

Thesis

Towards an Understanding of the Music Curatorial

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1. Abstract

This text shows how truth can be seen as a construct within a specific context, one that necessitates a certain subjectivity, and therefore necessarily also a community. This is done by first examining closely the function of the status of the author, in order to reveal its privileged functioning in certain discourses. The reason for this function appearing in specific discourses and not in others is explained as the result of what Foucault calls a regime of truth, which can also be connected to a specific form of subjectivity. The text then puts forward, summarizing Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, a conception of artistic truth as both immanent and singular, and comparable to the Deleuzian concept of the essence. It then explains that the relationship between hermeticism and the artwork acting as an operation is a matter of a specific subject's relationship to the discursive object that is the artwork. This conception is then shown to be analogous to the process of curating, which is also a process of mediating encounters. Finally, in interpreting a text by Rancière, the link between curating and community is made visible, and it is argued that curating is the constitution of a coming community, which in turn reflects the subjectivity of the curatorial process. This effectively unhooks the curatorial process from its typical seat in the visual arts, and provides a means to apply its concepts to the formation of any community, with a view to translating this theory into the musical discourse, where such questions of community are slowly beginning to be asked. It is then argued that by engaging more closely with the concept of community, the musical discourse can move away from the necessity of a transcendental listening subject that shares the same universal categories as the producer(s). This last step opens up potential for new modes of musical production possessing a new and more refined understanding of its relationship to community.

2. Introduction

This text will argue for a music curatorial understanding of the production of music, one that takes as its starting point not the study of scores or composers, but rather the musical performance itself. The music curatorial situates itself in the relationship between, on the one hand, the musical work (though its coherent unity will be called into question in this paper), and the audience on the other. It will be seen that the coming together of these two separate elements produces a third thing, which can be called a community, and that necessarily transforms both the work itself, and the audience who perceive it.

This paper has its background in the increasing interest in the concept of curating in the various fields of the performing arts. In the fields of dance and theater, this topic has already become wildly popular. There are, for instance, several prominent “curators” currently active in theater and dance today, each with different understandings of how their practice and methodology relates to curating. The Yale theater scholar Tom Sellar is currently doing an excellent job documenting the emergence of the term in this area, a trend that currently shows no sign of stopping.¹

¹ For a discussion of the curatorial turn in theater, see Sellar, T. “The Curatorial Turn.” *Theater* 44.2 (2014): 21–29. Notable publications in this area include a special edition of the journal *Theater* (edited by Sellar) published in 2010, and dealing exclusively with this topic, as well as a special issue of the Croatian theater magazine *Frakcija*: Malzacher, Florian, Tea Tupajić, and Petra Zanki, eds. *Curating Performing Arts*. Spec. issue of *Frakcija* 55. Summer (2010): 120. Print.

In the field of contemporary music, things are slightly more subdued. There are however two main approaches to the topic in the field that are worth mentioning here. The first is the musicological approach, where for instance the Graz-based music scholar Christa Brüstle argues for a definition of music based on performance rather than the musical work (17). By prioritizing the performance over the work, Brüstle fundamentally shifts importance away from the authoritarian figure of composer, and towards an investigation of the constitution of the musical event. This shift is fundamental to the emergence of the figure of the curator, whose purview is precisely the creation of said event. The figure of the composer has not completely disappeared from the musical discourse just yet, but it is a term that is increasingly coming into question in just such contexts. What is at stake is the means by which the “truth” - or even the “authority”- of the musical event is constructed.

The other existing approach in the field is the more practice-based figure of the festival organizer, who, in the past several years, has emerged as crucial figure for shaping festival programs into not just a collection of premiers, but rather a sort of meta-investigation of a specific theme by means of the individual works. A strong example of this would be the 2015 edition of Märzmusik in Berlin, a week-long festival that takes place in the city in March of each year. The 2015 edition of the festival presented itself not just as a coming together of a specific community of people interested in the topic of contemporary music, but a gathering that should revolve around the presentation and investigation of a specific thematic aspect of musical practice, namely the presentation and perception of different forms of time (Berliner Festspiele 5).

