

## **Coming to our senses: from the birth of the curator function to curating live arts**

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The emergence of live arts curating brings an anxious feeling that this is not a new phenomenon but a return of the repressed. We have been here before. What does the curator's presence signify in the gallery arts, and why adopt it for live arts practices? What might it indicate about this precarious process of marrying the aesthetic and the social? Is the 'curator' simply a more prestigious term for tasks of programming, commissioning, and producing that I like so many others have been doing for decades? Or does the turn to this paradigm imply a change in practice, a new historical self-consciousness of mediating performing arts?

A sense of being late to the party is particularly acute within the world of new music—my field—which for decades has been regarded as lagging behind the gallery arts. At least since John Cage opened the floodgates of music to any and all sounds, dispensing with claims for music's autonomy, it has been vulnerable both to nostalgic urges to defy the times by insisting on the comfort of established definitions—usually by genre—and to a resurgence in claims for its 'ineffability', Romantic ideals of pure (non-verbal) expression, and modernist emphases on abstract compositional structure. As a result, contemporary music has often been considered remote from the wider culture and marginal to *the* artworld in which it claims its share. It is no accident that the language of curating has been co-opted within music circles at just the time that this radical opening to all sounds has become an everyday reality, when digital platforms have seemingly made the music of all times and places simultaneously available. Curatorial discourse appears to offer the possibility of redemption, of creating value by circumscribing possibilities that have become limitless.

This late-coming is not all that it seems, however. It has advantages. As many in the gallery arts have been disavowing or abandoning the term curator for a decade or more, its synchronous revival across the performing arts offers the potential to change the paradigm. This is not a tale of history repeating itself, first as tragedy and then as farce. Curating live arts not only turns attention towards the public mediation of dance, theatre, and music; it can also affect the sense of curating itself—including within exhibitionary contexts—by drawing on the legacies of experimental practices to rebalance the relationship between the senses away from a hierarchy of the visual.

To make this claim, I will begin by showing how the curator function became visible in the 1960s as an apparent by-product of a problem of ‘visuality’. Anticipating the issues posed by this first issue of *TURBA*, it led to the question of what curating was if it was not simply a continuation of practices of exhibition-making, collecting, preserving, and adding to visual art’s history, as Hans-Ulrich Obrist (2014) described the role. What did its *visibility* signify? How did this affect the way artists’ work was produced and presented, and how did it change the way viewers were addressed?

It is important to recognize that the same processes that exposed the curator function also catalyzed a proliferation of artists’ practices beyond the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture (Bishop, 2007). The professionalization of the curator as a distinct role—separate from if overlapping with those of art historian, critic, technician, education, and communications—can then be understood as symbiotic with the *reintegration* of these disparate practices within the museum’s ‘expanded field’. That is, the invention of Performance Art and Sound Art among others as *visual* practices distinct from the performing arts and their traditions was a curatorial construct. In brief, the role consolidated the gallery arts by showing that *ways of seeing* were fundamental but no longer innocent or transparent, a distinction that enabled the differentiation and validation of practices understood as *self-*

*consciously visual*. By contrast, the performing arts not only showed less inclination to emphasize their opticality, but also their dependence on ticket sales appeared to make them more akin to other forms of ‘mere’ entertainment, striated by class. Failing to maintain their aesthetic autonomy, their value difference, they were social, all too social.

The turn to live arts curating from the late aughties therefore also acts as a corrective and challenge to the gallery’s expanded field and its proclamation of the visuality of *all* art, of ‘art as such’. In this sense, it can be aligned with the contemporaneous project of reconsidering ‘the curatorial’ *within* the gallery arts, a project that no longer privileges either the visual or the discrete figure of the curator (Martinon 2013). Might this, then, be an opportunity to address issues and experiences of aesthetic production through a paradigm that is no longer predicated on such a prior distinction and separation of the ‘sister arts’ and the senses they are considered to embody?

After narrating the curator’s coming into visibility, then, I will elaborate its function as a visualist operation by drawing on theoretical models from the period leading to its professionalization. Grasping the ensuing contradictions of curating as a consequence of attempts to resolve problems of ‘plain sight’ through visual means, however ‘critical’, will finally indicate the broader significance and task of live arts curating beyond visual privilege.

