimental music and performance in San Francisco in 1961. Five years later, Robert Ashley, Alvin Lucier, David Behrman and Gordon Mumma formed what became the Sonic Arts Union, and by 1979 the Sonic Arts Network formed in the UK to support experimental and electronic music. Trevor Wishart, one of its pioneers, provided a theoretical introduction to these practices in a series of lectures (1985) published as *On Sonic Art*. Not only was there ‘no such thing as an

representation and mediation that had been initiated with Visual Culture Studies, even whilst its metaphors shifted from the lens or frame to a process of ‘transduction’. Sterne, *Audible Past*. For an alternative opening to Sound Studies not predicated on this problematic but on the issue of *resonance*, see Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*; and *Hearing Cultures*.

²⁷ Cage, “45’ For A Speaker”; “Future of Music”.

²⁸ Schafer, *Soundscape*, 5. Emphasis in the original.

unmusical sound-object', but music didn't need *any* boundary condition – it was simply a continuum following from a principle of (sonic) transformation.²⁹

Such an all-embracing notion of *music* posed challenges for the 'new' art of *sound*. If anything went, what criteria might be available to judge quality, to select for public presentation, and to inform viewers how to understand and make sense of these works? What history of sound could charge the moment with a pressing necessity for *this* work at *this* time? The musical field may have lost its autonomous distinctions, its production of value through figuring audible difference, but the art world – with the significant contribution of the curator function – was insistent on maintaining its own.

Gregory Battcock – whose anthologies of Minimalist Art, 'Idea Art', and Artists Video had registered the significance of many of the new movements (and would shortly do the same for Performance) – was among the first to address the latest trend. *Breaking the Sound Barrier* compiled texts from composers, critics, and theorists exploring the condition of the newest music, remarking its fundamental diversity and untimeliness.³⁰ Music appeared to lack both a common root or sonic essentialism against which the new could be defined *and* a shared measure by which its critical difference from within the field of sound could be assured. An abyss beckoned. Or at least, an essential fluidity and hybridity.

If sound was to be accepted as a medium of gallery arts practice, it would be necessary to formulate a position (re-)establishing its autonomy. This was precisely the concern of *Sound by Artists* (1990), an anthology published by Toronto's Art Metropole just over a decade after its compendium on *Performance by Artists*. Its editor, Dan Lander, made the task clear:

If a critical theory of sound (noise) is to develop, the urge to 'elevate all sound to the state of music,' will have to be suppressed.³¹

²⁹ Wishart, *On Sonic Art*.

³⁰ Battcock, *Breaking the Sound Barrier*.

³¹ Lander and Lexier, *Sound by Artists*, 11. Lander specifically took issue with drummer, composer, artists' record label manager, and theorist Chris Cutler's argument against abandoning 'music' in favour of 'sound', though Cutler would perhaps have the last laugh: his multi-part audio series for the radiophonic arm of Barcelona's MACBA on the 'emancipation – or aestheticization – of noise...[into] music compositions and performances' Cutler, *Probes*.

The ends of music, its boundaries, needed to be defined in order to locate new beginnings. It was not an 'outside' waiting to be reincorporated to the visual, but an 'inside' that was expurgated, expelled.

The anthology predominantly featured contributions by experimental musicians and some artists, but also provided a platform for one of the first theoretical attempts to designate sound *in opposition* to music, 'Audio Art in the Deaf Century'. Here, Douglas Kahn – an apostate former student of Lucier's – set out an agenda that he influentially elaborated at book-length at the decade's end. (In the gap between, the influence of Jacques Attali's *Bruits*, which famously claimed 'Music is inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of the social codification it reveals', was strategically excised.)³² The twilight of 'music', Kahn argued, could herald a new dawn for a *representational* art of recorded sounds (phonography) that the institutions and discourse of music had long repressed. Here was an art of audible signs referring to objects, people, places, and contexts. 'The capacity for overt mimesis is, after all, what phonography shares with photography and what it doesn't share with music.'

It was music's insistence on an immersive and immediate sonic world outside language and the political – *outside representation* – that had, Kahn claimed, created a gulf between its advanced composers and the literary and artistic avant-gardes. In this tendential account – separated from song texts, drama, film, performance, gesture, genre formation, and social context – music was sonic, all too sonic. Music's autonomy was not so much formal as ideological: tied on the one hand by dependence on an elite rather than a bohemian milieu due to its high production costs (orchestras, virtuosi); and on the other by its alienation from mass markets saturated in audio realism by the broadcast and film industries rather than opened to experimentation. Musicians had isolated themselves from the main currents of art, a caste apart. A residual art of sound then lay *already within* a visualist paradigm, in

³² Attali, *Noise*. This is referenced at key points in Kahn, "Deaf Century", but noticeably absent from *Noise Water Meat*.

what had been excluded from 'music': the presence of 'noise', the stubborn persistence of *meaningful* sounds, often registered by non-'musical' artists.³³

For Kahn, it was precisely the attempt to render noise meaningless by musicalising it that had led to its loss of formal or critical difference from any and all other sounds. The passage from Luigi Russolo's Futurist 'noise' instruments; Henry Cowell's 'string piano' (resonating its strings directly) and other extended techniques (forearm tone clusters, playing the piano casing); Edgard Varèse's extension of music's percussion family; Pierre Schaeffer's investigations of 'acousmatic' music (recorded sounds made unrecognisable from their visual reference or source by varying playback speeds, reversing sounds, and cutting them); through Karlheinz Stockhausen and others' synthetic generation of *elektronische musik* from sine waves, sound synthesis, and loudspeaker systems for spatial diffusion; seemingly terminated with John Cage's *4'33"*, which demonstrated – amongst many other things – the impossibility of silence and the ever-presence of environmental sounds that could be enjoyed 'in themselves' as music. (Indeed, refuting Cage and the 'silent piece' in particular – as a concert work – as effectively his last major artistic statement became a common feature of histories and theoretical models that followed in establishing the new art of sound.) The end of music in panaurality, in 'anything goes', was therefore its deconstruction and sublimation as Sound Art. There was no 'outside' of representation.

Coinciding with a marked increase from the late 1980s in exhibitions focusing on the voice, that pre-eminent medium of signifying sound, this conception indicated a more self-confident and self-conscious approach to sound by galleries.³⁴ Museums expanded the range of Sound Art exhibitions – even whilst featuring composers and experimental musicians – which in turn helped to consolidate the definitions of the form that followed. Even when contested, the term gained wider currency from landmark shows such as *Sound in Space* (MoCA, Sydney, 1995),³⁵ *Sonambiente Festival für Hören und Sehen* (Akademie der

³³ Kahn's examples include: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's inscriptions on shellac discs; Dziga Vertov's application of musical cut-up techniques to film; the influence of phonographic distortion of voices on sound poetry such as Schwitters' *Ursonate*; and experiments with radio sound like Hans Flesch's moves towards the radiophonic *Hörspiel*.

³⁴ Cluett, "Ephemeral, Immersive, Invasive," 116.

³⁵ See Australian Sound Design Project, "Sound in Space".

Künste, Berlin, 1996), and especially from the turn of the millennium, including: *Sound Art – Sound as Media* (NTT, Tokyo, 2000); *Sonic Boom: The Art of Sound* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2000); *Volume: Bed of Sound* (MoMA/P.S.1, New York, 2000); *Bitstreams* (Whitney, New York, 2001); *Sonic Process* (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2002); and *Sons et Lumière* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2004).

A steady flow of book-length historical and theoretical accounts appeared in their wake, building on exhibition catalogue essays and coinciding with – or participating in – calls for the emergent interdiscipline of Sound Studies. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner opened their 2004 anthology with a set of theoretical positions under the banner of 'Music and Its Others: Noise, Sound, Silence'.³⁶ Brandon LaBelle (2006) and Alan Licht (2007) described the historical emergence of a distinct body of artists' sound practices from the intertwining of radical art movements and experimental music in the 1960s.³⁷ Art-theoretical positions were then elaborated initially by Seth Kim-Cohen (2009), Salomé Voegelin (2010), Laura Maes (2013), and latterly again by Cox (2018).³⁸

This is by no means an exhaustive list; indeed, I will come to others later. Yet I want to pause here to remark on the implications and reverberations of the argument and history developed by Kahn and others – producing a discourse of sound by insisting on a difference from music – in order to note what has been muted in the process. Listening carefully, I suggest, allows us to discern how the institutionalisation of Sound Art has remained contested, confused, and incomplete. The problem of music provides a test for the curator function and for the gallery's underlying assumptions about the foundational role of mediated experience – of representation – and its own possibilities for producing a reflexive or 'necessary' difference (chapter 4). From this, I explore other implications for what follows the 'end of music', when anything goes.

³⁶ Cox and Warner, *Audio Culture*.

³⁷ LaBelle, *Background Noise*; Licht, *Sound Art – revised as Sound Art Revisited*.

³⁸ Kim-Cohen, *blink of an ear*; Voegelin, *Philosophy of Sound Art*; and Cox, *Sonic Flux*.

When 'music' ends

In defining Sound Art in opposition to 'music' as an art of pure sound, two notions of noise were deployed. As Kahn noted, 'the trouble is that noises are never just sounds and the sounds they mask are never just sounds: they are also ideas of noise.'³⁹ It came to name *both* the signifying work that 'music' sought to exclude, the referential meanings preceding and contained by material sounds; *and* simultaneously, as its constitutive other, noise was the material condition of music's possibility, the substrate from which music as the idea-of-sound is extracted. This is why music could simultaneously signify too little, repressing its linguistic operation, *and* signify too much, representing more than it intended. The former indicates the possibilities for sound as a (post-) *conceptual* art; the latter registers the tremors of an art of *vibration*.

The end of any audible distinction between music and the sounds of everyday life provided clear parallels with the loss of visual difference – the inability of the naked eye to separate art from other (readymade) objects and images – signalled by Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, Minimalist artists' turn to industrial manufacture and the situated perspective of the embodied viewer (as with Robert Morris' *L-beams*), and Conceptual Artists' seeming indifference to "what the work of art looks like" (in Sol LeWitt's words) deferring to the artwork as idea.⁴⁰ For Kahn, sound was then not just another medium, not specific; its essentialism was dispersed.

The stronger conclusion, developed by Seth Kim-Cohen, was that this paved the way for an art of sound without sound, an art that need not be audible but that embraced (belatedly) its conceptuality. Nodding to Duchamp's notion of a 'non-retinal art', this 'non-cochlear sonic art' would be sustained by discourse – indeed, would make its discursive context audible, amplifying how meaning becomes attached to sound just as conceptual art had revealed the gallery's scopic regime. Beyond sound, this practice could then be materialised in any medium.

³⁹ Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 20.

⁴⁰ On the influence of Cage and younger composers gathered around La Monte Young on the development of Minimalism and Conceptual Art, see Joseph, *Dream Syndicate*.

Developing the notion of a sonic art in its post-medium condition, Kim-Cohen followed Rosalind Krauss' post-structural model defining a practice as the product of a matrix of oppositional differences.⁴¹

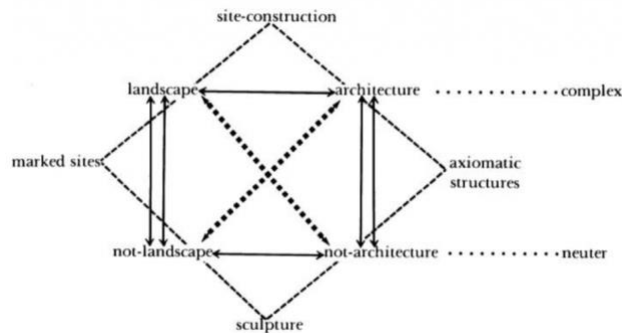


Fig.11: Krauss, Sculpture in the Expanded Field

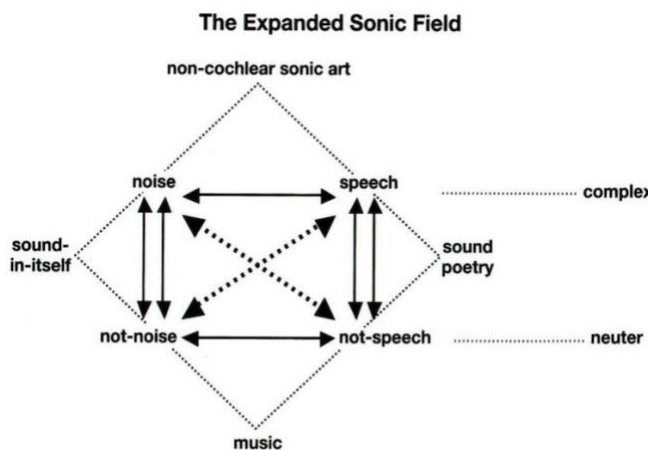


Fig.12: Kim-Cohen, The Expanded Sonic Field

Introduced with caveats – the model ‘functions allegorically or synecdochically’ – this approach added analytical sophistication to Kahn’s critique of music whilst surreptitiously multiplying its lacunae. ‘Music’ is tellingly situated as the differential product of denying both explicit reference and its materialist ground, neither (purely) ‘speech’ nor ‘noise’. Yet the structure’s other products only raise further questions. The opposition of speech and not-speech producing sound poetry is, Kim-Cohen suggested, better left to ‘colleagues in literary history and theory’ as if song was better unsung, and ears and eyes averted from practices such as Cage’s musicalisation of text (a consistent feature of his lectures) or ‘reading through’ texts (*Mureau*, from Thoreau; and *Muoyce*, after Joyce).⁴² More startling given the critique of music as *too* sonic, ‘sound-in-itself’ is displaced onto another

⁴¹ Krauss, “Expanded Field”; Kim-Cohen, *blink of an ear*, 155.

⁴² See Cage, *M*; and Mac Low, “Cage’s Writings”.

differential pair with the implication that Schroedinger's music might simultaneously be and not be 'sound-in-itself'.

Whilst the schematic framework clarifies the terms for a possible art of sound that isn't music, then, it also inherits several fundamental problems. To begin with, the 'combination of the positive categories of "noise" and speech"' that constitute a non-cochlear sonic art produces by extension the field of oppositions that determines the whole. That is, as Kim-Cohen acknowledged in passing, it acts as a synecdoche just as Krauss' expanded field is governed by her initial (and problematic) selection of oppositions by which 'sculpture' is defined (chapter 8). Furthermore, like Krauss' pairing of architecture and landscape, the opposition of speech and noise introduced as a given an *a priori* alienation, an ontological divide between 'culture' and 'nature', intention and 'nonintention', that requires the praxis of art – as an essentially social and relational enterprise – to resolve.⁴³ More fundamentally, the structure is paradigmatically *visualist*, as Krauss noted (chapter 2).

Kim-Cohen appears aware of this problem, obliquely, claiming that a non-cochlear sonic art practice 'is neither music nor gallery art'. If this was another post-medium practice, one that could be manifest in any material, how might it be any different from artists' work after conceptualism that could likewise take any form, including sound? 'Neither music nor gallery art' also implied the basis for *another* four-square opposition; yet as Mieke Bal observed in her critique of Visual Culture Studies, 'the temptation to make definition the starting point' – the curator function's distinction of art *prior* to its social encounter – was the fundamental problem.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'Speech – "built sound, if you will – functions like architecture in Krauss's model, while noise parallels landscape as the nonintentional ambience of the environment (natural or otherwise).' Kim-Cohen, *blink of an ear*, 156.

⁴⁴ Bal, "Visual essentialism". Kim-Cohen's distinction echoed articulations of the aesthetics of visual production – between the Scylla of a totalising and all-levelling textuality and the Charybdis of a biological or naturalised transcendental opticality – reflected in the first years of the *Journal of Visual Culture* (founded 2002). Here, WJT Mitchell influentially claimed that Visual Culture Studies was an 'interdiscipline that performs the showing of seeing', and that 'it is because there are no visual media that we need a concept of visual culture', such that all media – even painting – were mixed, opening the field to meditate on apparently non-visual practices of things unseen and overlooked, of blindness, touch, auditory culture and deafness. "Showing seeing", and "There Are No Visual Media".

Already by 2013, Kim-Cohen was anxious that the institutional embrace of sound in the visual arts was not an occasion to celebrate but required a sharpening of his critique.⁴⁵ Sound had leaked into exhibitions, but had neither stayed apart nor joined the mainstream of art's post-conceptual condition. It was the wrong kind of Sound Art. Rather than learning the lessons of a conceptual inheritance for sound practices, it signalled a broader shift by galleries away from discursive praxis, a worrying disengagement from the political. The turn towards mystical platitudes of sound's 'ambience', of the pure phenomenological encounter, was symptomatic of a felt exhaustion from the superabundance of data and a quiescence in the face of apparently unstoppable forces of neoliberal power.

No longer insisting on a difference with gallery art, Kim-Cohen emphasised the necessity of postconceptual practices as the basis of all 'important' art of the past forty years. Non-cochlear sonic practices (now just 'Sound Art') – whether sounding or in other media – were not now defined in differential opposition through pre-established terms but produced their own constitutive differences discursively.⁴⁶ Crucially, however, this discursive operation had to be enacted within the curator's art historical framing: 'An artwork, *if it is to register as such*, cannot help but rejoin the narrative contentions of the art that precedes it.' The gallery offered the possibility of determining Sound Art's *lawfulness* as the 'jurisdictional context within which a given discourse of sound happens'.

Where 'music' begins...

If non-cochlear sonic art took off where music 'ended', in 'sound' (as idea) *after* sound, another model for Sound Art was approached from music's 'beginning', in the virtual possibility of 'sound' *before* sound. Here, music as fixed duration (4'33"), a sample, or mode of listening attention was extracted from the vibrational energies and flows that subsist as its foundational condition.

⁴⁵ Kim-Cohen, *Against Ambience*.

⁴⁶ He develops his model from Miwon Kwon's account of site specificity, moving from a phenomenological, to a critical, and finally to a discursive paradigm. In the process, he mutes her more subtle concern with the ways discursive 'sites' often predicated and so overdetermined the identities of the communities that became the 'object' of artists' work (chapter 4).

It was Attali who first and influentially formulated an account of music in terms of a prior state of 'noise': 'Noise is a weapon and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon as a simulacrum of ritual murder.'⁴⁷ This dramatized a Fall narrative, a production of culture not from a state of grace but from a field of material potentiality. Noise was the not-nothing from which the something of music took shape. Like Epicurus's *clinamen* (and Althusser's encounter – chapter 4), music was the outcome *and* unwitting host of noise as an anticipatory condition, a latent touching, a structuring structure that was necessarily pre-social, pre-subjective (and so before intention), pre-symbolic, even pre-human. In this way, music was both reifying as a social embodiment *and* always coming into being, changing, restless, open to its material accidents. On the one hand, it articulated the social by organising the relation of individual to the collective, the parts to the whole, both as musical form *and* mode of cultural production designating who could participate and on what terms. On the other, as a *performance* making social identities recognisable, it nevertheless retained the dynamic principle from which its organization coalesced. Traces of noise – that which had to be extracted ("sacrificed") in order to endow form – remained that not only marked the contingent and provisional status of any given social contract, but also heralded *another* order that was yet to come.⁴⁸

Noise was that *within* music but not yet recognised as such, heard only as disruptive, disturbing; as interference. The end of music in *all* sound, then, signalled a fundamental shift in political economy, a turn to new modes of production in which individuals now had the tools to fashion their own 'codes' – expressive practices of identity – in whatever form they pleased. This anarchic condition of performative 'composition' was, Attali claimed, waiting to be born and could already be heard in the postmodern clamour of different sounds jarring in city streets, pulsing through neighbouring walls, and buzzing on untuned frequencies.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Attali, *Noise*, 24.

⁴⁸ '[Music] is prophetic in its very essence. From time immemorial, music has included in its own first principles the annunciation of times and social orders yet to come. Thus we will see that if the political organization of the 20th century is rooted in the political thought of the 19th, this last is almost wholly present in embryonic form in the music of the 18th century.' Attali "Interview".

⁴⁹ In a pre-echo of Bourriaud's notion of curatorial 'postproduction', see Hennion "Musicalisation of Visual Arts", a position further elaborated in Szendy, *Listen*.

For those concerned with the possibilities for Sound Art, Attali's staging of historic shifts – from sacrificing to 'representing' (established by the concept of authored works fixed in musical scores initiating the separation of composer, performer and listener functions), 'repeating' (the age of reproducible recordings and mass music industries), and ultimately to composition – was too teleological and, fundamentally, too *musical*. Composition was not, after all, Sound Art. Nevertheless the distinction of noise from music was not only instructive; it also echoed a number of other more or less materialist philosophical programmes that provided a counterbalance to (post-structural) textual, discursive, cultural and critical models that dominated the visual arts. By emphasising noise as the anterior material possibility of language, symbolization, mediation, and social form, Sound Art could again be distinguished from both music *and* from the visuality of the gallery arts. At the same time, as the *idea* of sound before sounding, a metamorphic condition prior to the fixity of encoding by any given medium, it could once more be transposed to non-sonic media and – as unstructured time – have a closer affinity to installation practices within exhibitionary frameworks.

For Greg Hainge, noise inhered at the threshold of sense in the material resistance of any encounter with this art to fully cohere in a fixed understanding or interpretation.⁵⁰ It had instead the structure of an event, always becoming, an 'expressive assemblage' giving a consistency to the relations it produced. Christoph Cox similarly set out a Sound Art that opens onto this 'immemorial material flow' of vibrational energies, intensities and affects preceding language or intention by drawing attention to gaps in the sensible appearance of reality, dislodging the 'human' as a central category of knowledge. Echoing Kahn, the creative use of film audio and sound recording technologies had, he argued, paved the way to revealing this 'sonic flux' as music had 'approach[ed] the condition of visual art'.

Operating 'not on the empirical level of common sense, but on this transcendental level, where the faculties are unhinged and one witnesses the differential processes that constitute the world of everyday experience', this materialist encounter once more confronts the improbable logic and mechanics of its own production. As a virtual condition

⁵⁰ Hainge, *Noise Matters*.

of pure difference prior to any identity form, this 'sonic' or 'primary ontology' of noise nevertheless posed a challenge for how it might be manifest, recognised *as art* within the 'secondary ontology' of its 'auditory culture', its humanised conventions and discourses.⁵¹ If noise subtended intention, how could its revelation be produced and experienced in a cultural form that was *already* given, that structured relations between artists and public, like an artwork in an exhibition? How could this ontological realm beyond history acquire its own historicity of artistic display without also constructing its own canons and conventions constituting an identity for Sound Art? Cox, like Kim-Cohen, claimed that 'art is the privileged domain in which this sensory experimentation takes place', even whilst criticising curatorial habits of treating sound through the visual, as synaesthesia or *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁵²

Where Hainge located noise in the transition from the virtual to the actual and Cox placed its appearance in the contexts of art, Salomé Voegelin sited its affective production in the listening body through which it will emerge into speech – preferably the 'tendential' language of the encounter with Sound Art. Once more, noise precedes culture (especially music). It 'breaks with the language base' by abjecting the individual, rendering her speechless, intensifying and occupying her corporeally, and precluding any relation with other listeners, with her own memory, or with any cultural framework.⁵³ This experience nevertheless has an anticipatory structure, a desire for articulation that in her next breath – schematically rendered in 'silence' – becomes an expectant opening through which the subject-as-listener emerges into language.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150: 'All noise...is firstly produced in the very extraction of expression into actuality, in a primary ontological mode, prior to reception.' Brian Kane took issue with precisely this in his argument against the 'ontological turn' in Sound Studies. Cox and Hainge, he claimed (drawing on a distinction from Quine), confused *embodiment* – their 'primary ontology' of noise – with *exemplification* as a (secondary) reference or indication of a larger totality. Kane, "Sound Studies". Whilst Cox (*Sonic Flux*, 132) disputes this, claiming that artworks can make evident the vibrational field underpinning the cultural production of reality, he doesn't address the broader gallery framework within which this expression is disclosed.

⁵² 'Any sound art worthy of the name affirms something of this effort to restore to sound its ontological and aesthetic value. Yet for the most part, contemporary sound artists and their curators have been interested in *negotiating* the visual, rather than *rejecting* it wholesale. In fact, the very tension of such negotiation is often central to this uncertain art form operating between music and visual art, medium specificity and a postmedium condition.' Cox, *Sonic Flux*, 183-4.

⁵³ Voegelin, *Philosophy of Sound Art*, 65.

Indeed, the listener is not only the site and the product but also the co-creator of this experience. For this process to claim the aesthetic autonomy Voegelin deems necessary for her 'philosophy of sound art', it must then be *private*, 'a sensory, engaged and solitary relationship with the symbolic in silence' that can only secondarily enter into dialogue to be shared with others.⁵⁴ Anxiously sensitive to the conditions structuring this encounter producing the listening subject – one that must essentially be without precedent, history, critical framework or convention – she hesitantly acknowledged its limitations in an endnote:

I have no interest in facilitating the building of canons, but only wish to encourage a listening practice, which in its essence is anti-canonical and remains forever an encouragement to listen rather than a theory of the heard. I understand a philosophy of sound art as a loose [*sic*] infrastructure for listening: some fleeting possibilities and suggestions to practise at home.⁵⁵

Indeed, dissatisfied with the gallery arts' emphasis on discourse and especially by visitors' reluctance to dwell with sound works – to listen patiently, humbly, and silently in the manner required before coming to judgement – Voegelin co-hosted a colloquium in 2012 seeking a rapprochement with music.⁵⁶ Welcoming a less dogmatic relation between radical music and Sound Art, participants noted: the institutional, professional, and economic effects of their separation; the continuities and overlaps between practices; differences and challenges in creating appropriate ritual contexts and temporal framings; and a turn to the 'responsible' listener. The distinction between authorship and reception, however, remained largely intact.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The listening mode this calls for connects the material body to discourse – another *praxis* – as 'the wobbly and swaying bridge that connects the phenomenological experience with its semiotic articulation'. Voegelin, *Philosophy of Sound Art*, 107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, n.12, 199. Without a context for listening to its sounds as not-music, 'it won't be heard. Instead...the headphones, the plinth, the visual aspects of the show or anything vaguely musical will override the sonic experience.'

⁵⁶ Gardner and Voegelin, *Sound Art – Music*, 1: 'This colloquium was motivated by the lack of a joint critical framework for sound art and music and was inspired by their persistent separation.'

⁵⁷ Invited to audit the proceedings, Kate Lacey remarked precisely on the obligations placed on the listener by the discussion's emphasis on authorship, on a politics of voice rather than a politics of reception, and a consequent oversight both of processes of mediation – or curation – and of popular musics in which fans need not be judged by the quality of their attention.

In summary, whilst these competing theories maintain important differences, what they share in common is the attempt to locate an art of sound as a post-medium gallery practice, distinct from music.⁵⁸ In the process, they reproduce the binary positions of the curator function's doubled perspective I identified with Foster and Bourriaud (chapter 4). On the one hand, a reflexive (post-)conceptual form with a fractured relation to its own art (and music) history provided a critical distance from which to address contemporary political-economic concerns; artistic necessity preceded the contingent social event. This echoed the allegorical (as Kim-Cohen noted), 'horizontal', discursive form in Foster's schema. On the other, a contingent material encounter with noise in a solitary listening mode produced its own necessity, resonating with the 'vertical' axis of its vibrational medium. Both positions faltered similarly on the privilege afforded to art's autonomy *prior* to its social articulation. Sound Art was either sublimated into the visualist production of meaningful differences, severed from the material 'real' by a foundational alienation; or it was purely virtual, awaiting the meaningful accident from which it would make sense.

The cultural domain provided their foundational problematic of representation. Claims for music's 'immediacy' were fallacious; experience was unavoidably mediated. Where 'music' seemed unreflexive or unselfconsciously attached to the real of its own production, or where it naturalised the listening self (the aural subject-object relation), the gallery provided a context within which representation itself was troubled and mediation was thematic. The problem for theorists of Sound Art was how to register a specifically *sonic* mode of critique or practice within such a visualist framework. Once more, the problem of mediation – of the curator function – remained: should it make itself audible (or legible, or visible) after the manner of reflexive curating, or mask its own production to be silently transfigured as the privileged process of materialising the work?

These contradictions left the field pragmatically open. It remains 'nascent', 'too young', yet undeniably a part of the gallery arts ecosystem with its multiple genealogies. I turn now to the exhibitionary record, finally, to consider whether the rhetorical distinctions made for Sound Art have been reflected in curatorial practice. If the distinction between the gallery

⁵⁸ Kane, "Musicophobia".

arts and music was not firmly established, the 'bridge' between the two merely artificial and pragmatic, how might this be reflected in notions of curating? Do the spectres of 'curated' playlists and celebrity 'curated' music festivals begin to haunt the field of art, or how might music be 'curated' – within or outside the gallery – in ways that distinguish it from these more commercially-oriented practices?

After and Before Sound Art – the music curator emerges

It is largely an open question what we hear when we hear sound as art, in a museum. It is precisely this openness, however – which is categorical as well as phenomenal – that ultimately constitutes the opportunity of all "sound art". Helmut Draxler⁵⁹

It is important to recognise that Sound Art was *never* wholly institutionalised by the gallery system. Experimental music's legacies remained noisily in place, heralding other possible futures. Listening more carefully to the historical record, the turn towards 'sound' exhibitions especially from the 1990s was in practice much more open than the emerging discourse claimed.

Many events drew on musical models and infrastructure as city-wide festivals – like *SoundCulture*, first mounted in Sydney (1991), then hosted by Tokyo (1993), San Francisco (1996) and New Zealand (1999) – but with a greater emphasis on installations and site specificity. Whether as festival or exhibition, as Alan Licht wryly observed, 'their curatorial picks reflect and reinforce a tendency to apply the term "sound art" to experimentation within any music genre of the second half of the twentieth century'.⁶⁰

This should not be surprising. The influence of Fluxus – itself ambivalently accepted in the gallery arts – remained strong, as for example at Roskilde's Museum of Contemporary Art. The *Festival of Fantastics* (1985) saw Fluxus artists work across the city, its documentation forming the basis of the Museum's collection when it opened in 1991, with *SoundImages* becoming a biennial of sound and ephemeral art. Cage's influence was decisive. For its

⁵⁹ Draxler, "How Can We Perceive Sound as Art?".

⁶⁰ Licht, *Sound Art Revisited*, 5.

founding director Marianne Bech, his 'way of thinking about and understanding music, this special form of *musicality*, is the core of the museum's sound collection.'⁶¹

Several landmark exhibitions were led in large part by experimental musicians with broad networks and frames of reference – notably *Volume: Bed of Sound* for MoMA PS1, co-curated by Elliott Sharp with Alanna Heiss and design input from Klaus Biesenbach; and *Sonic Boom* at London's Hayward Gallery, devised by David Toop.⁶² Both emphasised the necessary diversity of artists being presented, including those represented by galleries alongside wildly differing musicians and sound designers. Sharp built on his experience compiling conceptual albums featuring experimentalists from music, performance art, sound poetry and beyond, like *State of the Union* (1981); whilst Toop – the exhibition's 'selector', not curator – emphasised the fundamentally hybrid nature of contemporary practices.



Fig.13: *Volume: Bed of Sound*

⁶¹ Emphasis added. Bech, *SoundImages*.

⁶² *Volume* CD catalogue; and Sharp, *IrRational Music*, 212-3; Toop, *Sonic Boom*. Sharp met Heiss when his band, I/S/M, performed as part of one of the exhibits at the opening of her Basquiat show at PS1 in 1982 – email with the author, 26 Feb 2020. *Volume* then featured a wide range of artists from free jazz legends like Muhal Richard Abrams and Ornette Coleman, experimentalists such as Ikue Mori, Carl Stone and Arto Lindsay, bands including Sonic Youth and The Residents, sound designer Walter Murch, to practitioners more familiar with gallery installations such as Vito Acconci, Christian Marclay and Maryanne Amacher. Toop, meanwhile, featured gallery artists like Angela Bulloch and Mariko Mori, Max Eastley and other sound sculptors, electronica artists familiar with installations such as Scanner and Pan Sonic, and many practitioners straddling categories like Brian Eno, Ryoji Ikeda, and Lee Ronaldo.

Charting the expansion of sounding exhibitions from 2003, Seth Cluett noted a marked polarization between curatorial attempts to build a canon for Sound Art and, more common, conceptual approaches to group shows without undue concern for the medium's genealogy. Sound was 'beginning to shed the stigma of curatorial novelty'.⁶³

It is telling, then, that the term 'Sound Art', its genealogies and limits continue to be contested and expanded, with many now treating it as an open category. As a subset of Sound Studies, 'sounding art' exceeds the 'mere aesthetic realm' according to Marcel Cobussen, chiming with Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze's description of it as a 'persistent and expanding art form...entangled with a broad diversity of genres and cultural phenomena' and a concept that is 'intrinsically paradoxical, absurdly undefined, yet constantly attractive'.⁶⁴

A fragmented and dispersed curatorial literature on music, Sound Art, and sound is now emerging in the wake of this noisy proliferation and blurring of lines. For example, *Curator: The Museum Journal* published a special double issue on sound (2019) covering: musical instrument collections; exhibitions of ancient and pre-historic music; sound design for museums and exhibitions of cultural history; the presentation of popular musics and genres; and artists' Sound Art projects (Susan Phillipsz, and John Kannenberg). Reviewing the journal's archive, its editor found only seven previous articles on sound in its 62-year history.⁶⁵ Ethnomusicologists are now attending to issues of archiving and curation.⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Cluett, "Ephemeral, Immersive, Invasive," 117. As one example, see Belque, *Sound of Music*, in which the legacies of Cage, La Monte Young, and Fluxus artists provide the framework for recent work by contemporary visual artists.

⁶⁴ Cobussen, Meelberg, and Truax, *Sounding Art*; and Groth and Schulze, *Handbook of Sound Art*. See also Weibel, "Sound as a Medium of Art", 147: 'Finally, in the course of the twentieth century, sound art has become a universal medium'; though once again (91), 'sound is everything that has been shut out of the concert hall.'

⁶⁵ Fraser, "Hear Here"; Wiens and de Visscher, "How Do We Listen To Museums?"; and Bubaris, "Sound in museums". The Science Museum Group, in particular, has developed a strong interest in sound, making it one of the key fields for its National Science + Media Museum (Bradford) led by its Curator of Sound Technologies, Annie Jamieson, and publishing research in its own journal: see Rich, "Acoustics on Display"; Boon et al "Organising Sound"; and Mansell, "Chamber of Noise Horrors".

⁶⁶ See Vallier, "Preserving the Past" and Lobley, "Curating Sound Is Impossible".

growth of museums celebrating popular music heritage has generated its own literature;⁶⁷ whilst musicologists and cultural theorists have also turned their attention to – horror – the curation of playlists.⁶⁸ Yet this proliferation of curatorial discourse begs the questions of whether ‘curation’ means the same thing when applied to a music festival, a Sound Art installation, and an exhibition on the history of noise abatement.

The issue of curation, then, has become ambiguous within this unresolved distinction of what is proper to the gallery and the museum, to sound and to music. It is noticeable, for example, that little scholarly attention has been paid to the specifics of Sound Art curating, and almost nothing on the subject appears in the gallery literature. A few conferences have been held, such as ‘Methodologies of Sound Art Curating’ (2013) and ‘Sound Art Curating Conference: Histories, Theories and Practices of Sound Art’ (2014).⁶⁹ These have primarily provided a platform for speakers to discuss individual projects, to expand the field’s reach beyond the US and Europe, to stake out positions aligned to the conceptual or vibrational models of Sound Art, and to register some of the field’s problematics. The unruliness and unpredictability of this ‘ephemeral, immersive, and invasive’ medium – as Cluett summarises it – challenges the museum’s visual structures, its conventions of knowledge production, its acoustics, collections, archiving, economies, and ideologies of containment. For example, the tendency for sounds to blend and to take on qualities of their acoustic environment make it harder to distinguish ‘target sounds’ and background noise, figure and ground, making each presentation at least minimally site specific – hence the common practices of incorporating headphones, listening devices, acoustic controls, and other measures to contain ‘sound bleeding’.⁷⁰ Yet vanishingly little attention to Sound Art curation has reached wider publication.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See for example *Popular Music History* 12 no.1 (2019) and 13 no.s 1 and 2 (2020); also Atton, “Curating popular musics”; Baker, Istvandy, and Nowak, “The sound of music heritage”; and Fairchild, “Caught Between the Spectacular and the Vernacular”.

⁶⁸ Drott, “Why the Next Song Matters”; Wade Morris and Powers, “Control, curation and musical experience”; Bonini and Gandini, “First Week Is Editorial”; Barna, “The perfect guide”; and McKeon, “The Concept Album”.

⁶⁹ For the former, see ZKM Karlsruhe, “Sound Art Curating”.

⁷⁰ ‘Relations between elements in respect of the auditory analogue of the spatial dimension cannot be presented simultaneously, all at once. They turn essentially on change. Roughly, two visual elements can be seen all at once as at a certain visual distance from one another; whereas two auditory elements cannot be heard all at once as at a certain auditory distance from one another.’ Strawson, *Individuals*, 79-80.

⁷¹ Aceti et al, *Sound Curating*; van Eyk, “Evolving Strategies of Sound Art Curation”; and Belford, “Brief History of Sound-Art Curating”.

On the one hand, then, a more relaxed approach opening to music is evident – if predicated, like the ‘conceptual’ approach to Sound Art, as a discursive site – indicated by John Kannenberg’s much-cited chart:

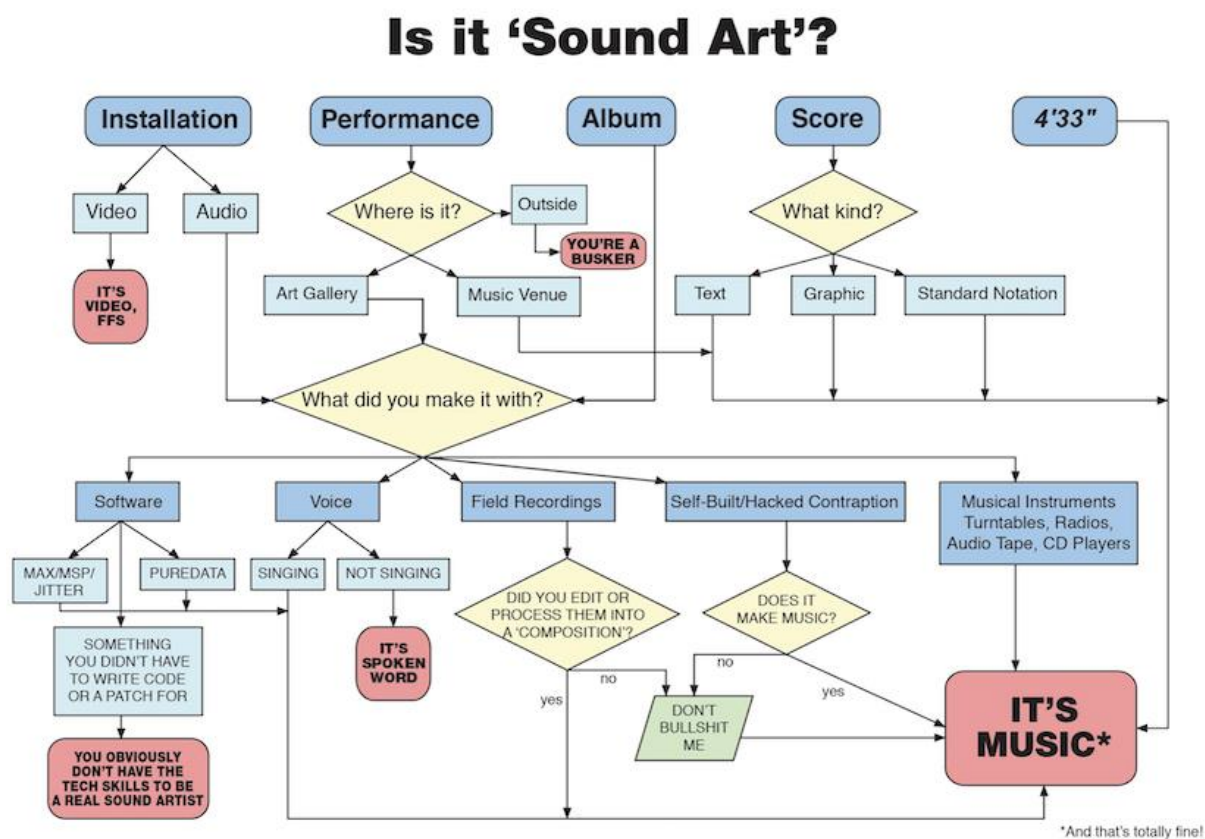


Fig.14: John Kannenberg, *The Museum of Portable Sound*⁷²

Added pragmatically to the gallery’s expanded field, this leaves unaddressed the curatorial rationale for marking the distinction in the first place. Emptied of specific content, it risks becoming a discursive gambit for claiming prestige, whilst inadvertently registering the vulnerability of the ‘mere’ aesthetic as an autonomous zone. If ‘anything goes’ and no singular history can account for it, do the contents of (sound) curation become arbitrary? What might constitute the necessity of a given sound work’s inclusion? More disturbing,

⁷² Kannenberg, *Museum of Portable Sound*. He describes it (in terms similar to Kim-Cohen’s) as ‘art of any form that critically explores the cultural, political, scientific, and/or conceptual situations surrounding the act of listening’. Groth and Schulze, *Handbook of Sound Art*, 15.

perhaps: must music conform to the gallery as a site of representation, or could it effect an alteration to this system?

On the other hand, operating beyond the exhibitionary frame, an emerging discourse on curating music can be understood as an adjunct or *parallel* practice akin to the conventional gallery roles of selection, presentation (rather than installing), and relating to (music's) history – perhaps with commissioning new work in lieu of the challenges of 'collecting' and 'preserving'. This could be considered an updating and extension of the 'imaginary museum' of musical works – and its elevated concert formats – as elaborated by Lydia Goehr.⁷³ *Defragmentation* – a research project on 'Curating Contemporary Music' begun in 2017 by four leading European festivals (Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, Maerzmusik, and Ultima) – provides a good example.⁷⁴ Rather than address the specificity of the discourse of curation, this embraced roles more commonly known as 'artistic director, dramatist, festival programmer etc.', as composer and festival director Lars Petter Hagen put it in his introduction. Thus alongside issues of technology, many contributions focused on questions of diversity, gender, and decolonization, challenging 'eurological art music' practices that privilege white male composers of notated works and their unsustainable claims for universality, aesthetic 'sophistication', and 'bleeding edge' innovation.⁷⁵ Others touched on concert history and moves by performer-curators away from the concert hall towards 'situations', 'events', and relational practices.

The first taught programmes on Curatorial Practices in Music (ArtEZ, University of the Arts, Arnhem/Zwolle) and Curating Contemporary Music (University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland) were established in 2019 and 2020 respectively, moving towards a more musically-inflected concern for the curatorial.⁷⁶ The latter has been developed

⁷³ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*.

⁷⁴ Freydank and Rebhahn, *Curating Contemporary Music*; and *OnCurating* 44. A number of PhD studies by musicians and composers adopting the role of curator are also emerging, for example Dutta, "The Curating Composer".

⁷⁵ George Lewis, for example, remarking on the project's emphasis on the 'need for change in the art world of contemporary music' noted that of the composers featured in the history of Darmstadt, 0.04% were of Afrodiasporic descent.

⁷⁶ The programme at ArtEZ has been developed by Mirjam Zegers, building on a pilot programme from 2007. Meanwhile, a further course in Curating Musical Projects attached to Moscow's Higher School for Social and Economic Sciences was announced in February 2021.

alongside a series of publications written or edited by Brandon Farnsworth, including the first monograph on the subject.⁷⁷ Here, the lessons of critical curating and relational aesthetics figure prominently. I add to and develop this by arguing that music – in its own ‘post-medium condition’ – *changes* the operation of the curator function itself.

Rather than adding music to the gallery’s expanded field or creating a parallel practice within music institutions, the implications of the opening of the gallery to music are just beginning to be broached. For example, Peter Kraut, as one of the advisers to the Cage-inspired *A House Full of Music* (2012), considered this a new approach presenting ‘music and art as equal partners’, a levelling that aimed to trouble the incorporation of music and sound by the dominant architectural, acoustic, economic, cultural and discursive frameworks of the visual arts.⁷⁸ This was, significantly, a joint programme between Darmstadt’s Mathildenhöhe gallery and the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. Going further in his essay for *See This Sound* (Lentos Museum, Linz, 2009), Diederich Diederichsen registered the significance of music’s history within the museum precisely as *not* demonstrating the porosity *between* music and the visual arts, but marking *the erosion of their demarcation lines*.⁷⁹ There was no purely visual medium, just as there was no purely acoustic medium. The solution, he suggested, was neither to persist with the binary division of music and the visual arts with their supposed ‘border crossings’ or ‘transgressions’, nor to open the floodgates to a condition in which everything and anything could be connected. Rather, curators needed to develop tightly-focused ideas that could resonate between previously unconnected works, phenomena, and cultural forms embracing both the aesthetic and the political. Curation once more becomes contingent on its qualities of authorship, of finding significance in the spaces separating seemingly heterogeneous

⁷⁷ Farnsworth, *Curating Contemporary Music Festivals; OnCurating 47*; and Farnsworth, Jakobsson, and Massera, *Taking the Temperature*.