The following thesis proposes a third approach to this topic of curating, one that attempts to come to terms with it through a much more

fundamental and philosophical questioning of what curating entails. In order to do this, I have focused my research on philosophical texts dealing with questions of truth and how it is produced, the relationship of aesthetics to truth, and the relationship between truth and the construction of a community. Through an investigation of these topics, I will show that curating can be understood as an immanent process that is inherently linked to the constitution of a specific community, and that the emergence of the figure of the curator in certain contexts is only a byproduct of this functioning. This text shows that curating is a concept that can be applied to any artistic field equally, and that an understanding of its functioning is crucial to understanding the relationship between art and its community. This approach to the topic engages with the topic on a more general level than those outlined above, in that it seeks to develop a discreet explanation for their way of functioning.

3. The Author as a Function

Let us begin with one of Michel Foucault's most central concepts, namely *discourse*. In the transcript to his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, entitled "The Order of Discourse", Foucault outlines his understanding of discourse as controlled and determined by what he elsewhere calls power [*pouvoir*]. For him, "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (52). These procedures are operated by relations of power, which, according to several procedures of exclusion, shaping, and differentiation, exercise control over, as well as create that which we commonly identify as, the subject. As seen in the quote above, these

processes tend to take on a certain subjectivity of their own, in that they wish to preserve something like a constitutive *essence*² of themselves, to preserve a certain way of operating in the face of other powers that seek to change or shift discourses according to their own interests and away from the interests of other subjects.

What is crucial to stress when reading Foucault is the *primacy* of discourse over the individual. It is not the individual who speaks through language, rather it is language that speaks through (and thus forms) the individual. It is perhaps here high time to give an example, one which I believe can be expanded on a bit further in order to better examine this topic.

In the discourses of art, and that surrounding Western art music is a paramount example of this, the figure of the author (whom I regard as analogous to the composer) plays an extremely important role. It could be said that the author figure is perhaps the most important factor in determining the artistic legitimacy of a work. The figure of Mozart, for example, or even John Cage, to name a more recent example, is a sort of mark of quality for a work, giving it an air of legitimacy, as well as serving to orient the listener towards certain expectations in regards to what to listen for.

Foucault makes a sharp distinction between the individual and the function of the author. For him, the name of the author plays a fundamentally different role than the name of an individual, in that the author's name serves a classifying function for a discourse, whereas the name of an individual (even when it is the same name) serves only as an

² For further discussion on this topic of essence see, among other texts, Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. First Edit. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988. Print. pp. 22-25.

element *within* a discourse (“What is an Author?” 5). This classifying function bestows the property of truth to diverse works grouped under its name in specific discourses (“Order of Discourse” 58). To borrow an example from Foucault, saying that the poet Homer did not exist as an individual does not in any way diminish the unifying function that his name lends to the works grouped under it. To adapt another of his examples, to find out that Mozart was really born in this house and not in that one would have little effect on how we perceive his works (for it only changes our conception of Mozart as an individual), but finding out that he was the author of both the *Requiem* K. 626 and Beethoven’s Symphony no. 1 in C Major would have a profound effect on how we understood his name (“What is an Author?” 5). The author function can thus also exist without knowing anything about the individual themselves (as is the case with Anonymous IV in the history of Medieval music).

Furthermore, this unifying function of the author only exists in certain discourses, but its presence can also vary historically. The role of the author in contemporary science, for instance, plays no role in determining the truthfulness of the text. In the Middle Ages, however, the name associated with a particular theory was a marker of the truth of the theory (7). Conversely, during that time (just as in Homer’s case), the author of a poem was unrelated to its status. Foucault then shows that these two conceptions have swapped places in contemporary society, with the author function becoming extremely important in the field of art (as we have seen above).