### **The Curator Function Made Visible**

It is important to note, firstly, that the curator’s exposure from the 1960s was not only a result of political and social critiques of its neutral framing of art. That had a long history of its own. The Futurists and suffragettes were only some of the more spectacular insurrectionists against museum historiography, as with Mary Richardson’s taking an axe to Velasquez’s *Rokeby Venus* in London’s National Gallery in revenge for the state’s incarceration of Emmeline Pankhurst.

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. 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 remained 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 were subject to extensive critique within what Martin Jay (1993) dubbed “antiocularcentrism”. 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.

The museum and its curators had withstood external attacks for decades. Minimalism changed this by drawing out the contradictions *immanent* to its modernist construction of Art. The curator function of creating ways of seeing—to invoke John Berger’s celebrated critique (1972)—was itself made visible when art objects were explicitly separated from their formerly naturalized and conjoined discursive framing. What the public saw with their own eyes and what they were invited to see were no longer self-identical. When the artwork no longer ‘spoke for itself,’ it then required a public advocate.

The predominating *idea* of painting, advanced by Clement Greenberg (1940)—the doyen of modernist art critics—emphasized its essential abstraction and flatness. Yet the picture plane as a “pure surface” was constituted by the thickness of the frame that contained it and that concealed its *material* depth. In defending Barnett Newman’s canvases, Greenberg (1961) had argued that the material frame was no longer necessary, that even without it these

paintings “do not merge with surrounding space” but “preserve...their integrity and separate unity”. The physical frame could be discarded; painting’s surrounding historical frameworks could not.

For many younger artists, the necessary relationship between their artwork and these framing ideas was no longer self-evident. Without its material boundary, a painting’s third dimension separating it from the gallery wall was exposed. By drawing attention to this edge, or illuminating it as Dan Flavin did, Minimalist artists demonstrated that their works’ “objecthood”—as Michael Fried (1967) famously referred to it—was distinct from the transcendental logic of the flat picture plane. The viewer could gaze at its material form or ‘see’ its significance, but not both simultaneously. 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...unraveled 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”.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Morris (1966) 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 emphasis on “shape”, jumping off its plinth but remaining elevated by its discursive support. 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.” (17)

Morris’s use of recognizable geometric shapes emphasized a distinction between the formal idea and its material rendering. This echoed the underlying premise of Richard Wollheim’s “Minimal Art” (1965), which designated the movement (Meyer 2001, 142-50). 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—however “reduced”—and *a priori* “decision-making,” a distinction already implied by Greenberg.<sup>2</sup>

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 (1976) highlighted how it exposed “the ideology of the gallery space,” manifest in the emblematic “white cube”. 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 visual art through the problem of the frame, he noted that as “the painting entered into a dialogue with the wall beyond it... the dealer and curator enter from the wings.”

O’Doherty could have been describing the landmark large-scale group exhibition of Minimalist and other abstract sculpture, *Primary Structures* (Jewish Museum, New York, 1966). 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.” (Hoffmann, 2014)

“Entering from the wings” was Kynaston McShine, the first person of color to take a curating role at a major US gallery. 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 Lucy Lippard. For McShine, the separation between the work’s objecthood and the ideas it presented gave *Primary Structures* a split perspective. On the one hand, he stressed 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 encountered works of art as taken a course in them.” The artist’s studio had become a study, as Lippard and John Chandler (1968, 255) put it eighteen months later.

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 aimed to indicate the sense of an international movement defining the contemporary moment—the latest style of the ‘new cool’ following 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* (Rose, 1965), the look of a future-in-the-making inviting speculation—both for its interpretation and its market value. 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. The curator function was taking on an *active*, performative dimension. It became a verb: to curate.

The show's potential interpretations were limited by the specific works gathered within its curatorial framing. For the sculptor Mark di Suvero, speaking at a panel discussion, *Primary Structures* gave an uncanny echo of Judd's distinction between the artist's concept 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." 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.

I will return to this, but first I want to mark the significance of this moment in the history of curating. To begin with, it is no accident that the Whitney Museum initiated its Independent Study Program in 1967, bringing together art history majors and young artists through its Education department as a means to explore critically the expanding field of art. It soon provided the impetus for the Museum to develop branches Downtown (from 1973) as a laboratory for artistic and curatorial experimentation, creating a bridge with the burgeoning alternative spaces movement that provided a milieu for artists to develop new ways of making art. Crucially, its shift in emphasis from art history to museum studies in 1970 paved the way for the pioneering Curatorial and Critical Studies program (1987).