⁷⁸ Kraut, “Music Museum of the Present”. ‘For as long as Bruce Nauman’s acoustic works continue to be largely ignored, as long as we regularly encounter exhibition rooms with disastrous acoustics, as long as we are left with a feeling that exhibition technicians prefer to invest in high-quality video projectors rather than in decent sound systems, as long as exhibition openings use string quartets as decoration between speeches only to then proceed to play canned music of the worst kind through the loudspeakers, and as long as the interest of public museums and private collectors in acoustic art remains minimal, then important sounds and their manifestations will remain just as transient and unexplored as they often have been until now.’

⁷⁹ Diederichsen, “Tearing Down Open Borders.”

objects, sounds and practices, even whilst the perceiver's task tacitly retains its secondary function of reading between the lines.

Helmut Draxler – also contributing to *See This Sound* – drew a more radical conclusion. The histories of music and the visual arts, he argued, reflected *different* conceptions of the aesthetic as both mediums based on the different senses and as the singular concept of art. In the gallery's post-medium condition, he observed, the visual arts became synonymous with art *tout court*, from which its 'field' could be 'expanded'. By contrast, with the deconstruction of its medium specificity – especially by Cage – music had lost its autonomy altogether. Anything went. The implications of music's insistence within the gallery, then, marked a more fundamental change. Arguments for hybridisation, of a 'new media art', not only technologically-based but also combining sound and vision, were insufficient because they failed to register this aesthetic shift. Neither could anything go, with a general levelling of Art into 'culture'. The avant-gardist position of opposition both to culture and to tradition was also untenable because it naturalised alienation in order to cast art as redemptive praxis.

The remaining option, he proposed, was that art was taking on the condition of 'sound' as a mode of *mediation*. The museum's 'code' – its conceptual identity with art as such – could no longer be 'detachable from experience', pre-given, but would have to be immediate, contingent with the public encounter. 'Sound' provided a social model for the aesthetic precisely in its ambiguous status *between* material force and cultural expression, vibrating matter and the museum's elevated system of knowledge production. Sound 'does not develop. It can only be placed in concrete situations again and again – each time afresh.'⁸⁰

⁸⁰ 'Thus, the history of the relations between music and the visual arts since John Cage cannot be read as one of fusion...but rather as the history of a shift in the direction of the fields of sound and museality. The individual practices position themselves within these fields through links and borrowings; they *are* no longer music or painting but art in general, refracted through medium and code....What calls out for explanation is no longer the gesture of border-crossing or transgression, that is what made sound, as a processual phenomenon, of interest to the static arts, but rather what sound could possibly want from art. One answer may be that "art" is so institutionalized that it is easier to address the mediated character of sound in its name than it is in other contexts. Thus, sound as art can speak at once from the vantage point of the medium as well as from that of the institution; as a result, it is able to thematize the tensions in their relationship with each other.' *Ibid.*, 31.

This points precisely to the *musicality* of mediation – of ‘the curatorial’ – or perhaps more schematically, the musicalisation of the curator function. I take ‘sound’, here, to refer to music in its own ‘post-medium condition’, not so much as a phenomenon of audibility so much as a temporal articulation.

Draxler’s conclusion can be elaborated, initially, in relation to the curator function and its double perspective of signature and voice: bringing together what it keeps apart, ideas of (sound) art and works; and a border with the social. The ‘curation’ of music in the wake of experimental practices problematises this system of representation. Firstly, the dissolution of music as sound, where ‘anything goes’, erodes the framing operation that would mark out an autonomous domain of music – as art – from the ‘surrounding’ field of vibration. It lacks the definition necessary for a theory to delimit its object. As a durational form, secondly, it troubles the foundational assumptions of the gallery and of the conception of culture more broadly as a site of mediation and representation. It neither negates representation nor registers it reflexively but – with no definitive beginning or end – demonstrates that meaning is always in the process of production, and so performative.⁸¹ The post-musical subject is not ‘always already’ within language, screened or coded by convention, but constantly becoming, realising itself (‘you are the music whilst the music lasts’). It changes. An extension of its contextual acoustic, taking on qualities of its environment, it cannot be moved in space or time without being altered (‘each time afresh’), becoming something new.⁸² In repetition it becomes non-identical, a variation; more precisely, it manifests difference already at work within identity.⁸³ It is, in this sense, fundamentally relational, a dynamic articulation of material entities, ideas and conventions, human and non-human beings; its space and time are not discrete elements conjoined, but a morphological spacetime continuum.⁸⁴

Lastly – and perhaps most prominently – a post-medium music disturbs the fiction of a universal subject (‘*the public*’) corresponding to art’s transcendental object. Indeed,

⁸¹ Bonnet, *Order of Sounds*; Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense*.

⁸² LaBelle, *Background Noise*; Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak*.

⁸³ This was, of course, a fundamental lesson of Satie’s *Vexations* and La Monte Young’s *X for Henry Flynt*.

⁸⁴ Oliveros, “Space for Listening”.

'classical' music foundered precisely on its specious claims for universality – a music supposedly for everyone. The role of music in consolidating and performing subject identities has been exhaustively documented, making it an ideal material for artists dealing with issues of representation (as in Pop Art), and a medium for transferring iconographic and other visual and graphic art practices outside of the museum and into the broader field of culture (as in Pop Music).⁸⁵ The legacies of experimental musical practices, I claim, are more in keeping with Miwon Kwon's proposition for 'a collective praxis' (chapter 4), one based neither on individual identity nor a universal subject but situated, involving 'a provisional group, produced as a function of specific circumstances...performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modelling or working-out of a collective social process. Here, a coherent representation of the group's identity is always out of grasp.'⁸⁶ As I noted, this could be a polyphonic *listening* community – a plurality (after Arendt) – as much as one inscribing identities ('at the edge of language') that remain just beyond reach.

In their own way, these 'musical' qualities of the curatorial as I describe them here may appear as schematic as the curator function that I elaborated earlier. This is partly a corollary of its formulation as a post-representational process of mediation, one that cannot itself be represented. To give this a more concrete history, I turn now to the work of John Cage, in particular to the period *after* his 'silent piece', 4'33", in order to follow the implications of *musicality* 'after sound', after 'anything goes', after 'music itself'. The situated reflections that follow then offer specific instances both of music entering the gallery field as a form of mediation, a thoughtful practice, *and* as a mode of 'curatorial' writing, working immanently – both phenomenologically *and* analytically – from my experiences within given moments to dwell on the implications of this musicalized mediation.

⁸⁵ Crow, *Long March of Pop*; Roberts, *How Art Made Pop*.

⁸⁶ Barrett, *After Sound*, 167: 'Our real work, after sound *and* art, begins by composing radical collective formations of bodies, times, and spaces.'

The Future of ‘The Future of Music’

Allowing all of music as an art back in, as is the tendency of much theory today, obliges us to rethink first questions we tend especially as philosophers to ask: after the definition, status, or meaning of “music” in relation to the “other” arts. Lydia Goehr¹

I don’t think that music should have a definition. That would keep it from being what it necessarily is.
John Cage²

I believe...that it is primarily because of [Cage’s] music – his very substantial credibility as a composer – that we are drawn into a consideration of his philosophical and theoretical ideas. James Tenney³

I concluded the last chapter by proposing that the curatorial could be understood as the musicalisation of the curator function. I do not mean that curators have a kind of innate ‘musicality’ – a virtuosic or virtuous ear – nor that processes of mediation somehow become ‘music’, an object of listening, but rather that they can be understood as modes of articulating relationships – of artists, actions, spaces, contexts, social groups, objects, bodies, texts, and concepts – meaningfully in time.

Why ‘musicalisation’? Firstly, as I will show, it approaches the matter of being in time – the temporality of mediation – through a paradigm that has been foundational for questions of art, culture, and knowledge. Music and the museum share a common root in the Muses (chapter 8). Secondly, ‘the musical’ – or rather, *musicality* – also then provided the framework that was dismantled with the turn to Minimalism and that exposed the curator function (chapter 2). Rather than abandon the term, thirdly, I claim it is productive to transform it by addressing the problem that ‘music’ posed to the representational model of the gallery arts and its ‘unmusical’ curating (chapter 5). Musicality poses anew the question of art and mediation *after* the loss of autonomy, fourthly, when the internal and external structure of the curator function has been considered inadequate, prompting the project of the curatorial (chapter 4). In this way, finally, musicality directs us beyond the question of medium towards the articulation of temporal form.

¹ Goehr, “All Art Constantly Aspires”.

² Cage letter to Katherine Aune, January 23 1979, in *The Selected Letters*, 484.

³ Tenney, “Cage and the Theory of Harmony”, 283.

The notion of musicality is not new, though its conception as a *practical* mode of mediation has not yet been acknowledged. My account of its history of use will be brief, of necessity, focusing on its (re-)emergence in German Romanticism alongside issues of aesthetics, of representation, of mediation through language, and of the relationship of music to the other arts. The term's value, I argue, concerned attempts to define music's essence, an ambiguous project that marked a separation of music's materiality and ideas *about* music, whilst raising its prestige as a phenomenon that was ostensibly *im*-mediate and lacking 'aboutness'. The former – a question of music's 'medium specificity' and autonomy – offered a mode of critical legitimation (a curatorial representation) consistent with the emergence of *Werktreue*, the 'regulative concept' of the musical work that, as Lydia Goehr has demonstrated, gained further credibility through its parallels with the discrete objects of painting and sculpture and their museum collections. The latter, I show, provided *both a problem and an aspiration* for aesthetics and philosophy more broadly.

Approached in this way, the abandonment of claims to musical autonomy from the 1950s (but gathering pace from the 1970s) and the dissolution of medium specificity in the 1960s gain in significance. I have shown that the curator function emerged to *maintain* a reformed structure of (visual) autonomy for the gallery arts after the establishment of works that were 'neither painting nor sculpture' and when the production of visual difference was no longer a sufficient predicate for producing value. The loss of music's autonomy, by contrast, was *not* recuperated by a parallel rise of music 'curators', though some practices became accepted as Sound Art and Performance Art in the exhibitionary complex (chapters 5 and 7). Accounts of its demise treat it either as a casualty of postmodern preferences for hybridity over purity, with music fragmenting into so many social constructs and (sub-)cultural conventions; or perceive its continuation as a zombie-like (or at least culturally pragmatic) persistence, a set of regulative norms played out across multiple discourses, genres, and traditions.⁴

Without a curatorial framework of autonomy, what then remains of aesthetic value, of distinguishing an art of music from other musical and sounding practices? Does music's

⁴ Bonds, *Absolute Music*.

appreciation become simply a matter of convention, tended by specialist curators of jazz, of rock, of 'contemporary classical' music, of Indian 'classical' music, and so on? What remains, I claim, is musicality in its second sense. Distinct from the question of medium, it implies a relation also to practices that do not (primarily) 'sound', including visual, textual, choreographic, dramaturgical – and curatorial forms.

To grasp these issues concretely I then examine the later work of John Cage. What remained to be done after 'anything went', when any sound could become 'music'? His 'silent piece', *4'33"*, was emblematic for theorists of Sound Art (chapter 5). Taking all sounds to be musical, he was accused either of disavowing the constitutive role of mediation (of cultural frameworks that make sensory encounters with the world intelligible) or of rendering 'noise' conventional. I will show that he addressed these critiques before they became formalised. Habitually treated as a test case for considering the 'limits' of music, the heuristic – and *musical* – value of Cage's work comes, I argue, from his uncompromising concern for the relation of music to its essence, elaborated immanently to issues of compositional technique. By drawing out his methodological programme, I aim finally to draw out the implications of a reconceived 'musicality' for the curatorial.

Music and Musicality

Every art has musical principles and when it is completed it becomes itself music. This is even true of philosophy. Schlegel, *Literarische Notizen 1797-1807*⁵

This issue of musicality as distinct from music became a feature of philosophy, aesthetics, and of music theory with early German Romanticism. Goehr suggests that Schiller was the first to refer reflectively to "das Musikalische" (1794), its noun form solidifying a transference from more 'musical' concerns to its designation as an *essential* quality of the literary and visual arts.⁶ This novel usage drew in turn on two significant precedents: the notion of *mousikē* with its Pythagorean overtones from Classical Greek thought; and a reconsideration of language, especially after Rousseau, as not only constative, designating

⁵ Bowie, *Philosophical Variations*, 48.

⁶ Goehr, *Elective Affinities*, 313n.8. Schiller adopted the term to develop his claims for the status of landscape poetry, notably of Friedrich Matthisson, and – significantly – in response to his reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Gaiger, "Schiller's Theory".

and referring to worldly things, but also problematically constitutive of them and so mediating relations to nature.

A combination of music, movement, and poetry under the auspices of the Muses, *'mousikē'* shaped the way individuals and communities lived and sought to reproduce themselves. It was a medium through which ideals of behaviour were developed and enforced.⁷ I return to this in chapter 8; the important points to mark here are that its invocation from the later 18th-century served to question the relationship of music to its 'sister arts' – and so their relative autonomy – and to figure their relation to a singular, Ideal concept of Art. Figured as a family drama, each sister art could be asked to compete for the favour of Apollo, the Muses' paternal lawmaker. This left ambiguously unresolved the issue of how such a divine ordinance might be manifest, of how the universal was rendered particular. Was musicality the essence of music, an ideal *exemplifying* its medium specificity; or did it account for the manner in which all and any arts *embodied* the idea of art as such? Goehr observes that this ambiguous distinction was expressed in Socrates's final dream (in the *Phaedo*) urging him to practise *mousikē*: a compulsion either to follow the musician-poets; or a distinct order of philosophizing – beyond verbal reason, harmonizing body and mind.⁸

Music's status was thus uncertain. For those concerned with defining it as an art, its apparent inability to convey meaning – unless accompanying words, image, or action – made it a half- or step-sister to the others. Cast as Cinderella in its 'purely instrumental' form, it was often ranked the lowest art, including by both Kant and Hegel. Music required supplementation by concepts in order to inspire understanding. It was at best a 'language of the emotions' or wordless rhetorical expressive form; at worst it was disturbingly subjective. Only as the origins and limits of language were themselves questioned did music find itself magically transformed for the ball (as an object of the male gaze, perhaps), its difference now making it stand out as the first among its sisterhood equals. In its abstract, alienated form language had fallen from its 'natural' musical condition in song and expressive utterance, claimed Rousseau. At the limits of language, music disturbed reason – and the

⁷ Murray and Wilson, *Music and the Muses*, 2.

⁸ Goehr, "'All Art Constantly Aspires'".

self – as an expressive and affective force capable both of separating meaning from intention, and of endowing meaning with greater resonance.⁹ Its lack of referentiality, especially for instrumental music without text, then gave it value as a surrogate for the *movement* of philosophical thought; where language fell short, music expressed and embodied. Building on a tradition of treating music as a form of wordless rhetorical utterance, musical ‘arguments’ – their ‘sentences’ and ‘syntax’ of ‘questioning’ and ‘answering’ phrases, their consonant agreement and dissonant dispute, and above all their immanent organisation of thematic ‘content’ (‘ideas’) as *form* – offered for Friedrich Schelling and others a model for philosophy itself. Music was dialectics in motion.¹⁰ Indeed, as Michael Cherlin has shown, music had played a formative role in the emergence of dialectical thought from the classical Greeks onwards.¹¹

In this shifting formulation, music did not ‘tell of’. It was not ‘about’; it showed. What had been its gravest weakness, its impression on the feeling subject, became its greatest strength: it was *disclosive* of the divine or the world’s order, taken variously as an experience of the ineffable or as an expression of the movement of *Geist*.¹² This provided a philosophical framework for establishing the regulating norms and conventions of concert practice: the notion of *Werktreue* – the musical ‘work concept’ – distinguishing the scored Idea as an ‘objective’ form from its contingent performance contexts; the elevation of a canon of oracular ‘genius’ composers mediating the human and the immortal with their ‘imaginary museum of musical works’ (in Goehr’s formulation) – and its very real ‘curators’ (music directors, critics, and programmers); and its strict separations of composer, performer, and listeners, the latter now tasked with actively divining the music’s import through stilled, hushed, disciplined concentration.¹³ The becoming-autonomous of music, then, involved both a worldly separation (including from ‘folk’ and ‘popular’ musics) in what became dedicated spaces for listening – concert halls; and a material distinction from the

⁹ Hamilton, *Music, Madness*, 5: ‘Music and madness may be said to define the upper and lower limits of language, respectively....Both mark out a conceptual border beyond which language cannot reach.’

¹⁰ Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*, chapter 2; Goehr, *Elective Affinities*, chapter 2.

¹¹ Cherlin, “Dialectical Opposition”.

¹² For a recent return to a musical aesthetics of the ineffable, see Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*; and Abbate, “Drastic or Gnostic?”.

¹³ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*; Bonds, *Music as Thought*; Johnson, *Listening in Paris*. On the emergence of the professional concert manager, see Weber, “The origins of the concert agent”.

other arts.¹⁴ ‘Liberated’ from any dependence on words, images, or gesture, the symphony and instrumental chamber music provided music’s paradigmatic forms.

Whilst apparently decisive in claims for a sovereign art of music, its status remained profoundly ambivalent. Its essence was constitutively beyond its grasp. Its immediacy always paradoxically mediated (disclosed) *another* order of knowledge. It is important to recognise that this took two principal and usually overlaid forms, corresponding broadly to its genealogies in *mousikē* and philosophy’s turn to language. On the one hand, as a harmonic principle uniting mind and body, thought and feeling, its immediacy acquired authority from the *atemporal* metaphysics of Pythagorean numerology. The principle of ratios – or harmonic proportions – had from antiquity through to the early modern period provided a framework of ‘isomorphic resonance’ (as Mark Evan Bonds describes it) governing the relation of the part to the whole at both the microscopic and cosmological levels (as the ‘harmony of the spheres’). The order of the universe – and of the well-governed subject – corresponded to that of sounding harmony; indeed, music’s long association with number elevated its prestige at a time when mathematics became a foundational discipline for modern science.¹⁵ This both ‘naturalised’ the twelve notes of the Western musical scale, and ‘disclosed’ a cosmological order founded on consonance from which dissonance departed and was returned. On the other hand, music’s immediacy comprised an identity of its form and content, its medium and its message. Its unfolding through time – or rather, its articulation *of* time – was a function of the generative possibilities afforded by the relations between notes in its thematic (or melodic) material.¹⁶

¹⁴ Gelbart, *Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”*; and Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*.

¹⁵ Pythagoras famously demonstrated the harmonic principle of ratios, supposedly from hearing the beating of hammers on anvils of relationally different proportions. Given a vibrational wave form at 100 cycles per second (Hz), a ratio of 2:1 (200:100Hz) produces a pitch an octave higher, a ratio of 3:2 (300:200Hz) the ‘perfect fifth’ above that, and 4:3 (400:300Hz) a ‘perfect fourth’ above that (also an octave higher than 200Hz, and two octaves higher than the reference frequency of 100 Hz). These were the ‘consonant’ intervals, with dissonance increasing along with the ‘higher’ ratios. The adoption of ‘equal temperament’ for the twelve-note scale involved ‘rounding adjustments’ of these to enable a uniform or consistent set of ratios in the movement from one key to another.

¹⁶ Berger, *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow*, 9: ‘in the later eighteenth century European art music began to take seriously the flow of time from past to future....[T]his change in the shape of musical time was not a development internal to music alone but rather, with the onset of modernity, part of a larger transformation in the way educated Europeans began to conceive of time.’

It was entirely self-referential. In simple terms, the former was 'vertical', the latter 'horizontal'.

For Wagner, whose use of harmony projected the musical instant towards an infinity, the 'music of the future' belonged in its disclosive synthesis with the other arts, in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of his 'music dramas'. Music's immediacy was given voice – mediated – through word, image, gesture, and action. In its splendid autonomous isolation, 'absolute music' – as he pejoratively coined it (1846) to account for this completely novel construct – was mute. Opposing this, Eduard Hanslick influentially claimed in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*, 1854) that music was already absolute, without need of the qualifying adjective. Borrowing from a Hegelian argument, It was a pure art of tone, not 'natural' sound, the movement of whose musical 'ideas' disclosed to the attentive listener the movement of *Geist* (the Idea) in her inner experience.¹⁷ Music's form was its content. What it disclosed was, tautologously, thought thinking itself. It was this unique quality, for Hanslick, that comprised a distinctive 'musical Beauty'. Emphasising the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal' respectively, these rival positions ultimately combined both, agreeing that 'in itself' music meant instrumental music, and that it was essentially disclosive and so sublated in song, the 'tone poem', the concept, or the unspeakable.¹⁸

By the late 19th century the polemic, which had been based as much on the social purpose of art, began to dissolve as their commonalities became more prominent. In the process, two related but significantly different developments took place. First, as painters moved away from representation towards visual abstraction, the notion of musicality as immediate and disclosive – in its instantaneous 'verticality', the blink of an eye – provided a framework for articulating what was essential to the art of painting. Now its primary concern, form became identical with the 'content' of light and colour, given 'shape' by the frame. Just as Hanslick declared music to have its own essence, so painting and sculpture had theirs. Walter Pater's much-repeated dictum that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of

¹⁷ 'Not able directly to offer conceptual knowledge, music nonetheless shows in what conceptual movement formally exists.' Goehr, *Elective Affinities*, 17.

¹⁸ 'At its core, the debate came down to whether there was one kind of music that manifested itself in many ways, or two different kinds of music that manifested themselves in two distinct repertoires, one instrumental, the other vocal.' Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 140.

music" (1877) invoked musicality in just this way, twisted and enhanced to retain the possibility of visual representation and so laying claim to the laurel among the sister arts – and especially from music (painting needed no further mediation to be disclosive) – whilst simultaneously inferring music's separation *from its own condition*.¹⁹ By 1890, the painter Maurice Denis could declare: "it is well to remember that a picture – before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote – is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." This was the paradigm made definitive by Clement Greenberg in his own quest to raise the stakes for *American* abstraction, and in turn deconstructed by Minimalist artists, at which point artworks no longer spoke for themselves but were 'disclosed' – given voice – by curators (see chapter 2).²⁰ Danto's 'End of Art' was, as Goehr notes, the end of its 'musical condition'.

In the wake of this turn in the visual arts, secondly, the status of form in music itself was enhanced, especially from the post-War anti-Romanticism of the 1920s.²¹ 'Liberated' from its obligation to express as the movement of thought rather than of feeling, however,

¹⁹ "Art, then, is always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception...in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter, in their unity or identity, present one single effect to the imaginative reason." Pater, cited in *Ibid.*, 272. See also Goehr, "All art constantly aspires".

²⁰ Given its significance, Greenberg's argument bears citation at length: 'Music as an art in itself began at this time to occupy a very important position in relation to the other arts. Because of its 'absolute' nature, its remoteness from imitation, its almost complete absorption in the very physical quality of its medium...music had come to replace poetry as the paragon art. It was the art which the other avant-garde arts envied most, and whose effects they tried hardest to imitate. [...] But only when the avant-garde's interest in music led it to consider music as a *method* of art rather than as a kind of effect did the avant-garde find what it was looking for...an art of 'pure form.' It was such because it was incapable, objectively, of communicating anything else than a sensation, and because this sensation could not be conceived in any other terms than those of the sense through which it entered the consciousness. The emphasis, therefore, was to be on the physical, the sensorial. Guiding themselves...by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields.... The arts lie safe now, each within its 'legitimate' boundaries....The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perspectival space. Under the influence of the square shape of the canvas, forms tend to become geometrical – and simplified....But most important of all, the picture plane itself grows shallower and shallower, flattening out and pressing together the fictive planes of depth until they meet as one upon the real and material plane which is the actual surface of the canvas.' Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon".

²¹ 'The rehabilitation of form's prestige in the aesthetics of music owes much to changing attitudes in the visual arts and literature. Painters (Whistler, Gauguin), art critics (Worringer, Bell, Fry), and poets (Mallarmé, Wilde, Hoffmansthal, George) who insisted on the priority of form over content made it easier for a new generation of composers (Schoenberg, Busoni, Webern, Stravinsky) to embrace absolute music.' Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 271.

music's autonomous abstraction was pursued in its *horizontal* mode, especially as Schoenberg (also a painter, and member of *Der Blaue Reiter* group) – 'the dialectical composer' (as Adorno described him) – rescinded the governing 'vertical' harmonic order of the tonal system to make way, ultimately, for his serial method designed to accord equal 'weight' to each note in the scale. Music's elusive essence increasingly concerned the problem of *time*, played out as a dialectic of contrasts articulating the relation of 'form and content', necessity and contingency. For Schoenberg, 'musical thinking [was] subject to the same dialectic as all other thinking.'²²

In following the work of Cage as a student of Schoenberg, my concern is the transformation of this model of musicality's immediacy. The implications of his invitation to regard all sounds as music then go beyond a deconstruction of *Werktreue*. It certainly opened the way to a 'postmodern hybridity' rather than a 'musical purity', as Evan Bonds concludes, but the end of musical autonomy did not simply fizzle out into so many different genres and 'crossovers', pragmatically continuing as social constructs, habits, and conventions. For one thing, the question of musicality remained and this was never only about music, but also about the limits of language, and so increasingly revisited in recent decades as a philosophical question (and not only after Adorno).²³

It also raises anew the matter of music's relation to its sister arts, especially to the gallery's expanded field. This has been taken up, for example, by G. Douglas Barrett, who argues that 'music is in need...of both a new concept and content.'²⁴ Noting that music was never a 'medium', in the sense set out by Greenberg and deconstructed by Krauss, he suggests that 'musicality is a register that can and...must be instantiated across a variety of media,

²² Schoenberg, *Fundamentals*, 1 and 94. Dialectics was transposed into theories of musical history and techniques from the 1830s by François-Joseph Fétis, in the 1840s by Adolph Bernhard Marx, by Moritz Hauptmann in the 1850s, and – particularly influential for Schoenberg – in the 1870s by Hugo Riemann, who applied explicitly the terminology of 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis to aspects of harmonic progression, musical phrasing and rhythm'. Cherlin, "Dialectical Opposition". See also le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics*; and Bujić, *Music in European Thought*.

²³ Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*; and *Philosophical Variations*; Herzogenrath, *sonic thinking*. I take it as emblematic that *musical* metaphors, analogies, and concepts – in this expanded sense – feature prominently not only in Heidegger and Wittgenstein, but notably in the 'new materialist' philosophy of Catherine Malabou as I have indicated in previous chapters.

²⁴ Barrett, *After Sound*, 7.

including but not limited to sound.’²⁵ Distinct from what he claims as contemporary music’s unreflexive emphasis on originality, on ‘the new’ as such, and Sound Art’s dependence on its own medium (or at least on the concept of the medium), this ‘musical contemporary art’ would engage our historical condition as ‘a radically generic post-conceptual contemporary art that...is capable of producing meaning that exceeds the field of art and impinges on social life.’

Whilst broadly in tune with Barrett’s analysis, I approach the issue of musicality once more as a problem of mediation – not so much of the limits of language, but of material culture: of the curatorial. Cage provides my exemplary case not only because his work has been and continues to be influential across artistic forms, but also because – I claim – he systematically pursued the question of music’s relation to its essence *from within* this problematic of musical mediation.²⁶ What was at stake in letting all sounds in as ‘music’, and in breaking with both the conceptual and institutional structures of musical autonomy, was the issue of music’s immediacy *without* its predication as disclosive, and so *without* dependence on or reproducing a prior mediating condition. This not only brought him to reconceive the classical mimetic theory of art, I argue, its aim ‘to imitate nature in the manner of her operation’; it expanded his practice from the temporal organisation of sounds to the composition of events. The correspondences of musicality and the curatorial emerge from this transition.

After Sound: ‘Anything...not Everything’

The question of what music might become once any sound could be regarded as music preoccupied Cage from the 1960s, providing the undercurrent to his lecture ‘The Future of Music’ (1974/1979). Significantly, key prompts for this came from two formerly friendly composers whose critiques of his work anticipated the positions later adopted by proponents of Sound Art.

²⁵ Barrett, “Towards a Musical Contemporary Art”: ‘I want to argue that...as music becomes genuinely contemporary – that is, it reflexively confronts the contemporary defined as the historical temporality of global capitalism – it *requisitely* (also) becomes contemporary art.’

²⁶ On Cage’s impact on the turn from medium specificity in the visual arts, see for example Joseph, “Tower and the Line”; “Morris and Cage”; and “The Gap and the Frame”.

Invited to introduce Cage's music to BBC audiences for *The Listener*, Cornelius Cardew – once the leading British advocate for experimental music – took the opportunity instead to renounce his former affiliation and denounce him for a lack of political commitment. Reviving an attack that Luigi Nono had earlier mounted, he hammered Cage for standing aside from the social implications of his music.²⁷ His use of chance 'glorified randomness' instead of addressing the tensions of the social body, and where audiences and critics had once risen up in protest they had now 'learned to take their medicine' and enjoy the 'titillation' of the spectacles he put before them. From Cardew's recently adopted Maoist position, Cage's brushes with the Great Leader had clearly not left their mark.²⁸ His work was *too musical*.

This broadside came a year after Morton Feldman publicly admonished him – again for his use of chance operations – for abandoning his artistic responsibilities. Influenced by Zen, his use of the *I Ching* to depersonalise his work robbed it of its aesthetic force. In the choice between art and life, he had chosen life. 'Cage's idea, summed up...in the words "Everything is music," had led him more and more toward a social point of view, less and less toward an artistic one.'²⁹ His work was *not musical enough*.

In responding to these positions, 'The Future of Music' can therefore be read, in part, as a riposte to the discourses of Sound Art *avant la lettre*. Indeed, it is significant that the discursive positions on Sound Art each in their own way position the new medium's difference from music by critiquing Cage, exemplified by the musical 'silence' of *4'33"* (1951). His aesthetic is, as it were, frozen around the mid-century, missing the significance of his later writings and work especially from the 1970s.³⁰ What future, then, did 'The Future of Music' offer?

²⁷ Cardew, "John Cage; Ghost or Monster?". As a senior European avant-gardist and member of the Italian Communist Party, Luigi Nono labelled Cage 'profoundly reactionary' in an article – 'The Historical Reality of Music Today' (1958) – for his practices of indeterminacy, following the American's provocation with 'Composition as Process' and performances with David Tudor at the Darmstadt Festival – see Silverman, *Begin Again*. Between Nono and Cardew, Boehmer's "Chance and Ideology" directed perhaps the most trenchant critique.

²⁸ Cage's short-lived interest in Mao, c.1971-74, was always qualified rather than absolute. Cage, *M*.

²⁹ Feldman, "Eighth Street".

³⁰ This is the case even for more subtle and sympathetic writers like Branden W Joseph whose 'minor history' of Tony Conrad's work – *Dream Syndicate*, n.32, 384 – articulates the condition of 'the Arts after Cage' yet

First delivered as a lecture, it announced a programmatic change that had been emerging in Cage's work over the previous decade, marking a process of transition that was at once personal, professional, philosophical, and practical.³¹ This included: a move back into Manhattan from his rural home at Stony Point; the death of his parents and his own health worries; a sartorial shift from suit to jeans and beard; an increased scale of work facilitated by Mimi Johnson's Artservices; growing celebrity as both an artist and a public thinker; a turn towards the theories of McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Norman O. Brown, and a return to Thoreau's writing; his close friendship with Duchamp; a greater use of technology, often through collaboration with others; a renewed concern for language and writing; and – significantly – a more intense focus on issues of temporality. In short, the lecture provided an occasion for Cage to reflect on one of his favourite subjects, time and change, set out in his opening statement proudly accepting Feldman's critique in order to move beyond it, whilst registering the shift from his earlier essay 'The Future of Music: Credo' (ca. 1940). This was already a *different* future:

For many years I've noticed that music – as an activity separated from the rest of life – doesn't enter my mind. Strictly musical questions are no longer serious questions. It wasn't always that way.

He had followed Varèse, Cowell, and others in the battle to liberate noise, a battle now won. Any pitch, volume, duration, articulation, silence, melody, or rhythm was now acceptable, and so 'Anything goes. However, not everything is attempted.' Music was no longer bound by any preformed structure or idea nor by an identity that differentiated the sonic field; indeed, it seemed to be a quality of music for any limit to be exceeded – including the conventions and confining spaces of concert halls.

delineates his position only up to and including the early 1960s. Likewise, his more recent *Experimentations* cites Ben Johnston's "A.S.U.C. Keynote Address," to claim that after *HPSCHD* (1969) Cage 'largely ceased "to break new ground but rather buil[t] upon his earlier work in a most solid and impressive manner' (173).

³¹ Cage revised it for publication five years later in *Empty Words*. See also Silverman *Begin Again* and Cage, *Selected Letters*.

This was neither a victory nor a valedictory speech, but a statement of fact. Alongside the efforts of composers, this shift had significant social dimensions. Changes in technology had exponentially expanded possibilities. The ‘interpenetration of cultures formerly separated’ decentred the musical field, such that ‘there is no longer an essential difference between some serious music and some popular music.’ Together with this heterogeneity, population increases and new forms of social interaction ensured that the diversity and amount of music being made was constantly growing. This multiplicity marked a shift from the notion of a mainstream ‘into a situation that could be likened to a delta or field or ocean’ – anticipating David Toop’s *Ocean of Sound*.³²

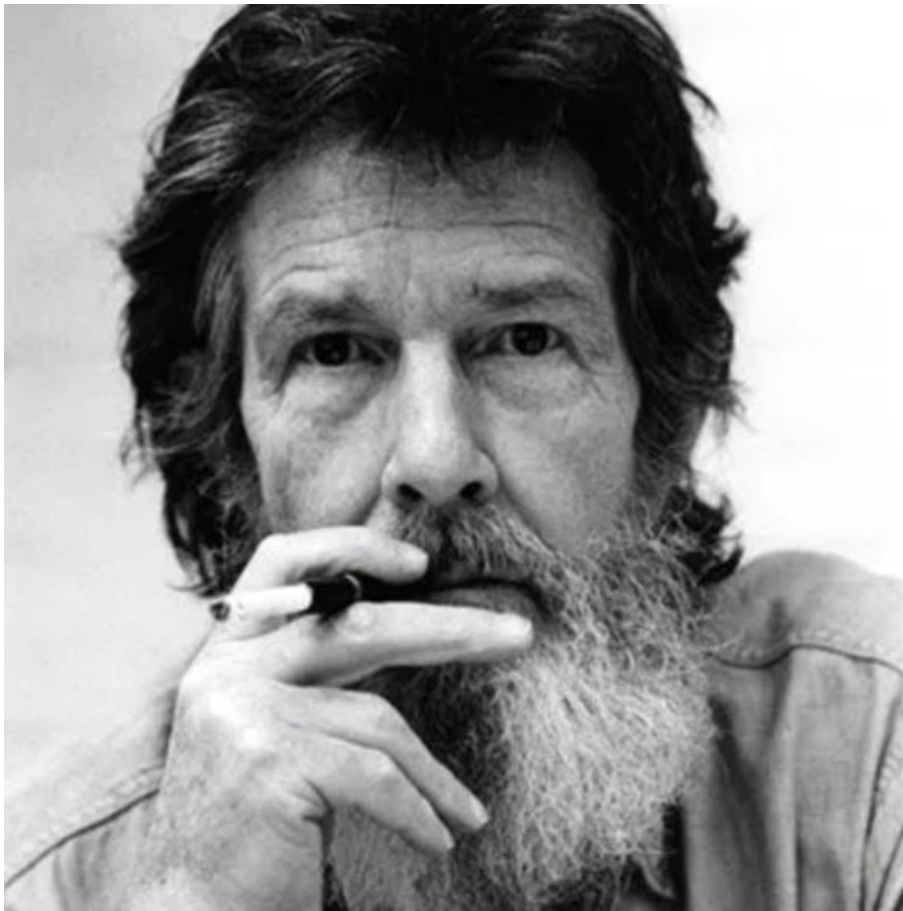


Fig.15: John Cage

The future, then, would be filled with music. Moreover, the distinctions between composer, performer, and listener that had developed from the Renaissance were now thoroughly breaking down, and for the same underlying reasons. Indeterminacy in compositions,

³² Interview with Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras (1980), excerpted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 238.

technological innovations opening the field of production to non-specialists, the decentring of musical practices afforded by cultural mixing, and the potential generated by the increase in musical activity provided 'evidence of an ongoing change in society', even if this change was incomplete and uneven.³³ For Cage, this necessitated a decisive shift in emphasis that he explained succinctly in a contemporaneous letter to Christian Wolff:

I have thought in recent years that since my practice of music changed my mind, that it might change the minds of some other people (that seems to be the case) and further that since society is like mind that it too might change through music's practices. And this too seems to be the case, though insufficiently. Not enough people take revolutionary music seriously, that is, not enough to change society.³⁴

Music's future, he suggested, pointed towards an art of social transformation 'voluntarily undertaken from within'. Revolution – or metamorphosis – was immanent to music, neither additional to nor separable from its concern with sound (*pace* Cardew).³⁵ Whilst 'anything went', then, not every music was revolutionary. This implied a radical change in the notion of aesthetic value. Indeed, if music could be any sound, without qualitative distinctions determining one as more 'musical' than another, the established and traditional aesthetic legitimations of music had to change. The musical work concept, its regulative operations and conventions were becoming redundant.

Goehr has claimed, by contrast, that whilst Cage had dispensed with music's *material* autonomy, he had paradoxically reinforced and expanded the scope for its *ethical* autonomy (to use Evan Bonds's distinction), its separation from the social and political. In my terms, the 'internal' distinction may have been erased, but the curator function remained intact through its 'external' border. By accepting the terms of concert practice by which its authority was exercised, the framework of *Werktreue* had actually been consolidated. 4'33" may have shocked in the 1950s, but the celebrated composer's eccentricities had been

³³ The resonances with Attali's *Bruits* (1977) are surely not accidental. 'Technology has brought about the blurring of the distinctions between composers, performers, and listeners. Just as anyone feels himself capable of taking a photograph by means of a camera, so now and increasingly so in the future anyone, using recording and/or electronic means, feels and will increasingly feel himself capable of making a piece of music.' "Future of Music", 181.

³⁴ Letter to Christian Wolff, January 17, 1974, in Cage, *Selected Letters*, 441-445.

³⁵ 'Revolution remains our proper concern. But instead of planning it, or stopping what we're doing in order to do it, it may well be that we are at all times in it.' "The Future of Music", 182.

absorbed with benign good humour by the 1990s; its score continued to be performed to appreciative audiences. This was not Cage's failing alone, she suggested, but reflected an inevitable 'paradox many composers face when they attempt to produce something revolutionary from within the institution' (which could always institutionalise its own critique).³⁶ He had perhaps at best (or worst) brought its disclosive function down to earth, making discursive claims for musical value more contingent (just as the Minimalist turn brought out the curator's voice). Thus, for example, Richard Taruskin, keen to bury his legacy shortly after the composer's death, attacked Cage in typically pugilistic fashion:

Sounds that were noise on one side of an arbitrary framing gesture are suddenly music, a "work of art," on the other side; the esthetic comes into being by sheer fiat.... The audience is invited – no, commanded – to listen to ambient or natural sounds with the same reverent contemplation they would assume if they were listening to Beethoven's Ninth.³⁷

To claim that *4'33"* commands silent listening because of its *un*-notated performance conventions is both a misrepresentation of any actual performance – it famously provokes giggles, coughing, and audible nervous twitching in concert halls – and a projective 'reading' of its instructions and intent. It never was just another 'concert hall piece'.³⁸

Goehr would no doubt also take issue with Taruskin's gesture of framing aesthetic discourse as 'arbitrary'; rather, any new consensus would, as before, depend on the language games of 'complex theories, and the practices to which these theories become attached'. Art's mediation – and music's – was unavoidable. Cage's work simply registered an irreconcilable gap between the *idea* of music and its *material* expression in given works. For Goehr, the relation between theory and practice (after Cage) became the fundamental issue – as also for her paradigms of Danto and Adorno.³⁹ Echoing the positions adopted by Bourriaud and

³⁶ Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*, 265.

³⁷ Taruskin, "Scary Purity of John Cage," 275. 'Cage is dead', he wrote, echoing Boulez's symbolic burial of Schoenberg after his death in 1951. A moribund attempt to feign the rhetorical venom of Tom Wolfe, the essay's elite 'anti-elite' populism can be read as an attempt to maintain the musicologist's critical privilege.

³⁸ Goehr claims that 'it is because of his specifications that people gather together, usually in a concert hall, to listen to the sounds of the hall for the allotted time period' (*Imaginary Museum*, 264). Yet the premiere, at Woodstock, was given in a barn, the back doors of which were opened to the surrounding rural environment, whilst the most famous document of Cage's own performance – in Nam June Paik's 1974 documentary *Tribute to John Cage* – took place in Harvard Square, surrounded by students and traffic.

³⁹ Goehr, *Elective Affinities*.

Foster elaborated in chapter 4, each work was now obliged either to compel its own art theoretical legitimation (after Danto) or to risk a *praxis*, holding theory and practice in dialectical tension (after Adorno's 'negative' dialectics).

For the paradigm itself to change, the question of value needed to be reconfigured: would it lie 'in the work itself, in its realization through performance, or in the interpretive act of listening to a work?' It was in rejecting these categories as spatially (and temporally) distinct, however, that Cage's work most thoroughly dismantled the work concept's regulative norms – and concert practices in particular – with their constitutive separation of theory from practice, musicality from music. His practices of folding into each other acts of composition, performance, and listening – erasing their distinctions – in his later work can be recognised as experimenting with procedures by which sound objects and listening subjects might be simultaneously co-produced without hierarchy and without privileging aesthetic concepts either 'before' or 'after' the event. 'Disclosure' – and so music's (or art's) mediation – was no longer necessary. These approaches challenged the mechanisms by which music's 'ethical autonomy' – instituting the separation of composition, performance, and listening – was produced.

The identity of form and content was no longer simply a feature of 'the work' (in its regulative sense), its temporal organisation contained like a time capsule within the concert form and its own organisation of time (with comfort breaks). It was now a feature of the production of the whole situation. Cage began to compose events. The future of music, without autonomy, involved the making of encounters in time. 'Strictly musical questions [were] no longer serious questions'; what remained to be addressed was *musicality*.

This can be approached, I argue, through Cage's well-documented considerations of compositional technique, developed in particular following his studies with Schoenberg (ca.1935-37). Whilst the impact of this experience for Cage was questioned in research from the 1990s, its significance – primarily for his earlier work – is now more widely accepted.⁴⁰ I

⁴⁰ Claims that Cage rhetorically used his studies with Schoenberg to advance the status of his own music and career have been made by Hicks, "Cage's Studies with Schoenberg" and Parsons Smith, "Athena at the Manuscript Club". Research on Cage's compositional practice, however, has revealed a much closer and more

aim to show that the logic of Schoenberg's method provided a model that he was able to adapt, and that understood in these terms can be grasped as an evolving project into his later work. Where influence has been traced, it remains attached to the 'musical work'; my concern is for how it addressed the issue of musicality. In particular, I will follow his shifts in the relation between music's 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions and their respective historical claims for immediacy by focusing, initially, on how Cage advanced a method of conceiving sound *as a function of time* through his disciplined use of chance procedures. This will also help to resolve some of the many misunderstandings of his approach to indeterminacy.

Variable Time

*Everything is permitted if zero is taken as the basis. That's the part that isn't often understood.*⁴¹

Cage shared his critique of preformed and transcendental aesthetic concepts with Schoenberg, for whom 'Beauty, an undefined concept, [was] quite useless as a basis for aesthetic discrimination.'⁴² The distinction between music and not-music was not an 'arbitrary frame' distinguishing an inside and outside of musical art, but an historically necessary and immanent logic, a critical development pursued dialectically between continuity and innovation.⁴³ Writing a year after Cage's studies with him, he emphasised that 'one cannot really understand the style of one's time if one has not found out how it is distinguished from the style of one's predecessors.'⁴⁴ Musical and historical movement came from comprehending the contradictions inherent in a given order as they appear to an unfolding and emergent potentiality. Change came neither from 'outside', imposed as an abstraction, nor as an accident of history, but as a self-reflexive movement specific to music's own technical and material present. It was through the dialectical tension between the socially-situated composer's subjective freedom ('anything goes') and the objective necessity in the limits imposed by music's historical development ('but not everything is

nuanced understanding of how Schoenberg's teaching affected his work. See Bernstein, "John Cage, Arnold Schoenberg"; Ravenscroft, "Cage and Schoenberg"; and Neff, "Point/Counterpoint".

⁴¹ Interview with Rob Tannenbaum (1985), reproduced in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 208.

⁴² Schoenberg, *Structural Functions*, 195.

⁴³ Schoenberg, "A Self Analysis"; Cherlin, "Dialectical Opposition".