As we can see in the transformation of the role of the author in both artistic and scientific discourses between the Middle Ages and now, there is no timeless and universal definition of the role of the author in constituting truth. There is another principle at work, one that controls and manipulates the manifestation of truth according to its particular needs and configuration.

The author function is only one strategy among many for shaping the structure of discourse and the relationship between the individual and truth.³

This principle is precisely what Foucault terms the “regime of truth”, a concept similar to the political regime, which “involves truth obligations that impose acts of belief, professions of faith, or confessions with a purifying function” (“Government of the Living II” 94). For Foucault, the truth is not in control of its own domain, rather the relation of the subject to truth is always governed by a belief in a regime of truth (98). This regime in the field of art is governed by a combination of forces that we could call, in this terminology, the *regime of truth of art*, which is responsible for producing the set of established discourses and objects that constitute what is understood as art. To come back to our examples before regarding the concept of authorship, it could be said that the function of authorship, at least in the 20th century, constitutes an important strategy employed by the regime of truth of art.

There is another very important aspect of this regime of truth that bears repeating here.

Foucault stresses that games of truth (a series of internal procedures) are the means by which the truth is established, but it is “not creator and holder of the rights that it exercises over men, of the obligations the latter have towards it, and of the effects they expect from these obligations when and insofar as they are fulfilled” (96).

It is rather the regime that is in control, determining the relation between subject and the truth. Furthermore, this relation *always* contains an

³ For a very well laid-out overview of discursive operations, see again Foucault, Michel. “The Order of Discourse.” *Untying the Text*. Ed. Robert Young. Boston, USA: 1981. 48–78. Print.

element of belief, “a certain assertion that does not belong to the logical realm of observation or deduction. [...There is r]ather a sort of commitment, a sort of profession” (96). This element of belief is not contained in the truth itself, rather in the regime that administers it. It is important to note here as well that this regime also extends to the regime of truth of truth itself, though this topic however is beyond the scope of this text.

Foucault explains this process by comparing it to the concept of Baptism in the context of Christianity. Before baptism, the postulant must be taught the major lessons of the religion, including the major prohibitions, as well as their standing with regard to God (104). Once these lessons have been learned, the postulant may be baptized, and in doing so, become a member of the community: “[t]hose who have been purified by baptism [...] after the long cycle of education that has taught them the truth, and after the act of faith by which they have affirmed the truth of what they have learned, are illuminated in their thought” (106).

To apply this concept to the matter at hand, namely the regime of truth of art, in order to become qualified to produce true statements, one must first be created by a formative process of indoctrination. It is in this way that one voluntarily submits to the invisible rules of the regime. The process of baptism in Christianity can be compared to the internalized rules and conventions that surround tonal harmony for instance, or the proper and accepted style of playing a particular piece. Note that though this process of training is rooted in the institution of the conservatory, it is something much more fundamental, taking place at the societal level and creating what I here refer to as the musical discourse, which is the result of a certain musical regime regulating access to the artistic truth of musical works.

The point of this excursion is to show that truth is made only in a context, as the product of a societal phenomenon, and not by some universal

rule. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his book *The Rules of Art* formulated the construction of this regime very succinctly, explaining that it consists of “the social conditions of the production (or the invention) and of the reproduction (or the inculcation) of dispositions and classificatory schemas which are activated in artistic perception” (288). Artistic perception happens not by virtue of some universal category, but rather as the product of a specific training and conditioning of the subject, which dictate the relation of that subject to the artwork.

All this to say that the context in which a work of any sort appears is fundamental not only to how it is created, but is constitutional as well of how it is perceived, and thus what its relationship is to the concept of artistic truth. These two aspects are in fact inseparable from one another, and are mutually co-dependent.

All this to say that the context in which a work is immersed is fundamental to its creation, due to the context determining its particular relationship to artistic truth. This means that the context is constitutional of how the work is perceived.