The separation of artist's concept and the work's fabrication changed the nature of curating in other ways too. For her "numbers" exhibitions—named after the population of their host cities (*557,087*, Seattle (1969); *995,000*, Vancouver (1970))—Lippard took instructions from many of the artists and made the work herself. In his *Artforum* review, Peter



Plagens (Lippard, 1997, 110-15) 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.” Jennifer Licht’s *Spaces* (1969) also involved her and the Museum of Modern Art team working directly on the galleries under instruction from the artists to create an early model for installation art. At the Whitney, Marcia Tucker’s and Jim Monte’s *Anti-Illusion* (1969) similarly involved the fabrication of works on site, displaying the processes through which works were made, and featured the composer-musicians Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Unable to review much of the work in advance, Tucker (2008) and Monte approached the show as an experimental form in which artistic creation and exhibition production 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? (83)

The turn to Conceptual Art came with yet more radical implications. The museum and its exhibition form could be bypassed altogether. The *Xerox Book* (1968), a group show organized by Seth Siegelaub, gave each of seven artists 25 pages, simulacra of white gallery walls. 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 vapor or (ultrasonic) sound—or that was ephemeral, a gesture, or performative. When there was no longer anything to show, the task became “*to make someone else aware that an artist had*

*done anything at all.*” (Siegelau, 1970) The way these works became public could then be recognized as a personal ‘style’. As Jack Burnham (1969) noted,

For over a year Siegelau has been “gallery director” for the best of the conceptualists. His publications of calendars and catalogs are already collector’s [*sic*] items. ... Siegelau 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.  
(54)

These examples demonstrated that the coming-to-visibility of the curator function was not only due to the arrival of charismatic individuals such as Harald Szeemann, who is often credited as a preminent 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 what was and was not art.

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

When the curator function was professionalized from the late 1980s, then, those seeking to define the role, to distinguish it from other practices—the art historian, critic, archivist, exhibition installer, educationalist—faced a problem familiar to us as we consider the ‘arrival’ of the live arts curator twenty years later. Was this a new, creative, quasi-artistic practice that had become increasingly prominent since the late 1960s, or was it the continuation of the custodian’s role that stretched back at least to the beginnings of the public museum around the late seventeenth century?

The historiography of curating, written not least to provide research frameworks for those studying the discipline, chose both (Green 2018, 29-61). It was a descendent of the

museum's scholar-archivists and exhibition-makers who established the public exhibition as a medium of (aesthetic) knowledge production (Schubert 2000; Bennett 1995); *and* it inherited a legacy of curatorial practice by artists. Operating independently of the institutions whose discourses based on historical models often failed to recognize them—and so innovating systems of display and ways of addressing publics—these ranged from Courbet's *Pavillon du Réalisme* (1855) to Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* and *Sixteen Miles of String* (Obrist 2014).

Significantly, this double genealogy—a dual parentage with two histories of display—has often been presented in terms that replicate *visual* problematics. 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 how ways of seeing are made visible (Burnett 2005; O'Neill 2012, 32-38).

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. I turn briefly to these now in order to grasp the contradictions inherent to the curator function, and why the curatorial turn in *both* the gallery and live arts is not simply a repetition that leaves the underlying problematic unchanged.

To begin with, the separation of idea and artefact produced two divergent 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.” We can hear this difference trembling 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”.

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 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 “unraveled 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 such that the image *contains* the text, or the text *determines* the image, always in hierarchy. The negation—this is *not* a pipe—decouples the text and image, laying bare the structure:

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.... (201-02)

Isolated from its disembodied institutional setting, it is here that we begin to hear the curator’s *voice* as a speech act between the precedence of the concept over its manifestation (as with Siegelau’s *Xerox Book*), and the priority of the work’s material encounter over the attribution of its meaning (“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.”<sup>3</sup> This introduced a gap between the objective tone of the museum and the necessarily subjective speech acts of the ‘independent’ curator requiring a different rhetorical position. As Tucker (2018, 88-89) described in her passage from the Whitney to founding the New Museum (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.”