⁴⁴ Schoenberg, "Teaching and Modern Trends," 377.

attempted') that the question of aesthetic value played out: 'It receives its legitimacy from the tradition it negates.'⁴⁵

For Schoenberg, this meant accepting the logical consequences of Wagnerian harmony for musical form (Chapter 7). The late 18th-century tonal system of keys had offered a musical syntax based on the dominance of 'centripetal' functions – of harmonic movement from and directed back towards the 'endings' of cadential closure – over 'centrifugal' tendencies that explored more remote harmonic 'regions' that offered greater expressive variety. Romantic composers had increasingly pushed beyond the gravitational pull of tonal centres and their relational orbits. The 'vertical' harmonic field was increasingly stretched into the horizontal as an instant projected towards the infinite.⁴⁶ Traditional musical forms could barely contain the harmonic implications of this material; as a result, the duration of works increased substantially.⁴⁷ Dissonance needed to be 'emancipated', then, because it was no longer defined by consonance. Disclosing the eternal was no longer an option. Music's formal necessity of 'logic and coherence', its identity of form and content, therefore had to be achieved organically by generating all of a work's material – its thematic and harmonic 'content', its horizontal and vertical dimensions respectively – from the same motivic *idea* (or seed). This was his celebrated notion of the *Grundgestalt*, the 'basic shape' from which a work's form would be self-generating.⁴⁸

Crucially, in order to avoid creating unintended harmonic expectations by accidentally reinstating distinctions of consonance and dissonance, or negating the formal dialectical principle of irreversible change by use of repetition, a rigorous and disciplined method was needed to maintain their equilibrium.⁴⁹ The contrapuntal procedure of *developing variation*

⁴⁵ Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg," 155.

⁴⁶ Thus Alfred Lorenz would famously later claim the 18 hours of Wagner's Ring cycle described a fall (with all its metaphysical implications) from E \flat to D \flat . See also Chapter 7 on Schoenberg's *Erwartung*.

⁴⁷ Beethoven's symphonies increased threefold from a classical norm of about 25 minutes for his First to the 75 minutes of his Ninth – defining, so legend has it, the duration of a CD's capacity – and by the end of the nineteenth century Bruckner's 'Apocalyptic' Eighth Symphony and Mahler's Third would take ninety. Wagner's music dramas, meanwhile, extended to the six hours of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, one of the longest in the repertory.

⁴⁸ 'Whatever happens in a piece of music is nothing but the endless reshaping of a basic shape.' Schoenberg, "Linear Counterpoint".

⁴⁹ 'As a developmental structure music is an absolute negation of repetition, in accordance with Heraclitus' assertion that no one ever steps into the same river twice. On the other hand, it is only able to develop by

(derived from Brahms, Hanslick's paradigmatic composer) provided just such an approach. Here, a single musical 'idea' generated a limited set of possibilities – configurations in two-dimensional (vertical and horizontal) musical 'space' – that could be set in motion without repetition to generate form by controlling the number of *variables* (like 'a Diophantine equation').⁵⁰ This was a music *embodying* historical movement as a dialectical process, each variation both derived from the music before it and generative of what followed, and its logic was fundamental to Cage's studies with Schoenberg.⁵¹

Whilst suspending systematically the temporal logic of consonance and dissonance, Schoenberg had nevertheless accepted the historical convention of the twelve-note tempered scale as a limitation, a principle he consolidated (and reified) with dodecaphonic serialism.⁵² Indeed, as Adorno pointed out, this latter move had not only betrayed his musical dialectics by imposing from 'outside' an arbitrary structural frame; the traditional forms to which Schoenberg had returned no longer functioned according to their earlier principles of harmonic tension and release. In short, form and content were not identical. The relation of music's vertical and horizontal dimensions needed to be transformed, and so musical time rethought: 'each tone and each instant should be equally near the centre, and this would preclude the organization of musical time progression which prevails in Schoenberg'.⁵³ Rhythm and timbre (sonority or 'tone colours', distinct sonic qualities produced by different instruments) now took on greater significance. 'Of all of Schoenberg's accomplishments in integrating musical means, not the least was that he conclusively

virtue of repetition. Thematic work, the principle which concretizes the abstract passage of time in terms of musical substance, is never more than the dissimilarity of the similar.' Adorno, *'musique informelle'*, 284. See also *Style and Idea*, 102-4.

⁵⁰ Schoenberg, "Linear Counterpoint"; and Cherlin "Dialectical Opposition".

⁵¹ Letters to Adolph Weiss and to Pauline Schindler, May 1935, in Cage, *Selected Letters*, 20, 22.

⁵² In this system, briefly, melodic and harmonic materials are derived by treating a sequence of the 12 notes – without repetition – through permutations by: transposition (moving every pitch by the same interval, such that, for example, a semitone difference would shift a C to C#, an E to F and so on, whilst maintaining the same sequence and contour); intervallic inversion (such that a minor third 'up' the scale, say from E to G, would become a minor third 'down', from E to C#); sequential inversion (reversing the ordinal position of notes, so that the 12th note would become 1st, and *vice versa*); and intervallic and sequential inversion combined. From the initial sequence of 12 pitches, this resulted in 48 possible permutations.

⁵³ Adorno, 'Schoenberg', 161; *"musique informelle,"* 271 and 286. On Schoenberg's turn to dodecaphony in relation to his retention of traditional rhythmic techniques as an uncanny presence, a haunting of modernity's temporality, see Cherlin, *Schoenberg's Musical Imagination*, chapter 5.

separated color from the decorative sphere and elevated it to a compositional element in its own right.'

Cage's next step has to be understood in this context if we are to grasp the significance of his *methodical* introduction of chance operations into his compositions. It is precisely this that Adorno missed in his critique; indeed, what is immediately striking about his analysis is just how closely this describes key aspects of Cage's music in the 1950s. His departures from this programme should then be understood not as an abandonment of tradition but as its further dialectical sublation. Music becomes musicality.

Cage famously had 'no sense of harmony'. In his early work, he rejected as an arbitrary constraint the principle of 'octave equivalence' – the tempered scale and its 12-step division – that Schoenberg had himself extensively analysed.⁵⁴ The vertical (simultaneity) could neither explicitly *nor implicitly* govern the 'horizontal' unfolding of time. In contrast to the residual idealism of Adorno (and Hegel, via Hanslick), this meant letting go of the precondition of 'musical' tones.⁵⁵ His primary concern was rather to allow each sound to come from its own centre without being determined by its relation to those around it. The 'vertical' was, in fact, already a function of the horizontal condition of *listening*: the time it takes to hear is shorter than the time it takes to understand or recognise. As James Tenney observed, each sound emerges through and as temporal difference due to the cultured mechanisms of listening and its *Gestalt* functions – a distinguishing feature of music, for Cage, from the visual arts.⁵⁶ Perception and cognition have their own musical rhythm;

⁵⁴ Schoenberg, *Structural Functions*.

⁵⁵ 'The site of all musicality is *a priori* an interior space and only here does it become constituted as an objective reality....In it the external objectivity returns as the objectivity of the subject itself.' Two-dimensional pitch space was then foundational of musical time for Adorno. One note alone lacked the principle of relation from which music's temporal form was created, he argued (implicitly critiquing composers such as Giacinto Scelsi), whilst composers' turns to instrumental colour and tone quality as a structural parameter was an imported abstraction (a bassoon has no immanent relation to a violin or a gong). 'Sound and music diverge.' 'Through its autonomy the sound regains a culinary quality which is irreconcilable with the constructive principle. The density of material and colour has done nothing to modify the dissociative character of the structure, which remains external. Dynamism remains [an] elusive...goal.' "*musique informelle*," 300, 301, and 313. Hanslick similarly had emphasised that only 'The sound of humanly produced tones...creates forms that move through time'; Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 147.

⁵⁶ Tenney, "Cage and the Theory of Harmony". That Cage may have consciously drawn on such an extended notion of harmony is shown in his letter to Peter Yates, 14 December 1940, in Cage, *Selected Letters*, 49. Strictly musical questions are no longer serious questions: 'I have searched...for what characterizes an art, what it is an art is doing that's different from another art. It seems to me that music is very close to the

sound's immediacy was not already mediated. Three-dimensional 'sound-space' of the listening situation displaced the two-dimensional 'harmonic space' of the musical object. His preliminary revolution, we might summarise, was to turn from a system in which musical time was a function of harmony towards a situation where harmony became a function of musical time.

After turning to percussion and other untuned instruments, Cage's adoption of chance techniques provided a systematic means to organise relations between form and content: to produce continual variety *without* a germinal idea. That is, in place of a musical 'idea' – a theme and its motivic potential – as the generative motor of a composition, Cage left a void but retained the principle of constant change. Now conceived as a temporal model in which variables were controlled to avoid producing relations of dependency with their own expectations, this principle of variation was at first balanced by and contained in 'empty vessels', durational structures that could accept diverse sounds (which Cage called 'gamuts' – aggregates or assortments, without order) such that each would marvel in its own splendour. "It is like an empty glass into which at any moment anything may be poured", he claimed in his 'Lecture on Nothing' (1949), which is why he could perform its wry paradox: "I have nothing to say and I am saying it."

Scandalising the European avant-garde at Darmstadt in 1958 – and as a riposte to an article by his former ally Pierre Boulez on 'Chance' ('Alea'), which denounced its dicey "intellectual devilry" by "humble frauds" – Cage gave two lectures that demonstrated the rigorous approach he took to refining this technique.⁵⁷ His work had changed. By introducing unknowns into his compositional method using chance operations, beginning with *Music of Changes* (1951), he had gradually been able to dispense with the structural scaffolding of his pre-fabricated (static) structures. Musical time then became a function solely of the developing variation technique of *form*, 'the morphology of a continuity'. The laborious and elaborate processes undertaken to achieve this are detailed in James Pritchett's *The Music*

nervous system....The way I've put it in the past is that it's irritating if you can't use it, and pleasing if you can. Whereas things you look at either interest you or don't.'

⁵⁷ Cage, *Silence*. "Alea" appeared in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, November 1957. This critical attack directed implicitly at Cage, followed Boulez's dismissal of 'experimental music' for the same publication in 1955, and the two composers' estrangement after a period of intense mutual interest and support. Boulez, *Orientations*.

of John Cage, and Cage's correspondence with Boulez from the early 1950s.⁵⁸ Giving further variables over to chance techniques – notably the sound qualities of frequency (pitch), amplitude (loudness), duration, timbre, and order of succession – as with *Variations I* (1958), enabled sounds to become simply 'events in a field of possibilities'.

It is imperative to understand that in stripping away his personal taste, aspects of compositional control, and cultural convention, this was *not* a process of erasure indifferent to the sounding result. Quite the opposite. It was a controlled means for organising the interdependencies of variables such that no one element is in a hierarchical or determining relation with another, thereby allowing a temporal movement of constant and continuous transformation. Anything goes, 'but only when nothing is taken as the basis'; at the same time, 'Anything goes. However, not everything is attempted.'⁵⁹

One of Cage's favourite aphorisms confirms this. Recollecting his studies with Schoenberg, he gave an account of his teacher's practice of giving his class musical problems to solve, problems with several potential solutions. Having offered new solutions until all possibilities were exhausted, Schoenberg then demanded the common principle underlying all of them. Speechless, Cage regarded him with awe. Only later in the 1970s did he propose an answer; the underlying principle was the question asked.⁶⁰ As he put it in 'Composition in

⁵⁸ Pritchett, *Music of John Cage* – in particular chapters two, three and four (though Pritchett retains a privileged distinction of musical sounds over musical time, and thus also of Cage's status as the composer of musical works). See Nattiez, *Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, in particular the letter from Cage to Boulez of 22 May 1951 and his artistic statement from "Four musicians at work" (105-107). On his compositional *discipline*, we can note that he used at least five variables to avoid implying relations from the logical square of oppositions (A, B, not-A, not-B). Five variables introduced complexity. Only from five did the number of binary permutations exceed the number of variables by double or more; it was the fifth harmonic (5:4) that destabilised the Pythagorean modelling of the 12-note scale. Cage, *For the Birds*, especially the second interview, and 93, n.2; Retallack, *Musicage*, 237-8 and 297, as well as Appendix 1, 344.

⁵⁹ Cage "45' for a Speaker", 160; "The Future of Music", 178.

⁶⁰ *Silence*, 93; letters to Dieter Schnebel (1974) and Paul Griffiths (1977) in *Letters*, 441, 466; and *X*, 131-2. Indeed, This was the method for 'polymorphous canon' and 'polymorphous texture' described by Schoenberg in "Linear Counterpoint," whereby 'point and opposing point are placed as if right and left of the 'equals' sign, hinting at many possible solutions, or sound combinations.' Situating variables as functions of each other's morphology – as if either side of the 'equals' sign – is precisely the approach Cage describes in his Darmstadt lecture. Indeed as he explained to Joan Retallack (*Musicage*, 63-64) in one of his last interviews, 'I try in general to use chance operations – each number that I use, I try to have it do one thing rather than two things....I try to get an event divided into all the different things that bring it into existence and then to ask as many questions as there are aspects of an event – to bring an event into being hmm?'

Retrospect' (1981) in the form of a mesostic – itself a visual and typographical model of the principle:

Devote myself
to askIng
queStions
Chance
determIned
answers'll oPen
my mind to worLd around
at the same tIme
chaNging my music
sElf-alteration not self-expression

Fig. 16

Asked about the 'shape' of his Norton Lectures at Harvard (1988-1989), he replied: "a set of variations and the theme is not given." In short, without a vertical order, the horizontal could dispense with the arbitrary framing of a formal template, its temporal necessity then transformed from a relation of dependence (on a *Grundgestalt*) to one of *independence*. The formal control of the relation of variables was a procedure that aimed to accept any material and allow it to 'reveal itself' *through metamorphosis*, such that all aspects of the material became different in the same way – a movement that invited a similarly transformational mode of listening, equally independent of taste, control, and convention. Where for Adorno everything depended on the dialectical tension proper to the subject-object relation, the gap between composer's intention and the objective requirements of the musical material, for Cage there was no foundational separation. Listening subjects and sounding objects were constantly produced in the temporal movement of their relations. What moved was not the Idea, thought thinking itself, but the form of movement (the relations of subject and object, listener and sound) itself.

In dispensing with durational structures, his works no longer had 'beginnings, middles, and endings'. They were, rather, 'occasions for experience, and this experience is not only received by the ears but by the eyes too. An ear alone is not a being.' As a corollary, chance techniques could be used to explore the morphology of non-sounding materials such as

texts, gestures, and graphics *whilst still – at least for Cage – being ‘music’*.⁶¹ He often composed his lectures in the same way as his sounding works to exemplify his artistic programme. Likewise, having ‘tried charts of words based on a gamut of vowels and then made poems – as possibilities for vocal works – by tossing’ as early as 1951, he followed his friend and one-time student Jackson Mac Low in applying chance procedures more rigorously to texts (notably Thoreau and Joyce) from the 1970s, alongside his many mesostics.⁶²

One of the variables that Cage was obliged to explore was the conventional systems for musical notation. Always meticulous in his presentation of scores, and having both a practical experience in design and a wide circle of artist friends, these became visual artworks in their own right. This shift was not in itself surprising: he had tried painting at the time he began composing, was friends with and collaborated with many artists, and his work was, especially earlier in his career, more sympathetically received by visual artists and performed in galleries than by musicians and their institutions. Already in the early 1940s he had composed *Chess Pieces* for a gallery show of chess-related art, hand-drawn ‘in black and white ink within the squares of a coloured chessboard, to be hung on the walls as a painting’.

For his ‘twenty-five year retrospective’ in 1958, New York’s Stable Gallery presented an exhibition of the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, which incorporated eighty-four different notational techniques for the piano solo alone (alongside a Town Hall performance of his works), reviewed by both *Art News* and *The Times*. For the same gallery, he initiated *Notations* (1968) in collaboration with Alison Knowles as an exhibition and art book showing the diversity of contemporary musical scores – including hand-written lyrics from The Beatles though lacking a contribution from Schoenberg (despite persistent efforts). The

⁶¹ The idea that music need not be purely sonic is implicit in the contrast of Cage’s anecdotes. In two, Cage attributed his devotion to music to Schoenberg: that his teacher accepted him as a pupil on condition that he dedicated his life to music; and that he vowed to do so when Schoenberg told his class that his goal in teaching was “to make it impossible for [them] to write music”. These differ significantly with his early decision not to pursue architecture as he “would have had to give his life to [that] alone”, whereas he had many interests.

⁶² *Empty Words* and *X*. See also Mac Low, “Cage’s Writings”. Writing of his mesostics, Cage wrote: ‘thinking of my work as music, which is, Arnold Schoenberg used to say, a question of repetition and variation, variation itself being a form of repetition in which some things are changed and others not.’ Cage, *Anarchy*, vi.

following year, after Duchamp's death, he created his first dedicated visual art project, *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel* – two lithographs and silk screen printing on Plexiglass panels – again using chance procedures.⁶³ Attracted by these, Kathan Brown invited Cage to work at her Crown Point Press in California, where he made works each year from 1978 to 1992; Ray Kass likewise brought him to the Mountain Lake Workshop in 1988 and 1990 to make watercolours, again applying musical transformations to material processes.⁶⁴ Meanwhile his TV collaboration with Nam June Paik, *good morning mr. orwell*, broadcast simultaneously from New York, San Francisco, and Paris with hook-ups in Germany and South Korea on New Year's Day 1984, reached an audience of more than ten million.

Cage's work sold well, exhibited at Leo Castelli (New York) and at Westkunst (Cologne); his first solo exhibition as an artist came in 1984 at Kettle's Yard (Cambridge). By the early 1990s, celebrated both for his own work and for his legendary associations with artists across much of the century, he was invited to curate a number of exhibitions. At the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, he installed forty-eight works by himself, Dove Bradshaw, and two other artists alongside seven chairs, using the *I Ching* each morning to determine which fifteen works to show, or walls to leave blank, the number of chairs to be available and where they should be placed – an exhibition morphology, like “any living system”, he said. The same process was adopted by curator Julie Lazar for *Rolywholover* (Los Angeles' MOCA, 1992), incorporating works and objects by Cage and artists associated with him, as well as unannounced performances throughout the gallery space. Invited as a guest curator at the Neue Pinakothek, Munich, by Ulrich Bischoff (Curator, Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst), Cage asked collaborating local museums with specialist collections to submit lists of objects they were willing to show, and used chance operations to create a constantly changing variety:

Ordinarily when we go to an exhibition, we go to see one kind of thing. Whereas in this case, one saw a great variety of things in the museum space. It was very refreshing. The museum directors were very pleased, because they all knew their

⁶³ This was reproduced for *Source* issue 7 (1969) with commentary by the art critic Barbara Rose. Austin and Kahn, *Source*, 230-3.

⁶⁴ Brown, “Visual Art”; Kass, “Cage's Mountain Lake Workshop”. Cage also proposed a sound sculpture for the city of Ivrea, near Turin, ‘amplifying a local park, turning its trees and bushes into musical instruments to be played by local children’, though Olivetti – headquartered locally – proved unwilling to finance the project; and he created *Essay* as a sound installation for a gallery in Columbus, Ohio (later presented in Barcelona).

own collections *too* well. They were glad to see them brought into conjunction with things they didn't know at all.⁶⁵

After 'anything goes', then, musicality applied to any medium as a principle of organising the relations between different elements or variables in time without privilege, transcendental order, or pre-formed system. Its immediacy was not self-contained or tautologous, but acted on and unsettled the predicates of mediating operations that were always hierarchical, dividing and governing culture and nature, mind and body, subjects and objects. From the 1960s, as Cage turned from creating works to composing events, musicality would come to inform his approach to the whole situation, a process that can be seen especially in his concern for processes of 'interpenetration' and indeterminacy.

Interpenetration and Indeterminacy

Alongside his early connection with visual artists, Cage found a home for his music amongst dancers and choreographers. Not only had they staged his percussion music – starting with Bonnie Bird (a pupil of Martha Graham's) in 1938 – but the need for a more portable and flexible means for accompanying dance mothered his invention of the prepared piano. It was in teaching percussion music for dance that he met Merce Cunningham, first as a student and participant in his percussion ensemble, then later as collaborator and life partner. Cage acted as music director for Cunningham's dance company, and an inspiration in the choreographer's aesthetic and use of chance procedures.

Working with dancers contributed to another Cagean discovery: *interpenetration*. Given his musical search for techniques to structure and to form sounds in time without relations of dependency, it was necessary then to avoid simply accompanying dancers such that a composition would be seen as determined by their movements. The solution was to accept the dance as a distinct yet simultaneous production, a counterpoint of *independent* systems. This would famously become the principle of his working methodology with Cunningham, but also opened the way towards 'theatre' whilst letting go of art's medium specificity. Rather than a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or amalgamation of several *different* artforms, the

⁶⁵ Retallack, *Musicage*, 141. See also Belford, "Composer as curator".

procedure of interpenetration implied a mutual affection by which each element – whilst separate – was changed through time by its proximity to the others.

Cage and Cunningham experimented further with this way of working whilst teaching at Black Mountain College – the exile home of many Bauhaus artists – in 1952. Inspired in part by Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*, which he took to confirm the idea that 'sound, gesture, music, lights, movement, words, [and] cries...could all "operate equally"', this featured both Cage (delivering a lecture) and dancers led by Cunningham alongside readings by the poet Charles Olson and writer MC Richards, music played by David Tudor, and all-white paintings by Rauschenberg. Whether it justified its legendary status as the first 'Happening' or not, this principle was nevertheless influential in Cage's teaching, not least for Allan Kaprow and the artists who became associated with Fluxus.

The significance of Cage's work for the procedure of musicality can be approached through his exploration of the relations between the principle of interpenetration and his formal concern for morphology. Indeed, it is this task that marked the shift in his later practice and that broke decisively with the work concept and its aesthetic. Where his first Darmstadt lecture, 'Changes', detailed the transition in his compositions over the previous decade, marked by chance techniques producing differential relations between variables, his second – 'Indeterminacy' – indicated the direction his work was to take into the 1960s.

Observing that a work might be composed using chance yet determined for performance (and by implication, conventional for concert practice), he critiqued his own and others' works with social analogies.⁶⁶ For example, his *Music of Changes* required its performer to operate like a building contractor following an architect's blueprint. This separation of mental from practical labour introduced an intolerable dualism into the musical situation, which could be overcome in part by making the acts of composition and performance – as also production and reception – not only overlap but effectively *synchronous*. Musical time would then be inseparable from the temporality of its occasion.

⁶⁶ In fact, Cage had correlated musical and social structures from early in his career. Joseph, "A Therapeutic Value".

By implication, this extended the range of variables that might be incorporated to the performance situation itself, for example by separating performers spatially to allow their sounds both to 'be [their] own centre' and so to interpenetrate unconditioned by prior orders of relation. That is, interpenetration could operate as a variable principle within a situation opened to compositional morphology. The performance would not be 'contained' – let alone overdetermined – by the context. By denying a correlation between events he aimed to avoid any implicit predication of a 'higher' or 'internal' principle – an intention, referential meaning, or aesthetic model – that would govern the relation.

Lastly, as in his example of Christian Wolff's *Duo II for Pianists*, which was structured like a relay race with each performer cueing the other at indeterminate times, this indicated a compositional simplification towards a propositional form that could be enacted – not improvised – in the moment of its performance.⁶⁷ Without claiming a causal relation, it is perhaps not entirely accidental that George Brecht invented and refined the Event Score, a key development for Fluxus and precursor to Conceptual Art (and to curatorial concepts such as Hans Ulrich Obrist, Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier's *Do It*), whilst studying with Cage at the New School for Social Research in 1958-59.⁶⁸

His work from the 1960s began to explore precisely these implications, firstly creating compositional 'tools' or templates that could generate different works in diverse mediums – such as the utility for the tape collage piece *Fontana Mix* (1958) being redeployed for *Theatre Piece* (1960) – then dramatized by *O'OO"* (otherwise known as *4'33" No.2*, 1962). Dedicated to his former student Toshi Ichiyanagi and his then artist wife, Yoko Ono (who

⁶⁷ Cage has been taken to task for his insistence on indeterminacy and disinterest in improvisation and jazz, and hence the African American experience. See for example Lewis, "Mobilitas Animi". In practice, I argue, this comes from a misunderstanding of the philosophical import of his practice and its anarchic political form. See also Feisst, "Cage and Improvisation".

⁶⁸ *Do It* (ironically echoing Nike's ad campaign) began as a conversation between the two artists and curator in 1993 – the year after Cage's death, and with a striking similarity to his late curatorial work – about "how exhibition formats could be rendered more flexible and open-ended. This discussion led to the question of whether a show could take 'scores,' or written instructions by artists, as a point of departure, each of which could be interpreted anew every time they were enacted. Obrist, *Do It*. On scoring's use for situational work and in visual art more broadly, see the contributions by Pablo Helguera and Carlos Basualdo on Jackson and Marincola, "In Terms of Performance".

had also visited his New School class), this comprised the simple instruction, “In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action.” The day after its premiere, he added four conditions: that the action fulfil an obligation to others; that it be unique to that occasion, and not a performance of music; and that the performer pay no attention to the situation. For example, Cage’s 1965 performance at Brandeis University involved him writing correspondence, seated on a creaking chair whilst taking occasional sips of water, amplified by contact microphones.

Far from being an aberration signalling ‘a clear line of stylistic demarcation’, a move away from the musical towards ‘performance art’, or simply a pragmatic solution to the increased demands on his time – as James Pritchett suggests – this shift in his practice was not a rupture but a *further transformation* of his concern for musicality, a music *beyond* ‘music’.⁶⁹ It marks a turn from muting the order of sounds to the sounding of mutable orders.

At face value, *0’00”* mimics the type of instruction score Ono had developed in her collection *Grapefruit*, and presented in her New York loft – notably by La Monte Young, Henry Flynt, Nam June Paik, and Tony Conrad. It is certainly a simplified proposition. The conditions Cage added, however, extend his concern for controlling the interrelation of variables into the performance situation. The ‘fulfilment of an obligation to others’, for example, linked his concern for formal discipline allowing sounds to ‘be themselves’ to his increasing attention to *devotion* as the exemplification of disinterested *acts* that issue from their own centres – hence also the injunctions against repetition, of implicating a relation to musical tradition, or of staging or theatricalising a relation to audiences. Meanwhile the use of amplification introduced an element of indeterminacy into the moment of performance by making involuntary movements audible, or at least inhibiting the ability of a performer to control fully the sounds of their actions – simultaneously making intentional and necessary the unintended and contingent. As Pritchett noted, where *4’33”* demonstrated the impossibility of silence, *0’00”* showed there was no such thing as inactivity. The performed

⁶⁹ ‘Implicit in [4’33”]...is that the movements can be of any length. I think that what we need in the field of music is a very long performance of that work. It is the fulfilment of my obligations in some way to other people, and I wanted to show that doing something that is not music is music.’ Kostelanetz *Conversing With Cage*, 100.

task was, furthermore, the repayment of a debt – an obligation – to others, and therefore not only implicated in actions both prior and subsequent to the event, neither a beginning nor an end in itself, but also enmeshed in a *social* system of gift relations (or mutual obligations) constitutive of community.⁷⁰

This marked a shift from composing works to designing systems for making events that were at once formal interventions into social structures, exemplifications of actions as simultaneously independent *and* interpenetrating, and technologically-mediated networks relating the part of individual actions to the social whole.⁷¹ Cage's musicality was now less 'about' time – making change audible through a morphology of sounds – and increasingly an articulation of relations *through* time.⁷²

The addressee of Cage's letter from his Brandeis performance is unknown, but the following month he wrote to the three writers – and friends – whose work now fired his imagination asking that they might each donate a lecture for his non-profit platform, Contemporary Performance Arts: systems theorist Buckminster Fuller, media theorist Marshall McLuhan, and New Left social philosopher Norman O. Brown.⁷³ It should be clear by now that this by no means signalled a move away from musical issues, but that it was *because of his musical concerns* for the temporality of relations that he turned to thinkers addressing ideas of technologically-mediated social systems. The corollary of musical time was a social practice that might articulate the musicality of collaboration, teamwork and interdependence: 'How

⁷⁰ In contrast to the immunity of the sovereign individual, freed from the *munus* – the obligation, task, or duty – to others, the community (*com-munitas*) is formed by the network of relations and their dependencies. 'The person who is immune is the one who has been freed of the debt that not only is owed to the community but also forms the community's cohesion.' Hamilton, *Security*, 39.

⁷¹ This marks a significant precedent for the development of 'systems esthetics', championed by Jack Burnham as in his 1970 exhibition *Software*; and exemplified in *Variations V* (with Cunningham and Robert Moog), in the events of Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg's *9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering* (1966), which featured Cage's *Variations VII* with ten telephones connected to locations around NYC, and other contemporary works such as Robert Ashley's *String Quartet Describing the Motion of Large Real Bodies*, the score for which is a drawing of a circuit connection and instructions rendering its community of 43 performers and string quartet as a social network.

⁷² In an interview from 1965, he explained: 'when I'm asked what aspect of sound interests me the most, I [used to] say *time*; but this view that I'm trying to express now is one in which time is abandoned. This is very difficult, because a greater part of my experience as a composer has to do with measurement. And it is precisely this...that I want to be free of.' Kostelanetz, *Conversing With Cage*, 69.

⁷³ Cage, *Selected Letters*, 319-25. He began corresponding with McLuhan in 1964, the year *Understanding Media* was published, and became friends with Brown after lecturing at Wesleyan.

many people can work together happily, not just efficiently – happily and unselfishly? A serious question which the future of music will help to answer.’⁷⁴

In parallel with other musicians taking experimental approaches to composition, his work from this period onwards – including his lectures and publications – explored a wide range of musical possibilities for composing systems that might transform the situation of their presentation. Audiences became performers in projects like *33^{1/3}* (University of California, Davis, 1969), in which 300 LPs of various genres were provided with twelve stereo phonographs on tables around an otherwise empty hall for visitors to play as they chose. For *Les Chants de Maldoror Pulverisés par l’Assistance Même* (1971), extracts from Lautréamont’s novel were distributed, with audience members voting on how the text should be read. The instructions permitted minority rule and specified approved methods for rebellion. Applying the principle to the manufactured record for the Nonesuch release of *HPSCHD* (1969), Cage’s collaborator Lejaren Hiller generated *KNOBS*: 10,000 unique permutations – one for each record – for mixing the sound on home stereos.⁷⁵

Performers, too, became actors within the social drama of their own structures. For *Etcetera* (1973), orchestra members of the Opéra Français were invited to choose between being ‘governed’ by one of three conductors, or moving to autonomous spaces where they could play independently. At other times, as with the cello concerto version of *108* (1991), the conductor was removed altogether leaving ensemble and soloist to negotiate the musical space without an external agent to impose order.

Whilst some of Cage’s works wore their politics more overtly, like the *Lecture on the Weather* (1975), his primary concern was for musical events in which actions might be liberated from rules that both preceded and governed them – the same principles that had freed sounds of hierarchical and determinate relations. Just as the formal operation of controlling relations between variables allowed for a metamorphic temporalisation of

⁷⁴ “Future of Music”, 186. Indeed, music was inherently social (181): ‘It is the social nature of music, the practice in it of using a number of people doing different things to make it, that distinguishes it from the visual arts, draws it toward theater, and makes it relevant to society.’

⁷⁵ Dinwiddie, “Mewantemooseicday”; Brooks, “Music and society”, 217; and Silverman *Begin Again*. The parallels between *33^{1/3}* and Christian Marclay’s *Sounds of Christmas* are notable.

sounds, enabling each to emanate from its own centre, extending this to the social situation invited actions to become both independent *and* interpenetrating, mutually affected. Such ‘anarchic harmony’ could then exemplify a revolutionary process of transformation in action. ‘We need first of all a music in which not only are sounds just sounds but in which people are just people, not subject, that is, to laws established by any one of them, even if he is “the composer” or “the conductor”.’⁷⁶

Cage took the opportunity afforded him as Visiting Research Professor at the University of Illinois to stage a large-scale event embodying this principle, creating his first *Musicircus* (1967) in the Stock Pavilion, normally used for showing cattle. A variety of musicians – including David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, an ensemble led by Salvatore Martirano, and two jazz bands – were invited to perform independently and simultaneously, whilst he operated the lighting console amplified by contact microphones, all joined by films and slides, balloon floats, and the sale of popcorn and cider. Whilst the piece had no instructions, variables of the situation were still carefully considered and managed: performances were given without hierarchy, without specifying genre or category, and were presented non-commercially and free of charge over a period of time without clear beginning or end. Over five thousand people attended.⁷⁷

This approach provided Cage with an exemplar for his musicalisation of the social. The jamboree around the performance of *HPSCHD* featured 59 amplifiers and loudspeakers – the largest number ever used to that date, he believed – eleven 100’x40’ screens for eight motion picture and 64 slide projectors, amongst other attractions, experienced by around 7,000 visitors. ‘Municipal compositions’ – means to make a city “audible to itself” – began with *49 Waltzes for Five Boroughs* (1977); whilst *HMCIEX*, created for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, comprised a musicircus of folk music from the 151 participating countries. Even ways of living could be musicalized: approached in 1990 by a group of squatters in Hanau, East Berlin, Cage used a map of the area to create a chance-derived list of places, dates and times to record sounds. The brochure accompanying the record, *Five Hanau Silence*, drew

⁷⁶ Cage, *M*, ‘Foreword’; and *Anarchy*, vii: ‘The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed.’

⁷⁷ Brooks, “Music and society,” 221; Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 156-9.

the parallel – just as “all sounds are equal”, so this community intended “to live a life without domination”.

The counterpart to the large-scale, festive systems for musicalizing social structures came with Cage’s compositions modelling individual agency. Virtuosity was rendered in its classical sense as *virtue*, models for acting within such a social system.⁷⁸ He was famously wary of musicians wilfully interpreting his works whether for political, comic or (self-) expressive effect, and sought to emphasise values of discipline and devotion by which a musical act might issue from its own necessity.⁷⁹ Critical of conventions of musical improvisation, he pursued the implications of amplification – making contingent and unintended sounds simultaneously necessary and intentional – by creating systems that eluded control. This included writing pieces for unpredictable ‘instruments’ defying mastery, such as *Child of Tree* (1975) for amplified plant materials (notably a dried cactus, ‘plucking’ its spines) and *Inlets* (1977) for three water-filled conch shells. For highly skilled musicians like the violinist Paul Zukofsky, pianist Grete Sultan, and cellist Michael Bach, he developed approaches specific to their own practice that demanded near-impossible feats of technique as a gesture towards Utopian action:

these are intentionally as difficult as I can make them, because I think we’re now surrounded by very serious problems in the society, and we tend to think that the situation is hopeless....So I think that this music, which is almost impossible, gives an instance of the practicality of the impossible.⁸⁰

Cage’s work demonstrated, then, that music’s essence – its musicality – was not disclosive, sublimated to a ‘vertical’ cosmic order or to the ‘horizontal’ self-realisation of the Idea. It could not be prefabricated, but was immanent to the temporal morphology of an indeterminate event. Musicality involved the articulation in time of a plurality of subjects, objects and actions that were opened to the possibility for change, for becoming otherwise.

⁷⁸ This was explicitly recognised as an implication of the expanded situation of the composition and the changed roles of composer, performer and listener, by George Brecht. In his notes for a proposed article on ‘Situational Music’, he observed: ‘The “virtu” of virtuosity must now mean behavior out of ones [*sic*] life-experience; it cannot be delimited toward physical skill.’ Joseph, *Experimentations*, 162.

⁷⁹ Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*.

⁸⁰ Kostelanetz, *Conversing With Cage*, 94. Cage’s 1992 interview with Joan Retallack and Michael Bach demonstrates these concerns in action – Retallack, *Musicage*, 246-90.

This in turn required a discipline of letting go, not of a passivity or denial of the ego but a mode of making practical seemingly 'impossible' processes of self-transformation.

Musicality's immediacy involved a paradoxical labour of *de*-mediation. Closing the argument of 'The Future of Music', Cage noted: 'People frequently ask me what my definition of music is. This is it. It is work. That is my conclusion.'

Towards a Conclusion: On Musicality as a Temporality of Care

In the opening chapters I drew attention to the emergence of the curator function as a visualist problematic. When the relation between art works and ideas about art was no longer transparent or self-evident, the framing operation of curatorial representation itself became visible. The separation of artistic concept and its material form catalysed a proliferation of practices, modes of distribution, and forms of social connection that not only took hold outside the 'official' art institutions but also often explicitly evaded curatorial control. The process of professionalising the role of curator alongside the incorporation of much of this work into the exhibitionary complex then provided conditions both for the rapid expansion of the gallery field – such that the formerly 'purely visual' arts could be regarded as definitive for art as such – and for the spectacular growth in the curator's status. As a site for engaging issues and practices of mediation and representation, this included the designation of Sound Art as a category distinct from 'music'.

This framing work was, I argued, nevertheless riven with unresolved tensions and contradictions. Artists' curatorial practices challenged both its structuring processes and the distinct professional identity of the curator. The project of constituting the art field as a 'subject' of vision – defined by the alienation of systems of meaning from material experience, and claiming a (traumatic) continuity with visual arts history – was haunted both by practices that had been necessarily excluded and by the possibility of incorporating 'false' histories. Other genealogies of art persisted, however, informing and troubling the curator function's production of sovereign autonomy: of distinguishing artworks from other objects and practices, and articulating the field's relation to the body politic. Moreover, it proved difficult to escape complicity with broader systems of representation structured by power, whether in the institutionalisation of its own critiques or – as with relational

aesthetics and some social practices – instrumentalised within the leisure economy and in social policy frameworks whose politics were disavowed.

I presented ‘the curatorial’ as a project to reconsider these manifest problems of mediation and its representational frameworks. This addressed both models of social aesthetics and activist practices treating public encounters as sites of production, and processes not predicated on a hierarchy of the voice – of interpellation – but at least equally concerned with collective modes of listening. As a post-representational operation, the curatorial refuses to sublimate the event of connection to an *a priori* higher order, theory, or history of art. Aligned with new materialist philosophies, it likewise insists on the inseparability of theory from practice, mind from body, or of concept from material form.

One effect of the institutionalisation of art’s expanded field in the late 1970s involved the construction and gradual consolidation of Sound Art as a distinct category of work that was avowedly and theoretically elaborated as *not*-music. I showed that this process of absorption remained incomplete and problematic, leading to an opening of the gallery system to more self-consciously musical practices, a turn coinciding with a growing adoption of discourses of ‘curation’ across different musical forms. The greater significance of this permissive loosening of conditions concerned its exposure of the curator function to practices that were *not* autonomous, a process I described as its musicalisation.

Focusing on Cage’s later work, I have shown that after the erasure of music’s material autonomy (‘anything goes’) and of the separation of art from the social (through indeterminacy and interpenetration), this musicalisation of the curator function concerned the total situation composed as a transformational encounter. Far from arbitrary, the accidental relation of elements required careful organisation to unsettle mediating systems and their hierarchical orders. It is in this identity of form and content, without disclosive mediation to a ‘higher’ truth or authority, that musicality’s immediacy lies. This nevertheless leaves its resonances for the other arts and for philosophy to be addressed more fully. I will develop this in the following situated reflections, but will sketch out here some of its consequential aspects.

The notion of musicality, I noted, was intended to address a foundational problem of mediation by promising to disclose a meaningful order of being or becoming of the world that was otherwise inaccessible through language alone. Firstly, then, I claim that musicality does not oppose nature to culture, mind to body, subject to object, theory to practice, but approaches them relationally as moments of the same temporal unfolding. Cage's famous and controversial adoption of the proposition for art 'to imitate nature in the manner of her operation' was profoundly *not* a (neo-Platonic) representational abstraction or 'copy' of nature that revealed its essence, nor a claim for a 'return' to a 'pure' perception of natural sound that disavowed his own mediating work – contrary to many critics.⁸¹ Nor was it an Orientalist borrowing from Coomaraswamy and Zen.⁸² Rather, in a more dialectical fashion, nature fashioned human 'second' nature, which also transformed (its) nature. 'Art then continually changes in accord with our changing understanding of the operation of Nature,' and, 'our understanding of "her manner of operation" changes according to advances in the sciences.'⁸³

Approached in this way, secondly, Cagean musicality – transforming Schoenberg's dialectics of musical time – shares a close (or, in Goehr's term, elective) affinity with Catherine Malabou's reclamation of the notion of *plasticity* from within Hegel as a temporal sublation of the dialectic.⁸⁴ This metamorphic capacity to be formed *and* to form involves treating the problem of mediation (or alienation) as an historical movement – not as foundational – and so addressed through time. It was not teleological, directed towards self-identity or Absolute knowledge (or Absolute music), but occurs at the intersection or chiasm of two

⁸¹ Piekut, "Chance and Certainty," 146: 'Nature – whether figured as noise, chance, nonintention, or multiplicity – becomes the universal authority that grounds Cage's practice, and it is precisely the certainty of nature's authority that underwrites his aesthetic position.' Cage was not naïve to this, but nevertheless insisted that 'there is no split between spirit and matter, and to realize this one has only suddenly to awake to the fact' – "45' For A Speaker," 168. On recent studies problematically continuing to distinguish biological from cultural dimensions of musicality, see Honing, *Origins of Musicality*.

⁸² Cage's interest in Eastern philosophies should be understood as part of his project to seek universal principles that transcended cultural differences, hence also, for example, his rejection of the 12-note scale. Cage, "East in the West". The appeal of Coomaraswamy's *The Transformation of Nature* lay primarily in his similar synthesis of 'Eastern' and 'Western' philosophies, including Aquinas, from whom he adopted a neo-Platonist version of mimetic theory, and Meister Eckhart. Whilst there are echoes of this in Cage's early work, his approach became diametrically opposed. See Crooks, "John Cage's Entanglement with Coomaraswamy"; and Patterson, "Cage, Coomaraswamy".

⁸³ Letter to Mirek Kondraki, 29 January 1973, in Cage, *Letters*, 428; Cage, *Year from Monday*, 31.

⁸⁴ Malabou, *Future of Hegel*.

orders of time: between the 'becoming essential of the accident', a moment of self-fashioning, of becoming-subject; and the 'becoming accidental of essence', a moment of release or self-noughting, of becoming-otherwise. One came 'from behind' (like a reverberation or feedback loop), receiving form – individuality – as an accident of nature, a retroactive and irreversible event; the other opened itself to contingency without predetermination or predication.

To ground or to cause oneself creates a relation in which one element *repels* the other, causing one to be an active self and one a passive. Hegel speaks of "a passivity posited by its own activity"....There is one *fact* which makes this necessity what it is: grounding itself, necessity is never its own ground, but conversely experiences itself as radically passive in relation to itself. Although it has its source within itself it feels this to be independent of itself. Necessity forgets its own origin. *A point of sheer randomness dwells within essential being, within the 'original substance'*.⁸⁵

Cage would surely have agreed. I develop this temporal form – between activity and passivity, and between memory and expectation – in chapter 9, but note for now the uncanny echoes of the structure of 'plastic' events with Cage's use of indeterminacy and interpenetration. For here,

determinate moments arrange themselves in new relationships with respect to one another...each lets go of its independence, as they engage in a relationship of reciprocal tension that creates a 'space' between them, a space not of confrontation but of difference-within-continuity. What is crucial is not the extreme positions held by the confronting terms, but the distance that separates them, the totality of the space-between.⁸⁶

Lastly, I argue that musicality after Cage concerns the *futurity* of the future, much as *The Future of Hegel* is for Malabou not only a question of the continuing vitality of his philosophy but also a redemption of the question of the future itself as posed by Hegel.⁸⁷ 'The Future of Music' registered a loss of faith in the dialectical mode of futurity that his earlier 'Credo' had shared – implicitly – with Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* and, more specifically, with Schoenberg.⁸⁸ Music had a future, but 'strictly musical questions [were] no longer

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 162 – emphasis added.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸⁷ Plasticity thus 'forms and transforms individuals, fashioning their ways of waiting for and expecting the future.' *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁸ For an exploration of the quest for musical and social futurity, see Barry, *Music of the Future*.

serious questions.’ Neither ordained, nor an oracle for the future, neither teleological nor merely chronological, *musicality* involved a mode of temporal address, a form of action – ‘work’ – and a disposition.⁸⁹

Such a consideration of temporality, and of the future specifically, is posed as a challenge to the gallery and its curators by the curatorial. Indeed, Jean-Paul Martinon – a curator and influential theorist of the curatorial – has elaborated this precisely from Malabou’s work.⁹⁰ In this approach, art’s future cannot be represented or figured. Without relation to an origin or end, *archia* or *telos*, the curatorial disturbs any sense of interiority or identity of the present. Rather, this experience of metamorphosis resonates with musicality: ‘what comes can neither be perceived as the movement of confirmation of a presence that necessarily pre-exists the movement itself, nor as the foundational movement of presence.’⁹¹ It is instead rendered as an invitation to ‘go wonder’.

This has a particular bearing on the museum (and its archive) with its modernist ‘progressive’ temporality articulated by categories such as succession, periodicity, and duration. Martinon notes that much museum architecture has already changed in recognition of this model’s unsustainability – conceptually and materially – with a shift from the enfilade, the parade through time via a suite of rooms, to something more akin to the flea market, without centre or destination. Indeed, ‘the museum is an institution that positions itself at the juncture of endings and openings’: between its archive function where objects are embalmed or preserved from the contingencies of decay and corruption of meaning or use, the ‘mausoleum of art’; and its role in exposing its collections (and their legitimacy) to new conjunctions, interpretations, and publics.⁹²

⁸⁹ ‘Feeling is linked to the realisation that our being is finite, and not wholly autonomous. It consequently plays a key role in the constitution of time, which is, of course, essential to the experience of music....The tension between feeling as limitation and the sense that thought transcends limitation by its *awareness* of being limited gives rise to some of the most important Romantic ideas.’ Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*, 92.