If the truth is regulated by a regime, and it this regime that creates the immanent context of a work, then its power over the truth of art is indeed great. In order to look more closely at this link, we will continue with an investigation of the constitution of artistic truth after Badiou, whose view is more focused on precisely this topic of art.

4. The Regime of Truth of Art

In Alain Badiou’s *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, he outlines a definition of the truth of a work of art that is worth reviewing here.

In this text, Badiou identifies three schema that dominated the relationship between art and truth in the 20th century. He calls them the

didactic schema, the *romantic* schema, and the *classical* schema respectively. These schemas he then contrasts with a fourth schema of his own, defining a new possible way of understanding the relationship between art and truth. Each of them present a different combination of two central factors, namely that of the immanence of truth in the work, in other words, if truth is internal to the work of art or not, and of singularity of artistic truth, in other words, if the truth of art belongs solely to art, or if it can be circulated elsewhere (Badiou 9). I will now give a brief overview of each of these schemas, in order to make clear these different ways of conceiving the link between art and truth.

The first is known as the *didactic* schema. Here, the relation of truth to art is that art is capable of truth, but only the semblance or charm of truth, not truth itself. Truth comes from the outside, and is only represented in art, albeit packaged in the form of an attractive spectacle. If this truth comes from outside of art, it therefore must be controlled, after Plato, by philosophy, as there exists the danger of art presenting false morals in an attractive package, thereby misleading the people (Badiou 3). The didactic scheme is singular (“only art can exhibit a truth *in the form of a semblance*”), but not immanent because truth is extrinsic to the art (9).

Second is the *romantic* schema. Here, art alone is understood as capable of manifesting a higher and infinite truth, pressed into a specific earthly form always ready to escape or explode. Here, art is the “absolute as subject”, a concept very similar to the Deleuzian conception of art opening onto the Chaosmos (3).⁴ The romantic schema represents indeed again a

⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Ed. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print. p. 313-314.

singular truth, but not an immanent one, as truth is not internal to the work, rather the work is only a manifestation of a higher truth (9).

Third and last is the *classical* schema. For Badiou, this schema works on the basis of two theses, namely that one, art is incapable of truth, and two, that its purpose is rather the “treatment of the affections of the soul” rather than make any claim to truth (4). The relationship between philosophy and art here is that they keep to their respective domains, namely that art presents the “likely” truth, or verisimilitude (semblance) of truth, and philosophy the “unlikely truth” (4). Thus to categorize this schema according to the properties of immanence and singularity again, truth is immanent to the work, insofar as its verisimilitude accurately *resembles* the truth, but the truth is not singular, as it can only resemble something external.

Finally, Badiou suggests that though these schemes of art dominated the aesthetics of the 20th century, no new schema has emerged that understood the relation between art and truth in a new way (5). He thus suggests such a schema, whereby art is at once singular and immanent, meaning that art itself acts as a truth procedure (9). In this new schema he puts forward, Badiou contends that the *work* can no longer be the “pertinent unit of inquiry” when attempting to understand the relationship between art and truth, for the work is necessarily finite, and as such, to argue that the work is an infinite truth would be to fall back on the romantic schema’s argument that the work is a finite manifestation of the infinite in the finite (11). Instead of this, it is argued that the truth has its origins in the event, and that this truth is composed of works, which act as a “situated inquiry about the truth that it locally actualizes or of which it is a fragment” (12). The truth is thus not manifest in each artwork as it was in the romantic schema, rather the work is a fact of art that serves to actualize a small part of a larger, inexhaustible, and multiplistic truth which it is the manifestation of.

Comparing this conception of Badiou's to Foucault's understanding of truth, we see that there exist some fundamental differences, but ones that can be reconciled through close scrutiny. While Foucault's understanding is very much based on the premise that truth is self-evident, but not in control of its own regime, this aspect is not present in Badiou. For Foucault, the regime of truth governs, via a series of operations, how exactly the relation between subject and truth is articulated. Badiou understands artistic truth as a multiplicity, but one that can only be actualized locally in the form of the event, and thus this question of regime does not appear. This is because Badiou's work takes place at a much different level to that of Foucault. Badiou's argument takes place in a way "after" the forces of the outside have shaped and determined the actors that will play out the event.