In contrast with the supposed objectivity and expert knowledge of art history, theory provided both a framework critiquing visuality and a discourse that gave responsibility to the reader or viewer who was now encouraged to form their own opinion. Curatorial voices—with French accents—encouraged viewers to make the transition from observer to hermeneut. This helps to explain the apparent paradox that just as curators turned to ‘artspeak’ the popularity of gallery-going soared. 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... ‘quality’ simply didn’t exist according to the old rules.... I wanted...to engage the public and encourage them to decide for themselves.”

This co-responsibility for an exhibition’s meaning was nevertheless supplementary to the work’s *inscription* within art history through a form of curatorial *authorship*. For whilst the voice remained embodied and so subjective, the (curator’s) *signature* was, as Derrida noted, detachable and therefore occupied a quasi-objective position between curator and institution. Interpretation was flexible; the selection of what could be interpreted was not.

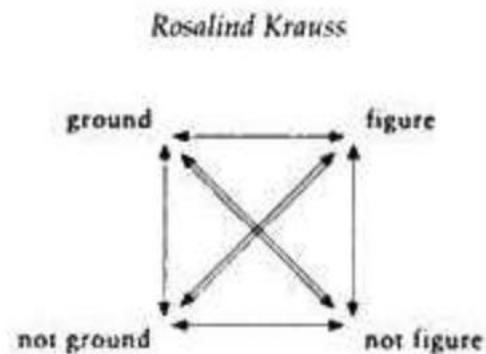


Ben Langlands & Nikki Bell, *Curators' Signatures*, installation at CCA Kitakyushu, 2021

In “What is an Author?” (1969), Foucault claimed that authors appear when texts require greater legitimation and regulation, when writers may transgress. Unlike the proper name that is separable from a person’s being, the author is bound to a singular body of work, circumscribing it from a textual field that is not limited. As such, it is *constructed*: a 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 were qualities expected of the new exhibition-making.

The curator function, I argue, was constructed as *both* a signature operation that limited the field whilst allowing it to expand; *and* a voice interpellating viewing subjects to make works meaningful. A perfect illustration of this is given in the influential writings on

visuality by the critic and curator Rosalind Krauss. In *The Optical Unconscious* (1993, 14), she developed a diagram of 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.

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 visuality was not that of empirical vision, but "the structure of the visual field as such." An identity with a center, a foundation, *x* marks the spot—of art, perhaps, with all its history. The structure can be *expanded*, but its shape went unchanged.

In her essay "Grids" (1979), Krauss 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." 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 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.”

### **Why Live Arts Curating?**

The curator function has enabled the astonishing success of the gallery arts. From the perspective of the performing arts, their market value remains eye wateringly high, visitor numbers are impressive, production values can be astronomic, and media coverage seemingly ubiquitous. Yet this has also come with very high costs, which I sketch out briefly here.

The distinction between artist and curator has at times become untenable, especially as the exhibition itself has been reframed as an ambiguous “post-medium medium” for artists (Green 2018), and redesignated a “primary unit” in the production of meaning as artists turned to creating situations for public encounter (Bourriaud 2002).

The power to *sign* a work into art history, acting as a “symbolic analyst”, established a disturbing proximity between curators and speculators. 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.” (Foster 1996, 120) In order to avoid becoming an art market functionary, an inside trader, a critical perspective—both reflexive *and* objectively detached—was necessary but also ever harder to sustain.

The curator’s demarcation of the aesthetic from the social field—the institution’s inside from its outside—also became increasingly problematic. It is important to note that ‘social aesthetics,’ treating public contact as the site of artistic creation, emerged from artists’ practices independent of the gallery system, often in politically-charged forms (Dietcher 1990). The historiography of this work has, significantly, begun to break with the exclusively visual arts framework, yet even here the curator is expected to maintain a proper distance (Bishop 2012; Jackson 2011). Too close to the vulnerable and marginalized and the curator is accused of acquiring cultural capital, serving political agendas of regeneration, or speaking the ‘instrumental’ languages of ‘improving well-being’. Too detached and the curator function becomes altogether de-politicized, a purveyor of entertaining situations to increase visitor numbers, even creating playground atmospheres as with Carsten Höller’s *helterskelters* at Tate Modern (Voories 2017).