⁹⁰ Martinon, *On Futurity*. Martinon was co-founder with Irit Rogoff of the curatorial programme at Goldsmiths College, University of the Arts in London.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48. It is telling that both Malabou and Martinon consider this form of active anticipation as a kind of ‘blindness in the field of vision created by the formation of the future’, marking this as a problem within visuality. No longer tied essentially to the sonic, musicality offers a more adequate expression of such a sensory engagement of temporality without risking the negation implied by visual privation.

⁹² Martinon, ‘Museums, plasticity, temporality’.

In its musicality, the curatorial transforms the temporality of ‘making art public’ (whether as an exhibition, performance, festival, or other public form). It involves a musicalisation of the event’s form, which can also be heard in many of the emerging themes of its discourse: ‘composition’, ‘duration’, ‘ephemerality’, ‘improvisation’, ‘score’, and ‘virtuosity’.⁹³ No longer behind the scenes, ordering and ordaining ‘transparent’ relations between prized objects and viewing subjects – nor rendering them ‘opaque’ as a self-reflexive, critical, or ‘traumatic’ curating – the curatorial implicates all those mediating operations by which individuals and publics are constituted in their mutual contact with material objects and practices, a contact opened to its accidents by this temporal production and its affects of difference-within-continuity, of feeling oneself – and art – changing and being changed. As a curatorial form, then, musicality composes a *temporality of care*.

⁹³ Millar, “Something between the two”; Jackson and Marincola, “In Terms of Performance”.

Expectant Performa(nce)

Performance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance. Peggy Phelan¹

History is the creation of value and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. Judith Butler²

The overall museological project could be known and recoverable today through an archaeological examination of traces and effects dimly legible in its later twin professional and institutional progeny (separated, so to speak, at birth), namely, history and psychoanalysis. Donald Preziosi³

I was drawn to Performa because of its significance for the institutionalisation of Performance Art, whilst often incorporating musicians and their work.⁴ I did not know what to expect, but thought I might discover something by dwelling with the paradox of encountering practices I knew from gigs, staged performances, and festivals – including those of musicians I have worked with – in this biennial of ‘new visual art performance’. How might this situation and framing change the way *musical* performance could be experienced and understood, and how might this bear on curatorial practice?

Founded in 2004, Performa is the dream-child of curator and art historian RoseLee Goldberg. Whilst curating performance at The Kitchen, a pioneering space for these practices in New York, she wrote one of its first art historical accounts, now a classic text, published in 1979.⁵ By 2017, Goldberg and her team were already considering the biennial’s legacy, how this might be archived and remembered in years to come.⁶ This question of history and memory – of representing and recalling events passing in time – then provides a key problematic through which I approach issues of performance and curation. Is performance an object of historical representation, or might the making – or writing, or

¹ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 27.

² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 165.

³ Preziosi, “Performing Modernity,” 30.

⁴ Examples included Paul D. Miller’s *Reset* (2005); Japanther, Jennifer Walshe, and *White Noise* featuring Cage’s *33^{1/3}* (2007); *Music for 16 Futurist Noise Intoners*, with performers such as Pauline Oliveros, Elliott Sharp, John Butcher, Mike Patton, and Blixa Bargeld (2009); Robert Ashley’s *That Morning Thing* (2011); and *The Voice in Performance*, with Joan LaBarbara, Meredith Monk, and Maja Ratkje (2013).

⁵ Goldberg, *Live Art*.

⁶ *Forever and A Day: Archiving Performa* at the biennial’s ‘hub’ on 427 Broadway, New York, 4 November 2017.

curating – of (its) history be itself understood as a performance, something that affects what performance might be or become?

Goldberg established Performa ‘to make the history of performance by visual artists... *visible*’, a locution that should make us prick up our ears.⁷ Making visible – making known, as the French *sa-voir* tells us – should be approached here as a *performative*, an utterance with its own reality effect, a structure to which I will return. The corresponding notion of ‘performative’ curating can then be understood as ‘performing’ the history of ‘artists’ performance’, *making history by making history*.⁸ Such double vision, making visible history’s blind spots, is problematic. An unconscious history – with all its psychoanalytical undertones – is revealed at work *behind* the familiar story of modern art. What a history lacks, its difference from lived experience, becomes both illness and (talking) cure. I will examine aspects of this history of Performance Art whilst also considering the effects of such historicising.

Drawing on Reinhart Koselleck’s work, I argue that staging history not only ‘corrects’ the record but affects the sense of historical movement itself. This reaches into the flourishing of museum culture in the nineteenth century, the emergence of performance as a category, and to the curatorial act, as I will show. Historical self-consciousness – *acting on* historiographical representations – is not only constitutive of modern (post-Enlightenment) temporality; its revolutionary scopic drive, supposedly ‘seeing’ into the future, also disturbs its own operation. Foresight and hindsight are not simply Janus-headed relations to the future and past, but operate at different temporal registers.⁹ Experience based on the past is ‘spatial’, observed, ‘made visible’, and can be revised; expectation, by contrast, ‘is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, *but which cannot yet be seen.*’

⁷ Giannachi and Westerman, *Performance Documentation*, 60. Catherine Wood, Senior Curator International Art (Performance) at Tate, also notes here (28) that ‘by programming this kind of work, we started to realize how important it was for it to be visible in the context of art history in the museum, in proximity to other kinds of work.’

⁸ ‘Performa’s focus on the history of art makes it unlike any other biennial. ...[It] looks at art historical precedent because it must: there is a story to be told, a neglected history to resurrect.’ Goldberg, “Where Mediums Collide,” 13.

⁹ ‘Questions concerning representation – for historical description is also narration – involve epistemologically different temporal levels of historical movement.’ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 105.

Facing the past in the name of the future, history's unruly lessons (as Marx noted) habitually move behind our backs.¹⁰

This chapter concerns the mode by which the past is represented and re-presented in anticipation of the future – a key concern of the curatorial (chapter 6). More precisely, it considers how curation affects performance, how performance affects curation, and the asymmetry of this chiasm. What is involved with 'preserving' ephemeral actions, and later 're-animating' them? This enterprise, I argue, is haunted by memory loss and its historiographical retrieval, what re-enactment may find and what remains missing. It moves in the silences between claims for performance's 'liveness' and arguments for its irremediable mediation, between the ageing body and the ageless idea, the event and its documentation.

This has significant methodological implications for what follows. A purely historical treatment of performance historiography and curation cannot escape its own time of writing and risks adding its own lacunae. Indeed, this problematic of writing about performance has become a common concern; many contributors consequently adopt the role of *eyewitness* or participant. For example, Claire Bishop used field trips to compensate for the fragmentary evidence afforded by documentary material, supplementing such 'visual analyses' that 'fall short' by attending to 'affective dynamic[s]'.¹¹ This demanded 'more on-site time commitment than I was habitually used to as a critic', and involved losing the sure footing of 'objective' distance to find herself imbricated with her subject. Writing on *Performance in Contemporary Art*, Catherine Wood likewise addresses ephemerality by emphasising her encounters with performances, or her involvement in their production, treating documentation of historical work with caution as 'prompts for the imagination'.¹²

So too, in order to avoid replicating the framework I aim to problematize, I approach the issues raised by Performance Art, its relation to music, documentation, liveness,

¹⁰ "Men make their own history, but they do not do so freely, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which directly confront them, and which are historically given and transmitted." *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 5.

¹² Wood, *Performance*.

historiography, restaging, remembrance, performativity, and curation as a participant and *earwitness*. History and memory will be enfolded. I attend to the resonances and pregnant silences between registers of information, their temporal and polychronic articulations, and modes of writing – drawing on fieldwork at Performa, interviews, the biennial’s own documentation and publications, as well as texts on performance, Performance Art, performativity, modern historiography, and historicity.

My point of departure will be the production of ‘the first opera performance in Times Square’, Arnold Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* taken as a found object and re-presented by the South African artist Robin Rhode for a Performa commission. Expectation (*Erwartung*) was unexpected, but perhaps it was looking out for me. The production on 7-8 November 2015 was announced in the programme only after my field trip dates were set. “In the art world, that’s how it’s done. It’s sort of released as close to the exhibition as it can be”, Esa Nickle explained. “We’re not doing performing arts PR, y’know.”¹³

This timely coincidence of scheduling nevertheless occasions untimely meditations prompted by another accident of history, the emergence of ‘performance’ *into* history. *Erwartung* was written and composed in 1909, the same year as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto*, the founding gesture of artists’ performance according to Goldberg’s history.¹⁴ As Adorno noted, *Erwartung* was explicitly Freudian. I will examine both the significance of this for the performance, and the functions of ‘expectation’ in Freudian temporality and the modern historical imaginary.

My narrative, then, explores the overlaying of times, the ‘contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous’ (in Kosselleck’s terms) through sets of paired times. I begin by situating the *Erwartung* of 2015 with its historicity from 1909. I then approach the curatorial

¹³ Esa Nickle is Performa’s Producing Director & International Affairs. Interview with the author (6 November 2017). Production fundraising often takes to the last minute, with less reliance on box office – not least for such an open-air performance in one of New York’s most visited locations – so most of the programme is announced only four to six weeks ahead of the biennial.

¹⁴ Goldberg, *Live Art*. Futurism has retained its originating position in all subsequent editions of her history, in 1988, 2001, and 2011 – a chronology echoed by several other accounts, including Bishop’s *Artificial Hells*.

separation of Performance Art from a wider field of performance practice and theory around 1979 alongside the working through of its problematics in Performa since 2004.

Erwartung

*Only this much we may anticipate about performance by artists: expect the unexpected.*¹⁵

Look into the cameras, red eyes filtered out, a press of bodies shuffles around in search of distraction by freak show performers staging the street, a dollar a smile, a flash bulb of teeth. This is the mythological city, the American Atlantis, life inside the screens. Everything can be seen. We are reassuringly transparent to the watchers, the informed uniformed, the store security and the regular blue brigades. We are watched. We watch ourselves being watched, and we watch ourselves watching. A thousand shuttered eyes remain on alert.

It's mid-afternoon, but according to legend it could be any time of day or night in the Times Square district. The only concession to circadian rhythms is the surplus light of day amidst the hundreds of square metres of luminescent advertising, scrolling headlines, and stock market updates, an ADHD sublime of spectacular submission to human self-mediation. This is the city within the city that never sleeps. It has no 'off' switch; it runs on repeat. It's a peculiar site for *Erwartung*, whose nocturnal action is crepuscular, moonlit, though Rhode claims the city lights provide the production's lunar illumination whilst the skyscrapers become the trees of its dream-forest.¹⁶ The protagonist's neurosis has become our lunatic reality.

Isn't the shadow moving...

Yellow, open eyes I see rising as on stems...

How they stare!¹⁷

¹⁵ Goldberg, "A Biennial of its Own," 15.

¹⁶ Rhode, interviewed in *New York Times*, "A Classic Operatic Work". See also Performa, "Artist Robin Rhode in Conversation". At a talk at the Whitechapel Gallery on 5 October 2017, Goldberg claimed the suggestion of locating the production in Times Square was her own.

¹⁷ Pappenheim, *Erwartung libretto* (Scene 3), handed out for this production.

In a relatively narrow channel to the main theatre, outside Walgrams™ on Broadway Plaza between 42nd and 43rd Streets, policed barrier fencing – the kind used to shield celebrities from their publics – marks out a ‘stage’ within this stage. Attached to the barrier is a sign informing us that at 5pm we can witness “Arnold Schönberg’s / *Erwartung* / A Performance by Robin Rhode”. Viewers may be surprised that Rhode himself will not be performing. The posters are marked with seals of ownership and endorsement by Times Square Arts, Rhodeworks (the artist’s production company), Performa, New York Council on the Arts, and NY Culture. Twitter handles and hashtags enjoin us to join in.

The inner stage is defined by A2 sheets overlaid like tiled carpeting, multiples of the same black, white, and charcoal-grey geometrically-overlapping ovoid pattern. An arrangement of pristine grey bricks occupies the centre, like Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* minimally repurposed as a prop. The mis-en-scène is completed by two sets of seating for 40 or so guests, a few other benches for the weary-legged, a line of onlookers two deep outwith the barrier, and by an orchestra divided on either side of the performance area. Amplified speakers balance the sound at each corner. Whilst it’s unseasonably warm for November, we are layered with coats, scarves, and hats.

As illuminated information rushes past, time is suspended. Time squared. We wait in expectation. The musicians of Wet Ink Ensemble drop in, tune up and turn on as the conductor – Arturo Tamayo – enters together with the French soprano Carole Sidney Louis and the ‘Male Character’ added by Rhode, performed by Moses Leo.

‘Die Frau’ – ‘the woman’ – has whitened face and hands, scarf-wrapped hair, and wears a red, white and black folkish floor-length dress featuring abstract designs, lacy figuration, and emblematic cockerels. In black-covered face and hands, Moses Leo sports a matching red single breast-pocketed neck-buttoned jacket and trousers, unadorned but for alternate red-and-white ‘speech bubble’ shapes on black trimming at the ankles and collar, zebra-striped cuffs, and two symmetrical black-and red helioforms badged on white squares at pocket level.¹⁸

¹⁸ A brief review with production images can be found at Artsy, “Robin Rhode”.



Fig. 17: *Erwartung*, Times Square, NYC (2015)



Fig. 18: *Erwartung*, Times Square, NYC (2015)

Amidst the hushed hubbub, an unspectacular fragmented line on woodwind and strings, limply fleshed with spectral harmony, signals the drama. Die Frau enters mid-thoughts, pursued by her imagination. She sings, entreats, exclaims, murmurs, clamours, berates and poetizes in German whilst the reduced orchestra shadows and amplifies her bewitched moods. I half-peer at the freely-provided libretto, catching The Woman's drift in dual text whilst the un-programmed make do with intuition: surtitles are provided only by advertising

and news of movements in currency and share values. If you can't follow the meaning, you can follow the money. But the singer is clearly upset.

The Male Character lies prone at the 'stage' edge. As our vocal protagonist courts the perimeter, he rises Lazarus-like and escapes her reach, touching fleetingly only once before laying aground once more. Pages of the stage 'tiles' are occasionally swept up in the delirium and the chilling breeze. Both characters are tailed by high-definition camera operators who pause only to monitor the orchestra and to capture the crowd.

Spent by the discovery of her self-loss and her lover's dead body, The Woman is stilled to exhaustion and the orchestra trails off. Applause breaks out, stabbed by the occasional whistle. We expect no more. The Woman and The Male Character take their bows and their floral tributes. The conductor and the musicians are cheered, and The Artist steps forward to accept his honours. The crowd disperses, trooping off to peer at other showmen and women amid the gloaming brilliance. The musicians hug, chat to each other, and with the crew begin the clear-up operation.

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Commissioned by Performa, this production is a curiosity. It is not the first time the biennial has brought a production to Times Square. For example, Arto Lindsay had fifty dancers wearing Bogart-style trench coats, choreographed by Lily Baldwin, moving to a stripped-down techno score in 2009.¹⁹ This event, however, was billed as the Square's first ever 'opera' – great expectations indeed. Amidst this hypertrophied forest of signs, Schoenberg's anxious step off the path of tonal-harmonic drive, figured through a moment of eternity as a woman's dreadful lamentation on her dead lover, is transferred through time and space. Rhode's programme text in turn relocates the drama to South Africa 'to reflect the experiences of women who have been separated interminably from their husbands by the migrant labor system, political exile, activism and/or imprisonment'.

¹⁹ Other Performa productions there include: Liz Glynn's *Utopia or Oblivion* (2011); Akademia Ruchu's *The Market of Toys* (2013); and several works – by Ed Atkins, Haroon Mirza, James Richards, and Louis Greaud among others – have featured on the Square's big screens.

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Rhode explains that he came across Schoenberg's work through his interest in Kandinsky, with whom – he erroneously claims – the composer 'collaborated'.²⁰ The article explains that the 'musical side of things', including a reduced orchestration, was handled by the conductor and soprano, whilst Rhode 'focused on the set and costume design'. The former was based on Schoenberg's initial plans for an oval stage, whilst the costumes 'draw upon Rhode's fascination with the culture of sangomas, South African spiritual healers who wear colorful garments striped with symbols of sacrifice and ritual.'

Rhode also added 'a new character, known only as The Man.' He explains: "When you are competing with the craziness of Times Square, you need to bring a real sense of physicality. I wanted to add a body to the stage so the audience really felt this sense of separation...I think stumbling across this performance has the potential to be very powerful. *It's the things we don't expect that can have the most impact on us.*"

Simultaneously an 'opera' by Schoenberg *and* a 'performance' by Robin Rhode. A quantum performance, each piece with its own time, its own temporal form, from different times. The composer claimed his intention was 'to represent in *slow motion* everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour.'²¹ Rhode's performance, by contrast, compresses 30 minutes into an image, a narrative concept, 'of various women around the world who have also lamented the loss of a man'. As a scored work, a set of (mostly musical) instructions, the monodrama lies in suspended animation awaiting each new production (it waited until 1924 for its premiere), open to multiple interpretations on different stages even on the same night. The video work of

²⁰ Whilst they met in 1913 and became friends, they never collaborated. Indeed, after the War, the painter's uncritical adoption of antisemitic ideas provoked the (Jewish) composer's furious response (April 1923), declining an invitation to help found an intellectual centre at the Bauhaus. Schoenberg, *Letters*, 88.

²¹ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 105. In the production's programme note, this became 'described by Schönberg himself as a 30-second anxiety attack extended musically into a 30-minute opera.' The flyer similarly described the 'opera' as 'atonal', a term that Schoenberg strongly repudiated – as in his 1922 letter to Kandinsky: 'I find it perfectly disgusting, at least in music: these atonalists! Damn it all, I did my composing without any 'ism' in mind. What has it got to do with me?' *Letters*, 71.

Rhode's performance will be unique, or perhaps a limited edition, usually presented in gallery conditions on a loop for viewers to enter and leave in their own time.

The differences between the two works, then, are not simply of the order of that between an interpretation and the 'original'. We might more productively perceive them, I will argue, as two performative utterances each troubling the felicity of the other. Their *realia* move not in synchrony but in parallel. Rhode's imagination doubles a representational field, indicating another time, another place: Times Square becomes enchanted, a fiction within a fiction. Schoenberg's aim was to avoid representation: reality was not to be a referent, but an emergent quality of its musically-abstract expression.²²

Horizons of Expectation

This performance was not double, however, but triple. The 'universal' languages of image and music were dependent on the Austrian inflection of Marie Pappenheim's libretto. Indeed, the authorship of *Erwartung* remained in dispute between composer and poet long after its creation.²³ The stakes involved less the property rights in the work than in the claims of the Woman to the meaning of her own trauma. Significantly, this also turned on the temporal structure of Freudian 'expectation'.

Both Schoenberg and Pappenheim were aware of Freud's work. Living in the same district of Vienna, they may even have known him personally. The founder of psychoanalysis and his associates had treated members of Schoenberg's circle.²⁴ Pappenheim, meanwhile, had not only studied medicine at the University of Vienna; her brother Martin studied psychiatry

²² "I love the idea of taking a public space and transforming it into another world," Rhode declared about his mural / graffiti works; Ting, "Robin Rhode". In contrast, writing to Emil Hertzka in 1913 on the proposition of creating a film from *Die Glückliche Hand*, the companion piece to *Erwartung*, Schoenberg pleaded: 'My foremost wish is...for something the opposite of what the cinema generally aspires to. I want: *The utmost unreality!* The whole thing should have the effect...of music. It must never suggest symbols, or meaning, or thoughts, but simply the play of colours and forms.' *Letters*, 44.

²³ Simms, "Whose Idea Was *Erwartung*?"

²⁴ His protégé, Alban Berg, had consulted Freud over his asthma in 1908; their friend Anton Webern – making up the trinity of the Second Viennese School – received treatment from Freud's associate Alfred Adler in 1913; whilst their celebrated fellow Austrian Gustav Mahler went on the master's couch in 1910. Carpenter, "Schoenberg's Vienna".

there and later taught Freudian theory. Her second cousin, Bertha, provided Josef Breuer and Freud's founding case study of hysteria, pseudonymised as 'Anna O'.

The libretto drew liberally from the symbolism and details of Freud's case studies. These included the zoöpsia (animal hallucinations), amnesia, disturbed memories, broken speech, and nocturnal attacks consistent with Anna O, but also the sexual trauma, involuntary speech, and free association present in the cases of Anna von Lieben ('Cäcilie M'), Fanny Moser ('Frau Emmy von N'), and most famously, Ida Bauer ('Dora'). Pappenheim lived almost directly between Ida and her parents. As an Austrian-Jewish feminist (like Bertha), she may also have been familiar with Ida's rejection of Freud's misogynistic interpretation of her condition. Treated as an object of exchange between her father and his mistress's husband, who had made a sexual proposal to her, Freud had contradicted her rebuke by concluding she secretly desired the relation as a revenge fantasy on her father – at which point Ida ceased her analysis.

Like Freud's 'Dora', *Erwartung* significantly involves the Woman's entanglement in a love triangle. The monodrama's disputed authorship concerns precisely the 'reality' and significance of this, played out in the ambiguity surrounding her 'discovering' the betraying lover's dead body. For Schoenberg, the action was *archetypal*; what mattered was the condensation of emotional expression, her hallucination as psychodrama. To that end, he cut those lines of Pappenheim's text that indicated a context for her hysteria, in particular those making explicit the Woman's murder of her lover. Where Dora became for Freud an exemplar of psychic disturbance at the expense of Ida's experience, so the Woman's repressive conditioning within Viennese patriarchy was filtered and distilled to a 'pure' expression. She is the victim only of her own suffering.

The point here, as Slavoj Žižek has remarked, is not to privilege either version of *Erwartung*, but to tease out the historical stakes of a crucial turn in modernism.²⁵ Schoenberg 'did not make the fateful step to atonality [*sic*] to be able to express in music the extremes of morbid hysterical violence; he chose the topic of hysteria because it fit atonal music.' More

²⁵ Žižek, "Staging Feminine Hysteria".

precisely, this was less a question of atonality than it was of the *musical expression of time* at a given historical moment (chapter 6).²⁶ Rather than representing the drama as Romantic opera would, using tonality's gravitational logic – its ability to produce the sense of an ending that can be delayed or withdrawn – to lend dynamism to her characterization, Schoenberg used the text as an alternative means for motivating musical structure, rendering the *Woman timeless* and mythological.²⁷ The temporal push and pull created by shifting tonal *expectation*, based on the desire for (musical) closure, was replaced by a fragmented time indefinitely *suspended by and within expectancy without resolution*. The realist *representation* of emotion, made conventional in Romanticism, had shattered; this was the movement of emotional expression itself.

My concern here is with the historical self-consciousness underpinning this change in temporal experience – and its contemporaneous manifestations with Futurism. Freudian hysteria, the break with tonality, and the emergence of the artistic avant-garde share a common historicity.

By the turn of the twentieth century expectations for the future – constitutive of modern temporality (or '*Neuzeit*'), as Kosselleck shows – had widened the gap between history's subjects and the lived experience of memory.²⁸ The promise of 'progress', not least its 'scientific' and technological forms, secularised and extended the Church's eschatology, its awaited day of Judgement.²⁹ Revolutions were now irreversibly transformative, not cyclical. Fate gave way to history's Napoleonic actors. Men – and the transcendental historical

²⁶ Adorno marked *Erwartung* as signalling the beginning of a new period of musical temporality: '*musique informelle*', 273. Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*. (Schoenberg famously rejected the term 'atonality'.)

²⁷ In his classic text, Carl Dahlhaus suggests that Schoenberg's free use of the text was a crutch with which to step over the threshold of tonal logic. Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg*, 85.

²⁸ 'Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered.' At the same time, 'expectation...is the future made present [directed] to the not-yet....Despite their respective present-centredness these are not symmetrical complementary concepts which might, for instance, as in a mirror image, mutually relate past and future. Experience and expectation, rather, are of different orders.' Kosselleck, *Futures Past*, 259. See also Berman, *All That Is Solid*.

²⁹ 'It has been possible since Hegel's time to convey into historical reality fictions such as the Thousand-year Reich or the classless society. This fixation on an end-state by historical actors turns out to be the subterfuge of a historical process that robs them of judgment.' Kosselleck, *Futures Past*, 23. It should be emphasised that this is not a totalising account of historical change, but that earlier systems – whether eschatological, dynastic or based on natural cycles – of temporality continued to operate, sometimes combined with the 'new time' of the agents of history. See also Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

perspective was undoubtedly masculine – could now be their own Gods. History could be re-made, monumentalised, and *staged* for the desired future. The past was grasped so that the future could be seized. What better way to illuminate the path ahead than the first electrified advertisements appearing from the 1890s in what soon became known as Times Square (from 1904)?³⁰

Yet this way also madness lies. ‘This self-accelerating temporality robs the present of the possibility of being experienced in the present, and escapes into a future within which the currently unapprehensible present has to be captured by historical philosophy.’³¹ The gap between memory and history – past present and future present – grew as the race for progress accelerated. Performing the self – to anticipate Judith Butler’s notion of performativity – became a struggle to keep up with each generation’s Oedipal responsibility to exceed the last. Freud’s theory of trauma engaged precisely this tension. The homeostatic mechanism of anticipation – *Erwartung* – rendered unforeseen events meaningful (chapter 4). Their contingent futurity was cathected as representations attached to autobiographical (or historical) narrative. Psychoanalysis thus decentered subjectivity by displacing memory from conscious recall to the functioning of narrative structure. As memory and history began parting company, anxiety that they might not cohere – that events might cease making sense – increased. Expectation did not easily resolve harmoniously; time was suspended. Thirty seconds could feel like a near eternity.

What went for the individual was good for social bodies too. Museums played a key role by articulating the ‘scientific’ objectification of history. The past could be ordered, displayed, and the public – especially the working classes – ‘civilised’ by imparting ways of seeing. The passion for museums that took hold from the mid-nineteenth century can be understood as a corollary of the drive to negate the past in the name of a future in progress, to produce a public conscious of and compliant with the *necessity* of extinguishing its archaic traditions.³²

³⁰ ‘By the early 1890s this once sparsely settled stretch of Broadway was ablaze with electric light and thronged by crowds of middle- and upper-class theatre, restaurant and cafe patrons.’ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*.

³¹ Kosselleck, *Futures Past*, 22.

³² Museums – imaginary and real – feature prominently in science fictions from this period, notably Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872) and HG Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895).

Cultures could be distinguished by the supposed historical awareness (or 'evolutionary development') manifest in their products. National identities could similarly be constructed on the same basis: new traditions and mythologies were required to bind (cathect) the industrialising masses to statist notions of 'the public'. With the burgeoning emergence of anthropological collections, 'race and culture were assumed to be intimately connected. The objective for the curator was to demonstrate the relationship between the two.'³³

Already by the mid-1870s, Nietzsche cast his invective against this historicising impulse. The power to define the conventions of a nation's history was also the capacity to control what future(s) could be imagined in its image.³⁴

But as the youth races through history, so do we modern men race through art galleries and listen to concerts. We feel that one thing sounds different from another, that one thing produces a different effect from another: increasingly to lose this sense of strangeness, no longer to be very much surprised at anything, finally to be pleased with everything – that is then no doubt called the historical sense, historical culture.³⁵

Nothing 'authentic' could emerge from such historicising; what was needed, he claimed, was a creative *forgetting*. Instead of exhibiting the past to project an historical destiny, the way forward could then be enacted as a proclamation. Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* included a eulogy inspired by an exemplary case, Wagner's *The Artwork of the Future* (1849). As Koselleck notes,

Concepts of the future become newly-minted; positions that were to be secured had first to be formulated linguistically before it was possible to enter or permanently occupy them.... Actual, substantial experience and the space of expectation coincide less and less. It is here that the coining of numerous "isms" belongs.³⁶

³³ Coombes, "National and Cultural Identities". Items in the collections had to be conserved and preserved from 'the inevitable extinction of the producers of the material culture in their custody'. See also Preziosi, "Performing Modernity".

³⁴ 'Create for yourselves the concept of a "people": it could never be too exalted or too noble a concept....But in your hearts you despise them, for you cannot bring yourself seriously to care about their future, and your behaviour is that of practical pessimists...directed by a presentiment of coming disaster.' Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 100.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁶ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 80.

His paradigmatic example of *communism* was announced in Marx and Engels' *Manifesto* (1848). Indeed, the genre of manifesto was a primary means by which 'concepts no longer serve[d] merely to define given states of affairs, but reach[ed] into the future.' Neologisms not only needed to be coined; they had to enter into wider discourse.

The significance of Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, published in *Le Figaro* (20 February 1909), was not simply its manifesto form. His was hardly the first artist's programme. Nor was it the arguments it made, which echoed Henri Bergson, Alfred Jarry, and George Sorel, alongside Nietzsche. Rather, it was the doubling of the "ism" function at the level of its utterance. It did not proclaim a future to be achieved so much as *the futurity of the future*. The horizon of expectation became history's *drive*, its motor, one that Marinetti's breathless prose acknowledged could careen uncontrollably off the course of seemingly well-laid plans, leaving its driver – and passengers – in a ditch.³⁷ "Futurism!" was a *performative*, an emerging fascination with the power of speech acts to produce their own reality effect, and thus a template for the ensuing avant-gardes. It not only laid out an agenda but staged it as a public performance through typographical techniques from advertising and mass market publications, myth-making, invective, wit, exhortation, rhetorical flair, a 'situational' approach, and a sense of improvisation.³⁸ Emblazoned on the front page of one of France's leading papers (itself named after Beaumarchais's play), it drew attention to the increasing theatricality of the news itself.

If making history had become a symbolic performance, this was an ironic and seditious repetition of that gesture. Agreement was not necessary; it was merely sufficient that it provoked a response (over 10,000, Marinetti later claimed). This principle underpinned the Futurists' infamous *serate*, a kind of variety 'theatre as *art-action* that invades society and provokes active responses from the spectators rather than serving as an object of consumption'.³⁹ The peculiarity of this performative utterance was that it paradoxically

³⁷ The same metaphor, of course, propelled Kenneth Grahame's infamous Toad from *Wind in the Willows*, published the year before (1908), but with a different moral of historical progress.

³⁸ 'To manifesto is to perform. The Futurists may be described as the original performance artists.' Danchev, *Artists' Manifestos* See in particular Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, especially 80-115; and Riccioni, *Futurism*.

³⁹ Berghaus, "Futurist Performance". These could draw huge crowds – the 'Battle of Florence', as it came to be known, at the Teatro Verdi (1913) brought between five and seven thousand people, many armed with 'sackloads of projectiles' and noise-makers ('car horns, cow-bells, whistles, pipes, rattles etc.').

depended on its own failure: that it *not* be accepted, made canonic, a pillar of (art) history. The future horizon compelled a movement, *an expectation without end*; it was not a destination.

We wish to destroy museums, libraries, academies of any sort, and fight against moralism, feminism, and every kind of materialistic, self-serving cowardice.... We, the powerful young Futurists, don't want to have anything to do with it, the past!.... We don't want to become history, but to be thrown on the trash heap by the next generation...nor do we want to defer to our own history, that we reject.⁴⁰

The historical irony of the Futurists is not that they failed, but that they *failed to fail*. Already old news by 1920, with their dynamism derailed by the Great War, Marinetti first attempted (unsuccessfully) to turn it into a political movement – flirting with Mussolini's fascists – then reversed course. He no longer inveighed against museums but praised them. He became yesterday's man. The Futurists' future had – unexpectedly – arrived.⁴¹

Expectancy, then, was at the heart of what retrospectively became 'visual artists' performance', but not all expectation was the same. For Freud, it operated as the anxious presentiment that sense might be castrated, such that unforeseen events could be cathected autobiographically. Schematically, it was the temporality of representation directed to the future. For the Futurists, expectation defined the historical condition. It was the temporality of representation driven from the past. Performance as a category, and the historicization of Futurism as the opening towards Performance Art, emerged in the movement between them.⁴²

In treating time through representation, these expectant temporal forms remained themselves unchanged. What events signified might differ, but they continued to signify in the same way. Indeed, the historicization of Futurism as a herald for Performance Art shows that the two could be symbiotic: the movement's shocking acts became symptoms to be analysed and instituted in art history's narrative, an outside 'internalised'. Performance as a

⁴⁰ Marinetti in Danchev, *Manifestos*.

⁴¹ Adamson, "How Avant-Gardes End".

⁴² On psychoanalysis as a mode of performance, see Malabou, *New Wounded*, 92: Freudian sexuality operates at the 'intersection of an energetic circuit and a theatrical scene'.

category, in turn, became a medium artists used when conventions needed to be surpassed, an 'inside' pushed outwards.⁴³ This dialectic of making (inscribing, signing) history and making (performing, voicing) history – of expecting the unexpected, as Goldberg put it – exemplifies the temporal production of the curator function's expanding field (chapter 2).

Presenting *Erwartung* in Times Square in 2015 as both an 'opera' and a newly commissioned piece therefore raises several further issues for the curation of performance. Firstly, the time of the work is simultaneously the temporality of early-twentieth-century Vienna, a structure of anxious anticipation, an affect of high modernism, an archetypal lamentation ('set' in South Africa), a woman's embodied trauma, and a moment articulated within a hyperreal mediatised economy that appears simultaneously in perilous acceleration and in stasis – what François Hartog describes as 'presentism'.⁴⁴ Schoenberg's and Pappenheim's work articulated a temporal economy that no longer exists. Its historicity has been ditched. Freud's 'traumatic' temporality is now *posttraumatic* (chapter 4), whilst Futurism's legacy appears in variants of 'Accelerationism'.⁴⁵ Expectation is not what it used to be. Despite attempts at historical authenticity, curatorial re-staging of past works cannot escape changes to the way historical time itself is experienced. By extension, I claim, any historicization of Performance Art that extracts it as an aesthetic category – even as a mechanism for renewing artistic forms – fails to account for this history of 'history', for the shifting 'regimes of historicity' (in Hartog's terms).

This is, secondly, a particular problem in reframing a musical work as an *objet trouvé* for a visual artist's 'performance'. Musical structures – whether sounding, or also as (post-dramatic) theatre, choreography or other time-based form – cannot be reduced to (visual)

⁴³ Goldberg, *Performance Art*, 7: 'whenever a certain school, be it Cubism, Minimalism or conceptual art, seemed to have reached an impasse, artists have turned to performance as a way of breaking down categories and indicating new directions.' This expands on and emphasises the claims made in the original 1979 edition.

⁴⁴ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 17-18: 'For Kosselleck, the temporal structure of the modern period is characterized by an asymmetry between experience and expectation that is produced by the idea of progress and the opening of time onto a future. This asymmetry grew ever more extreme....Has a somewhat different configuration not taken over since then, in which the distance between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation has been stretched to its limit, to breaking point? With the result that the production of historical time seems to be suspended...."Presentism" is the name I have given to this moment.'

⁴⁵ Noys, *Malign Velocities*.

concepts but articulate time *essentially*.⁴⁶ They are time capsules, ways of being in time with others, not fixed representations. Turning to performance afforded a critical reclamation of the body *in time* against its subjection to a higher order of signification (paraphrasing Judith Butler), a shift that was categorically gendered. Just as Pappenheim's expressionistic realism insisted on the contextual, material, and corporeal aspect of the Woman's condition – contesting her reduction to an archetype – so Futurism's performative symbolic violence was appropriated by the artist and suffragette Mary Richardson – known as Polly Dick – to demonstrate the much greater *physical* violence historicization engendered on women's bodies.⁴⁷ Performance from the 1960s provided a medium to defy the mastery of the ageing body by the ageless signifier, and so became a favoured form for feminist, Queer, post-colonial, and Black artists.⁴⁸ Performance's duration was political.

To elaborate these curatorial problematics, I turn now to the institutionalisation and historicization of Performance Art in the late 1970s – contemporaneous with the nomination of 'Sound Art' (chapter 5) and the incorporation of New York's alternative spaces and their varied practices by the exhibitionary complex alongside the growing professionalisation of the curator (chapter 3). I approach this through the historical framing of Performa as the realisation of Goldberg's ambition set out in her 1979 history.

Performing Changes

As the arrival of Futurism and psychoanalysis indicated, the staginess of reality was becoming a recurrent theme across many fields of study – what Peter Burke has called a 'dramaturgical' turn.⁴⁹ 'Performance' provided a concept through which to address this shift, as this Ngram indicates.

⁴⁶ Rebstock and Roesner, *Composed Theatre*.

⁴⁷ Umberto Boccioni, co-author of the *Manifesto of Futurist Painters*, 'himself accompanied the suffragettes in their window-smashing demonstration during the first Futurist exhibition at London's Sackville Gallery in 1912.' Richardson went further. Defending her action of taking an axe to Velasquez' *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery, she claimed in court her intention to destroy the most beautiful representation of woman in lieu of the state's destruction of 'the most beautiful character in modern history', Mrs Pankhurst. Diamond, "Freud, Futurism, and Polly Dick".

⁴⁸ See, for example, Lister and Jones, "Everyone Wants to Be the Girl"; and Sayre, "A New Person(a)".

⁴⁹ Burke, "Performing History".

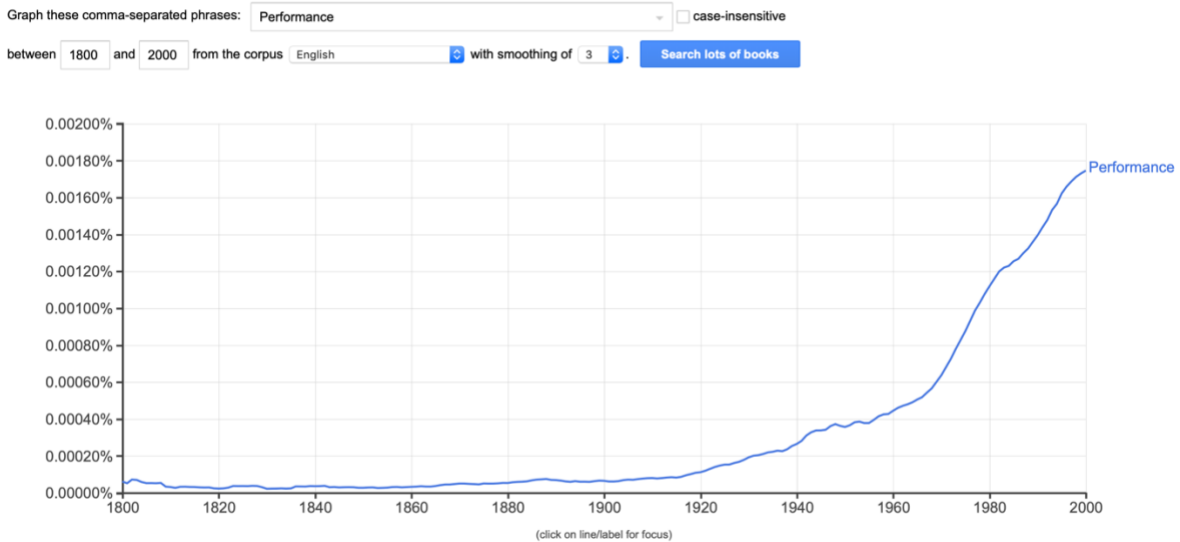


Fig. 19: Google n-gram for 'performance'

The literary scholar Kenneth Burke developed his 'dramatistic approach' in the 1940s, whilst the following decade anthropologists Michel Leiris, Victor Turner, and Erving Goffmann discussed respectively the 'theatricality' of possession by spirits, the idea of 'social drama', and a 'dramaturgical' approach to everyday life. RG Collingwood's *Ideas of History*, meanwhile, set out the performative aspect of historiography. The same ground seeded notions of society as 'spectacle', whilst Hayden White used 'emplotment' to describe nineteenth-century historiographic practices of treating narratives as dramas. 'Instead of drawing analogies between society and theatre, the new approach dissolve[d] the boundaries between them.'

Performance also offered a framework through which to theorise actions, to categorise them and to propose critical forms. For example, Bourdieu proposed 'improvisation' as an alternative to culture as a 'fixed script'; and Althusser set the 'scene' of interpellation subjecting the public through the voice of authority. JL Austin's elaboration of 'performatives' (1939-1955) was significant in this process, addressing language as performance. Introduced as a discrete class of speech acts whereby 'saying something is doing', the notion expanded – as 'performativity' – to acknowledge the contextuality and

contingency of *all* utterances.⁵⁰ Language was always at risk of misinvocations, infelicities, misfires, misapplications, and abuses such as misdirection or manipulation.

The question of signification – the relation of act and of ‘medium’ to sense-making – figured prominently in emerging notions of performance, artists’ turns to expanded forms of action, and critical elaborations of performativity. It is important to recognise that Performance Studies and what was baptised ‘Performance Art’ thus arose together from the 1960s; conjoined twins, both were instituted in Manhattan in 1979, with Richard Schechner and Victor Turner’s course at New York University coinciding with the publication of Goldberg’s history.⁵¹ The significance of their separation comes from the specific performativity of this curatorial act.

Three features of the cultural turn to performance need to be emphasised. Firstly, the period leading into the 1970s marked a distinct shift of historicity. Futurism was past; modernism was post. History gave way to a concern with ‘heritage’, but also to a greater focus on acts of memory. In Marshall Berman’s words:

Many modernisms of the past have found themselves by forgetting; the modernists of the 1970s were forced to find themselves by remembering....Our past, whatever it was, was a past in the process of disintegration; ...we look for something solid to lean on, only to find ourselves embracing ghosts. The modernism of the 1970s was a modernism with ghosts.⁵²

History itself seemed to have become the enemy of memory, in all its fleshy fragility.⁵³ The obsession with scientific historiography was being displaced by a compulsion to remember,

⁵⁰ Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*. His classic example was of a priest officiating a wedding, performing ‘his’ duty in the act of pronouncing the celebrants as married – the engendering of this operation and its possessive form would become key points of critique, as I will show. Successful speech acts were ‘happy’, and the unsuccessful – the misunderstood, mis-spoken and so on – were ‘unhappy’. He first contrasted performatives with ‘constatives’, expressions and statements that could be validated immutably as ‘true’ or ‘false’ on their own terms. This shifted when he recognised that the same sentence could be either; there was nothing essential to its grammar or syntax that could distinguish it. All constatives were therefore at another level performative also.

⁵¹ Whilst NYU drew primarily on the intersection of theatre studies and anthropology, this inter-discipline also took hold at the same time at Northwestern University (Illinois) through an emphasis on orality and speech acts. Schechner, “What Is Performance Studies?”.

⁵² Berman, *All That is Solid*, 332-3.

⁵³ ‘Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life...in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting...vulnerable...susceptible to

an urgent project especially for all those female, queer, non-white, and disabled bodies marginalised within conventional modernist narratives. This shift also fuelled new industries in nostalgia alongside an exponential expansion in oral histories, autobiography, archives (not least, Warhol's 612 *Time Capsules*, 1974-87), and historical re-enactments (The Sealed Knot and The Southern Skirmish Association formed in 1967 and 1968 respectively to re-enact moments from the English and US Civil Wars). The modernism of 'present futures' was by the 1980s overlaid with a (post)modernism of 'present pasts'.⁵⁴

Yet memory was neither essentially more reliable nor 'authentic', as Freud argued, but could equally operate as another form of forgetting – one supplemented by the development of recording technologies. This not only underscored the tension between the performance act and its documentation, as I will show; in a thoroughly mediatized culture saturated by photographic, filmic, televisual images, and sound recordings, the unreliability of representations – neither true memory nor history – informed the turn to appropriation art (such as Sherry Levine's photographic reproductions of old master paintings and John Oswald's plunderphonics), fabricated narratives (Eric Bogosian's media types, Cindy Sherman's celebrity impressions, Peter Schickele's *PDQ Bach*), and ironic re-stagings of history. As Pierre Nora noted, 'only in a regime of discontinuity are such hallucinations of the past conceivable. Our relationship to the past is now...a question of representation.'⁵⁵

Secondly, as noted, this catalysed a turn towards the body and to performance, not only as a site of representation troubling claims for subjective authenticity, but also as mediums by which signifying processes could themselves be disrupted. The past – and the self – could be addressed through acts that remained unfinished, incomplete, partial, works in progress. Nora's *lieux de mémoire* are indicative, those liminal material memories that persist in 'an

being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer...memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority.' Nora, "Les Lieux de Mémoire", 8-9.

⁵⁴ Huyssen, *Present Pasts*.

⁵⁵ Nora, "Les Lieux de Mémoire," 17. It is worth remarking that Nora not only helped publish Foucault's pioneering work on the histories of madness and of sexuality; he was married to Françoise Cachin, art historian and chief curator of the Musée National d'Art Moderne (1969-78), who later transferred from the Palais de Tokyo to Centre Pompidou, then becoming the first director of the Musée d'Orsay (1986), and latterly Director of French Museums (1994).

art of implementation....a history that, in the last analysis, rests upon what it mobilizes: an impalpable, barely expressible, self-imposed bond; what remains of our ineradicable, carnal attachment to these faded symbols.⁵⁶ Performance became critical of the representational economy, not a function of it. As a curatorial proposition, this involved relaxing any firm grip on (art) history.⁵⁷

Thirdly, as Marinetti's call to destroy the museums implied, performance not only created problems for its institutionalization from the later 1970s; it was often explicitly designed to do so. The paradox was that its very disappearance and ephemerality *compelled* a desire to remember it at precisely a time when the relationship between memory and history – and their reliability – was contested. The question was whether 'performance' would be adapted to fit curatorial conventions, or whether new types of institution might be needed and curatorial work adapted to meet the requirements of performance.