Badiou then introduces the poem as his analogy for the artistic work (16). Language manifests its power in the present, and it is onto this power that the poem fixes itself, pushing this power towards disappearance and the infinite (i.e. the poem could be defined as a pushing of language). Language acts as the lynchpin of the poem, guaranteeing it intelligibility and a limit to be attempted to be exceeded. It is the unmentioned subtext of the poem, that transcendent or coded element that is present only indirectly, without presenting itself in full, and only accessible through a process of inference (25).

Language thus operates as the *context* of the poem, acting as a hidden operational element behind it, necessary for its constitution. Just as was mentioned above, Badiou's argument concerns itself not with the formation of language via a regime *of truth* of language (Foucault's focus and interest), but rather more with language as a set element on which the poem bases itself, or expressed differently, a *regime of language* that we will now investigate. What is important is that the relationship between art and its

context or the regime in which it is found is not a simple “binary” relationship between, for instance, the structure of syntax of language and the poem’s use of this syntax to create artistic truth, but rather that this relationship is much more fundamental. It is perhaps useful here to apply this concept to music in order to illustrate this point.

The relationship of music to artistic truth is *not* at the first level that between, for instance, the stringency of the tonal system and the symphonies written using it that create artistic truth relying on it. This is not altogether incorrect, but the point being made is that the relationship is much more fundamental than that, namely that the musical discourse *determines* the work, and thus the relation between the work and the syntax of tonality. Thus in this example, the relationship still holds, but the reason why is due to the relationship of the whole musical discourse surrounding tonality to the work *inasmuch as it is also a part of this discourse*.

This musical discourse is constantly shifting, as we have seen with Foucault, as a reaction to outside forces of different types that shape it, and in turn determine a series of internal operations that act together in different ways to produce that which we understand to be the work, which is in itself also inextricably linked to the production of subjectivities as well. One can thus see that musical truth does not stay constant over time, but rather shifts according to its relationship to discourse. The relationship of the symphony to tonality is still crucial for the constitution of the musical truth of the symphony, but only insofar as this link is determined by discourse. Furthermore, the relation of the symphony to its truth changes as discursive elements seize or let go of it over time, a process that is constantly happening, and leading not to an apotheosis, but rather to ever-new combinations of a multiplicity of elements.

Let us however continue with Badiou a little longer, as he still has some interesting points to make regarding this issue.

Badiou begins the third chapter of *Handbook of Inaesthetics* by addressing the topic of hermeticism in the poetry of Mallarmé. He describes the poem as having an enigmatic surface, one that must be passed “through” in order to access the poem itself, which possesses no unique content of its own (29). For Badiou, “[t]he poem is neither a description nor an expression. Nor is it an affected painting of the world’s extension. The poem is an operation” (29). Though the works of Mallarmé doubtlessly possess this enigmatic surface and would not be poems without it, as Badiou would have it, they are not hermetic. This is because “In truth, it is legitimate to speak of hermeticism only when there is a secret or occult science and when in order to understand we require the keys to an interpretation” (29). What Badiou describes as “keys to an interpretation” would be information that would be needed for the poem to function as the operation he describes.

Badiou’s definition is here I believe quite straightforward, however by examining this statement a little closer, we can draw some interesting conclusions from it. What is meant is simply that a poem should not be tied to any specific information as a precondition of its functioning as an operation. Were this the case, it would mean that the poem functions only for specific people in specific privileged discourses, and thus endows a privileged status on the subject who possesses the necessary information to be able to pass through its surface, creating a direct link or similarity between the author’s intention and the subject’s perception.⁵

⁵ For more discussion on this topic, see here again Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art of the Literary Field Genesis and Structure*. Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press, 1995. Print. pp. 286-290.