The expansion of the field has stretched the curator’s expertise and responsibilities very thinly. Its incorporation of disparate practices as gallery art specialisms has involved making ambiguous—and, I argue, indefensible—distinctions. For example, Performance Art and Sound Art were absorbed by distinguishing practices from theatre, dance, and music, complete with alternative genealogies and theoretical paradigms. Thus a latent Performance Art gained an origin story from the starting pistol of Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (1909), and was made gallery-ready by the revaluation of its documentation both securing its constancy in time from the ephemerality of its moment, and neatly dividing it once more into its photographic, staged and filmed objects and their discursive mediation (Goldberg 1979,

2018).<sup>4</sup> Sound Art's genealogy has likewise been decoupled from the history of experimental and avant-garde music.<sup>5</sup> Its theorists almost all make critical distinctions from John Cage's *4'33"*, which is regarded as either 'too musical'—detached from referential and conceptual meaning in a supposedly misguided and impossible affinity with 'nature'—or 'not musical enough', too meaningful and coded by the concert conventions it is thought to negate.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Sound Art entered the gallery either as the material expression of an artist's concept, or as a vibrant material encounter whose meaning is to be determined.

The turn to 'curating' live arts, then, can best be understood *not* as a further extension of this framework. It is not only a product of the dissolution of the conventions of performance presentation that make visible the construction of the ways that live arts 'make sense'. It is neither an expansion of the gallery's field nor a repetition of its operation within the performing arts. Theatre, dance, and music—especially in their experimental forms—offer other ways of composing aesthetic encounters. The mediation of such temporal work challenges the curatorial conjoining of 'object' and 'idea' that must remain detachable—whether naturalized or rendered visible—or that privileges documentation of an event above the time it takes to unfold. For more than half a century, musicians, choreographers, and dramaturgs have challenged the conventions that separated one 'medium' from another in favor of experiences that involve all the senses simultaneously and without hierarchy. Crucially, the relationship between audiences and performance have provided a focus for collaborative working between artists and producers. Contact with the public provides the aesthetic basis of the work.

This is not to set the performing arts in opposition to the gallery arts, the time-based against the spatial as in Lessing's famous formulation. Live arts curation resonates, I claim, with the synchronous turn in the visual arts to the curatorial as a paradigm for aesthetic mediation. The curatorial does not isolate the singular figure of the curator but considers the

processes and roles articulating the social and aesthetic together without hierarchy (von Bismarck 2012). It emphasizes the moment of encounter as an “event of knowledge” without privileging the material object or its discursive framing. Theory and practice are not set apart in order to be reunited, but are interwoven, as Irit Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon argued.

Initially we recognized a necessity to distinguish between ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’. If ‘curating’ is a gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display, then ‘the curatorial’ operates at a very different level.... [it marks] a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance. ‘Curating’ takes place in a promise; it produces a moment of promise, of redemption [meaning, understanding] to come. By contrast, ‘the curatorial’ is what disturbs this process; it breaks up this stage, yet produces a narrative which comes into being in the very moment in which an utterance takes place, in that moment in which the event communicates. (Martinon 2013, ix)

Curating live arts and the curatorial offer complementary methods to re-examine the processes by which we produce and encounter aesthetic experiences. This necessarily involves all our senses, without privileging one over another, and the whole body without subordinating it to ‘reason’ or ‘the mind’. They invite us to come to our senses in every way.

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<sup>1</sup> "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.

<sup>2</sup> "[Barnett] 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." (Greenberg 1961, 86, emphasis added)

<sup>3</sup> Jan Verwoert (2010, 24) 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."

<sup>4</sup> Arguments over the primacy of the event or its documentation have broadly been staged between the writings of Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander respectively. The dichotomy has become more nuanced in more recent texts, notably Wood (2018); and Giannachi and Westerman (2018).

<sup>5</sup> "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 Lockwood, "What Is Sound Art?" cited by Licht (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Those distinguishing Sound Art from music's perceived emphasis on sound without conceptual reference include Kahn (1990, 1999) and Kim-Cohen (2009, 2016); those emphasising the materiality of Sound Art in contrast to the cultural conventions of 'music' include: Voegelin (2010) and Cox (2018).