Performance resisted definition. Indeed, the term gained currency during the 1970s *because* of its imprecision, its baggy capacity to accommodate very different approaches, concepts, aesthetics, and works. Bruce Barber noted that 'Performance Art' was only indexed from 1972 as a fluid category that by 1977 had absorbed more precise attempts at taxonomy such as 'Body Art', 'Happenings', 'total theatre', and German counterparts such as 'Aktion' and 'Handlung'; it was only differentiated from non-art 'performance'.⁵⁸ Whilst differentiation could usually be established by distinguishing a practice's history, morphology, and ideology, 'performance' failed on all counts. Its genealogies were multiple, its forms freely inconsistent, and its aesthetic commitments varied and at times conflicting. Barber concluded, 'If a work appears to defy designation, no extra effort should be made to ensure that it does'.

Moreover, the *lack* of definition was itself emphasised and defended as a primary quality from the late 1970s precisely as its first histories were being published. Performance

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁷ 'As public memory it is subject to change – political, generational, individual. It cannot be stored forever, nor can it be secured by monuments....Perhaps it is time to remember the future, rather than simply to worry about the future of memory.' Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 28-29.

⁵⁸ Barber, "Indexing".

practices were not only marginal but made marginality productive. They disturbed centre/periphery structures by referring simultaneously to different heritages, traditions, disciplines, meanings, and affects. It was precisely this weakening of conventional frameworks that many artists experienced as liberating. 'Undefined, there were no rules to break.'⁵⁹

The relation of performance practices to visuality were particularly contested. Dick Higgins, stressed the 'intermedial' character of much new work; Michael Kirby put performance on a continuum between 'acting' and non-acting that blurred distinctions between art and social life; Cee S Brown emphasised its theatrical mode of production ('those who make a hard-edge and sure distinction between theatre and performance only give a "preciousness" to performance art that it does not deserve or need'); whilst Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta founded *Performing Arts Journal* in 1976 to explore this liminal terrain. The issue was not to specify performance as an 'alternative' or 'outside' to visual art and its forms of representation; rather, it was visual but not quite gallery art, theatrical but not quite theatre, sonic but not quite music, choreographic but not quite dance.⁶⁰

The shifting relations between history and memory, turns to the body, and the unruliness of performance for disciplinary practices and thinking provide a broad framework for approaching the specific performativity of establishing Performance Art as a category of visual art, and so a curator's responsibility.

Becoming Performa(nce)

Goldberg developed her approach to Performance Art from the early 1970s as an extension of Conceptual Art. As Director of the Gulbenkian Gallery at London's Royal College of Art (1972-75), she worked with Bernard Tschumi (then at the Architecture Association) and his students – the 'London Conceptualists' – on projects investigating the articulation of

⁵⁹ Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, 5.

⁶⁰ Higgins, "Postmodern Performance"; Kirby, "On Acting and Non-Acting"; Brown, "A New Form of Theatre": 'The point is that this approach counters assumed...ways of thinking, breaking down meanings rather than presenting an alternate set.' Howell, "Art Performance," 36: 'Performance Art...presently stands before its own crisis. It has the possibility to reach forward for an art of genuine aestheticized social content, or it can let itself fall back into the congealing pool of an "art history" that History itself has already supplanted.'

concepts in space.⁶¹ This culminated in *A Space: A Thousand Words* (1975), featuring 28 artists and architects invited to submit a previously unpublished photographic reproduction and writing of up to 1,000 words to “reveal a change in attitudes towards the theories and language of space”. Each contribution appeared as a two-page spread in the exhibition book, a format scaled up and reproduced as paired display panels. This clearly referenced and inverted Siegelau’s *Xerox Book* (chapter 2) – not only the book-as-exhibition, but a space-as-publication. In short, ideas articulated space; artists made that *visible*.

Contributing to a special edition of *Studio International* on art and architecture, Goldberg set out her theory of performance, providing a basis for her 1979 history.⁶² If conceptual art implied, in Lippard’s phrase, the ‘dematerialization of the art object’, performance demonstrated the ‘materialization of the art concept’. Describing the scene in New York, she noted that for the first time since Bauhaus

there has been a coming-together of dancers, musicians and artists; and the resulting cross-fertilization of concepts and sensibilities makes it difficult for those wishing to relocate the categories into either theatre, music auditorium or art gallery....[Rather], there seems to have been a general consensus of sensibility which links that work which is now considered ‘conceptual’ to performance art. This merging of related ideas allows performance to be considered the ‘practice’ of much theoretical and analytical work.

By this account, the heterogeneous turns to performance became comprehensible – at least after the fact – as (post-)conceptual and so also post-medium forms aligned with the gallery arts in their expanded field.⁶³ That these often took place in alternative spaces was

⁶¹ Kaji-O’Grady, “The London Conceptualists”; and Crippa and Vandeputte, “Space as Praxis”. Goldberg later made explicit thanks to Tschumi in the dedication page for *Performance*, for his ‘help and encouragement’ in writing it. “My own introduction to contemporary art...was APG [Artist Placement Group], John Latham, and all the work we were looking at at the time, the entire sort of conceptual art era.” Interview with the author, 29 Nov 2017.

⁶² Goldberg, “Space as Praxis”. This echoes – possibly deliberately – the stakes raised by Kosuth who following “Art After Philosophy” argued that philosophy passed to art as *praxis*, the (re)constituting of reality by vivifying ideas. Kosuth, “Artist as Anthropologist,” 26: ‘Art means praxis.’ The explicitly political dimension of such *praxis* (Chapter 3) was not, however, Goldberg’s intention.

⁶³ “I still find it hard when people say that I curate performance art. No, I look at art. I’m an art historian. I’m not a performance art historian. And that profound difference, of me working in performance art, are not aware of the bigger picture of the entire history of art. So there’s still a long way to go on what we mean by curating performance.” Interview with the author.

something museums and curators could address in due course.⁶⁴ In this first curatorial move, what mattered was the performative effect of declaring this shift in terms of *visual* art history. The next task was to *make* it art history. Marking the centenary with a theme of ‘Back to Futurism’ (2009), Performa featured an exhibition – *100 Years* (MoMA PS1), co-curated with Klaus Biesenbach – a dream of Goldberg’s ‘ever since I wrote the opening paragraph to my book on the history of performance art...in 1979’.⁶⁵ Intended as a “living exhibition”, evolving with each of its touring iterations, this presented a chronological survey of “artists’ performance” whilst simultaneously displaying ‘a parallel history’ of its mediatization marked by technological shifts in modes of documentation.

I will come to the relation between the event and its documentation shortly. The first point to note concerns the unironic nature of this performative gesture. ‘Back to Futurism’ was not only a pithy slogan; it also invoked a return to a form of performativity – narrating the past in order to negate it – that Marinetti had both parodied and embraced. Making visible Art’s past was now a future goal. From this edition onwards, each biennial was curated with an art historical ‘anchor’, a prompt for research anthologised in ‘readers’ made available for commissioned artists who – whilst not obliged to respond – could then refashion if not radicalise the historical material from which it was cut.⁶⁶

If Marinetti’s manifesto can be understood tautologically as a kind of ‘performative performativity’, staging the gesture of constituting reality through a speech act, then the biennial’s curatorial emphasis returns to the performative as a ‘power effect’. This version of performativity was critiqued by Judith Butler (following Derrida).⁶⁷ The lawfulness of an utterance was not inherent to its text, but operated by binding speaker, statement, and interlocutor – intention, convention, and interpretation – with the appearance of an objective meaning *behind and identical with* the speech act itself. This art history was made *visible* as an authoritative statement whilst masking the provisional and contextually

⁶⁴ Goldberg, “The Golden Years”. One strategy was to make work outside established ‘contexts of art’, finding ‘less sedate venues for a medium that had traditionally been without traditions – that had in fact been a means to bypass curatorial or critical approval’.

⁶⁵ Goldberg, *Performa 09*.

⁶⁶ Russian Constructivism provided a backdrop to Performa 11, followed in 2013 by Surrealism, the Renaissance for 2015, Dada in 2017, and Performa 19 focused on the Bauhaus.

⁶⁷ Derrida, “Before the Law”.

situated position from which it was uttered. Its truth was disembodied. Moreover, it was the (en)gendering structure of this operation that Butler questioned:

The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation [*Erwartung*] conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.⁶⁸

Gender identities were habituated and naturalised – not ‘natural’ essences – as the result of performative iterations, a technique of subjecting by incorporating conventions through repetition and ritual. Whilst the male body was licensed to speak and act as one for Mankind, outside of historical vicissitudes, the female was marked by a lack, a separation of signifier and signified, the “I” and the eye. She spoke only for herself; her sexuality was inscribed on her, available to be read by the male gaze. Yet this legibility paradoxically gave women (and other bodies – racialised, classed, disabled – not recognised by power) the *power of refusal*, to be not-(not-male), and thus to claim by right their non-identity, the contextual contingency of their performances. This *critical* performativity lay in avoiding, varying, parodying or forestalling any sense of identity with the given-ness of a representation. It laid bare its devices, exemplified by practices of drag that revealed gender as ‘a production which...postures as an imitation’.

My second point, then, is that Butler’s argument raises the stakes for the curatorial treatment of artists’ turn to the body through performative gestures of art historiography and exhibitions. It risks not only gliding over the carnal attachment to memory that catalysed many performance practices from the 1960s, but also operating as a power effect ‘legitimising’ and giving value to these unruly bodies only through the order of historiographical signifiers. Political bodies are returned to the body politic; Woman’s trauma once more becomes archetypal. This is evident in Goldberg’s reluctance to feature artists whose work made the traumatised, fleshy, dangerous body a focus of their practice.

Performance art is still associated with the existential, difficult, and disturbing works of the 1970s, but the politics and the sociology of our times are very different from

⁶⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv.

that period, which was very desperate. The art milieu is distracted by the excitement of large crowds in new museums designed for them and by celebrity culture and the media. Performa aims to provide an antidote to such distractions.⁶⁹

The task of making distinctions visible, such as that between ‘visual artists’ performance’ and non-gallery practices, has been troubled by further critiques of performativity. If (visual) art is regarded as the singular, ‘male’, or normative category, then Performance Art – rendered as the mode of practice artists turn to when rigid conventions require innovation – can be understood to occupy the position ‘marked’ by its lack of self-identity. For example, the 2007 Performa initiated a focus for each edition on a given medium, beginning with ‘Dance After Choreography’. Yet this principle of negation (‘after’) could itself become normative, its marginality – at the limit of an expanding field – made visible and represented.⁷⁰ A Queer performativity marking its representation critically *as a representation* could become naturalised, just as “Futurism!” could be historicised without irony.

The curator function’s performativity of nominative determinism – of making something ‘visible’ by naming or (re-)staging it – is open to ‘queering’ of this sort. My third point is that this nevertheless remains provisional and incomplete. ‘Performance Art’ may have come to stand by the late 1970s as a relatively open category for a range of heterogeneous practices, as Barber noted, but this designation is still not definitive for ‘visual artists’ performance’, as Shannon Jackson has shown (chapter 4). Butler proposed strategies of misusing words, inhibiting the referentiality of an utterance – ‘catechistic naming’ – a technique arguably at play, for example, in the continuing use of ‘Performance Art’ as a descriptor by artists not recognised by the gallery system, and the use of ‘opera’ by gallery artists as an alternative.⁷¹ Indeed, the inclusion of opera in its experimental forms by Performa – as with the production of Robert Ashley’s *That Morning Thing* (2011) – also disturbs the biennial’s own organising category. It is in this sense that *Erwartung*, as simultaneously ‘opera’ and

⁶⁹ Goldberg, “Putting on Performance,” 39. See also her introduction to the talk ‘It’s History Now: Performance Art and the Museum’ archived at Clocktower, “Not For Sale”.

⁷⁰ Indeed, the problematic of this ‘liminal-norm’ (to use Jon McKenzie’s term) similarly became a conundrum for Performance Studies by the mid-1990s, that the appeal to define its object – however negatively or open – contradicted its own premises. Phelan, “Introduction”, *Ends of Performance*.

⁷¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; and McKenzie, “(The) Butler Did It”. Lina Lapelyte’s *Have A Good Day!*, Xenon by Mikhail Karikis, and Haroon Mirza’s *Year Zero* are examples of artists’ “operas”.

‘Performance Art’, different works performed simultaneously with differing temporalities, can be understood as two performatives each making the other ‘unhappy’ or infelicitous.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s further unsettling of performativity provides a valuable resource in reflecting on the ‘divorcing’ of ‘Performance Art’ from experimental performance more broadly.⁷² I will highlight three aspects. First, she worried Austin’s paradigm for ‘explicit performatives’ – that of a priest officiating a heteronormative wedding – by noting the slippage between the ‘bond’ of marriage performed and the ‘bondage’ it confers. As Ida’s (“Dora’s”) predicament showed, ‘unhappiness’ in marriage was often a function of being ‘given’ in ownership. Performatives are disturbed by property relations, not least the ‘right’ claimed to pronounce as a higher authority’s representative, whether of God for a priest, or of art for a curator. Rhode’s *Erwartung* queers and multiplies the meanings of Schoenberg’s and Pappenheim’s monodrama precisely by adding a parallel gloss in which The Woman’s hysteria results from a separation, ‘the loss of a man’, though rather than exposing her woes it adds to them. Not only is she detached from the stultifying conventions of bourgeois marriage, but her oppression is once more rendered mythic, aesthetic, and off-loaded to The Man. She doesn’t mourn her lover, haunted by the violence of her jealous act, but laments his absence.⁷³ Her trauma becomes His property.

By extension, the act of marrying ‘Performance Art’ to the visual arts – or at least the right to confer a qualitative difference through that bond – is unsettled by the contestation of any exclusive right to speak for art as such. The artist, curator, critic, and art historian are not the only figures – and the museum and biennial not the only institutions – that might speak authoritatively. The philosopher, choreographer, musician, dramaturg, writer, and (not least) the viewer and listener do not necessarily defer to other representatives of aesthetic authority.

⁷² Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*. The arguments here were first developed in Parker and Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*.

⁷³ In other interviews, Rhode distances himself from any overt politics: “I can’t say from a personal point of view I’m super political. I’m also very influenced by pop culture, music videos, fashion, design.” Ho, “A Clean Slate”. Echoing Schoenberg’s abstraction and concern with the materials of his art, he told *Zoo Magazine* ‘it had to be a very conscious decision not to make politically-engaged art but to make highly aesthetic works’. Gnyp, “Robin Rhode”.

Secondly, Sedgwick noted that symbolic acts are not only forms of speech, reducible to signification, but also often charged with affects, the capacity of feelings to touch and comprise reality. Language and emotion (or non-verbal expression) are intertwined – as Pappenheim’s *Woman* expresses urgently. The line between the two was permeable, she argued, socially-constructed, subject to historical change, a movement between what we intend and how we are understood, between introversion and extroversion. As such, it operated ‘between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity’. Whilst not essentially ‘queer’, productive examples – notably of shame – nevertheless clustered around LGBT spaces including ‘butch abjection, femmitude, leather, pride, SM, drag, *musicality*, fisting, attitude, zines, histrionicism...; in a word, *flaming*.’⁷⁴ As a speech act, curating is in this sense not only a means of producing meaning, but also of producing *meaningfully* in its broader, affective dimension.

This draws attention to the productive role of audiences, lastly, the crucial other party to the utterance. Publics – and artists – may not share the same conventional wisdoms implicit in a curator’s speech act, but bring unexpected references to bear. Sedgwick offers a spatial metaphoric in which making sense is constitutively *plural* and so undecidable, a simultaneous movement with different vectors and affective intensities.⁷⁵ These ‘periperformatives’ disturb the exclusive centring of the speech act in its boundary-forming process by risking the stakes marking any perimeter. They infer other ‘neighbouring’ meanings occupying the same semantic domain – as with ‘opera’ – indicating multiple not singular possibilities. What Goldberg called the “performance fringe” – acts layering the edges of art with the margins of entertainment, politics, and of other disciplines – can be understood as periperformative in just this sense, as ec-centric, inhibiting their incorporation by any one ‘centre’ or idea that would institute them.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 63-64 – emphasis on musicality added.

⁷⁵ ‘Plural’ here should be understood in connection with the notion of the *polis* or public as a ‘plurality’, as set out in Arendt, *Human Condition*.

⁷⁶ Sally Banes, who both recorded New York’s experimental performance scenes as a critic and supported Schechner as a graduate student in forming the Performance Studies department at NYU, critiqued the performativity of Goldberg’s designation of Performance Art in similar terms. “Either her meaning of the word *artist* is so wide that it includes all creative artists, or she means plastic artists specifically. In the first case her definition is too broad to be informative. In the second she provides her own counterexamples by including in her book performance works created by dancers, writers, musicians, and theater people.’ *Subversive Expectations*, 6.

In summary, the curatorial performativity of marking out Performance Art as both a discrete category of visual art and a principle of the field's ongoing development and expansion suffers on three accounts. It institutes a regime of historical movement that is itself ahistorical; always moving expectantly towards or away from a representation, it subordinates the body and its memory to its signification; and lastly, it marks marginality as a function of representation, a periphery defined by a centre, in contrast with the periperformative persistence of edginess as a strategy contesting and resisting any such centralising manoeuvres.

Before considering alternative approaches to conceiving the relation between performance and curation, I note that these fault lines not only affect the project of determining Performance Art; their tremors destabilise the project of recording the project's own history. The tendency to treat the performance event and its documentation as distinct processes is, I argue, a corollary of addressing the relation of memory and history, the body and the sign, the margin and the centre as binary oppositions. This is particularly evident in examining Performa's own archival 'memory', as I now show.

Documenting Performa(nce)

The curatorial turn for Performance Art and its new historiography stimulated a desire to experience canonic works, with re-stagings and re-presentations gathering pace into the 1990s.⁷⁷ This set the stage for the polemic between 'liveness' and 'mediatization', concerning questions of *how* performance should be recalled and its temporary communities constituted.

The curatorial tasks of preserving and collecting performances were doubly problematic. As memories faded and artists' bodies aged, re-enactment was vexed by aesthetic, ethical, economic, physical, and legal challenges to authenticate and reproduce works, especially when artists' intentions and creative concerns had altered over time. Similarly, dislocated

⁷⁷ The reconstruction of events from Soviet Constructivism by Mel Gordon's Mastfor 2 Company in 1986 and of Dada by DADANewyorkDada Company in 1989 anticipated the passion for re-staging works in the 1990s. Amelia Jones, "Timeline of Ideas".

from their historical, social, and spatial context, performances re-presented might be transformed by their interpolation within new environments by younger bodies to different audiences.⁷⁸ Not recognising such metamorphoses of the work by predicating performance ‘authenticity’ on notions of fixed ‘originals’ unravaged by time risked staging encounters with *representations* of performances – their fame and historical significance – rather than with their potential for surprise, unpredictability, and invention.

The positions at stake here can be approached through a brief summary of the arguments made by Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander, often taken respectively as defending and critiquing performance ontology.⁷⁹ On the one hand, liveness was celebrated for its apparent immediacy, disappearance, non-reproducibility, spontaneity, community, presence, and audience feedback. On the other, each of these qualities was evidenced in highly mediatized products; the concept of liveness itself emerged as a product of radio (and its ‘live’ audience); and the difference between indexical and ‘theatrical’ performance documentation – photographs *of* and *as* performance – was deconstructed (both equally addressed *another* viewer beyond any putative ‘original’ event). Yet despite their perceived polemics, notably claimed by Auslander, their similarities are instructive. The binary is false; these positions fold into each other.

To begin with, both were concerned with performativity as a critical operation within a culture of representation. Auslander emphasised that there was no ‘outside’ of representation from which an opposition could be mounted, no authentic ‘reality’ independent of its prior schematic imagination (chapter 4). He conflated ‘mediatization’ and ‘mediation’ whereby the former – especially with recording and reproduction technologies capturing durations – intensified a pre-history of techniques of representation. ‘Far from being encroached upon, contaminated, or threatened by mediation, live performance is

⁷⁸ See, for example, Lepecki, “Not as Before,” discussing the production of Allan Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* for Haus der Kunst (Munich) and Performa 2007. On the legal challenges involved in substantiating the ‘work’ of performance and the evolution of frameworks to ‘stabilise’ it within the market, see McClean, “Collecting Live Art”.

⁷⁹ Key texts include: Phelan, *Unmarked*; Phelan, *Mourning Sex*; Phelan and Lane, *Ends of Performance*; Auslander, *Presence and Resistance*; Auslander, “Performance Documentation”; and Auslander, *Liveness*.

always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live.⁸⁰

If a performance only made sense because of conventions that 'always already' exist, its documentation took on the performative role of marking what it lacked *as a representation*. 'It is by virtue of presenting the photographs of their actions that artists frame the depicted actions as performances and assume responsibility to the audience....The audience to whom they assume responsibility is the audience for the documentation, not for the live event.'⁸¹ In this account, performances were made for their 'secondary audiences'.

Aware of the limits of critiquing representation through another – doubled – representation, as Butler noted, Auslander then proposed that its critical difference was registered through a situated, contextual and *phenomenological* encounter. By a curious 'reversal', it was the 'liveness' of representations that afforded visual pleasure and offered a properly critical experience. Just as there was no essential difference between The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* as a studio album and a 'live' recording, he claimed, 'the crucial relationship is not one between the document and the performance but the one between the document and its audience....perhaps its authority is phenomenological rather than ontological.'⁸²

This was, I will suggest, an optimistic assessment. It is also more akin to Phelan than his polemic implied. On closer reading, her 'ontology of performance' was not a defence of pure liveness (Auslander's straw woman argument); rather, she emphasised phenomenological qualities of unrepeatability, disappearance, and embodiment to make claims for performance as that which eludes ontology *as a representational system*. Mediation – and mediatization – are not opposed from an 'outside'; rather, performance was valued precisely because its material duration disrupted the signifying process.

⁸⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, 56.

⁸¹ Auslander, "Performativity", 54.

⁸² *Ibid.* 57; see also *Liveness*, 62. Auslander's choice of *Sgt Pepper* is intriguing as it does, in fact, miss the *essential* aspect of this album, that it was released on vinyl without the insertion of 'silent' markers between tracks, binding the whole as a single (and first true) 'concept' album rather than a selection of tracks, thereby also articulating a continuity from beginning to end. McKeon, "Concept Album".

Like Sedgwick's performativity the system of representation was not always already present but constantly had to be reproduced and could therefore be jammed, failed, made incomplete. 'Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy.'⁸³ This is precisely why 'performance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance,' and why museums 'must invent an economy not based on preservation but one which is answerable to the consequences of disappearance.'

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A small exhibition of film documentations of *Commissions from Performa's Archives* is on its first public display, on rotation over six months in the Old Library at London's Whitechapel Gallery (October 2017).⁸⁴ Two short benches provide a comfortable viewing perspective for the large screen projection, and in the corner of the room a table with chairs and a lamp invites visitors to scan brochures and the 'Readers' anthologised by Goldberg and her colleagues for Futurism (2009), Russian Constructivism (2011), Fluxus (2011), Architecture and Performance (2017), and Dada (2017).

"It's so important to see it in the gallery space," says Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator of the Archive Gallery, in a short promotional video.⁸⁵ "Not in its live form, but in its looking at performance as a temporary, ephemeral time-based medium. And seeing how this can be enjoyed again by audiences inside the gallery." This echoes Robin Rhode's concern for the documentation of his work. In an interview with *initiArt*, talking of his murals, he states: "Sometimes my work would get bombed by the other graffiti artists, but I don't care since my work is the photograph and the video."⁸⁶

⁸³ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 3. She develops this idea, complicating the relationship between documentation and event, in "Violence and Rupture: Misfires of the ephemeral", Phelan, *Live Art in LA*, 1-38. Elsewhere, she critiques Auslander's reading of *Unmarked* precisely for his purposeful neglect of her use of a feminist Lacanian psychoanalysis – see Phelan, "Performance, live culture".

⁸⁴ Whitechapel Gallery, "Commissions". The featured image is from *Erwartung*.

⁸⁵ Whitechapel Gallery, "Nayia Yiakoumaki".

⁸⁶ Ting, "Robin Rhode".

Narcissistically, I scan the moving image to see if I appear, oddly relieved to find myself off-screen, out of focus, blurring the edge, unseen. Disappeared. A couple of visitors pause with me, curious to watch and listen at a distance as The Woman pours out her heart, but they soon move on. In fact, no-one appears to stay more than a few minutes, at least during my visits. The room is darkened so that the video illuminates the space and those venturing in remain hushed as at a cinema. Times Square is nearly 3,500 miles away, its bare echo only the faint thrum of traffic and weekend revellers from the road outside bleeding through the gallery window. Expectation has dissolved.

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By the late 1990s, with the process of normalising acquisitions of performances and their documentation for museum and private collections, the performativity of performance historiography was itself contested. Following Phelan, Amelia Jones argued for a ‘feminist phenomenological approach’ recognising that the performance of (historical) meaning needed to be acknowledged ‘as a process, an ongoing exchange.’⁸⁷ It was in this context – as performance moved uncertainly from the margins towards the centre of institutional practice – that Goldberg founded Performa.

It is instructive, then, that she gave two narratives for its establishment that together reflect the differing commitments ascribed to Auslander and Phelan, and that – combined – conjure the paradoxes and apparent contradictions that constitute performance and its curation. In many respects, it is from within the gap between these positions – the movement between representation and performance, and *vice versa* – that much of its energy, improvisation and imagination emerges.

The first story emphasised the thrill, surprise, risk and excitement of commissioning new performance work. Enamoured by high quality video works appearing in the late 1990s, Goldberg felt visceral possibilities for them as live events, proposing to Shirin Neshat the

⁸⁷ Jones, “Art History / Art Criticism”. This is echoed by Adrian Heathfield (“Then Again”): ‘historical narration must honour the multiplicity and singularity of events through “an experiential practice of history writing”’; and by Fabião, “History and Precariousness”.

idea of the artist 'stepping out from the screen' after experiencing *Turbulent*, her Venice Biennale installation (1999).⁸⁸ Contrasting with the 'frustration of a passing parade of viewers in a crowded gallery obscuring the view, or groping for a bench in the dark wondering when the loop might end and begin again', performances would provide absorption, a 'spectacle without interruption....Through eye contact, the shock of the "live" would stand out in a sea of mediated images.' Following a workshop at The Kitchen, *Logic of the Birds* (2001) featuring the singer Sussan Deyhim was commissioned, produced, and toured. Whilst the experience inspired, it nevertheless affirmed her determination not 'to produce isolated productions *outside* of an art historical context'.⁸⁹

An urgent need to get this art history 'right' underpinned her second narrative. With the transformation of museums from quiet spaces for contemplation to places of action and events, performance history was being staged in the spotlights of its own institutionalisation. She was determined to show that artists' turning to performance was not a 'sideshow' but the 'central event' of modern art.⁹⁰ A narrow focus on traumatic body art, artists' toying with gender and sexual identity, or slumming it against the art market located performance *within* a history, missing its greater significance. Rather than a history *of* art performance, performance *as* art history – and by implication the curator function's performativity – needed to be emphasised. Performa's first gesture was then to initiate a panel discussion – 'Not for Sale' – at New York University (2004), to consider issues of

⁸⁸ 'The idea of asking visual artists, some of whom might not have contemplated performance previously, to create multimedia productions that would take place over an extended period of time and that would connect with audiences through the presence of live performers, grew from the proliferation of film and video installations in galleries and museums over the past decade. The impact of their seductive cinematic surfaces, of their specially constructed spaces filled with surround-sound so thick it verges on solid, and of their subtle storytelling by visual means only, cried out for a live outlet that would similarly engulf and affect the viewer.' Goldberg, "Biennial of its Own".

⁸⁹ Goldberg, "Putting on Performance", emphasis added. The tour included – for me – a memorable performance produced by Artangel at Union Chapel, one of London's atmospheric music venues. On this production and its credits, see Artangel, *Logic of the Birds*.

⁹⁰ 'The fact that performance is regularly a sideshow at biennials, and that its enormous influence in the history of twentieth-century art is still so little understood, led to the decision to create a biennial dedicated to the form. One hundred years of radical propositions that have infected, disrupted, and changed thoughts about the meaning of art in the minds of artists and their audiences, and that helped shape a century of modern art, had to be confronted head on.' Goldberg, "Biennial of its Own", 12.

documenting, conserving, collecting, preserving, and representing performance within the art institution.⁹¹

Combining new commissions and re-stagings of canonical works, the biennial proper – from November 2005 – attempted to live out the apparent contradictions by which performance and its historical production were entangled. Indeed, the process of re-presenting performances was adopted as a mode of research, recovering materials, documentation, and intangible aspects of works lost within established records. To ‘restage or re-present events that were made precisely to evade institutional display, not to mention being provocative, anarchic, and often antithetical to the rules of good behavior’, it was necessary, Goldberg claimed – to *re-live* them.⁹² At the same time, as the example of Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces* (Guggenheim NYC, 2005) made clear, mediation for a secondary audience was now a feature of the live experience: ‘Everyone was conscious of being recorded, not only by the fixed camera, but by the roving camera and tape recorder of Babette Mangolte, whose project made it clear that the community forming around the performances was becoming part of the piece.’⁹³ This process of historical reconstruction continued in 2007 with Allan Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, which in contrast was ‘reinvented’ in recognition of its essential unrepeatability.⁹⁴

Goldberg and her team have been operating in this uncertain movement, simultaneously reanimating histories of performance that are always too late and venturing new unedited chapters through its own commissions. On the one hand, performance is curated *in*

⁹¹ A tendentious account of this was given by the art critic John Rockwell for the *New York Times* – see Rockwell, “Not For Sale”.

⁹² ‘Such restagings, reconstructions, reenactings, or reactions, as they are variously called – active history lessons all – have considerable implications for the future, not least because the process of reconstructing becomes itself an empirical study of the ideas contained in the work.’ Goldberg, “What We Did And Why”, 19. This echoes Hal Foster’s reflections on Performa’s first edition: “one thing PERFORMA makes very clear to us now is how this mediation of performance has become second nature.” Goldberg, *Performa*, 11.

⁹³ Blessing, “Seven Easy Pieces”. Coinciding with the first edition of Performa, this show was planned by curators Nancy Spector and Blessing over the previous 12 years.

⁹⁴ ‘For every venue [of the touring retrospective, *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*] we found people interested in reinventing the Happenings. People would get the scores, and do, in a way, whatever they wanted. You can imagine the long discussion that we had with Allan: What do you mean, *whatever you want?*...He was really very radical. He decided his work is the invitation to reinvent the Happening, and then it’s not really his work anymore. He said, “They just have to take responsibility.”’ Stephanie Rosenthal – the exhibition’s curator – in Goldberg, *Everywhere and All at Once*, 247. Kaprow proposed this method of re-making after insisting that the photo documentation could *not* substitute for the event.

expectation of its documentation for a secondary audience, witnesses to the performative gesture of its becoming a mute object of art history. On the other, artists are invited expectantly to revivify the form by departing from the fixed record of history.

The push and pull of this dialectic creates its own tensions which, like *Erwartung*, remain fragmented and unresolved. It shapes Performa's processes of institutionalising whilst inviting risks; its ambivalent claims for documentation or the live event; Goldberg's equivocal invocation and repudiation of 'performativity'; her celebration of work that (citing Marinetti) 'takes pleasure in being booed' – by large and enthusiastic audiences; her earnest dismissal of hype whilst appearing in *Picasso Baby*, Jay-Z's collaboration with Abramović; the predication of performance as a post-conceptual materialization of ideas, alongside commissions driven by a conviction that the selected artist would make something visually 'stunning'; the biennial's occasional anti-consumerist or activist rhetoric and its high production values supporting the ambition of its invited artists; its reflection on global and cultural differences transposed within New York's universal heteroglossia; the ambiguity with which performance is addressed as both a 'discrete medium' and as a condition of all art; and – not least – its emphatic and increasingly strident nomination of '*visual art performance*' whilst presenting the work of practitioners self-identifying with dance, theatre, architecture, poetry, music and composition.

Forever and A Day?

If anything these discrepancies have become more marked over time, not least as Performa has established a training programme for performance curation and begun to address its own memory and historiography.⁹⁵ Following the acquisition of 175,000 files from Performa's archive by NYU's Fales Library, the biennial organised a discussion at its downtown 'hub' to consider how best to present this material – tellingly titled *Forever and A Day* (2017). Against the grain, violinist and artist C Spencer Yeh questioned the ontology of performance works; Nicholas Mirzoeff (NYU) argued for the decolonisation of museum histories and collections; Anthony Elms (ICA Philadelphia) proposed performance not as an

⁹⁵ Performa, "Performa Institute". The troubling performativity of this trend is especially evident in Goldberg's most recent account, *Performance Now*.

object 'medium' but a social form; artist Sur Rodney (Sur) imagined the archive as a form of collective memory, noting the impossibility of recreating the moment without reproducing the chemical make-up of a given moment's airborne sweat.

This is not to critique Performa or Goldberg as such, but to address apparent inconsistencies as symptoms of the curatorial display, preservation, and narration of performance – its performativity. Indeed, recent considerations of the unwitting transformations being wrought on museums and art institutions by the incorporation of performance are beginning to probe and challenge their assumptions and practices. Catherine Wood, for example, has likened the entry of performance documentation and residual objects into museum collections to a Trojan horse: 'it might look like a sculpture, but contains a living army within'.⁹⁶ Like institutional critique, this intrusion of unpredictability into systems designed to preserve and fix in perpetuity 'unmasks the museum's human infrastructure'. It requires a shift in curatorial practices to operations more akin to those of production, the recalculation of budgets and art's institutional economy, and adaptation to modes of temporal or generational transmission from body to body (a precarious requirement made tangible by staging Boris Charmatz's *If Tate Modern was Musée de la danse*, 2015).⁹⁷ More radically, she argues, it fundamentally questions the institution's production of 'audience-artist-artwork relations' (the articulation of 'I-We-It'), and its delimitation of borders (including between artforms). Rather than privileging the gallery as a place for absorption in seductive images, performance emphasises it 'as not just a viewing space, but a public space in which to gather'. Furthermore, the cross-disciplinary examples of performance dissolving borders between practices have given galleries licence to invite in and learn from other artforms. Begging the rhetorical question, Wood asks, 'how does the specific approach of the musician both lend new approaches to co-operation, or improvisation, and also benefit from the space of the propositional art context'?⁹⁸

Gallery collections not only already include traces of performances – more commonly designated within photography, video, drawing or other sub-categories – but all works

⁹⁶ Wood, "In Advance of the Broken Arm", 125.

⁹⁷ Charmatz and Wood, "If Tate Modern".

⁹⁸ Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art*, 29.

require *active* preservation against entropy and the vicissitudes of time. This is dramatized especially with works made from perishable materials, as Phelan argues with respect to Eva Hesse's sculptures. Rather than re-making such works, she proposes the process of re-fabricating could be staged 'like a play', in front of an audience, and dissolved once more afterwards. If preservation acts to ward off mortality, this approach emphasises the need 'to keep memory alive across the life-death divide'.⁹⁹

Performance, then, is staging a metamorphosis of the museum and of curatorial practices. No longer securing art's immortal truth, a statement constating knowledge by making differences visible and legible, art's institutions are self-consciously operating as forms of speech act aware of the contingent necessity of their listening witnesses, requiring constant repetition not necessarily to secure a norm but to risk the contingency of any universal claims, not insisting on a single continuous history of art stretching from a mythical past into a visionary future but seeking transformational ways of collective remembering.

This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in shifting thoughts on the museum's archival function. Greater attention is now placed on issues of practice, of the work archives *perform*.¹⁰⁰ Museums are recognising the role audiences play in constituting encounters; acknowledging intangible aspects of performance; following artists' leads in planning the afterlife of events rather than imposing standard conventions for documentation, conservation, and taxonomies; supporting them in crossing disciplines; and opening archives for visitors to organise and show. In this process, performance practices have provoked a re-thinking of art's possible futures by re-awakening memories of what has always-already been present.

For example, in curating *Rituals of Rented Island* (Whitney Museum, 2012), Jay Sanders made an exhibition as a performance of memory by building an archive adequate to reflect the contribution of unrecorded as well as documented artists from the constellation of

⁹⁹ Phelan, "Violence and Rupture".

¹⁰⁰ Giannachi and Westerman, *Performance Documentation*, 1-12.

experimental practices across performance disciplines in 1970s SoHo.¹⁰¹ ‘The ways we approached displaying this work in museum galleries straddled a fundamental tension: if the show appeared museological, it should simultaneously reveal itself to be a series of fantasies and approximations reflecting vanished realities.’ By drawing the gallery’s attention to its long history of presenting work by composers, musicians, dancers, poets, and theatre-makers, this process helped to reconsider its practices, such as treating performance equally with exhibitions on its website, creating more versatile spaces, and allowing artists to determine how their work should be documented (or not), even if working against the institution’s muscle memory felt like ‘running the wrong way on the conveyor belt’.

Limor Tomer – the General Manager of Live Arts at New York’s Metropolitan Museum – adds that this expanded notion of performance and of the museum has further implications for the curator.¹⁰² Where the notion of visual arts performance involved a process of de-skilling, or rather of making unique requirements to materialize its concepts, accepting histories of performance in their plurality necessitates a *re-skilling*, of bringing in production expertise particular to different media – from sound design, lighting and scenography, to caring for performers and audiences.¹⁰³ Opportunities then emerge not simply to establish discrete programme slots – “like Friday-night jazz” – nor to embellish displays “by putting a pipa player by a Ming vase”, but to integrate practices, for example when she invited the choreographer and dancer Bill T Jones to guide visitors round the Museum (the first time this had been done by someone other than an art historian).

This subtle knowledge has also been one of the keys to Performa’s practice. Its curatorial and production team has included people with diverse skills and interests. For instance, much of its music- and sound-oriented programming has either been co-produced with

¹⁰¹ Interview in *Ibid.*, 21-27; interview with the author (5 November 2015); and Sanders, *Rituals of Rented Island*.

¹⁰² A former colleague of Sanders at the Whitney, she started at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Interview with the author (5 November 2015), and Mandell, “Limor Tomer”.

¹⁰³ “That’s another way in which Performance Art is different from performing arts, because in performing arts you have the work and you have the audience and you can’t have the work without the audience. But in Performance Art you have documentation, and it doesn’t really matter if only eight people ever saw it live.” Interview with the author.

partners (like David Weinstein of Clocktower Radio) or led in-house by curatorial producers experienced in performance beyond the gallery arts, like Esa Nickle.¹⁰⁴ The curators first develop ideas with artists, allowing them to dream and be ambitious, before she steps in to address the concrete realities of finding appropriate spaces, considering the audience experience, how each event fits into the programme, budgeting issues, technical requirements, scheduling and other production aspects – only then delegating to other producers and team members. Many visual artists are habituated to producing and presenting objects and installations, less aware of the audience, she says, so “I think about what I would want to see, and I think about how different types of audience respond; but more often than not, how we’re going to keep them completely focused.” Crucially, the relationships built through the process endure. “We take care of people the rest of their lives... because some of these people make work that nobody can deal with.”

Performa lives out the contradictions and emergent possibilities of performance and its curatorial acts. In the movement between its historicising and collective memorising, its production of meaning and staging events, its claims for performance’s centrality and its inhabiting the margins, the curator function has changed and is morphing still. From a performative authority, a power function, it is perhaps transitioning to something more periperformative, something more musical.

¹⁰⁴ Nickle’s background is in sociology, arts education and opera; interview with the author.

Scoring, Casting, Instilling: the *Kunsthalle for Music*

One thing music is not, is [that] music is not a medium. Ari Benjamin Meyers¹

As our understanding of the fate of all the 'arts' is temporalized, so the transformative extensions of their practices enter into new relations to the 'musical' as previously understood. Peter Osborne²

What had already singularized itself in the name of the Muses as pars pro toto (but was there properly speaking a totum of the chorus of the Muses? that is the whole question) – in other words, music – was the tekhnē mousikē. Jean-Luc Nancy³

Casting off

If I listen carefully, stilling myself, I recall the senses of being there. The bare walls and grey concrete floors of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (now Kunstinstituut Melly) present the contemporary 'white cube' in its raw state: part laboratory, part church, and part courtroom as Brian O'Doherty described the genus.⁴ Part classroom too. The chorusing of rote learning by heart, scraped chairs, furtive glances, calls to order, ringing of the bell like monastic hours – beneath the pigment, the former school building echoes its rites of passage like graffiti etched in plaster, scored into desks, secreted in cavities and on toilet doors. The slate is never wiped clean.

This Rotterdam gallery is hosting the *Kunsthalle for Music* (2018), a project composed by Ari Benjamin Meyers. As I arrive on this cold February evening, a humming draws me into the first room, a presentation I recognise as Pauline Oliveros's *Tuning Meditation*. Eight performers are lying or sitting on the floor, alternately tuning into another's pitch and finding a distinct one of their own according to the polyrhythms of participants' breaths. These living musical sculptures are cast in off-white denim-style jackets branded for the project, each uniquely detailed, with dark trousers and white trainers completing the effect of musical notes, a scale of ivoried keys.

¹ Ari Benjamin Meyers, at Kunstinstituut Melly, "Music is Not!", c.33'40".

² Osborne, "The Terminology is in Crisis," 198-9.

³ Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts?", 5.

⁴ O'Doherty, *White Cube*. The Rotterdam gallery changed its name on 2 October 2020, in recognition of the violent historical legacy of its former namesake, a Dutch East India Company naval officer.



Fig. 20: *Kunsthalle for Music*, Kunstinstituut Melly (2018)

I find a space by a wall, but this becomes the 'stage' for the next piece, a sung rendition of the *Kunsthalle's* Manifesto. From here, the evening's four-hour programme flows, the ensemble dividing and re-forming at various points in solos and smaller groupings using all the gallery spaces, performing simultaneously, sometimes taking a bar's rest. Each night will end with *séance for an ensemble and chairs*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's invitation for the players to summon the musical spirit of a deceased composer or musician whose name has been drawn from a hat.

The absence of things to look at has a curious effect both on the visual apparatus of the gallery *and* on the character of musical performance. Unlike O'Doherty's 'acephalic' viewer, the white cube's detached and transcendental eye inspecting the given-to-be-seen, we must follow where our ears lead across the gallery's two floors, discovering secret itineraries pursued by the musicians. Its space is temporalized. Small wall texts indicate the pieces each room may feature and the Manifesto is emblazoned on one partition; but there are no

announcements, introductions, stage entrances, invitations for applause, programme notes or schedule. Without a score, we improvise.

There is no interaction as such; rather, we figure the *dérive*, floating around the galleries as individual flâneurs fishing for points of connection, snagging bits of meaning as we cast our lines of thought. The listener is *imagined*; an audience community is never approached. A few cushions are made available, discreetly, but most visitors do without, squatting on the floor or shifting upright and shuffling between rooms. Free to come and go, we can seek out the musicians to watch them at work, listen across the highly reverberant galleries to create our own mix from pieces playing simultaneously, or browse the signage.

As our listening appears not to affect the performances materially, the exhibition is emptied of music's erotic charge, joy, channelled or wild expression. It has little felt economy of desire, no structure of contingency, anticipation, or urgency. We are not ravished, hailed, or seduced by sonic riches. The only sirens here are those bleeding in from the street outside.

Evacuated of its visuality, the gallery is reduced to an acoustic container and social experiment: the institution extracted of its essence, for it has no collective memory or collection of music. No song called it into being, no melody heralded its theme, no rhythm or metre patterned its time.

"The walls are empty, but the space is full," suggests the gallery's new director.⁵ Musing on the same paradox with Meyers, Hans Ulrich Obrist invites a comparison with Yves Klein's *La vide* ('The Void', 1958) – in which the artist famously emptied the gallery leaving only its white walls (and white soft furnishings) – and Arman's ironic response, *Le Plein* ('Full Up', 1960), in which he filled a gallery space to the brim with found objects, such that viewers could only peer in through the window.⁶ Music in the *Kunsthalle* is everywhere *and* nowhere; the exhibition is both void and plenitude, empty *and* full, container and contained.

⁵ Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy interviewed in Siegal, "These Gallery Walls Are Empty".

⁶ Obrist interviewed Meyers about the *Kunsthalle* on 8 February 2018 in Rotterdam, see Kunstinstituut Melly, "Ari Benjamin Meyers interviewed".