What I will argue takes this proposition slightly further. In my view, without a discourse underpinning it, the work effectively does not exist. There is however *always* a discourse underpinning the work in some way or another (inasmuch as there exists a subject perceiving it), which serves to constitute it and give it significance. This being said, the discourse that surrounds and actualizes the work changes, and changes in accordance with the regime of truth in which it becomes embedded. This regime, which creates the work's context, will serve to constitute the "event" of the work's appearance, and will constitute the truth of the work.

Part of this constitution is the determination, on the part of discourse and the regime of art, as to the relation between what could be called hermetic and non-hermetic elements in the work. These two aspects form two poles that are in constant struggle with one another, existing only in abstraction. In order to better grasp this concept, we shall look quickly at the concept of the plan(e)s⁶ of transcendence and immanence taken from *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari.

In the *Becomings* plateau, the authors make the differentiation between two types of planes, that of transcendence, and that of immanence. The plane of transcendence (also called the plane of organization) is:

A hidden structure necessary for forms, a secret signifier necessary for subjects. It ensues that the plan(e) itself will not be given. It exists only in a supplementary dimension to that to which it gives rise ($n + 1$). This makes it a teleological plan(e), a design, a mental principle. (DG 265)

⁶ Plane or planes will also appear as plan(e)s the context of Deleuze and Guattari's work, in order to preserve the double meaning of the word in the work's original French. *Plan* can mean both "plane" and "plan", an ambiguity that the authors rely upon in the text.

This plane can be linked to Badiou's concept of the "hidden keys" that he mentions as the hallmark of hermeticism in that it consists of the information that is assumed, or that is taken as a pre-given element. Language for Badiou underpins the poem, providing it with a foundation on which it rests, but which is only inferred. He states that "[w]ithin the poem, syntax is the latent power in which the contrast between presence and disappearance [...] can present itself to the intelligible. [...] It operates without presenting itself" (25). If language for Badiou underpins the poem, then what is it, if not "a hidden structure" as Deleuze and Guattari describe it? This conception can also be linked again to the concept of the regime of truth, which is the process of indoctrination by which certain principles are internalized in the subject, becoming fundamental to their interpretation. Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari write of language that "[it] is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience" (76). This expresses a similar sentiment to Foucault's description of the process of baptism in relation to the "profession" needed to belong to a certain regime of truth.

Let us take a short example to look at this concept more closely. The regime of truth of classical harmony creates subjects with a certain profound obligation towards the rules of tonality, in that these rules, in their perception of a piece that follows them as well, cannot but be by the listener. It works as a sort of "hidden principle" that guides their decisions about how to compose, perform, or listen to the music. It can only be grasped indirectly in the music which obeys its law, "[i]t can only be inferred, induced, concluded from that to which it gives rise" (265). In other words, one needs to go through a certain process of formation, of a sort of education, in order to learn it. This education is the *inculcation* of a specific regime of art on the subject, which thus obliges it to a certain interpretation of the work.

This plane is contrasted with the plane of immanence, its polar opposite, whereby:

[T]here are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. (266)

It is here that the poem would work, in Badiou's conception, as an operation. It does not have a form, but rather would operate as one process among many, arriving in its time, creating an affect, and then disappearing one more. Here, there can be no hidden elements (as that would imply a subjectivity), only relations. This plan(e) is very much in harmony with Badiou's conception of the poem. To take another example, this could for instance be the plan(e) created by free jazz, one of pure intensity. The form fits the line; the length of the solo is determined only by the wandering, nomadic line of the performer, and not influenced by any outside structure.

Where however Deleuze and Guattari deviate from Badiou is the relation between these two planes. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari make it very clear that these two planes can in reality exist *only* in mixture with one another, and are completely codependent on one-another. Any expression of the one is inconceivable without the presence of the other creeping into it in some form or another.