Meyers has also stripped away layer on layer of 'music'. In contrast to the effect of exposing visuality, looking at the institution's conditioning of the gaze, there is no essential core unravelled, no 'aurality' of listening to the construction of listening. Only one statement in his Manifesto is repeated, "Music is not necessarily what you think it is," a proclamation that donated the title of two days of discussions and talks preparing for the *Kunsthalle* the previous May: 'Music is Not!'⁷ "Music is not 'sound art'", he tells Obrist. "Music is not a medium", he insists for the opening panel. The Manifesto adopts a rhetorical form of negation – "a dissolution of performer and audience, of rehearsal and performance", a process that continues "whether there are visitors or not", that is "not about perfection or reproducibility" – or of indefinite possibility: "can we imagine a space for music that exists outside of any media and beyond the stage? A space for unrecordable music, music of undefined duration". Whilst Meyers may have trained as a composer and conductor, wrote the critic Jennifer Allen, 'he seems closer to an ontologist'.⁸

By reflecting on the *Kunsthalle*, this chapter examines ways in which the contemporary relationship between music and the visual arts takes form, and in particular how it might be instituted. How might music correspond to art as a generic category? Going further, what has 'music' been *before* it became an artform, before the autonomous distinction of art was instituted? I begin by introducing Meyers as he turned his focus to collaborating with visual artists and presenting work in gallery spaces.

Cast Adrift

Meyers's creative journey to the *Kunsthalle* goes back to his role as music director and conductor for *Il Tempo del Postino* (2007), a curatorial project by Philippe Parreno and Obrist initially produced for Manchester International Festival. For this exhibition-cum-'opera', artists were given a block of staged time rather than a space in which to present

⁷ For video documentation of the two panel discussions and the keynote presentation by Peter Osborne, see Kunstinstituut Melly, "Panel discussions". The process of composing the *Kunsthalle* began with *An exposition, not an exhibition* (2017), presented by the Spring Workshop, Hong Kong, in collaboration with Witte de With: see *Kunsthalle for Music*, "Spring Workshop".

⁸ Allen, "*Black Thoughts*".

their work. It was a group show in which artworks were temporally mobile before a fixed audience, rather than the gallery arrangement of fixed objects before mobile spectators.

Collaborations with Gonzalez-Foerster – one of the *Il Tempo* artists – followed: *NY.2022* commissioned by the Guggenheim; then *K.62* and *K.85* (2009) for Performa, which choreographed enigmatically the movements of audience members divided between different spaces.⁹ Defne Ayas, the curator, considered this one of her favourite projects from the biennial, and after becoming director of Witte de With in 2012 she was an obvious collaborator for Meyers.

His practice from this time became more conceptual, finding a home in the gallery more than the concert hall, with installed performances and other events leading to his composition of the *Kunsthalle*.¹⁰ This included pieces using the conceptual space of the gallery to deconstruct musical practices, such as *Symphony X* in collaboration with Tino Sehgal, performing a reduction of the concert environment by gradually removing lighting, music stands, chairs, and other structured elements that separate audience and performers. Other works extracted audition from performance, leaving only the observation of gesture, as in *The Lightning and its Flash*, and *Chamber Music*. In *DUET (Composition for Two Strangers)* and *Serious Immobilities* (after Satie), compositional tropes provided models for retranslation by the gallery framework.¹¹ In the gallery, music could make sense without being heard.

Perhaps the most significant precursor to the *Kunsthalle* was Meyers's installation at the gallery Raeber von Stenglin, Zurich, a former garage. *The Name of This Band is The Art* ran for a month, for which he produced and displayed a rock band that would exist only as long as the exhibition, creating songs in the space using basic lead sheets he provided and song

⁹ Goldberg, *Back to Futurism*, 98-103.

¹⁰ Rafael with Meyers, *Music on Display*.

¹¹ *Serious Immobilities* adopted Satie's *Vexations*, a piece he also reworked in *Vexations II* by writing out the piece by hand, one copy for each of its 840 iterations. 'I'm asking: is there a place for music that exists beyond what we actually can hear?' *Music on Display*, 42. 'It was an attempt to illustrate the possibility that one can understand something musically, but without necessarily hearing anything'; 59.

scenarios developed by a writer. A designer made the band's outfits and merchandise, though the group would leave no recording (other than documentation).¹²

Working in galleries was liberating, Meyers felt. It opened up ways of deconstructing music and providing vastly different economic, social, temporal, and practical conditions. Its risk was not measured by ticket income. Audiences were not genred. Performances need not be predicated on the conventional durations of attention. As empty boxes, galleries did not demarcate the (dis)positions of performer and audience; nor did they mask their presence with perfected acoustics.

Yet this also came with a significant cost. Music here was an ugly duckling, not quite one of the family. It appeared to walk like a duck, swim like a duck, and quack like a duck – but it wasn't a duck. It didn't look like other mediums because it wasn't a 'medium'. By insisting on the terms and legacies of 'music', rather than 'sound', Meyers was struck by the discrepancies, summarised in the *Kunsthalle's* Manifesto. Music's history was participatory, live, social, and so also 'messy, political, meta-temporal. Music was not merely in space; it was space. Music was not only social through listening; it was social in its conception. Music didn't happen in time; it defined time.'

If music was not left to swan around as entertainment, product, or accompaniment to media and advertising, what remained of its historic claim to be (an) art? Its institutional forms of concert hall, orchestra, and critical apparatus no longer secured this right; yet music was equally cast adrift from the art institution and its visualist – if not 'purely' visual – mediums.

Music traditionally had been a driver of the contemporary; all the more striking then the situation wherein music *qua* music has mostly separated itself and been separated from what is considered to be contemporary art. It is in this schism that the *Kunsthalle for Music* operates.

¹² Meyers, *Name of This Band*. See also *Ibid.*, 70-73. Artangel's project with PJ Harvey – *Recording in Progress* (2015) – offers an interesting comparison, in which the singer and her band created an album in a specially-designed studio created at Somerset House whilst visitors could view the process behind a half-silvered mirrored wall, as if it were an exhibition.

I turn now to this question of the art 'medium' to tease out the implications of his claim that music is not one. What is at stake in Meyers's insistence on *music* within the gallery?

Mediums of Art?

The issue of art's 'mediums' has been a constant refrain in the late modern era. Alongside pressing claims for inclusion made by photography, video, film, Performance, and Sound, the loss of painting and sculpture's 'medium specificity' precipitated the gallery system's identity crisis and the emergence of the professional curator (chapter 2).

Rosalind Krauss has been one of the most influential critics to account for the teeming diversity of artists' practices that followed, returning repeatedly to the issue of medium. 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1978) proposed a deconstructive model in which mediums were constituted by the opposition of terms within a discursive field (chapter 5). For *The Optical Unconscious* (1993), she radically simplified this structure to provide a paradigm for visuality as such (chapter 2). The opposition of figure and ground became the basis for visual perception, articulating identity and difference, the separation and distinction of one object from another; but also – in the opposition of the '*not-figure* versus *not-ground*' – the principle of *containment*. It articulated the condition of possibility for (formerly visual) art's mediums, which in turn became the means by which the art institution could renew and reproduce itself.

This intimate and necessary connection became explicit when Krauss revisited the issue at the decade's end. In *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1999), the question of mediums' material techniques returned 'like the repressed'. The abstract structural presentation of visuality was necessary but not sufficient to account for the specific formal qualities of a medium's 'material and technical support', which provided a framework, a limitation of possibilities, a set of conventions and a sense of *necessity*.¹³ Unlike Conceptual Art and the ubiquitous mixed-media installation to which it gave rise, she argued, the rules of this game were not

¹³ Krauss, *Voyage on the North Sea*, 26: 'In order to sustain artistic practice, a medium must be a supporting structure, generative of a set of conventions, some of which, in assuming the medium itself as their subject, will be wholly "specific" to it, thus producing an experience of their own necessity.' The relation of 'medium' to 'technical support' might best be understood, here, in parallel with that between gender and sex.

simply an exercise in theoretical legitimation and works were not exchangeable 'like so many signs or commodities'. Each medium was both an *automaton*, a memory form that conditioned its history whilst affording freedom for artistic improvisation;¹⁴ and an aggregation – a constellation of specific techniques, spaces, and conventions mediating the grid of modern subject-object relations. Thus for Richard Serra, *Casting* (1969-91) – beginning with his pieces splashing molten lead – was a material process producing a series of works, opened to chance, that resulted in unique pieces that nevertheless conformed to a recognisable order: a formal or homeostatic principle. It was as if the lead *remembered* and adhered to its material and formal possibilities.

Shortly after that essay Krauss suffered an aneurysm, her resulting amnesia and treatment becoming a personal token of the stakes involved for medium as the art institution's memory function (*Under Blue Cup*, 2011).¹⁵ Castigating poststructuralism's emphasis on language (influencing her earlier writing), medium was the mechanism for art's cathexis, its capacity to touch itself touching – or rather, to see itself seeing – and so constitutive of its subject identity. The grid, that ultimate proxy for modernist vision, provided the scaffolding on which new mediums could be discovered and articulated – like a mechanism from which memories could be recovered. The medium was then like a knight in chess, she claimed, the chequerboard acting as the framework within which the piece could improvise its moves according to its inherited rules. 'Constituting a unified field, the medium's [oppositional] paradigm might be considered the foundation of all the possible variations open to a physical substance.'¹⁶ The forms art takes could then proliferate as long as its visualist logic was foundational; such 'technical supports' could, once exhausted, be discarded.

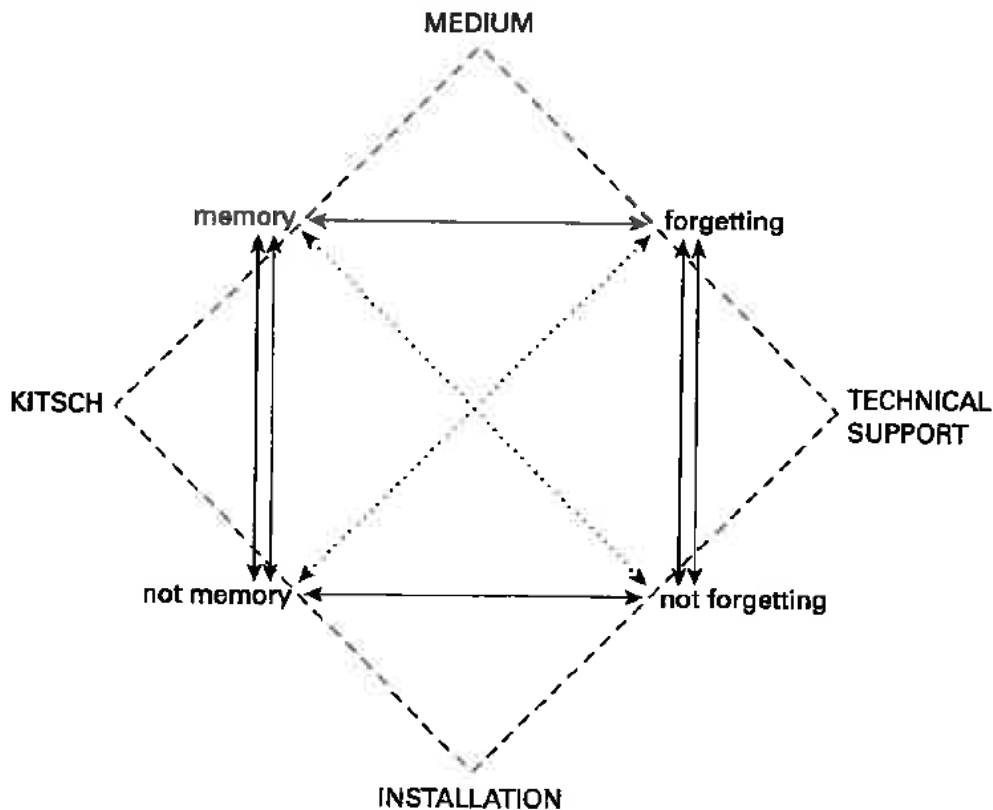
'Brain – the medium is the memory', Krauss aphorised (*contra* McLuhan), charting medium as '*memory versus forgetting*':

¹⁴ Krauss adopted the notion of the *automaton* from Stanley Cavell, and exemplified the principle from his essay, 'Music Discomposed'. Here he insisted on the necessity of convention – underpinning critical judgement – (like the rules of fugue) as a prerequisite for the good faith in which a work could be publicly recognised as art. The constant innovation of modern composers had detached music from its regulative norms, he argued, thereby becoming unrecognisable, beyond reasonable judgement, and ostensibly arbitrary. Significantly and problematically, the critic – or the curator – then became the arbiter, one competent to issue judgement. Cavell, "Music Discomposed".

¹⁵ Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*.

¹⁶ 'The medium is the binary.' *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Fig. 21: Krauss, diagram for the art medium



Memory and forgetting are not contraries, however (chapter 9), as shown when what is remembered is the institution's desire to forget. In *The Play of the Unmentionable* (Brooklyn Museum, 1990), Joseph Kosuth – as artist-curator – used its collection of 'art historical and ethnographic objects' alongside contemporary works by Mapplethorpe, Serrano and others to unearth historically shifting attitudes to issues of sexuality, nudity, and eroticism, presenting those fighting the Culture Wars with a model of their own (Freudian) operations of repression and sublimation.

The problems multiply when the exhibition form itself becomes, as here, an artistic *work*. Artists' curation differs, claims Alison Green in citing Kosuth's show, precisely by their ability to *change* memory. Where the museum is tasked with preserving memory through its archive, artists are free to reveal its hidden meanings.¹⁷ As an authored product of an

¹⁷ Green, *When Artists Curate*.

immanently critical, permissive, performative, and self-reflexive practice, artist-curated exhibitions could then – she claims – be understood as a ‘post-medium medium’.

Green refers explicitly to the differential logic of the ‘expanded field’ to draw out these distinctions, yet her argument introduces a significant problem for Krauss’s model: the exhibition-as-medium is not distinguished as a product, so much as it is a process. It enacts or *performs* the institutional function of remembering by displaying the *objects* of its recollection, marking the gap between them. Made visible, brought to consciousness, the museum’s archive function becomes ungrounded, its memory – never neutral – exposed as potentially unreliable. Indeed, as Catherine Malabou has shown, the Freudian model of indestructible memory is inconsistent with contemporary neuroscience (chapter 4). Those suffering trauma today do not return to themselves but are vulnerable to *false* memories. They can self-differ, becoming ‘like someone else’.¹⁸

Krauss’s construct of the medium can be understood as the means by which the institution of art can continually regenerate without itself changing fundamentally. Indeed, it is this peculiar conjunction of dynamism and stasis that characterises the contemporary exhibitionary complex, corresponding to the distinction between the grid of oppositions and the relatively arbitrary relations it constitutes for its particular contents – as Peter Osborne has shown. For example, the use of ‘landscape’ and ‘architecture’ as contraries to schematise sculpture’s ‘expanded field’ were not the only terms that could have determined its logic, but they were necessary to account *retrospectively* for the categories of ‘marked sites’, ‘site-constructions’, and ‘axiomatic structures’, enabling ‘the ideological reappropriation [remembering] of all those practices of object-making that were *against* ‘sculpture’ by the idea of a *renewal* of sculpture.’¹⁹ This not only restabilised the museum after breaking with the ‘specificity’ of its historical mediums; the structure could equally be projective, generative of the field’s centrifugal performative expansion (chapter 7). New ‘mediums’ external to art history could be invented to maintain the system’s

¹⁸ Malabou, *New Wounded and Ontology of the Accident*.

¹⁹ Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*, chapter six. He suggests the scale of the human form as another paradigm, whilst I consider the role of gravity in chapter 9.

contemporaneity; these could then be absorbed and institutionally incorporated under the authoritative category of 'sculpture'.

The diminishing returns of this process, with its inability to forget how to forget, mark the 'entropic crisis' that the art institution faces. Resisting its own metamorphosis, the system requires new mediums and 'technical supports' to maintain its currency, whilst separating the whole – through its structure of containment – from the social and political. It is in this context that some galleries have risked the entry of historic artforms into their spaces not as a medium – they neither conform to the grid, nor its memory structure – but *as another institution*, an 'institutional takeover'. Boris Charmatz's *Musée de la danse* is the most celebrated of these; the *Kunsthalle for Music* is another.²⁰

The issue of 'medium' cedes to that *of which it is a medium* – of art as institution. Moreover, the *Kunsthalle* raises the question of the institution's *singularity*: the relation between art and the plurality of artforms. If the different arts fall under an encompassing concept one might imagine an institutional form capable of incorporating all. The notion of a 'Kunsthalle' implies this, even whilst its general use designates a contemporary gallery without its own collection; so it is significant that projects like Meyers's have adopted the term as an experimental structure without fixed co-ordinates of location, medium, or discipline.²¹ In this way, the *Kunsthalle* is being repurposed as a generic institutional signifier – a curatorial gambit – for diverse practices to investigate the (singular) contemporary condition of art, a condition or concept that cannot be predicated in advance but is always under construction through a *generative* architecture, neither pre-fabricated, modelled, drawn, nor diagrammed.

²⁰ Meyers insists the *Kunsthalle* "is not a music museum". On the turn to music as a means to address the 'crisis' in Art, see the comments by Lisette Smits and Dafne Ayas in the *Music is Not!* panel discussions. The reconstruction of the *Kunsthalle Bern* inside the Fondazione Prada in Venice for the recreation of *When Attitudes Become Form – Bern 1969 / Venice 2013* is another significant additional example – Germano Celant's restaging of Harald Szeemann's 'canonic' exhibition. von Bismarck, "Exhibiting Performances".

²¹ This flexibility has been exploited by other 'Kunsthalls', such as the *European Kunsthalle* – see Wege and Müller, "Kunsthalle". It is perhaps significant that whilst the term first came into use in the mid-nineteenth century, it only took off concurrently with the loss of visual art's medium specificity in the 1960s. The term is also distinct from that of the 'Art Centre', a pragmatic nomination designating a more community-oriented space housing the variety of recognised art practices.

Meyers's *Kunsthalle* engages the contemporary gallery considered (alongside the biennial) as the institutional form adequate for art *as such*. It does this specifically through the problem music – and musicality – poses to its singularity. I will now examine what kind of institution the *Kunsthalle* might be and what insights it offers by bringing it into dialogue with approaches to this question from Adorno, Osborne, and Jean-Luc Nancy.

A score of scores

Meyers insists that he is not a curator but the *composer* of the *Kunsthalle*. What sort of composition might this be? To begin with, like an artist's curated exhibition – such as Kosuth's – it can be understood as a singular work comprising a collection of other works. It functions as a kind of 'meta-score' (or curatorial composition), a method inspired by Cage – everywhere present by his absence, appropriately – that Meyers first adopted for *Il Tempo del Postino*.²² Yet scoring embraces divergent ways of expressing forms, of relating parts to a whole, performances to instructions, a unity ('work' or art concept) to a multiplicity (of instantiations, forms, or mediums). Like other scores, the *Kunsthalle* also then addresses the continuity of an identity through the multiplicity of its instantiations through time, both its nightly presentations and its transformation in different instantiations.

The *Tuning Meditation* and *séance* framed its four-hour programme, but the sequence of other pieces was variable. Performances could be simultaneous – in different rooms – as well as consecutive, and not every work had to be performed each evening. Spanning over a century of experimentation, its repertoire is broadly in three historical moments: avant-garde pioneers such as Satie, Ives, and Duchamp; American minimalists and radicals from the revolutionary 1960s and '70s, including 'classics' by Riley, Reich, and Glass alongside Ono, Oliveros, and Julius Eastman; and works (three-quarters of the total) from the last two decades embracing the increasingly fluid space between visual and musical artistic practices (and introducing a more international and diverse cast) – from Christian Marclay, Tim Etchells, Gonzalez-Foerster, and Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólaffson; to Superflex, Sora Kim,

²² 'What I created was a sort of meta-score, which became very important not only for the show but as a concept for my own thinking and practice.' Rafael and Meyers, *Music on Display*, 24-25. On Cage, Meyers acknowledged the significance for him of experiencing a *Musicircus* in Philadelphia in the 1990s (possibly the *Rolywholover* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995) – conversation with the author, 8 February 2018.

Sandyha Daemgen, Anri Sala with Franz Ferdinand, The Residents, and Meyers himself. These are not zoned either by room or temporal sequence. This is not an historical survey show, even whilst the selection implies a narrative trajectory. Instead, as an apparatus the *Kunsthalle* has the effect of flattening differences: the chronologically 'older' works register their cultural moments obliquely, performed as if contemporaneous with those newly commissioned.

Whilst individual works whisper the politics and historicity of their gestation, the singular focus on 'music' in its relation to a visual regime divests the meta-composition of any critical relation to the street outside. The musical and the visual are played together in relative abstraction, an admiring form of institutional critique. There is little sense of danger, that possibility in live performance that it can go awry, offend, delight, or take an unexpected turn that might surprise or astonish. The exhibition's fundamental address is *duration*, time occupying space.

In summary, the *Kunsthalle* is scored in three ways – not hierarchically ordered, but a mechanism whose tensions galvanise its formation. Firstly, its 43 scores comprise different ways of forming time marked by the loss of a necessary relation to historical temporality. Untimely still-lives, they register and respond in different ways to an historical abstraction of historicity.

The meta-score itself enacts this time relation as a durational container. Its inner sequence is unfixed, giving no sense of progression or significant juxtapositions. Like Cage's technique of the late 1940s, whereby 'gamuts' of sound objects were distributed with silences in the empty vessel of the work's temporal frame (chapter 6), individual pieces are treated as interchangeable and exclusive objects without relation. Yet these are not 'just' sounds but composed objects, material concepts. Between individual works and the meta-score a chronopolitics unfolds, a torsion between incommensurable temporalities.

Witte de With hosts this parasitic institution at the third level. Meyers insists the *Kunsthalle* is itself a work-in-progress, not only a pragmatic process of production but a negotiation with the gallery's habits, economy, capacities, and conceptual structure. He enters it as a

fiction, a chimera – part artist, part composer, part curator, part antagonist. The meta-score is not made explicit. The *Kunsthalle* is not a work-concept on show. Its manifesto is displayed, but this is not an instructional score. Its authorship is not that of an artist, but a periperformative gesture (chapter 7) whose reality is conditional on the communities affected by its address – not fixed, but in the making. It shows the gallery, *qua* institution, is not a single centred whole but provisional and shifting. Its iterations change its form. Its score is still being (re)written, inscribing itself in the interstices of its host.

These differences between the *Kunsthalle's* meta-score and repertoire, and between its periperformative operation and the gallery, are not commensurate. The former essentially describes a unity, different each day but recognisably a product of the same structuring structure. The latter is morphological, algorithmic, a generative proposition and procedure that subjects the meta-score to contingencies. The distinction *between* these differences can be elaborated by considering the implications of Adorno's argument and its revisions by Osborne and Nancy, to which I now turn. In what follows, these are necessarily abbreviated in order to draw out the particular implications of the *Kunsthalle's* institutional form in addressing the relation of music to the gallery arts.

One and Many

In 'Art and the Arts' (1967), Adorno addressed the erosion of boundaries between the arts as an *historical* development of the previous half century, understood less as the exchange of formal types (say, Earle Brown's translation of Alexander Calder's mobiles for *December 1952*) than as a negation immanent to each artform.²³ 'Music is Not!', as Meyers put it, with a corpus of music implying an unfolding narrative of fluidification. What (re-)unified the field of Art – whilst simultaneously blurring its plurality of forms – was precisely this *post-medium* turning marked by a cleaving of aesthetic appearance into artistic techniques and the materials on which they worked.

For Adorno, this was exemplified by Schoenberg's shift from a 'doctrine of musical coherence', a formal negation immanent to *music*, to the implications of his serial method

²³ Adorno, "Art and the Arts".

as a technique applied 'externally', as a form of mastery, to musical tones (chapter 6).²⁴ Serialism was not only 'musical' but could be applied as a permutational principle to non-sounding materials. Schematically, where the different arts had moved historically and dialectically through negation in the form of a finite set ($x^1+x^2+x^3+\dots+x^n = X$), asymptotically approaching their 'condition' retrospectively from the futural edge of their movement, in their post-medium situation they formed the potentially infinite set of a function. Whilst art was singular in its autonomous opposition to 'empirical reality', it remained multiple because artforms differed in the material forms of their negation.²⁵ Adorno, then, marked a convergence in forms of practice that nevertheless remain distinct due to their material forms. By implication art's institutions differed, but differed in the same way, and it was the historical singularity of that difference that unified the field.

The *Kunsthalle* – as 'institutional takeover' – then presents a problem by registering the way that music institutionally and in much of its practice has *not* conformed to the same historical process as the visual arts. This is picked up by Osborne, who follows Adorno but updates him by marking an irreversible shift in the 'historical ontology' of art after the gallery arts' conceptual turn. In shedding medium as an organising category, he claimed, the (formerly) visual arts internalised art's 'necessary conceptual' component – what makes it historically meaningful and intelligible *as* art – immanently to the individual work. After the failure of Conceptual Artists' 'anti-aesthetic' gesture of insisting on the work's essentially propositional form (chapter 3), the 'aesthetic' dimension was subsequently accepted – whilst rendered problematic – as 'equally necessary' but not sufficient.²⁶

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 374: 'Such sovereign mastery, which makes it possible to establish coherence even in an incalculable variety of dimensions, creates from the inside the link between music and the visual arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting. The more the coherence-creating methods of the individual arts spread their tentacles over the traditional stock of forms and become formalized, as it were, the more the different arts are subjected to a principle of uniformity.'

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 377: 'The different arts may aim at the same subject, but they become different because of the manner in which they mean it. Their substantial content lies in the relation between the what and the how.'

Ibid., 383: 'It is this that conditions the dual stance of art toward its forms. In tune with their inextinguishable involvement in empirical reality, art exists only in the arts, whose discontinuous relation to one another is laid down by reality beyond the world of art. As the antithesis to empirical reality, by contrast, art is one.'

²⁶ Osborne, "Terminology is in Crisis", developed from 'Die Idee'.

This has two related implications for the *Kunsthalle*. Firstly, *all art as such* was now ‘postconceptual’, unified by this ‘generic’ condition defined by the law of art’s historical movement. This dialectic – its relation of form and content, concept and aesthetic material by which it formed its condition of possibility *as art* – was inherent to *each* work, not as a ‘painting’, ‘sculpture’, or piece of ‘music’ but as a critical relation to art’s history and its own contemporaneity.²⁷ Rather than a ‘post-medium condition’ in which the question of medium remained central, Osborne preferred ‘the *transmedia* condition of post-conceptual art’.²⁸ Musical works were therefore not art *qua* music, but insofar as they were now postconceptual, a point echoed implicitly in the *Kunsthalle*’s repertoire, even whilst these became ‘music’.²⁹

Secondly, to the extent that postconceptual art was unified by its dialectical movement, a *temporalised* form, Osborne proposed that all art ‘enter[s] into new relations to the “musical” as previously understood’ (chapter 6). In his keynote presentation for ‘Music Is Not!’, he then described the *Kunsthalle* – inferring its meta-score – as “a musical modality of the use of the art space itself”.³⁰

The definite article – *the* art space itself – is productively problematic here. In the transition from Conceptual to *post*-Conceptual art, the gallery space is pivotal in Osborne’s account. It was because the ‘aesthetic refuses to remain ‘indifferent’ in art spaces’ that conceptual artists were compelled to form a strategic relation to its institutions from which their conceptual negations made (art-historical) sense.³¹ As a corollary, each work’s appearance

²⁷ Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*, chapter one; Osborne, *Anywhere*; and Osborne, *Politics of Time*.

²⁸ Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics”.

²⁹ Following Adorno, Osborne notes the gap between ‘compositional logic (= the conceptual) and what is heard (= the aesthetic aspect)’ as now constitutive. “‘Music’ is this split...and its social meaning resides in its enactment of the split itself...*Music thus stages its own postconceptual structure as the crisis and disintegration of the concept of music itself*. This is not to say that, institutionally, music does not continue to be composed and performed according to its classical concept....It is to say that the *artistic meaning* of those practices derives from their place within the continually developing concept of art, the generic and anti-medium character of which has become established in the domain of the ‘formerly visual’ or no-longer-very-visual arts’. *Postconceptual Condition*, 197. Emphasis in the original.

³⁰ Osborne, keynote, 26 May 2017 – see Kunstinstituut Melly, “Contemporary Postconceptual,” c.38’35”.

³¹ The aesthetic ‘had to be increasingly strategically incorporated or ‘contained’ through the ongoing negation of various of its specific modes and the instrumental refunctioning of others.’ *Postconceptual Condition*, 195-6.

as art becomes conditional on the institution that it temporalizes in the same gesture. The postconceptual condition outlines a dialectic of individual work and art institution.

Moreover, whilst the totality of art was constituted in the 'radically distributive' and continuing manifestation of all, implying no single institution or institutional form capable of laying claim to contain or embody it, the postconceptual condition nevertheless privileges the contemporary gallery and biennial as its paradigmatic forms. The *Kunsthalle* would hardly bear the same significance if presented in a concert hall.

The visual arts alone had fully absorbed the conceptual turn, 'conceptuality...[being] historically central to the allegorical function of art.'³² It was in distinction from such conceptuality that music – and Western classical music especially – had historically been differentiated (chapter 6). Osborne does not entertain the *musicality* of post-sonic compositional work in music's own 'expanded field'.³³ Meyers's insistence on the *Kunsthalle's* being *for Music* is not simply a stubborn anachronistic retention of medium specificity, but a critical and periperformative refusal to subsume the problem that music remains for the gallery to its 'transmedia condition'.

Lastly, the dialectic of work and institution side-steps the issue of institutional mediation – of curation. The postconceptual condition misses the *Kunsthalle's* third dimension, its form of institutional learning, adaptation, and metamorphosis. It is not a work – the meta-score – *contained* by the gallery, but a curatorial parasite affecting the homeostatic operation of its

³² Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 664.

³³ To be fair, Osborne prefaces his discourse on new music with the disclaimer that he is not a habitué of the field (albeit this is symptomatic within art theory). He gives the example of a focus on 'Music in the Expanded Field' at Darmstadt (2016) as indicative of music's institutional identification with medium specificity yet does not engage with the arguments developed by that session's leader, Marko Cicalini who – drawing on composers such as Jennifer Walshe, Yannis Kyriakides, and Stefan Prins – approaches music's 'expanded field' decisively *not* via the set of oppositional terms within a discursive field but through issues of practice. These include: an expansion of instrumental tools beyond sound-making devices, in particular an embrace of new technologies with a necessary autodidacticism to craft a technique; a shift in traditional affiliation *away* from Western canonic histories, and a parallel exploration of theories, models and discourses from non-musical disciplines; and a renewed focus on embodiment for sounding, gesturing, and listening. Significantly, he notes 'that when composers expand into other disciplines, this usually also changes their understanding of music....this expansive movement is not only one.' Cicalini, "Music in the Expanded Field". See also Prins, "Composing today"; and Walshe, "The New Discipline".

host. Nancy's approach to the 'ontological question of the *singular plural* of the Muses' addresses this.

In 'Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?', Nancy observed that the dialectic in Adorno – echoed by Osborne – was based on a foundational difference resounding from Plato's distinction of *poiēsis* from *tekhnē* in the *Symposium*.³⁴ Both terms concern a specifically *human* agency to deviate from natural causes; yet *poiēsis* was elevated to a principle of *cultivated* techniques by which the (Platonic) Forms or Ideas might virtuously be revealed. As a singular distinction, it offered an origin or anteriority of art from which its negation took form. By refusing this dialectical subordination of art's material techniques – its *tekhnē* – to a higher essence – *poiēsis* – expressed allegorically, conceptually, or philosophically, Nancy instead drew out the singular (peculiar, unity) plurality of the ontology of art and its implications.

Art could not be identical with its own concept, not in the dialectical form of negation but in its own necessary plurality, a condition that suspended any resolution of a work's 'meaning' or encompassing of art in its totality by theory. It did not collapse into the particularity of any one *tekhnē*, as each implied the sense of a plurality of others – "an ear alone is not a being", as Cage put it. Nor was the ontological question shelved, with technologies – or techniques – rendered transparent to their given utility or purpose. The paradoxical essence of *tekhnē* instead became a question of 'knowing how to produce what doesn't produce by itself': how something might emerge from 'nothing', not presupposing a form of mastery applied externally to pliant material but an immanent 'production in an exteriority to self' (echoing Cage again).

This raises the issue of what *institutional* form might be adequate to such an ontology. The gallery or biennial might appear best equipped to embrace the plurality of art's forms; yet its operation as a container adumbrates its contents under the singularity of its concept or the dialectic of its negation. If art is *non-identical* with its concept by being plural, then the 'exhibition' as a 'post-medium medium' offers a more promising model, though – *pace*

³⁴ Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts?". Plato, "Symposium".

Green – it would deny any origin in an artist-author, destination in a particular meaning, or the critical authority of a ‘work’.³⁵ Rather, it is perhaps like the *Kunsthalle* – as a guest curatorial conceit, orphaned and adopted – that such a form could be manifest, neither subordinated to the authority of its genealogy, contained by a ‘higher’ general concept, nor subsuming or overdetermining the material plurality of its manifold expressive media. Nancy implies something very much like this, claiming that

Art is the transcendence of immanence as such, the transcendence of an immanence that does not go outside itself in transcending.... A “transimmanence”. Art exposes this....it does not “represent” this. Art is its ex-position. The transimmanence...of the world takes place as art, as works of art.³⁶

A curatorial project: a work that is both singular *and* plural, and whose orders are incommensurable.

Finally, then, how does this institution *learn and adapt*, becoming what it was not? What singular plural body might be the agency of this metamorphosis? Returning anew – changed, perhaps – to the questions posed by Krauss with ‘the medium’ and Adorno and Osborne with art’s historical ontology, how (and what) might this ‘transimmanent’ form *remember*? Why, indeed, are the Muses daughters of Mnemosyne – the Goddess of Memory – and Zeus, the son of Kronos (Temporality)? It’s time to return to the ex-school that Kunstinstituut Melly now is, and to reconsider who or what is learning, and how. It’s time to meet the ensemble, this singular plural body, and to reflect briefly on the Muses’ pedagogical function.

Music, *Mousikē*, and the Museum

The musicians are relatively young, and I take them (mistakenly) at first to be students or recent graduates. I feel an unevenness in the playing, a particular tension in the realisation of text scores compared with pieces using staff notation. The instruction works seem to lack some of the gravitas and inscrutability that I’m used to from devotees of this repertoire. The

³⁵ ‘Technique is the obsolescence of the origin and the end: the exposition to a lack of ground and foundation, or that which ends up presenting itself as its only “sufficient reason”.’ Nancy, “Why Are There Several Arts?” 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35. This resonates with the ‘epigenetic’ movement articulated by Malabou (chapter 4).

performances appear almost too easy, relaxed in comparison with the difficulty and complexity involved even – or especially – with the simplest of instructions. It takes time to live with these works, to *instil* them, allow them under your skin. The virtuosity that many text scores require is not a technical proficiency, but a mode of being, of in-habitation.

Assembling the performers for the *Kunsthalle* was a key compositional process alongside the meta-score. An open call for ‘musicians / dancers / performers / thinkers’ asked for instrumentalists who could read music, sing, and move, leading to the selection after audition of three professional musicians, a dancer, a performance artist, and three visual artists (three women, five men, mostly non-Dutch albeit based in the country). Breaking with ingrained habits of conventional musical pedagogy and its performance practices, Meyers aimed to form a collective open to altered conditions for making musically within the gallery, one not bound by the production of ‘musical perfection’.³⁷

He described the process of “*casting*” the ensemble, and it’s precisely this plural sense of a sculptural *and* performative quality that becomes audible in the gallery. The repertoire (or ‘collection’) of the meta-score is moulded through the musicians, solidifying in its iterations whilst liquifying (or *plasticising*) the ensemble, which must be fluid as well as fluent in adapting to the needs of differing scores. Musical duration takes on an *embodied and relational* spatial form. The performers are not ‘living sculptures’ after Piero Manzoni, nor ‘singing sculptures’ after Gilbert & George. They form a communal body that sculpts itself over the course of the exhibition’s six weeks as the members engage each other, share experience and skills: *become* ensemble.

This was tangible in the collective processes on view: an early rehearsal for a commission by The Residents preparing for the *Kunsthalle*’s finale; and a workshop in which the performers – with audience participants – created a Calder-like mobile using cut-ups from scores of their national anthems.

³⁷ “I wanted to take a radical approach for this first iteration because we’re not playing all pieces from beginning to end, and they’re not all perfect. We rehearsed, but we rehearsed about how to make the show.” Interview with Obrist (from c.51’20).



Fig.s 22 and 23: *Cut-up Indeterminate Anthem*, by Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson



Meyers puts on display an institution in the process of transforming itself (trans)immanently through a mode of learning.

The idea that the ensemble is a group that has to be put together, that has to be trained in some way,...there's a whole educational aspect that's...through music kind of turning on itself. The typical education model is something a bit external, like we have an education division that's reaching out...and here at the *Kunsthalle for Music*

a big part of this education is internal,...thinking again of what a musician needs to be.³⁸

For its second presentation, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara (2019), the focus on the ensemble *and its interaction with audiences* as the motor generating the *Kunsthalle's* transformation came to the fore.³⁹ In a radio interview, Meyers explained:

It's all about the performers....trying to find a kind of performer that barely exists, a kind of musician-performer. This is a process that took months and months....the *Kunsthalle* is still becoming, constantly changing, mutating.

Abaseh Mirvali, the gallery's Chief Curator, echoed this, noting in a public discussion with the ensemble that "it really helped us to understand why we think the museum is such an important space in this community for experimenting, for educating not just for the audience but for ourselves. This is the first exhibition I curate where the day I hang the pieces or I install the sculpture it's not over. It keeps going....It required a daily conversation...looking at this puzzle."⁴⁰

After five auditions, the corpus of the group comprised local musicians from Los Angeles and Southern California, most having graduated from music college and composition programmes (three contributed works to the *Kunsthalle's* repertoire) – with the exception of the Berlin-based leader, Mika Hayashi Ebbesen. With two weeks of intensive rehearsal prior to six weeks of performances ("230 hours", Ebbesen noted), they had practically lived together, discussing, trying out ideas, "seeing sunsets on the beach together, stargazing"; it had involved "very personal and surprising ways of interacting, to play together". For Diego Gaeta, the members had

moulded to each other, we've moulded to the music...almost like monks would do. Who performs, like, four hours a day, five days a week the same thing...it's been a

³⁸ Ari Benjamin Meyers, 'Music is Not!' panel discussion.

³⁹ *Kunsthalle for Music*, "Documentation" and Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara, *Kunsthalle*. "The exhibition's score is open to variations, which are determined by audience participation, by ensemble members, and by interaction in between audience and ensemble."

⁴⁰ Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara, "Ensemble Panel Discussion". "This was very different from what they did at Witte de With. Our ensemble is very different. And as they shared with you the interaction with the audiences was completely different.... This exhibition...was about compassion, it was about standing still and allowing yourself to be washed over."

journey; spiritually it's been testing at times, but I think we all have the same relationship with music, it's like oxygen to us....We've been incredibly dedicated... also not playing the same set every day, slight variations...we'd constantly be very sensitive not only to the space but to the time...problem solving, shaping time...for people who returned I hope people learned something from this. We certainly did.

At least one audience member responded in kind, describing the experience as encountering “a living and breathing organism, how you were inhabiting the space...that was as strong and powerful as the pieces you were performing.” Another noted the effect of patient adaptation by the musicians on their own listening, “learn[ing] that sometimes I had to sit and live with it, not just be impatient for the pieces I loved.”



Fig. 24: *Kunsthalle for Music*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara (2019)

Ebbesen's summary of the project's meaning for her and the ensemble testified to this. Noting that a broader public had not habituated to experimental music, in contrast to the apparent accommodation with provocative visual and performance art, it was insufficient to demand respectful listening from visitors, nor was the project designed to satisfy their tastes. The *Kunsthalle*, instead, was an invitation to share the space with the ensemble, engaging together in the process of *musical* learning.

We hope there is a compassionate open-mindedness of what it means to be human, to be before another human...and how we responded to it, we had to do it...I hope you realise how unreadable we are to each other, and how much time it takes to find a place, to find an understanding to feel safe. And that's the emotional spectrum, and I also probably cried a lot. But yeah, I hope you can understand that what's most challenging, to get to a point of realising that that is what we're doing more than playing music, and the music was the technical labour but what we actually did was to constantly feel the space.

This has noteworthy resonances with practices of *mousikē* in classical Greece, understood as an inductive process of enculturation, of instilling. A brief turn, here, helps to clarify finally what was occluded when 'music' was separated from *mousikē*, which in turn provided a basis for the supposedly universal and all-encompassing museum, and so marks a difference between the *Kunsthalle* and the *Kunstinstituut*.

A combination of music, movement, and poetry under the auspices of the Muses, '*mousikē*' shaped the way individuals and communities lived and sought to reproduce themselves. It was a *medium* through which ideals of behaviour were developed and enforced.⁴¹ A basis for education and socialisation (*paideia*, hence pedagogy), it provided a model for the production of an ideal citizenry for both Plato and Aristotle and was therefore to be regulated rigorously.⁴² Self-production – *autopoiēsis* – was a process of nourishing and nurturing from within, a preparatory movement entraining the affective body through repetition towards a harmonious disposition with the elevated faculties of mind, reason, and discourse. Wisdom was acquired through character, and learning afforded a resonant pleasure.

Following the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, *mousikē* provided a medium to ancient knowledge concealed from mortal eyes, a recollection from the collective wisdom of historical cultural memory and so a donation of the Muses.⁴³ According to several traditions, these goddesses were intimately linked with

⁴¹ Murray and Wilson, *Music and the Muses*, 2 – emphasis added.

⁴² Schoen-Nazzaro, "Plato and Aristotle; and Stamou, "Plato and Aristotle".

⁴³ The cult of the Muses was associated with Orpheus – reputedly the son of the Muse Calliope with Apollo – and the Orphic cults, where they featured on golden tablets given to initiates for journeying to the Underworld, providing instruction on how to gain refreshment from the 'Lake of Memory'. Hardie, "Muses and Mysteries". On the close association between Pythagorean and Orphic traditions, including claims that

bodily practices affording mnemonic and ‘musical’ intelligence.⁴⁴ Hesiod’s encounter with the nine Muses became canonical, their gifts inspiring the poet and endowing immortal fame; yet significantly, ‘despite the individuality of their names, we cannot speak at this stage of single Muses having individual spheres of competence; rather they exist as a plurality...one implying all the others.’⁴⁵ Only later, in the Alexandrian penchant for categorisation, were they differentiated between the various arts, a process that privileged the word in the song, the spoken from the sung, the unmetred from the metred. As a specialized activity, riven with class politics, music became separated from *mousikē*, just as *mousikē* became distanced from the Muses.⁴⁶ ‘The Muses become unmusical’. Recast as ‘goddesses who preside over education, scholarship and learning’, they became emblematic for the Museum at Alexandria, itself a central inspiration for the emergence of the encyclopaedic concept of the *museaum* in the late Renaissance.⁴⁷

The museum with its imperishable memory-collection and its archivist-curator priesthood replaced an embodied practice of cultural production giving potential access to immemorial wisdom. Its lawful authority – a new commencement and commandment, as Derrida put it – came from the *archive*.⁴⁸ The implications of this shift can be heard in the etymology of the ‘record’, caught between its verbal and noun forms. Not only a fragment or document of history to be preserved for eternity, its meaning can also be understood to address practices of devoted care or curation, that what has ‘burned the heart’ (*cor-urat*) such that it will be remembered might once more be called back into the heart (*recordari*).⁴⁹ As all music collectors know intimately, records are prone to accidents, to wear and tear, to misuse, and even erasure, suffering memory loss through slips of the needle, dust returning to dust,

Pythagoras and his followers were the authors of the Orphic hymns, see Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*.

⁴⁴ According to Plutarch, the (three) Muses were recorded as *Mneiai* (memories), or – in Delphi – as Nete, Mese, and Hypate (the three chords of the lyre); whilst Pausanias named the trinity of Muses as Melete (rendered variously as practice, repetitive exercise, care, attention, meditation, and contemplation), Mneme (remembrance, memory), and Aoede (song, voice).

⁴⁵ Murray, “The Muses and their Arts,” 367.

⁴⁶ Csapo “The Politics of the New Music”. ‘The homology between music, the soul, and the state has most to do with the hierarchy of control: the words of the song must rule the music, the logical part of the soul must rule the emotional, and the educated elite must rule the masses. In each case *logos* must keep in check the forces of disorder.’

⁴⁷ Findlen, “The Museum”.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

⁴⁹ This etymology of *cura* – care – comes from the ancient grammarian Varro. Hamilton, *Security*, 74.

warping, scratching, pre-echo, skipping, buffering, and other irreversible events. Fidelity need not be dedicated to fixing in time, securing the record through a perfectly sterile environment; to play a record is to accept its precarity and vulnerability, to repeat it like a mantra in the mind's ear, grooving it into the body.

Foot notes from Athens: documenta14 and the Listening Space¹

Treating their visitors as, essentially, 'minds on legs'...[the exhibition] is a place for 'organized walking' in which an intended message is communicated in the form of a (more or less) directed itinerary. Tony Bennett²

Besides, music has now gone beyond the boundaries within which it was enclosed for so many centuries; within the term "music", the composer of our time includes even the sounds and the footsteps of the man in the street. Jani Christou³

We hope that documenta 14 will be one of many steps toward a world in which we want to live – even if it seems unlikely that this world will be "civilised, free, prosperous, law-abiding, moderate, and cautious. Adam Szymczyk⁴

"We're going to walk as slowly as possible. I'm going to play some music, so we'll continue to listen to the whole field, but listen with our feet too. Listen to the ground and the earth beneath. Like this..." Her right knee rises gradually, frame by frame, gathering her calf, ankle, and heel, peeling her socked toes from the floor. For someone turning eighty, IONE is supple, centred in displacement.

At the 'aneducation' space in the Athens School of Art, sheltered from the morning heat, this unpedestrian action redistributes attention down our bodies. The deep resonance of Pauline Oliveros's accordion tones – flowing through and around the electronic vibrations of Panaiatos – comes through loudspeakers, a ground and overtone field for the blooms of Stuart Dempster's trombone, whilst conditioned air is breathed around us.⁵

Moving the first leg against gravity is the easy part: wilful, controlled, inching. As I reach the tipping point, called by the earth, my legs are in contrary motion, the rate of descent of the right impelled against my will to delay it, accelerating, the left losing its flat-footedness in too-eager anticipation. Gracefulness and balance are displaced by this awkward play of

¹ In loving memory of Pauline Oliveros and of Roman Szymczyk. I had the great honour to get to know Pauline after featuring her as an invited artist for the Frontiers festival in Birmingham, 2014. We were due to work together on producing her last opera with her spouse and creative partner IONE, *The Nubian Word for Flower*, when she passed away. Roman Szymczyk, the son of documenta14 Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk, was killed in a street fight in Amsterdam at the time this chapter was written.

² Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 6.

³ Jani Christou, interview with Vangelis Psyraakis, *Messebrini* 18 July 1966, cited in Lucciano, *Jani Christou*, 82-83.

⁴ Szymczyk, "Iterability and Otherness," 42.

⁵ Pauline Oliveros, Stuart Dempster, Panaiotis, *Deep Listening*.

resistances and rates of movement. I feel simian, a tree-dweller of four limbs now earthed, learning to find a home with two, bipedal. I loosen my toed grip, releasing myself somewhat from the action and reaction of forces, to enjoy the momentary sensation of flight between steps.



Fig. 25: *Extreme Slow Walking* workshop, Athens School of Art, documenta14 (2017)

This suspended animation brings to my mind the revelatory turn of Greek sculpture with the 'Kritios Boy' (or 'Kouros') that I observed the day before in the New Acropolis Museum. By placing the body's weight on one leg, balancing lift and gravity in counterpoise, the artist observed the distribution of energy across the figure, giving it a dynamism that had been absent from statuesque forms of earlier periods. The human form was no longer static and geometric but a figured motion, a movement taking form, gaining an orientation, its head at an angle to its body. Subject by its own material weight, its first steps did not require a first cause, a push from behind, but fell frontally according to an imbalance, an impossibility of stasis, and an action thoughtfully personified: an acquisition of consciousness at the cost of a certain weightiness. This 'dynamic ponderation', prior to formal *contrapposto* –

contemporaneous with Plato and Aristotle – began to assimilate a psychological ‘depth’, a plasticity indicating the surface expression of inner thoughts and feelings.⁶



Fig. 26: *Kritios Boy*, New Acropolis Museum

The workshop introducing Oliveros’s *Extreme Slow Walk* was part of documenta14, which for the first time relocated half of its programme to Athens whilst retaining the other half in Kassel, its home city.⁷ I was there to give a presentation on ‘Listening Changing Itself – A Future for Pauline Oliveros’ with a synchronous performance of her *Song for Margrit* given by IONE. This formed part of the *Listening Space*, a programme of music performances, sound installations, talks, and exhibitions of scores and sound sculptures unprecedented for documenta and perhaps for any biennial other than specialist Sound Art programmes.⁸ I came to listen, to look, to learn, and to be moved.

⁶ Benson, *Greek Sculpture*.

⁷ The instructions for the exercise, in which the use of sound is optional, are given in Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, 20.

⁸ Music, sound, and listening featured prominently across the programme in both Athens and Kassel, in performance, in discussion, on display, sculpted, installed, and broadcast (as *Every Time A Ear di Soun*) on eight radio stations across five continents. Other featured artists included: African-American composer and Fluxus-affiliate Benjamin Patterson; Guatemalan composer and innovator Joaquín Orellana Mejía; Alvin Lucier, experimental musician and co-founder of the Sonic Arts Union in the 1960s; Mattin, who ‘sets up situations for the “exhibition as concert”’ through experimental music and noise; Athenian rapper and artist Negros Tou Moria; and the Turkish artist of sound sculptures, Nevin Aladağ. Sound and musical performances were also prominent in the work of other featured artists, whilst the main exhibition included displays of historically



Fig. 27: IONE performing *Song for Margrit*, 13 July 2017

This chapter considers the reasons why the curatorial team turned to music, sound, and performance. I claim this was a movement to re-centre documenta, or rather to shift the form of centredness for which the institution has stood. It concerns its passage through and continuity over time, its relation to history and the future from its founding in 1954. I will approach this with two steps and a leap.

I begin by following the curators in questioning ‘the beginning’ – both the origins of documenta and the issue of ‘the foundation’ – and its relation to the task of making its future. Taking a lead from their controversial working title for this edition, *Learning From Athens*, this will also ponder the structuring logics of neoclassicism that have shaped the institution and governed its historical movement. How can documenta move whilst elevated on its pedestal?

significant works by composer and architect Iannis Xenakis, of the early Soviet avant-garde composer and theorist Arseny Avraamov, and an installation of Lucier’s *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977). The Odeion’s exhibition of documents, scores, sound sculptures, and artworks was also extensive, incorporating works by Cornelius Cardew, Howard Skempton, Jakob Ullmann, Guillermo Galindo, and Lala Rukh among many others. documenta14, “Listening Space”.

In turning to the role of music for the programme, I will not focus on individual works or performances presented so much as on the adoption of paradigms from Jani Christou and Oliveros for its curatorial production. Both composers, I show, pursued musical thought beyond the medium of tones, after sound, and from works to disciplined practices. Their value for documenta14 emerges in the forms of mediation they model, in their articulation of memory, time, and social bodies.

This opens the way for a final reflection on the curatorial team's mobilisation of documenta through its correspondences with the *Extreme Slow Walk*. Dancing through the chapter is a shifting of weight and dynamic – from the statuesque to a wave form, from the near-permanence of carved stone to all-too-transient flesh – as a way of moving in time. Listening through our feet invited a choreography of new directions.

documenta's 'law of motion'

Widely regarded as one of the – if not *the* – world's most important large exhibition projects, documenta has been the focus of considerable scholarly research, critical and even fictional writing.⁹ I will not review that here, but instead focus on four key 'lessons' contemplated at documenta14: the institution's role in reconstructing Germany's post-war identity; its projection of 'Western values' on a Cold War frontier; its significance for establishing a foothold – an identity, and a public – for post-War Western European and North American contemporary Art; and – not least – its role in introducing the curator as a 'heroic' but also troubling figure.

documenta emerged from crisis amid the ruins of post-War West Germany. Contemporary art, after its attempted elimination by the Nazis, offered a vehicle for Kassel to re-brand a city and country released from its war debts and its immediate history with a progressive and modernist outlook. Kassel projected the emergent 'economic miracle' and artistic 'freedom' as trademarks of the 'liberal West' from its Cold War frontier, its border with the new East a short hop away. It was home to the Fridericianum, one of the world's first public

⁹ See for example *OnCurating* 33; Vilas-Matas, *The Illogic of Kassel*.

museums (opened 1779), albeit bomb-scarred, which became the exhibition's principal venue; and – as documenta's founding director, Arnold Bode proposed – it could look to the new unburdened by identification with any significant artist school, 'ism', or tradition.¹⁰

Bode had organized three modern art exhibitions in Kassel in the 1920s, but worked on installations for trade fairs and pavilions at world exhibitions after the Nazis took power. His flair for staging spectacles would become an institutional trait. Alongside local businessmen and civic leaders, his principal co-founder was the art historian and former Nazi Werner Haftmann, whose *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (1954) provided an influential and authoritative art historical framing. Haftmann took a 'universalist' approach emphasising art's autonomy, favouring forms of abstraction that for the first documenta (1955) were situated historically by looking back to Weimar Germany, bypassing the war years, and introduced anthropologically by photographs of African tribal masks, archaic Greek portraits, Pre-Columbian sculptures, and Mesopotamian castings.¹¹

Realist works and their politics of representation were sublimated, distinguishing art of the 'free West' from socialist realism; works from East Germany were not included until documenta 6 (1977). For all its rhetorical universalism, then, the first exhibition adopted what Walter Grasskamp has called a 'selective Eurocentrism'. Over half of the artists presented were German or Italian; no Jewish artists were included, and women, Black, Asian, and 'peripheral' European artists (the Baltic, South East and Central Europe) were absent or significantly underrepresented.¹²

It was, however, successful in gaining recognition and by its second edition (1959) was already inspiring the establishment of new collections, contemporary art museums, and an

¹⁰ Writing in 1954, Bode noted: 'Kassel lies in a border zone. [It] was totally destroyed and is actively rebuilding. It can be an example thirty kilometres from the border [with the Iron Curtain]...Kassel is not burdened by artist groups and political-artistic linkages...Kassel doesn't want to build on old traditions...but rather wants to create...a new living tradition, whose basic idea is...expandable.' Floyd, "d is for documenta".

¹¹ Grasskamp, "Becoming Global" and "For Example, *Documenta*".

¹² Haftmann denied Jewish artists had been targeted as 'degenerate' and maintained a public silence on his Nazi affiliation, not least perhaps as the Italian government sought his arrest for his involvement in the interrogation and torture of a captive who was later shot. Hickley, "This Show Sets the Direction of Art".

incipient rise in biennials.¹³ The artistic emphasis remained broadly similar, although the period covered was shortened to works post-1945 and many more Americans were featured. As Grasskamp noted, this *temporal contraction and geographical expansion* from its centre in Kassel became documenta's '*law of motion*'.

By 1964, then, the focus was on much more recent art still; Bode now dubbed it a 'Museum of 100 Days'. The retrospective element disappeared altogether in documenta IV (1968), with a glimpse of the future supposedly afforded by the very latest art. As the legitimating authority of art history faded, the spectacle of exhibiting became more prominent and its curatorial operation – especially its blindspots – more visible. With the departures of Haftmann and Bode, the stage was set for the emergence of the independent curator, famously with Harald Szeemann's appointment to direct documenta V (1972) – now a '100 Day Event' (Chapter 2). Whilst ending with a financial deficit and a public dispute between curator and institution – a foretaste of documenta¹⁴ – it was nevertheless a scandalous success. Guest curators were from then on invited to direct each exhibition (now quinquennial), briefed to mark the leading edge of contemporary art, adding incrementally to art's history. Each edition became a curatorial statement, an authorial role that risked conflict with the artists forming their exhibition material.

These features of documenta – its North Atlantic perspective, its 'history of the present', and its lionisation of the white male curator-author – increasingly prompted anxiety, doubt, and calls for renewal from the 1990s. Only then were artists from Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America presented on a more equal footing. Catherine David became its first woman to lead the programme, assembling documenta X (1997) with a curatorial team placing greater emphasis on discourse (notably post-structuralism and postcolonial theory), and featuring installations and video art.¹⁴ After leading the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Okwui Enwezor then became documenta's first Black curator. His curatorial team aimed to

¹³ Handberg, "The Shock of the Contemporary". A young Hans Haacke, who featured in documenta¹⁴, also acted as a guard at the exhibition, a formative influence on his later work of institutional critique.

¹⁴ This dimension was heavily gendered in critiques of David's approach, as somehow 'cold' and lacking sensuousness, though a subtle antisemitism may have been at work also. Richter, "Being Singular/Plural". David also later featured as Krauss's 'worthy opponent' in *Under Blue Cup* (Chapter 8) for precisely these aspects.

decentre documenta11 (2002) through four ‘platforms’ – panel discussions, lectures, and debates – in Vienna, New Delhi, St Lucia, and Lagos before the fifth in Kassel coinciding with the exhibition. Contemporaneous with the New Institutionalism (Chapter 4), social and relational aesthetics provided another focus, notably with Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument* in the immigrant working class district of Norstadt. Enwezor observed,

My sense of it was that the jury wanted a choice that could be disruptive of the old paradigm but still not abandon the almost mythic ideal of this Mount Olympus of exhibitions.¹⁵

This tension between strategies of disruption and continuing Olympian progress appeared to mark the limitations of curatorial critique. The institutionalisation of critique appeared only to grant the exhibitionary complex – and the curator function – an even greater authority.¹⁶ Moreover, the incorporation of non-Western artists within an implicitly ‘universal’ but nevertheless ‘Western’ value structure risked erasing their differences. Critics like Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie and Anthony Downey then doubted whether such large-scale exhibitions could attempt ‘the revaluation of art from the periphery to the center, without subsuming, misrepresenting, and excluding artists in vast new spectacles’.¹⁷

Appearing at an impasse, documenta 12 (2007) saw a slight retrenchment; documenta(13) – ‘directed’ by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev – then marked a disavowal of the curatorial title whilst retaining its privileges and authority.¹⁸ More progressive biennials in the 2010s (including Athens), meanwhile, were reflecting a dramatic rise in activist art after the 2007-08 financial crash and adopting a curatorial experimentalism emphasising both the exhibition as event and the public sphere.

The task for Adam Szymczyk’s curatorial team for documenta14 was therefore to build on David’s and Enwezor’s examples whilst critically transforming its institutional form. The implicit universalist metaphysics had to be dismantled, not for a ‘post-truth exhibition’ but

¹⁵ Gardner and Green, “Post-North?”.

¹⁶ ‘The paradox was that, as *Documenta11* began to exert its massive influence on subsequent biennials, Enwezor’s success quickly cemented the very curatorial authority he was seeking to destabilize.’ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117; and Green and Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta*, 198-9, and 205 n.30.

¹⁸ Richter, “Being Singular/Plural”.

to experiment with different ontologies.¹⁹ documenta had to be decentred such that it could not simply 'return to normal' and so incorporate its own critiques. To change its 'law of motion', a *post*-representational and performative approach was required that shifted its material weight.

By physically co-locating documenta in Athens, Szymczyk aimed to dislodge those universal values for which it acts as a synecdoche: for a German and North Atlantic predication of 'the West'; and for the contemporary moment of art history understood as a single, global category of historical experience oriented toward 'the future'.²⁰ These values inhered in the immobility of its 'centre'. Szymczyk described the approach as

searching for footnotes – it's not the main text but always annotations, cross-references....We are not proposing any unified, muscular narration in this exhibition but looking at things as a kind of interpolation of many viewpoints that are produced by living outside of the 'main place'.²¹

This was dramatized by documenta14's Athenian adventure. Shaped amidst the 'Greek crisis', it deliberately highlighted the history of Germany's relation to the country and the West's to its defining 'civilisation' and philosophy as *a structure that produces crises*. This structure correlated with documenta's own 'law of motion' and its crises – of the authorial curator, of integration with the art market, of institutionalism, of false universalism, and of defining the futural 'new' in relation to a singular 'art history'. documenta14's curators aimed to improvise a *different* movement.

Before jumping ahead, I consider the implications of this curatorial manoeuvre, firstly by examining the critical conjunctions of returning this 'Olympian ideal' to Athens. This was not an 'arrival' or destiny, crucially, but a *new* point of departure for its 'return leg' in Kassel.

¹⁹ This critique – missing the point, I argue – came from Jeni Fulton, who connected her dismissal of the programme's featuring of musical scores with the curators' disavowal of the fundamentally 'post-conceptual' nature of art (Chapter 8) and their subsequent withdrawal of explanatory or guiding texts. Fulton, "How documenta 14 Failed Everyone".

²⁰ Möntmann, "Plunging into the World".

²¹ Szymczyk in conversation with Enwezor, speaking shortly before the Athens opening. This referenced a poem and artwork by Naeem Mohaiemen, published in *South as a State of Mind* #6, the first of four editions edited by documenta14's curators as guests of the journal's founder, Marina Fokidis. Haus der Kunst, "Adam Szymczyk interviewed," from 1h 8'10"; Mohaiemen, "Volume Eleven."

Reaching ‘home’ from this Odyssey, I argue, would not return documenta to itself unchanged. Following in Jean-Luc Nancy’s footsteps, secondly, I aim to elaborate the structural logic that Szymczyk aimed to displace. Nancy registers the impediment created by the *desire to return*, the tragic drama of treating ‘crises’ in Western history and philosophy as the result of deviations to be resolved by finding a way back to the ‘true path’. I show that his argument treads carefully using the metaphors of walking, orienteering, gravity, pondering, debt, and weight in ways that track a key lesson to be learned from Oliveros’s *Extreme Slow Walk*.

The foundations lie in ruins: (Un)learning from Athens

The tie between futureness and pastness is assured by the bridging concept, that of being-in-debt.
Paul Ricœur²²

documenta14 received considerable criticism from visual art media, Athenian commentators and sections of its arts communities, and from (predominantly) far right German politicians. It was considered obscure yet too obvious; over-complex and over-simple; too distant – over there – and too proximate – over here; it owed too much whilst paying too little; it was too backward-looking, anachronistic, yet also too concerned with contemporary social concerns, exemplified by its music programme.²³ Its ‘working title’, *Learning from Athens* – which Szymczyk related to Cornelius Cardew’s *The Great Learning* – especially drew the ire of the offended. Putting issues of knowledge and power in the frame, who was learning what from whom?

These mirrored oppositions highlight the many tensions and identity positions that the curatorial team was addressing. Rather than taking a stand for one side, documenta14’s *movement to and from* the Greek capital afforded a shifting – not a fixed – perspective. Not only did Athens have lessons to offer Kassel; it also offered a critical *distance* from which to reflect on documenta’s own history, context, and self-identity. With one foot in Athens, it

²² Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 363.

²³ Thorn, “Keeping Score”: ‘I wondered at this move from gallery spaces to sites of official musical culture: it seemed symptomatic of a show that makes substantial claims about what large-scale exhibitions can do in the 21st century while looking to the sonic avant-gardes of the last century for answers. ‘Learning from Athens’ leans heavily, too heavily I think, on these histories.’

was possible to be simultaneously corporeally immanent with the encounters presented there *and* sufficiently detached to view its origins on the horizon in Kassel.²⁴

The team was sensitive to its role as a self-invited guest, relocating to Athens two years prior. As immigrants – albeit potentially powerful visitors – no simple re-identification or process of ‘going native’ was possible. It was precisely this counterpoise of putting documenta’s own power on display – or to reveal it in a state of vulnerability – whilst trying to operate without throwing around its institutional weight that pressured the dynamic of this edition. This was dramatically thematized by the press launch on 6 April 2017, the 76th anniversary of the German invasion of Greece, which opened with a curtain rising on stage to reveal the curators and participating artists performing a ‘Continuum’ developed from Christou’s *Epicycle* (1968).

Treating the institution as a ‘divided self’, Szymczyk’s most audacious move, and arguably the most controversial, was his distinction between the Kassel-based documenta gGmbH – the institution incorporated – and documenta as an implicitly universal (singular plural) proposition. Ending both his essay introducing the curatorial project of documenta14 in the *Reader* and in an ‘Exergue’ – or extended footnote – to the *Daybook*, he suggested that beyond its legal and financial stakeholders (the City of Kassel, the State of Hesse, and the Kulturstiftung des Bundes), ‘documenta does not exist in the strong sense of the word’.²⁵ Rather than an extension of German cultural policy,

documenta must be considered an autonomous, commonly owned, transnational and inclusive self-organized artistic undertaking – one that is carried out by a multitude and not limited to any location in particular. Such a scene is composed of visitors experiencing and debating the exhibition and its preceding stages; artists contributing their time and work; and other makers, including the documenta team and all its collaborators and friends working long and often unpaid hours, as we attempt to create a transformative experience in real time. Understood in these terms, documenta is thus owned collectively and by no one in particular.

²⁴ I draw here on the notion of ‘Two Standpoints’ developed by Thomas Nagel in *Equality and Partiality*, elaborated by Ricoeur, of occupying simultaneously both a singular or personal perspective, a view ‘from here’, and also an abstraction to an impersonal position, a ‘viewpoint, which is a sort of non-viewpoint...indivisibly epistemic and moral.’ *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 315.

²⁵ Szymczyk, “Iterability and Otherness,” 40.

Distinguishing between the institutional centre and its moving parts transferred the weight of documenta's authority from the presiding legitimacy or authorship of the curator across the elements assembled for the event. The burden of responsibility for this movement was then contested. Whilst the curatorial team was embedding itself in Athens, the company management remained fixed in Kassel. Tussles over finance were, perhaps, inevitable. Szymczyk insisted on treating Athens as an equal partner, not only as a 'platform' or sideshow to the main event in Germany. That meant a comparable profile in the programme: the principal exhibition was held at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens (EMST), which in turn presented its own collection – which it had been unable until then to show fully in its own galleries – at the Fridericianum.

It also meant an equitable distribution of the budget. The curatorial team later argued that the extreme reluctance of documenta gmbH to accept this precipitated the €7.6 million deficit (from a €37 million budget), after German politicians – notably from the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) – sought to use the shortfall as a political tool in the September 2017 elections by laying blame on the Greek programme.²⁶ The irony of this was not lost on the curators. As everyday realities of German-Greek relations – and with a classical heritage – debt and indebtedness, including reparations, were thematic in the movement from Kassel to Athens itself.

Where the first documenta was staged in the post-War wreckage of the neoclassical Fridericianum, documenta14 opened in a city reconstructed – by architects trained (in the neoclassical style) in Berlin, Munich, and Copenhagen, and with a Bavarian king – in the image of its 'classical' ruins.²⁷ Greek independence from Ottoman rule (1831) was bought by accepting an unpayable 'classical debt', the West's ideal self-image in ancient Greece, in return for military assistance and war loans on ruinous terms by Philhellenists like the

²⁶ See documenta14, "Statement by the Curatorial Team". Many of the artists and contributors to documenta – myself included – also issued a statement, see documenta 14, "Statement by Artists."

²⁷ Hanink, *The Classical Debt*. Shortly after his accession, King Otto moved the capital of this new antique nation to Athens, at that time 'an insignificant town' with a population of about 12,000 that European travellers often described as resembling 'an African village'. In addition to the building programme he initiated to restore the city to the image of its legendary glory, structures in the vicinity of the classical sites that failed to conform to the ideal were forcibly removed. This 'purification' process was of a piece with the adoption of *Katharevousa*, a version of the Greek language modelled on its classical form with additions from foreign tongues cut out.

London Greek Committee – loans on which the First Hellenic Republic unsurprisingly soon defaulted.²⁸ Exemplary in this was Shelley’s call to arms – ‘*We are all Greeks*. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece’ – made in his last play, *Hellas* (1821), itself a reworking of Aeschylus’s *Persians*, the proceeds from which he pledged to the Greek cause. A tragic, tragic irony.

The ‘Greek ideal’, as Shelley proclaimed, was also the glory of ‘Western Art’. At least from the birth of Latin literature as a project of translating Greek drama, the remnants of Hellenic culture were plundered as models, paradigms, and as the foundations of antiquarian collections that provided the archival pre-history for European museums. The Olympian ‘torch’ was ‘saved’ by the Romans from the vanquished Greeks who were manifestly its unworthy heirs, and in turn reclaimed from its aberrant path – via its Byzantine and Ottoman ‘deviations’ – by Renaissance and early Modern Europeans as keepers of the true flame. It was this that the 1936 Berlin Olympics ritualised symbolically. The historian K. E. Fleming has described it as ‘a different form of colonialism, in which the history and ideology, rather than territory, of another country have been claimed, invaded, and annexed.’²⁹

Indeed, the ardour to claim rightful ownership of this classical legacy produced its own ruins. For example, the Venetian siege and bombardment of Ottoman positions in 1687, including troops from Hesse, destroyed the Parthenon’s roof causing ‘the greatest physical damage to the Acropolis since it had been sacked by Xerxes in 480BCE’. It also rendered its fragmented monuments more ‘portable’, ready for plunder. documenta14’s *Listening Space* adopted the image of a pair of marble ears – now in the permanent collection of Kassel’s Schloss Wilhelmshöhe – cleft and taken from the city at this time, as its emblem.³⁰

²⁸ The ‘classical debt’, here, is akin to the notion of ‘primordial debt’. See Graeber, *Debt*.

²⁹ Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, 71. The Renaissance enthusiasm for antiquity – the ransacking of monasteries for its textual traces, the offering of Greek grammars and texts by Aldus Manutius (‘Europe’s first professional publisher’) by the end of the 15th century, and the establishment of studies in classical languages with the Collège Royal in France in 1530 and Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge in the 1540s – is consistent and broadly contemporaneous both with the development of early museum collections and with Arendt’s contention (echoed by Kosselleck and Ricoeur among others) that the modern invention of History emerged from the *secularisation* of Roman Europe’s Christian legacy.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86-89, and Roelstraete, “When, and where,” 469.



Fig. 28: Marble Ears (Attica, 100 BCE – 400 AD)

Szymczyk was keen to display the connection of museum holdings – and art history – to such acts of theft, indicating the parallels between antiquities collections (such as the British Museum’s claims to the Parthenon Marbles) and the recently revealed Gurlitt Collection of around 1,500 art works, many looted by the Nazis from their Jewish owners.³¹ The study and promotion of classical remains, pre-eminently by Johann Winckelmann in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (‘History of the Art of Antiquity’, 1764), was a catalyst for the emerging disciplines of aesthetics and classics in Germany. Classical statuary became the model and ideal. With disastrous consequences, Winckelmann’s conviction that one of their principal attributes was their *whiteness* – a lustrous and beautiful complexion that supposedly reflected the superiority of skin colour – also proved murderously influential.

Such bedazzlement by the sculptor’s art as the monument to an ideal is, of course, the curse of Pygmalion whose Venus, ‘white as snow, an image of perfect feminine beauty’, provided Ovid with a counterpart to Narcissus.

This heavenly woman appeared to be real; you’d surely suppose her
alive and ready to move, if modesty didn’t preclude it;
art was concealed by art to a rare degree. Pygmalion’s
marvelling soul was inflamed with desire for a semblance of body.

³¹ Whilst unsuccessful in gaining permission to show the Collection in exhibition, it was introduced in the *Reader* and thematised in other ways.

Again and again his hands moved over his work to explore it.
Flesh or ivory? Not, it couldn't be ivory now!³²

The *passion* for antiquities and their reclamation from burial to museums (another correlation with the mausoleum) gathered pace through the nineteenth century, not least with authorised digs initiated by the new Greek Republic.³³ The Kritios Boy, for example, was resurrected from his resting place and – with severed head restored, recapitulated, crowned – raised on his plinth after his discovery on the Acropolis site in 1866 as part of excavations making way for Athens's first archaeological museum. It is not surprising that the near-contemporary production of WS Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871) scored a hit (inspiring George Bernard Shaw's adaptation).

Three points need emphasis here. Firstly, the operation of male desire with this classical ideal was not only a matter of identification, a form of self-recognition, but also a project, a future-oriented task. To 'return' to the origin was an end to be accomplished. 'The one way for us to become great, perhaps inimitable', Winckelmann declared (pre-empting Trump's slogan), 'is by imitating the ancients.'³⁴ At the same time, secondly, this was an impossible union, a fantasy endlessly deferred. (Gilbert's twist in having his sculptor form a likeness of his wife conveys well this structure of seeking the unattainable in what one already 'has'.) Indeed the attempt to reconstruct the glory of the ancients – and thus 'repay' the classical debt for good – by hosting the 2004 Olympic Games and then opening Bernard Tschumi's New Acropolis Museum (2009) precipitated the crushing downgrading of Greek debt amid accusations of a national temperament prone to laziness, corruption, mismanagement and profligacy – precisely the colonial framing on which the theft of antiquities had been 'legitimated', to put them in 'safekeeping' from a people constitutively incapable of valuing their true worth.

Thirdly, this was the *foundational* lesson. It was not only a modern phenomenon but a return to school. The classical ideal had itself been an Athenian one going back at least to

³² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 394.

³³ 'Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art.' Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum".

³⁴ Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, 108.

Pericles's funeral oration, given 'immortality' by Thucydides. By his account, the city state's claim to fame came from its leadership of combined Greek forces in defeating the Persians – the regional superpower – in 480 BCE. This came in the wake of the destruction of the Acropolis by Xerxes's army when the retreating Athenians abandoned their citadel on losing the Battle of Thermopylae. Returning victorious, they were confronted with rubble and broken statuary – including the Kritios Boy – which they buried in mass graves. Some of the ruins, however, were deliberately not interred but *displayed* amongst the new foundations to signal the task of rebirth. They were presented as a compulsion *not to forget*, an historic and unpayable debt burden that required annual tribute from the other settlements of the Delian League (a 'defensive' coalition against the Persians). The annual spectacle of the funerary oration became a signal ritual, held to commemorate the grateful dead and to initiate their orphans into armed service at the time of the drama festival, when visiting dignitaries were expected to pay their dues. Pericles had the League's treasury moved to the Acropolis, where it controversially funded the grand building project of returning Athens to its glory. He proclaimed:

Taking everything together then, I declare that *our city is an education to Greece....Athens, alone of the states we know, comes to her testing time in a greatness that surpasses what was imagined of her. In her case, and in her case alone, no invading army is ashamed at being defeated, and no subject can complain of being governed by people unfit for their responsibilities. Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now.*³⁵

The legend would be impossible to live up to, as some contemporaries objected and later generations found at great cost. The medicinal reading was always the same, at once curative and sickness: to re-member or bring to life what was already dead, to 'reclaim' the essence or centre that was constitutively past. Greek ruins continued to fuel the desires of others' dreams of greatness, a sculptured brilliance awaiting an impossible reanimation.³⁶

³⁵ Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 147-8, emphasis added. I note, here, with Ricœur the iconographic operation at work. It is *as an image* that the debt to the past and the instruction (or lesson) of its obligations are constructed, for the image (the *eikon*) not only stands for something absent – dead, ruined – but as itself also makes visible the absent thing *as absent*. This would, for example, be the logic of hypotyposis in historiographical narrative. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 265.

³⁶ Roman glory was trumpeted on the carnage of Carthage and Corinth in Polybius's *Histories*, whilst the Empire's own crises catalysed Constantine's 'New Rome' – the first of many – built on the (formerly) Greek settlement of Byzantium. Incorporated into the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, the Greeks' 'Western'

It was no surprise that documenta14 was accused – albeit unfairly – by some Greeks of participating in ‘thanatotourism’, offering the spectacle of a devastated country under the tutelage of the European Central Bank, IMF, and World Bank. It would be more appropriate, however, to consider it an attempt to unlearn Pericles’s ‘education’ and so to cancel the *structure of indebtedness* on which it was based.

Johanna Hanink has described the ‘lessons’ of Pericles’s oration as ‘the Athenian brand’ with four aspects that were emblematic for the programme. Firstly, Athens’s leadership had secured all of Greece from the barbarian Persians – indeed, the meaning of ‘barbarian’ shifted from ‘foreign’ to become an *Eastern* threat, oriented according to qualities of ‘despotism, material extravagance, and cruelty and disregard for life’.³⁷ The similarities between the Delian League and NATO have often been observed. Kassel’s Cold War border position similarly marked the separation of West from East, the ‘free world’ from the ‘totalitarian’. The process of decolonisation at documenta14 not only then involved an embrace of artists from the ‘non-West’ – notably from the Global South – but also artists already in or now incorporated into ‘the West’ who did not conform to its late-modern identity and art history: Ost-modernists of the former Soviet Bloc; artists from indigenous communities, such as the Sámi in northern Norway; and Greece’s contemporary ‘others’, notably from Albania.

The city state was *unique*, Pericles claimed, for its democratic system and the ‘rituals that reinforced it’, rhetorically open to all-comers and providing ideals that were worth fighting and dying for. The curatorial team emphasised constitutive exclusions to this happy image of Western polity: refugees, such as the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra; and those crushed by neo-colonial oppression and forms of dictatorship within the ‘democratic’ order, including victims of torture.³⁸ The *Reader* likewise featured ‘Documents of Empire’ and ‘of

privilege was itself rendered questionable: simultaneously part of Europe and insufficiently European, it was damned by its own mythology.

³⁷ Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, in Hannink, *The Classical Debt*, 48-49; Kosselleck, *Futures Past*, chapter 10.

³⁸ Regina José Galindo, one of the featured artists, suffered waterboarding, being shackled and chained as part of the ‘civil war’ in Guatemala. For documenta14 in Kassel, she detoured Duchamp’s *Étant donnés* by

Decoloniality' that aimed to undo colonial rule and to open possibilities for political transformation.³⁹

The Public Programme – *The Parliament of Bodies* – was controversially sited in one of two buildings used as a headquarters by the military police during the junta years (1967-74): one that had been turned into a white cube gallery; and the other housing the museum of resistance. Its lead curator, Paul B. Preciado, explained the programme's intent:

We need a new narrative, a different way of telling ourselves the history of Europe, because if we continue telling the story as leading from the mythical time of Greek democracy to the European Community and the Euro and the troika, this is a catastrophe, right?⁴⁰

Thirdly, the monuments of Athens proclaimed it *the* home of civilization as an Olympian ideal and dwelling of the Gods, an identity and a quasi-spiritual mission adopted in documenta's founding. Alongside an abundance of artists absented from the genealogies of modern and contemporary Western Art – and a general avoidance of artists represented by major commercial galleries and collections – Szymczyk and his colleagues emphasised the unmonumental, the unspectacular, the ephemeral, durational, processual, the perishing and precarious. Their turn to music, sound, listening, and performance was indicative of this.

Lastly, but by no means least, the city's foundations were built on the glory of its exceptional ancestors, on the unpayable and unperishable classical debt that Pericles bequeathed his successors. documenta inherited this premiss from an Enlightenment tradition of German classics and aesthetics, with their colonisation of idealised Greek models. Its independent curators – exemplifying the curator function – helped to secure an

replacing his key/peephole with the barrel of a gun as the only way for viewers to see her within an enclosed room – Latimer, *Daybook*, 12 May.

³⁹ Colonialist documents included: *Le Code Noir* (1685), defining the conditions of slaves in the French colonial empire; the *General Act of the Berlin Conference* (1885), regulating European colonization and trade in Africa; the *Aboriginals Protection Act* (1869), giving the British sovereign rights over native Australians; the *Indian Act* (1872), claiming similar control on behalf of the Canadian Government over the peoples of the 'North West Territories'; the Marshall Plan (1948), regulating the post-War settlement to 'stabilise' Europe on American free market terms; the *McKee Treaty* (1790), claiming as property ancestral lands of First Nation Canadians, on behalf of George III, aided by Hessian troupes from Kassel; and the *Treaty of Waitangi* (1840), mandating British rule of New Zealand. Decolonial treaties included: the *Sámi Act* (1986-87), 'authorising' the creation of a Sámi Parliament in Norway; and the *Zapatista (EZLN) Women's Revolutionary Law* (1994).

⁴⁰ Preciado and Sagri, "Exposed to the Unknown".

unbroken continuity for art with the majesty of its past, beyond the crises of 1960s modernism. By dividing the programme between Kassel and Athens, documenta14's curatorial team and artists aimed to dispense with this debt structure, unwilling to play the role of tribute act towards the institution's idealised past or to impose it on visitors. They needed different ways of relating artistic practices and those encountering them meaningfully to time and memory that were not dependent on an enduring history fixed immemorially but mobilised, *in* time. This is the context in which they adopted practices from Christou and Oliveros.

Their approach can be understood in the first instance as a shift both of documenta's institutional weight and in the implications of the concept of weight. Attached to the notion of debt, weight functions as a burden, a load *external* to the subject obliged to carry it. It is in this sense that 'the weight of history' presses on those condemned to renew it – and that 'gravitas', the capacity to bear the load, is expected of those with its authority.⁴¹ The classical debt could never be settled for precisely this reason, but was levied on each Sisyphean generation. The curators did not carry documenta's institutional weight with them but distributed it among the publics, producers, partners, and artists that the programme comprised. An alternative possibility then emerges of bearing weight across this collective body through rates of motion and flow, speed and (extreme) slowness. This marks a turning, I claim, from the archival collection as an externalised mnemotechnic preserved by the curator function to an embodied and active remembering akin to the *vestige* (or 'footprint'). Movement, the passage in *and as* time, becomes essential. Memory moves.

It will be helpful briefly to trace the steps of this movement alongside Jean-Luc Nancy. This will amplify the stakes involved, clarify the curators' rationale for turning to 'musical' paradigms, and so prepare the way for surprising connections between listening, walking, remembering, and being in time with others. If documenta's 'centre' was no longer fixed in Kassel and moving only as a form of territorial expansion – its 'law of motion' – then a

⁴¹ 'To the idea of debt belongs the character of "charge," of "weight," of burden. In it we find the themes of heritage and transmission, stripped of the idea of moral lapse....Inasmuch as it obligates, the debt does not exhaust itself in the idea of the burden either: it relates the being affected by the past to the potentiality-of-being turned toward the future.' Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 381. On gravitas, see Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 123.

different temporal movement was needed, not one in which the centre was carried unchanging over time but one in which centredness is *in the movement itself*.

Stepping into the Unknown

Nancy turned to the thematics of weight and gravity alongside the problem of ‘the return’, re-centring from the limit, reclaiming business-as-usual. ‘The Forgetting of Philosophy’ – followed and joined by ‘The Weight of a Thought’, published as *The Gravity of Thought* – was written in the late 1980s as a riposte to those who would cancel the work of post-structuralism (and before that Heidegger, Nietzsche, Marx, and Hegel) in the name of a ‘return’ to the true path of thought. Such calls were symptomatic, he argued. For ‘the aging West’ they registered an impasse. There could be no return to a philosophy that would conveniently forget its own dependence on language that was no longer transparent to its own operation. ‘Truth’ was now the name for an event, for something happening *in time*. Arguments carried weight not because of their sources but because of their effects.

Yet such a crisis was not new but recurrent, a series of repetitions. If the ‘European philosophical tradition’ was essentially ‘a series of footnotes to Plato’ – as Alfred North Whitehead characterised it – then these feet had a habit of going astray.⁴² ‘We have thus seen – at the very least – a crisis of the ancient Greek world, a crisis of the classical Greek world, a crisis of the Roman world, a crisis of the Christian world, and now (this is the whole history of the twentieth century) a crisis of the modern world.’⁴³ He could as easily have been describing Western Art. Moreover, in each instance the return was figured as a debt that could be cancelled through restoration, ‘the Solon of thought’ (invoking the Ancient Athenian statesman and his debt amnesty). As with the fantasy of returning the classical debt, however, the true beginning or uncorrupted secure path could not be found, indeed was unfounded, abyssal. In ruins.

⁴² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 39. Whitehead is pertinently echoing Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, for whom it was Ancient Greece ‘in whose name alone the cultivated man of Europe (and in particular we Germans) feels at home.’ Cited in Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 370.

⁴³ Nancy, *Gravity of Thought*, 13.

The gap exposed was rather, as with Pygmalion, a function of desire directed towards an identity that was constitutively split between a symbolic form and a transcendental and irrecoverable essence. Meaning lay tantalisingly outside of and anterior to modes of signification that Western philosophy employed to constate it; indeed, 'this obligatory antecedence governs the very structure or operation of signification.'⁴⁴ The loss of meaning, or rather of failing in language to coincide with a meaning that would authorise it, was essential for its always-potential reconstitution. Its 'presence at a distance' was produced through a constant displacement, a lack that structured desire as the will to intend, to be meaningful, the will for self-closure – destined to be unfulfilled. 'In each case, what is at stake is the very meaning of *orientation*: that which can rule, direct, or even be the norm for the movement of the Occident toward what it has, by essence, lost.'⁴⁵

The 'occidental mode of thought' – of representation – had reached its end, exhausted, unable to 'return'. Philosophy encountered itself at its limit.⁴⁶ Instead of returning to the same impossible point – 'There Is No Alternative' – it was time for 'another movement' that would 'sweep away' the mediation of presence and distance as mutually constitutive, and instead find meaning as something – like a 'musical notation' – that 'takes place *between us* and not between signifier, signified, and referent.'⁴⁷ Meaning becomes constitutive of a collective subject, both 'empirical and transcendental', without origin in any anthropology, humanism or antihumanism. 'We: the community of meaning sets itself in motion as community.'⁴⁸

Exposed to the risk of not knowing or understanding ourselves, Nancy proposed, we might find *wonder* (philosophy's foundational affect) in the meaning that we are. Meaning could be neither owned nor levied, but involved an opening to or welcoming of our own strange becoming that could be understood – he suggested – as a shift in weight, a bodily

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34. Nancy notes (40) that this subject of self-representation is always 'the object of a certain vision, referred back to the latter's optic system, to its orientation, and to the distance at which the subject stands in order to see the object.'

⁴⁶ 'Their discourses in one way or another always take responsibility for a closure of signification, for the payment of an infinite debt to Meaning, *and* for the opening of a breach or an excess, the abandonment of debt and its economy.' *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

movement. 'If "thinking" [*penser*] means "weighing" [*peser*], it is first of all in *letting* what weighs *weigh*, of feeling [*éprouver*] today the weight of the West reaching its destination, of letting it weigh with all the weight of its exhaustion and its venture of meaning.'⁴⁹ This could only take place at the limit of signification, where thought was not immaterial, ideal, or transcendental, but also material, embodied, and temporal. Gravity presented itself as the materiality of reason, not weighing from outside but a 'balancing oscillation *from oneself to oneself*', a constant process of movement and transformation: 'the existence of meaning rather than the meaning of existence.' It is in this sense that

We need an art – if it is an "art" – of thickness, of gravity.⁵⁰

documenta 14's curatorial team searched for other models ('antiauthoritarian, transdisciplinary') at these limits of representation and discourse, discovering 'to our astonishment and with joy, that other modes of address are possible'.⁵¹ Alongside practices such as 'strollology', Lucius Burckhardt's wry examination of the production of the aesthetic as a corollary of modes of transport – of the journey rather than the arrival – musical models offered untried possibilities.⁵²

The *Listening Space* – curated by Paolo Thorsen-Nagel – provided a focus for the musical, sounding, and aural focus at documenta14, a 'vessel' for exploring the programme's wider concerns and an experimental mechanism for practising ways of relating artists and audiences. It aimed to address 'sonic conditions that go beyond aural signification' to show 'how sound's physical, social, and political dimensions can be performed and heard.'⁵³ The

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵¹ Latimer and Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter".

⁵² Strollology was emblematic for the curatorial team. Developed by Burckhardt, a landscape theorist, with his artist wife Annemarie – whose 'Fake catalogue of documenta' (1991, *Der falsche documenta-Katalog*) had been withdrawn from publication on documenta's 'humourless' insistence – and his students at the University of Kassel (1973-1997), it proposed that the aesthetic was no longer marked, autonomous and distinct other than through the otherwise arbitrary framing of the museum. Now, 'the way or route to a place can no longer be taken for granted, but must be reproduced in, or represented by, the object itself.' Burckhardt, *Why is Landscape Beautiful?*, 229. On the links between spatial organisation, movement and speed, memory and forgetting, see Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*.

⁵³ Thorsen-Nagel, "Listening": 'Listening seems as permeable an act as sound itself, always changing, never twice the same, and yet it registers with other parts of the human self and, in turn, directly illuminates our knowledge and feelings about all kinds of matter and experience.' As just one example of the programme's political intent, the four pianists of the Kukuruz Quartet performed seminal works by the African American

relation of aurality to the production of temporality in particular informed the curatorial team's challenge to address documenta's historical form. This applied across the whole programme, not only the *Listening Space*, as an undercurrent – a *continuum* – that permeated its processes and concerns. It was not simply an exhibition of music but involved a *musicalisation of the exhibition form*. Musical paradigms provided *curatorial methods*.

In the spring of 2016, the team of documenta14 proposed the first of many formats that might enable and open onto another way of making and thinking – away from control, and without fear. “Continuum,” a term borrowed from twentieth-century Greek composer Jani Christou, describes an open form of common action, a score for activities that may occur over an undefined period of time, engaging different actors and their contributions without a prescribed scenario. The Continuum thus became a model that allowed us to receive and work with artists invited to documenta 14....⁵⁴

I turn first to this example, introducing Christou's notions of ‘continuum’ and ‘metapraxis’ as modes of action adopted for the curation of documenta14, temporal forms based on both collective memory and irreversible change.

Memory, History, Event: Metamorphosis

*I don't make music; I philosophise and the result is music.*⁵⁵

Christou was both Greek and not Greek, a composer and not a composer. The son of a Greek industrialist and chocolate manufacturer, he was born in Heliopolis, Egypt in 1926. Only after Nasser gained power, in 1960, did he move to Athens – and Chios – where he began promoting new music until his tragic early death, in a car accident, in 1970. At the war's end he had moved to King's College, Cambridge, studying philosophy with Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell. Aside from private lessons in harmony, counterpoint, and composition – with the Alban Berg specialist Hans Ferdinand Redlich – and a course in orchestration and analysis, he was largely self-taught and musically independent. Christou's

composer Julius Eastman, including *Evil Nigger* and *Gay Guerrilla* (both 1979) alongside *Fugue No.1* and *Buddha* (both 1983), at Megaron – Athens Concert Hall – opposite the US Embassy, with its flag proudly erect, on 4 July. On Eastman, see Packer and Leach, *Gay Guerilla*.

⁵⁴ Szymczyk, “Iterability and Otherness,” 34.

⁵⁵ Jani Christou cited in Zouliatis, “Jani Christou,” 1496.

other abiding interest came through his brother Evangelos, who studied with Carl Jung in Zurich, where he may have met the pioneer of the collective unconscious.⁵⁶

His musical development shares many similarities with Cage's (chapter 6). His early works pursued the Second Viennese School's concern with material constantly evolving and changing through time. With his arrival in Athens, he began to establish a methodical approach on the principle of 'a dynamic *a priori*': a dialectic of 'patterns and permutations' – a thematic or identity drive, a will to return; and a variational drive, an impulse for transformation – such that no iteration was the same whilst underlying structuring patterns provided shape. The notion of 'continuum' indicated the becoming-audible of a background formation inhering through the dynamic process, somewhat like Cage's mesostics, or a *cantus firmus* 'hidden' by foreground activity.⁵⁷ This principle expanded in significance for Christou beyond the 'medium-specificity' of music, to become a general organizing concept of temporal action.⁵⁸

Fig. 29: Jani Christou



⁵⁶ One of Jung's stories formed the basis of a key late work of Christou's, *The Strychnine Lady*.

⁵⁷ In his notes to *Patterns and Permutations* (1963), Christou describes his use of 'sustained series' – a given combination of notes, held across different instrumental parts – as 'a sound continuum "in" which the "action" may or may not take place. The continuum is not, of course, heard continuously: when it does appear it is as though it has emerged out of the inaudible into the audible.' Lucciano, *Jani Christou*, 46. The similarities with Cage's 'mesostics' are striking.

⁵⁸ 'The music is also the action, while the action becomes the music. Yet the two are separate...the boundaries of music and theatrical action are impossible to define.' *Ibid.*, 109.

His passage to a metamusical conception of composition came in part through creating works for theatre, many with the director Karolos Koun, each based on a Classical Greek drama: *The Persians* (1963), *Prometheus Bound* (1963), *Agamemnon* (1965), *The Frogs* (1966), and *Oedipus Rex* (1969).⁵⁹ Although he regarded this as tangential to work he initiated directly, it occasioned his rejection of any purely sonic determination of musical art.⁶⁰ Pursuing language at its limits, he musicalized text rhythmically and contrapuntally, incorporated recordings of elemental sounds (such as thunder), treated words as sound or as a phonic texture whilst emphasising breathing, turned away from conventional notation, introduced improvisatory sections, and began to conceive his compositions as instructions for ritualised actions synthesizing gesture, music, movement, and choreography.

This culminated in his 'oratorio' *Mysterion* (premiered 1969) which introduced his notion of metapraxis, indicating an irruption into the event of something mysterious, miraculous, exceptional, and transforming.⁶¹ 'Praxis' was the logic of a conventional or habitual action; 'metapraxis' was immanent to a praxis but exploded it from within. An unexpected step. For example, an orchestral conductor observes a praxis, a limited set of gestures required to coordinate an ensemble. A conductor walking, speaking, shouting, or screaming, however, *could* be a metapraxis.



Fig. 30: from Jani Christou, *Enantiodromia*

⁵⁹ Christou also provided the film score for Philip Saville's *Oedipus the King* (1968), starring Christopher Plummer, Orson Welles, and Lili Palmer.

⁶⁰ For his only comedy, on Aristophanes's *The Frogs*, he turned to jazz and pop elements, and also placed a greater emphasis on aspects of ritual.

⁶¹ Of vast scale – with three choruses, sixty instruments, and tape parts – its action was 'set' in the underworld, its text comprising 'magical formulas' in Ancient Egyptian, and its score incorporating both visual and instructional elements for performers to learn their parts like actors their roles. Christou designed the masks and costumes himself, and oversaw the whole production.

An actor or dancer making these gestures would not be a metapraxis, but these could be part of their praxis. Metapraxis was, then, situated, contextual, historical. It was an eruption from a norm.

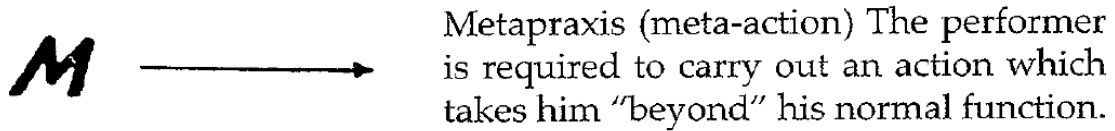


Fig. 31.

It was an instruction for a mode of irreversible change and metamorphosis that was not predicated on determinate negation (something logically anticipated) but on the basis of an order – a continuum – that cast any routine patterned behaviour into uncertainty.⁶² The continuum registered a temporal distortion by which any convention or cultural habit was subject to self-alteration. Even walking could be destabilised. These principles not only applied to Christou’s works, which by extension could never become self-identical with an ‘ideal’ or ‘foundational’ performance; they could be applied – with care – to ways of being more broadly and even to curatorial practices.⁶³

In step with Nancy, metapraxis signalled an opening to the production (or semi-improvisation) of encounters that put the conventions of meaningful perceptions at risk to allow for the emergence of something unknown, unexpected, unpredictable, and potentially revelatory. It was not a case of ‘anything goes’. The aim was to create a situation in which an unspeakable order might occur that was nevertheless necessary, to offer a sense of wonder and awe, just as the ‘lunar pattern’ – the cycle of waxing and waning – might suddenly produce an inexplicable eclipse. It set into motion energies that disturb the

⁶² Christou insisted that praxis and metapraxis ‘are opposites and imply each other’, yet praxis is not determinate – it has no ontological foundation – because it rests on a continuum that is itself unstable and open to transformation. This endless process was informed by Heraclitus, whose principle of ‘enantiodromia’ – the play of opposites without end – provided the title for one of Christou’s last works.

⁶³ Lucciano, *Christou*, 99: ‘A metapraxis is an implosion, a tension under the surface of a single medium which threatens that very medium’s meaning barrier....A violation within a single order of things. Or a subtle pressure against the barrier of meaning which any system generates.’ In one of his last working notes, he wrote: ‘Metapraxis is concerned with breaking through the meaning barrier of a single medium, whatever that medium may be. Whenever that happens, that is music. SO THAT MUSIC CAN BE IN ANY MEDIUM, PROVIDING METAPRAXIS CAN OCCUR. MUSIC CAN BE SILENT.’ Typewritten manuscript, 13 Dec 1969, cited in Zouliatis “Jani Christou,” 1503.

immanent flow of inherent patterning. 'I am concerned with the transformation of acoustical energies into music.'⁶⁴

With *Epicycle* (coinciding with the military junta's putsch), a paradigmatic work for documenta14, Christou's role was more of a curatorial facilitator and the public became co-authors of the experience.⁶⁵ Anybody could participate either in producing the continuum, by using any sustained sound (or keeping a vigil) as long as this was undertaken in a spirit of 'total impassivity' and detachment; or by contributing 'an event', one that could be given only without prior notice, unexpectedly.⁶⁶

The role of the composer has been devalued in order to allow whatever elements were available at the time to behave as symbols of events, and certainly not "artistic events", nor as synthesized events. This is a dangerous game, I know, but it is essential if one is to get to the roots of protoperformance [acting at the limits of signification], the roots of all art (in the last analysis this reflects a questioning of the validity of history itself, and of historical societies which make "art" meaningful).⁶⁷

In many respects, it was less a 'work' than a score elaborating his principles of musical energetics, an opening towards the collective unconscious, the call and movement of memories *beneath* 'the ruins'.⁶⁸ In a pre-echo of Nancy, 'these are not problems in "music", but problems in meaning; and meaning changes all the time, possibly at a quicker rate today than ever before in history.'⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Jani Christou, 'A Credo for Music' (1966), in Lucciano, *Jani Christou*, 92.

⁶⁵ The political dimension of his work became more pronounced in his notes from this time. For example: 'I am therefore concerned with a music that confronts; with a music that wants to stare at the suffocating effect, even terror, of much of our everyday experience of living; with a music that does NOT seek to escape the relentlessness of the patterns in which this experience keeps unfolding...but that seeks out its forms – and eats them up, and throws them up again, just as dreams do.' Jani Christou, 'Protoperformance' (1968), in Lucciano, *Jani Christou*, 149-50.

⁶⁶ Christou, *Epicycle*.

⁶⁷ Lucciano, *Christou*, 111. To rediscover the mythic quality of being 'it may sometimes be necessary to undo all other "languages", all other forms of communication which we have inherited without questioning. In art this means, for some perhaps, getting out of history altogether to return to the conditions of PROTOPERFORMANCE.' (149)

⁶⁸ Jung claimed to have dreamed of the collective unconscious as an assemblage of bones and fragments beneath the basement of a house, that Freudian paradigm of the individual's unconscious. Christou aimed to evoke memories of archetypes through ritual enactment, experimenting 'with the idea of an irrationality that also makes sense, as in dreams.' Yerosimou, "Christou's *Strychnine Lady*," 183.

⁶⁹ Jani Christou, manuscript note, 'Ritual', July 1968, cited in Zouliatis, "Jani Christou," 1503.

For its premiere at the Hellenic Week of Contemporary Music, Christou constructed an event – scored through drawings and instructions – that lasted a day but could have any duration, ‘days, weeks, months, years’. The activities initiated through these principles could likewise ‘take place not only in conventional areas of performance, but anywhere, depending on the work: outside the auditorium, in public squares, in the streets of a city, anywhere.’⁷⁰ The score itself indicates the possibility of organising it in ‘other manifestations, such as exhibitions, seminars, conferences and so on,’ with licence for ‘soundless performance’ if such conditions resulted in objections to its audibility.

The opening ‘reveal’ of documenta14’s curators and artists performing from *Epicycle* was not simply a ‘stunt’. Christou’s rules for the continuum informed the very first working sessions between the curatorial team and invited artists in April 2016 – over a year before the opening – in which they discussed their projects and presented existing work. Shifts in exhibitionary conventions also indicated the subtle distorting influence of the continuum, such as the withdrawal of standard explanatory texts, the *disorientating* of information and the removal of many wall texts, given instead as footnotes, literally on the floor.

⁷⁰ Cited in Lucciano, *Jani Christou*, 150.

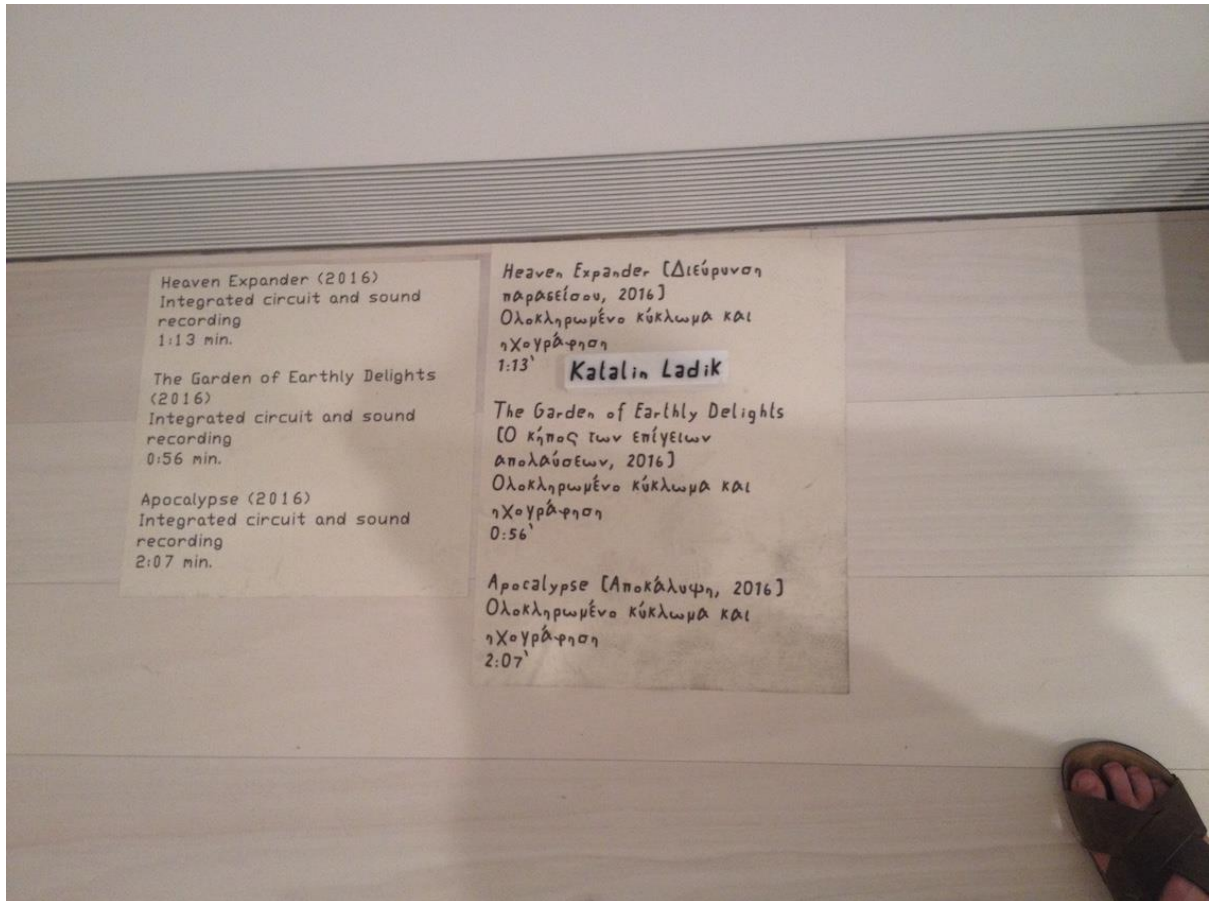


Fig. 32: Foot notes, documenta14 exhibition, EMST (2017)

The team took a close interest in the way that music – and scores – offered ways of operating at the limits of language. Indeed, this was a theme of an essay by documenta14 curator Hendrik Folkerts published (concurrently with the workshops) in *South*.⁷¹ Noting a surge of interest in exhibitions of musical scores, he argued they were neither purely archival – ‘works’ authorizing their performances – nor documentary event substitutes like photographs and videos of performance art (chapter 7). Neither ontologically prior to nor subsequently displacing the event, scores were more elusive, post-representational, ‘contemporary’ (in Agamben’s terms) – ways of being in time opening generatively to their future iterations.⁷² In short, musical scores such as *Epicycle* offered the curatorial team

⁷¹ Folkerts, “Keeping Score”.

⁷² ‘With each enactment, the score morphs into the liveness of a performance, and, vice versa, the score holds the potentiality of all its future and past enactments. ... The score demands this de- and rematerialization of time, in that it always anticipates itself through its enactment, exists within that present moment, and looks back at itself.’ *Ibid*. The attraction of scores is clear for a curatorial project seeking an alternative temporality to historical systems of representation. Nevertheless, this was not an ontological condition of all musical notation. Folkerts gave the example of José Maceda’s compositions as just one model for ‘a decolonization of Filipino music and its forms of notation in the context of Southeast Asia’.

another way of articulating documenta's temporal form, one that took place simultaneously *in* time and *through* time – in the continuum of a collective unconsciousness that patterned temporal experience and the metapraxis of a rupture with that order.

This contemporaneity was not simply the futural 'now', time's cutting edge, a temporal contraction indicative of documenta's law of motion. It opened to the spectral presence of memory and especially of artists who were no longer living. As Fanny Singer's review in *Art Papers* noted, 'given that a staggering 60 of the exhibited artists are no longer living, this aural motif often produced the sensation of walking around listening for voices from beyond the grave.'⁷³ It underscored the programme's emphasis on performance, often embodying memories, transmitted body-to-body across generations.

Oliveros's work, I argue, offers a counterpart. Firstly, whilst different in many ways, she and Christou nevertheless share some remarkable parallels that connect through their prominence for documenta14. Both explored forms of attunement and expanded awareness through practices of meditation, yoga, and dream diaries.⁷⁴ 'Music' was not restricted to concert works but was fundamentally a social practice and so political, participatory, open equally to people not musically trained.⁷⁵ It was not a medium but a discipline and set of techniques relating self to other through time, blurring distinctions between 'art' and 'life', and practicable for very different spaces and situations – including as a curatorial method. Both gravitated towards ways of working that diminished their own roles as composer-authors in favour of approaches that distributed agency across all performers, participants, and audiences. Moreover, Christou's notions of continuum and metapraxis resonate with Oliveros's emphasis on the simultaneity of 'global' and 'focal' awareness, as I will show, and especially of intuitive synchronicity – the timing of a sounding

⁷³ Singer, "documenta 14". For another review of the programme that also notes and draws on the significance of the music programme – and in particular Christou, Cardew, and Oliveros – see Buchman and Lafer, "Aus Fehren lernen".

⁷⁴ IONE specialises in this area – see Ione, *listening in dreams*.

⁷⁵ Deep Listening pieces and newly composed ones were used in the Occupy movement on the West Coast and on Wall St. in 2011. Santoro, "Return to SOURCE".

‘event’ that might uncannily co-ordinate with another’s and so change the sonic field, rendering it dynamic, mobile, and metamorphic.⁷⁶

Oliveros featured prominently at documenta14, her extensive posthumous presence including: a display of her scores and documents within a music-oriented exhibition at the Odeion, Athens Conservatoire; a performance of her works by New York’s International Contemporary Ensemble; an entry in the *Daybook*, and the inclusion of three of her texts in *The documenta14 Reader* (she was the only featured artist there aside from Ross Birrell, and her prayerful *Pauline’s Solo* – ‘dedicated to a world without war’ – closes it). In leaping, finally, to her work I will show her importance for documenta14’s curators in changing its ‘law of motion’, and in particular how she added dimensions to the musicality revealed by Cage (chapter 6) through incorporating the lessons of gravity. Time was not something external to our experience of it, but a function of movement across the threshold of consciousness.

Centred in Time

*History changes as the future unfolds and enfolds the present.*⁷⁷

*Listening is an active engagement with other and simultaneously is memory.*⁷⁸

*During your waking or sleeping life, bring yourself to attention with a thought – “remembering and remembering to remember”. You might find yourself listening backward in time to a sound that you didn’t know that you heard!*⁷⁹

Considerations of temporal change and transformation, undertaken collectively, were exemplified by Oliveros. The experience of alteration, of becoming different, is a constant in her work, her life, and the extended possibilities for listening that she bequeaths those who

⁷⁶ For example, for *Environmental Dialogue* – reproduced in the *documenta14 Reader* – participants are instructed to listen to the sounds around them, and then to create their own pitch and timbre that merge (not imitate) with this, creating in effect a resonant continuum with the sonic field. Similarly, she noted that ‘Deep Listening comes from noticing my listening or listening to my listening and discerning the effects on my bodymind continuum from listening to others, to art and to life.’ Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, xxiv.

⁷⁷ Oliveros, “To NMCE,” 66.

⁷⁸ Oliveros, “Nature of Listening”, 249.

⁷⁹ Oliveros, “Listening Journal,” 18.

follow her. These are also inseparable from her appreciation of music as a discipline, inflected especially by technological change, her gender, and sexuality.⁸⁰

Born in 1932 in Houston, Texas, two of her early experiences are emblematic. Her accordion teacher showed her how to create difference tones, phantom frequencies produced psychoacoustically as the *differential* of two tones sounded together.⁸¹ Sound occurred *in between*, in the non-linear relations between notes, between a vibrating source and listeners, and ultimately between listeners *and other listeners* (what she called ‘quantum listening’).⁸² Pedal notes and drones provided further means to explore the phenomenology of sound, an interest shared with fellow West Coast composers at the end of the 1950s, including La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Loren Rush. In the electronic age, this mantra became the ‘*hum* rather than *Om*’.⁸³

When her mother bought her a tape recorder, she experimented by dangling a microphone from the family’s San Francisco apartment and letting it run. Listening back, she was astonished at all the sounds the machine had ‘heard’ and ‘remembered’. Aurality simultaneously involved a conscious process, focusing on events or details within the sonic field, and an opening to memory below the threshold of consciousness. These were *differential rates – or processes – of attention*.

⁸⁰ This was often accompanied by laughter, exemplified by her filmed interview with Robert Ashley for *Music With Roots in the Aether* (1976), during which her appearance is visibly altered, and by her *Postcard Theatre* (1976) with Alison Knowles, a ‘theatre of substitution’ presenting images of Oliveros reading in her garden alongside the motto ‘Beethoven Was A Lesbian’, the artist astride an elephant for ‘Mozart Was A Black Irish Washerwoman’, and a pairing of childhood pictures of Knowles at the beach and Oliveros with dagger for ‘Brahms Was A Two-Penny Harlot’.

⁸¹ The difference between tones needs to be in the audible range, when both are sounded with sufficient intensity. A short explanation can also be given in terms of ratios. Two notes at an interval of a third – ratio 5:4 – will sound the fundamental tone of the series, two octaves below the ‘lower’ of the two sounded notes. An interval of a fourth – ratio 4:3 – would likewise produce the impression of the fundamental tone, now one and a half octaves below the ‘lower’ note.

⁸² ‘There is a coordination of brain waves when there is a performance and an audience. When this coordination happens, you feel it is a very unified field of listeners listening. It is pretty unmistakable.’ Interview with Obrist, *New Music*, 138. Oliveros, “Quantum Listening”.

⁸³ Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation,” 147. La Monte Young’s influential mode of drone is emblematic, with its tuning to the frequencies of electricity transformers, pylons, and the US electrical grid. Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line*; see also Kramer, *The Hum of the World*.

Recording and sound technologies were not only tools for ‘capturing’ and transforming sounds; they could affect the experience of time. Sounds could be sped up, slowed down, looped, intercut, and played backwards. The opportunity to listen again could also affect practice. Listening back to improvising sessions with Riley, Rush, and Stuart Dempster helped attune them to each other’s playing, improving spontaneity and non-verbal communication skills to ‘become ensemble’.⁸⁴

With Ramon Sander, then teaching at San Francisco Conservatory, she produced the first ‘Sonics’ concert series in 1961 (chapter 5), featuring experimental music and performance, free improvisation, and early tape pieces such as her *Time Perspectives* created using a variable-speed recorder.⁸⁵ People were encouraged to “bring your own speaker”, which were then ‘dispersed around the auditorium and wired to a specially configured keyboard [that] allowed the composers to “play” their works spatially’ – a fascination with the movement of sound in space and between listeners that remained a lifelong interest.⁸⁶ *Time* was produced as a function of the movement of sonic energies, embodied individually and collectively, in space.

When the Conservatory declined to support the second series, Sander pooled technical resources with Morton Subotnick, paving the way for the San Francisco Tape Music Center. This became a community hub for radical artists, self-organised and uncurated, a pioneering countercultural model for the ‘alternative space’ movement (chapter 3).⁸⁷ With the city’s burgeoning light and sound events, such as the Vortex Concerts at the Planetarium (1957-60) developed by Jordan Belson and Henry Jacobs, the Center also included its own light and

⁸⁴ ‘We learned an all-important lesson in these early sessions: If we talked first and tried to impose guidelines or structure for the improvisation, the attempt would likely fall flat. If we played first without talking about it, then listened to the recording critically, our improvising would improve naturally. We liberated ourselves from unnecessary controls and developed trust in process through spontaneity. As far as we know, we were the first in avant-garde art music to engage in “free improvisation”.’ Oliveros, “Memoir,” 81.

⁸⁵ Oliveros, *Four Electronic Pieces*.

⁸⁶ My first encounter with Oliveros was a performance she gave in the round, using her own sound spatialisation system, in 2003 at Dom, Moscow.

⁸⁷ The Center’s premises were shared with Ann (now Anna) Halprin’s Dancers Workshop and a community radio station, KPFA. It provided a focus and resource for many local artists, musicians, and groups, from the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Actor’s Workshop, to Steve Reich, Walter Murch, Francis Coppola and George Lucas, as well as ‘jazz musicians and theater people and poets and artists and all-purpose hipsters and pranksters...’, and the nascent rock-critic scene took an interest in this music, too.’ Bernstein, *Tape Music Center*, x.

projection artist, Tony Martin, alongside gifted engineers like Don Buchla, who provided an early model of his modular synthesizer. The Center enabled Oliveros to connect with other experimental musicians pushing boundaries, such as the ONCE Group, Tudor, Cage, Brecht, and Ichiyanagi, and catalysed her musical explorations beyond sound. Her works became more collaborative, theatrical, situational, humorous, political, and participatory, culminating in *A Theatre Piece* (1965) at the legendary Trips Festival.⁸⁸ This incorporated audience feedback with invited responses taped and re-worked into the soundscape, and Oliveros's *Rock Symphony (The SSSSSSSSSSSSS)*, a collage of rock 'n' roll hits also featuring a speech by Mario Savio, founder of the Berkeley Free Speech movement.

In addition to her continuing explorations of difference tones – now using oscillators to generate frequencies above the audible range whose differentials produced ghostly tones in the audible range – Oliveros experimented with time by improvising with techniques of echo and tape delay (using the 'gap' between the machine's record and playback functions) in pieces such as *Mnemonics I-V* and *Once Again*. These investigations of resonance demonstrated a fundamental relation between the timing of sounds and the impression of acoustic space: time could be produced as a spatial effect because sound moves constantly. Evolving continuously over fifty years, her Expanded Instrument System for improvising live with technology was, she said, a 'time machine' creating a kind of temporal resonance in which her own playing, transformed, returned unpredictably as a layer in the *next* moment.⁸⁹ Listening deeply involved an awareness of and attentiveness to the potential future recurrence – and alteration – of sound made spontaneously in the present.

The Tape Music Center's success brought the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation, which offered a substantial grant on condition that it gain an institutional affiliation. Oliveros went with it to Mills College, Oakland (from 1966, later becoming the Contemporary Music

⁸⁸ The Trips Festival (21-23 January, 1966) was a milestone celebration of the counterculture in San Francisco, with over 6,000 attenders, toward the following year's Summer of Love. Produced by Sender and Stewart Brand and promoted as "a non-drug re-creation of a psychedelic experience", it was intended as an "electronic art happening", influenced by McLuhan, blurring the 'line between artistic radicalism and popular culture'. It brought together experimental theatre, dance, and light shows, and bands including the Grateful Dead, Big Brother, the Holding Company, and Loading Zone. The Festival was the culmination of projects and events initiated through the Tape Music Center, with growing ambitions, notably *City Scale*, a happening that treated the whole of San Francisco as its "stage". *Ibid.*, 5-41.

⁸⁹ Gamper and Oliveros, "Performer-Controlled"; and Oliveros, "Expanded Instrument System".

Center). The next year, she moved to the University of California San Diego (UCSD), where her work increasingly focused on listening as a means to expand consciousness, developing modes of attention that could be composed and affected by technological change.

In the political wake of 1968 and its violence, including seeing a student self-immolate in protesting the Vietnam War, Oliveros increasingly felt a need to respond both to the political situation and its masculinist foundations, dominant modes she had encountered in her own life and practice. In her pioneering feminist reading of music, published in the *New York Times*, she recognised that the understanding of what music itself could be had to change.⁹⁰ It was not enough to be recognised as a composer or artist in a man's world, to become one of the guys.⁹¹ Her *Sonic Meditations* (1974) then stated that she had

abandoned composition/performance practice as it is usually established today for Sonic Explorations which include everyone who wants to participate....She is interested in communication among all forms of life, through Sonic Energy. She is especially interested in the healing power of Sonic Energy and its transmission within groups.⁹²

The *Extreme Slow Walk* provides a key to this transformation and a stepping stone towards Deep Listening, the practice that centred her work and research from then on. For Oliveros, listening was not only aural and acoustic. An ear alone is not a listener. It was also fully corporeal, physical, involving the whole body (especially palms and feet), a *disposition* that could be practised.

⁹⁰ Oliveros, "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers". This appeared, notably, four months before Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" was published in *Woman in Sexist Society*, and later to widespread acclaim in *ArtNews*. Oliveros's own position was partly informed by her sympathetic reading of Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*, exemplified in *To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe in Recognition of their Desperation* (1970).

⁹¹ 'Our Western culture is suffering from the lack of spirit from music traditionally provided by women. It is not enough for women to buy into art music – no matter how attractive it is – and only become accomplished in the techniques and forms created and taught by men.' Oliveros, "Breaking the Silence," 17. See also Malabou, *Changing Difference*.

⁹² Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*.



Fig. 33: Pauline Oliveros leading a Deep Listening workshop at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, as part of Frontiers Festival, 2014

The *Walk* was dedicated to Elaine Summers – dancer, choreographer, and intermedia artist – with whom Oliveros first collaborated in 1969 on *Energy Changes*. An original member of the Judson Dance Theater, and close to Merce Cunningham, Summers was diagnosed with osteoarthritis at thirty. Reluctant to accept infirmity, she sought to relearn how her body moved by studying with Carola Spreads and Charlotte Selvers, both former students of Elsa Gindler (1885-1961), a pioneer of somatic psychotherapy and a leading figure in the Gymnastics movement in Berlin from the 1920s.

Gindler was influenced initially by Hedwig Kallmeyer, who emphasised a ‘natural’ mode of movement exemplifying an external, idealised model of female beauty adopted from Greek statuary, combined with ‘wearing Grecian tunics and chitons’.⁹³ After setting up her own school after Kallmeyer’s model, teaching through imitation, by the 1920s her approach changed, becoming experimental. Rather than acquiring a ‘feeling of natural beauty’ by imitating a model, Gindler encouraged each student to explore the forms of movement ‘natural’ to them by opening themselves to gravity. Pygmalion’s Venus not only came to life,

⁹³ Loukes, “‘Concentration’ and Awareness”; Heller, *Body Psychotherapy*: ‘These gestures were beautiful, close to those we could reconstruct by observing the statues of ancient Greece.’

but found her own way of moving independent of the sculptor's eyes and hands. She was no longer petrified of her own potential.

Movement became a mode of thought concerned with the distribution of weight across the body, the expression of gravity, unique to each person whilst sharing common principles. 'In every fibre of us, consciously and unconsciously, we feel keenly that the earth pulls us toward it and holds us. Full trust should be placed in the force of gravity.'⁹⁴ It involved a recalibration of psychophysical awareness by slowing down bodily motion to allow attunement to internal processes, feeling the rhythms of the body's movement in space, and especially attending to breathing.

In contrast with the patented methods of other movement practices from this time – such as those of Jacques Dalcroze, Rudolph Laban, and Konstantin Stanislavsky – and especially with the Nazis' body ideal, Gindler's method was deliberately not systematised. It was not a set of 'authored' or authorised techniques to be imposed on all and any body, but permissive and particular, an approach for each to establish through exercise, practice and discipline in her own way.⁹⁵ As such, it was continually open to revision, a constant work in process through a feedback method between individual gesture and recognition within the group, passed from body to body as 'a viral, network knowledge'.⁹⁶

These ways of working were also expressive of a feminist form of knowledge production. Gindler and other women investigating the thinking body – such as Genevieve Stebbins, Nina Gorte, Elizabeth and Isadora Duncan, Charlotte Pfeffer, Gerda Alexander, Hedwig von Rohden, Louise Langaard, and Mabel Todd – tended to approach learning through *and as* practice and experimentation. Excluded from university training and traditional networks of scholars and professionals, and often self-employed and self-reliant, they produced their own networks. Gindler formed 'working groups' for her courses as safe spaces open to *not* knowing, acknowledging and allowing a position of vulnerability from which a more intuitive

⁹⁴ Gindler's student Rudolph Gilhelm, cited in Loukes "'Concentration' and Awareness," 395.

⁹⁵ Geuter, Heller, and Weaver, "Elsa Gindler and her influence".

⁹⁶ Rothe, "The Gymnastics of Thought," 203.

understanding could emerge.⁹⁷ In this way, Katje Rothe claims, 'Gindler initiates, mediates and curates a process of self-formation and self-education.'

As a curator...she adopts a different role from that of the researcher as a critical intellectual seeking elucidation and revealing hidden mechanisms. A curator of knowledge arranges reception stimuli and invites her students to participate as researchers in an act of research, an exploration of their own resources and capabilities.⁹⁸

This echoes both Summers's approach to 'Kinetic Awareness' and Oliveros's Deep Listening, both developed with women's groups from the late 1960s.⁹⁹ Informed additionally by studies of anatomy, physiology, and nutrition, Summers initiated two key changes. Firstly, where Gindler emphasised relaxation – expressed as *Gelassenheit*, a letting fall, an opening to gravity's pull in contrast to "controlling" or "resisting" – Summers gave equal status to 'tension', the intuitive capacity to channel the body's movement at different rates of both extreme slowness and speed.¹⁰⁰ These techniques could also then be choreographic. Where Gindler had moved from an aesthetic posture to a process of experimental bodily learning, Summers reincorporated this methodologically into a changing mode of artistic expression using instruction scores.

Oliveros worked with Summers at precisely this time, developing a musical counterpart to the dancer's emblematic work, *Energy Changes*, a piece lasting between two and a half to six hours that embraced 'not only the vocabulary and discipline of movement, but also its approach to time.' Significantly, Oliveros's musicalisation of this process can be understood as a further development of the lessons absorbed from Cage's *4'33"* and *0'00"*. Not only was there no such thing as silence and no possibility of inactivity; temporal experience could

⁹⁷ Rothe, "The Gymnastics of Thought," 206: 'For Gindler (and for the women of the gymnastics movement more generally), the focus is thus not on the thinking, cognizing, inquiring ego, nor on the exercising, communicating group, but on the collective self and the participatory, tactile exploration of experience and perception, the exploration of the self within a network of other explorers.'

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁹⁹ It's perhaps significant that at this time gravity also began to feature in the selection of materials and forms of display for postminimalist artists. Artists' walks and movement also gained prominence from this time, with examples including Bruce Nauman's *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968), Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), Marina Abramović and Ulay's *The Great Wall Walk* (1988), and more recently Francis Alys's *The Green Line* (2004). I am grateful to Judith Cowan for this observation.

¹⁰⁰ Wooster, "Elaine Summers"; and Summers and Marx, "Gardens of Light and Movement".

be affected by listening, occurring in the movement *between* conscious and unconscious processes, attuning to differential rates of flow. Her score invited the performers to make intuitive responses from listening simultaneously to their environment *and* to their 'internal sounds, such as blood pressure, heart beat and nervous system.'¹⁰¹



Fig. 34: Summers, *Invitation to Secret Dancers*, with Oliveros, 1981

Tuning to the environment involved a process of letting go akin to *Gelassenheit*, an extension of the self to the rapid flow of energies in the field; attending to the body's own sounds required a slowing down of the body and an immersive concentration. The resonances with Christou's continuum and metapraxis are audible, but it is the implications of this transferral of processes of relaxation and tension that became touchstones of Deep Listening. The *Extreme Slow Walk*, Oliveros noted, helps to 'reconnect with very subtle energies in the body as the weight shifts from side to side....You may discover the point-to-point connections of movement and/or the merging into the experience of flow.'¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ 'Listen to the environment as a drone. Establish contact mentally with all of the external sounds and include all of your own continuous internal sounds, such as blood pressure, heart beat and nervous system. When you feel prepared, or when you are triggered by a random or intermittent sound from the external or internal environment, make any sound you like in one breath, or a cycle of sounds. With the completion of the sound or sounds, the cycle could be repeated. Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 83; emphasis added.

¹⁰² Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, 20.

Aurality can have a ‘musical phrasing’.¹⁰³ Its gait has a dynamic tempo, a rubato and a cadence (a ‘falling’). Oliveros’s articulation of ‘global’ and ‘focal’ awareness, not separate so much as *simultaneous* processes, work across the threshold of ‘passive’ and ‘active’, a two-eared movement. Where active listening had been gendered male, characterised as analytical, ‘verbal and rational, sequential’, full-bodied attention also required ‘the intuitive, tacit, diffuse’, gendered female (and raced as ‘Oriental’) and so ‘often devalue[d] culturally, personally, and even physiologically’.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the ‘active mind’ and sedentary body, the posture of Cartesian meditation, the ‘Listening Meditations’ she developed with the ♀ Ensemble at UCSD emphasised the dynamic mobility of attention.¹⁰⁵ Summers worked with the group on kinetic awareness alongside a consultant psychologist, specialists in Tai Chi Chuan and Karate, and an assistant taking EEG samples for each participant.¹⁰⁶ Attention – ‘mental activity... aroused by interest or desire’ – and awareness – ‘the body’s sensory receptivity’ – worked in tandem.¹⁰⁷ Rather than opposites, a mind-body dualism, they both had ‘a tunable range’, such that it was possible to ‘remain aware of inner and outer reality simultaneously’. In most circumstances, one or the other predominates, *unbalancing* the other, which then ‘tends to drift or become unconscious’. One was ‘present’, whilst the other might later be retrieved or recur spontaneously as memory.

This anticipated and, I claim, improves on Nancy’s distinction between hearing and listening.¹⁰⁸ Hearing – *entendre* – implied understanding, an immediate and largely unconscious position already within coded systems, a recognition of a sound with its signification. By contrast, listening – *écouter* – involved a straining, a continuous conscious effort, a listening *in or toward* meaning that remained elusive. For Nancy, then, both modes of attention were defined by a relation to signification, operating like a ‘refrain’: an ebbing

¹⁰³ I’m grateful to Anne Bourne for this concise expression.

¹⁰⁴ Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 101; “Rags and Patches”; and “Contribution of Women Composers”.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands’ – Descartes’s meditations were immobile, fixed. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Oliveros, “Meditation Report”. The EEG tests showed an equalisation of alpha wave activity in participants, a recalibration between left and right brain hemispheres, over the course of the project.

¹⁰⁷ Oliveros “On Sonic Meditation,” 153.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy, *Listening*. Writing more than a decade after his reflections on the weight of thought, the temporal form of resonance – simultaneously a sound and its *return* – offered an alternative to the ocularcentric form of ‘presence at a distance’ that he had critiqued.

and flowing of self returning to itself as a feedback loop from its social environment, never fully or finally self-identical but singular-plural.¹⁰⁹ The weight of this subject appears constantly *off-centre*, a pendulum – one-legged – whose movement is always towards or away from meaning and its limits.¹¹⁰

In Deep Listening, by contrast, the centre of time – or rather, of being in time – can perhaps best be approached through its operations as memory.¹¹¹ Contrary to Freud, Oliveros's practice shows that memory is not fixed immemorially, traceable to the ruins of childhood and their debt burden.¹¹² Nor was (psychoanalytic) listening to memory simply a quasi-telepathic – and pre-civilised – mode of transmission or inference, *contra* Theodor Reik, whereby the weight of memory is transferred from one being to another, its errancy returned to its rightful place in language.¹¹³ For Oliveros, a 'deep' listening memory was not the sole property of a subject but an approach to listening in the spaces between self and other that she went on to explore using generations of networked technology and wireless transmission.¹¹⁴ It involves the twinned processes of a mutual affection opening to the field

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7: 'To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin.' Then, echoing Folkerts, 'one might say: there is the *simultaneity* of the visible and the *contemporaneity* of the audible.'

¹¹⁰ Thus music, claims Nancy, was 'not a hope that promises itself possible futures, but rather an expectation that, without expecting anything, lets a touch of eternity come and come again.' In this way, 'music is the art of the hope for resonance'; it is a being 'always imminent and always deferred, *since it is not in any time.*' *Ibid.*, 66-67 (emphasis added). The limitations of Nancy's balancing of listening in relation to the movement of meaning becomes more evident with Szendy's *Listen*, for which Nancy wrote a foreword. Listening is traced in history through arrangements, transcriptions, borrowings, appropriations, remixes and plunderphonia understood as *signed* listenings inside existing works, the carving out of one text inside another. To listen becomes to rewrite. The possibility of listening affecting and so transforming itself, of having its own temporal techniques, is foreclosed, as is the rhythmic motion of an intuitive or spontaneous and an attentive listening.

¹¹¹ For a subtle tracing of these connections between Deep Listening, walking, and memory within an artist's practice, see Corringham, "Listening With the Feet".

¹¹² 'Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one.' Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 17. His 'civilised' man, raised vertically on his hind legs to privilege vision, remains peculiarly static, the weight of his history rooting him to the spot.

¹¹³ Reik, *Third Ear*. For Reik, early memories were not visible, self-evident, but required auscultation, 'listening with the third ear' to effect a process of transference or resonance within the analyst of the condition expressed between the words – especially through extra-verbal processes, mannerisms, and tics. By developing a 'poised attention' – both focal, on the analysand's words, and global, on unspoken meanings and their resonances – 'a series of neurodynamic stimuli come to us [analysts] from other people and play a part in producing our impressions, though we are not conscious of noticing them.' Such 'telepathic' capacities were, Reik suggested, archaic remnants, 'replaced in the course of racial evolution by the superior method of communication by signs' (138).

¹¹⁴ For a history of Oliveros's practice, see "From Telephone to High-Speed Internet".

of vibrations *and* an attunement to internal processes without a destination in language alone. Like walking, it incorporates a relaxing from conscious control, a *Gelassenheit*; and a pulling, raising into awareness.

In a similar way, Ricœur distinguishes between memory that acts, that 'searches', and a memory that is stilled, latent, *beneath* the threshold of consciousness. It is in this sense that forgetting, like listening, has 'an idea of depth, which the phenomenology of memory tends to identify with distance'.¹¹⁵ Forgetting is not simply the opposite of memory, a zero sum game, but *another* operation of memory in asymmetrical motion, a speeding *up* and a slowing *down*.¹¹⁶ 'Remembering, and remembering to remember', as Oliveros put it. Nor is forgetting willed or compelled (though memory can be repressed or displaced through the compulsion to repeat);¹¹⁷ in Deep Listening, it is memory letting itself fall. The making and remaking of memory is an interplay or counterpoise that is constantly shaped and re-shaped, metamorphic. As the anthropologist Marc Augé described it,

what remains is the product of an erosion caused by oblivion. Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea.¹¹⁸

Deep Listening offers a discipline of centring the self in and *as* time. The centre, here, is not a debt, an ideal imposed on the self, a compulsion always to return and never to arrive. It is neither a linear process, the constant production of self-presence in regulated time; nor is it a singular movement towards and away from meaningful self-identity. The centre of Deep Listening is an epiphenomenon, like difference tones, between movements at shifting frequencies above and below the threshold of consciousness. A wave function.

documenta14's curatorial team aimed to change the institution's 'law of motion'. By moving its weight as a two-legged subject, bi-metropolar between Kassel and Athens, Athens and Kassel – overlapping between the two (on Olympic Air) – its centre was shifted not only

¹¹⁵ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 414.

¹¹⁶ Milan Kundera's observation is apposite: 'The degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.' *Slowness*, 34-35.

¹¹⁷ 'Forgetting is not an event, something that happens or that someone causes to happen.' Ricœur, 502.

¹¹⁸ Augé, *Oblivion*, 20. In this movement between individual and collective memory, moreover, (59), 'the connection to time is always thought of in the singular-plural. This means that one should be at least two in order to forget, which is to say in order to manage time.'

spatially but temporally. Its contemporaneity was not only of the moment, a galleried 'walk through time' that pointed to 'the future'. It was not a representation of time, an exhibition of historically-relevant art, but an attempt to move and be formed *with* time, requiring a 'letting fall' of the Western category of Art and an opening to other memories than the canonic archive, to enact its transformation.¹¹⁹ Its future would be dispersed like seeds in the air, a product of the collective memory of all those engaging with and producing it.

The *Daybook* was indicative of this shift. Instead of page numbers or an alphabetic system to organise its featured artists, each was given a double page spread and invited additionally to reference a significant date. These were then ordered in reverse chronological order, with the 'first' also given a calendar date for the programme. Reading sequentially, the book was 'synchronous' with the programme whilst 'simultaneously' diving into historical pasts. It moved from 'The Future' (designated by Georgia Sagri, 15 April) to the mythic 'In the beginning was the Word' (Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci, 3 September). Thus Oliveros, landing on 23 July, was at the same time 1 December 1955, the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus for white passengers.

Similarly, more than 18 months before the official opening, Szymczyk and Quinn Latimer (Editor-in-Chief of Publications) set out the programme for documenta14 as both 'attempt[ing] to deliver a real-time response to the changing situation of Europe', whilst 'going back...to some of the historical staging grounds of Western hegemony, which we believe might help us understand the often-abstracted powers structuring our present.'¹²⁰ This required an effort 'against the politics of forgetting', the 'forgetfulness of the history of colonialism', of slavery, 'of the dissident histories and peoples that have often been left out of the Western canon.' In contrast to an ordained amnesty, a compulsion to forget, the programme would be open to an ocean of memories, to 'dissident and marginalized' voices through which the centre of the contemporary West might be moved and shaken, in turn

¹¹⁹ 'What Szymczyk's exhibition conveyed is that the neoliberal epoch that began with the regimes of Thatcher and Reagan, and which intensified after the fall of the Berlin wall, not only coincides with the epoch of contemporary art, but also that this epoch is now at an end. It is history. Contemporary art must thus be thought anew if it is to claim contemporaneity.' Petersson, "We Need to Reclaim".

¹²⁰ Latimer and Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter".

requiring 'modes of production of meaning that would entail producing situations, not just artifacts to be looked at.'

We believe that they might offer us the means to imagine and delineate alternatives to our untenable present and unclear future. "The learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot," writes Audre Lorde. We hope so.

Listen deeply – documenta14 encouraged us – and remember to keep listening.

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