The most appropriate model for their relationship is that of the fractal. Fractals (like the Koch snowflake for instance) can be expressed in terms of a very precise mathematical formula (the plane of organization), but are fundamentally irrational, as their form can only be grasped in abstraction

(the plane of immanence). The line formed by the Koch snowflake⁷ is an abstract one, as in theory every point it contains can be subdivided into an infinity of further points. It thus represents a space of infinite area, but also one that can be very clearly grasped and defined. It consists both of a smooth space in that its line travels between points, and contains in it an infinite space beyond the limits of any mathematical formula. At the very same time, it follows a rational pattern, and clearly defined rules, the sign of a striated space.

For Badiou, these categories seem to be mutually exclusive, if there is a hidden principle, then the poem is hermetic and thus there can be no free operation, while for Deleuze and Guattari, the two poles form two abstract categories that cannot exist in reality, except in a mixture with one-another similar to the fractal described above, locked in a permanent struggle:

The plane of organization is constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialization, weigh them down, re-stratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects in a dimension of depth. Conversely, the plane of consistency is constantly extricating itself from the plane of organization, causing particles to spin off the strata, scrambling forms by dint of speed or slowness, breaking down functions by means of assemblages or microassemblages. (270)

The relationship between these two elements determines the configuration of the event, and constitutes its coordinates at the intersection

⁷ I am here relating two very similar concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, namely those of the smooth and the striated, and those of the planes of immanence and transcendence. For a discussion of the metaphor of the Koch snowflake, see Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Ed. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print. pp. 482-488.

of the two planes, which in turn determine the relation of the work to the fragment of truth that it actualizes. Looking at this relationship in this light puts a very heavy emphasis on the role of discourse in determining the truth of the work. The construction of the event determines the way in the work is formed, making the work into what can be called an event-object. As we will see in the next chapter, this prioritization of the context in the constitution of artistic truth can directly be linked to the concept of the curatorial.

5. The Curatorial and the Constitution of Artistic Truth

In this chapter, we will look at how the concept of the curatorial can be seen as the sum of forces that shape the event-object, as well as how the figure of the curator in visual arts is thus the embodiment of several of these forces, while being themselves also in a way “curated”, or shaped in reaction to forces of the outside.

Before we begin to speak about the figure of the curator and their relationship to the curatorial, there is another aspect that needs to be examined. This is the concept of the exhibition, and its relationship to the constitution of an event-object that possesses a certain truth.

What makes the exhibition a worthwhile form for our examination is the fact that, for many decades now, there has been an interest in questioning what make up the boundaries of the exhibition. This questioning has lead to an understanding in the field of visual arts of the relationship between content and context in relation to the exhibition that is very much in line with our purposes here.

We saw in the last chapter a description of the relationship between the planes of transcendence and immanence, and the constant struggle that

exists between them. The creation of an artistic truth, as we have seen, is a haecceity⁸, the coordinates that correspond to the product of the pull of these two fundamental forces. The relation that these forces take on to one another is determined by a whole multiplicity of elements that come together in order to determine the essence of a given event, which is in turn what makes up the object. To say this in another way, the event is formed by the cross-section of a specific relationship between bodies and processes which shape them. Deleuze and Guattari speak of this concept, saying:

We must avoid an oversimplified conciliation, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type. For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that. [...] You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. (262)

What they explain here is a fundamental relationship between the context and the subject, with both playing their part in forming the other, and becoming inseparable. To bring this back to the topic of exhibitions, one could thus say that the “essence” or “truth” of the exhibition, that which is special and unique, and cannot be taken away without changing the whole, is exactly this unique combination of all elements involved. Crucially, *that which is traditionally known as the subject is also taken up in this process.*

We can go further, linking this view to another key concept presented above, namely that of the regime. To back up just a little bit, this situation,

⁸ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Ed. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print. pp. 260-265.

with its own unique combination of elements leading to the creation of its own unique essence is sculpted out of the chaos of all possible essences, all possible truths, by a specific combination of forces that act upon it. These forces control everything about the event, as well as constitute its essence. The forces in charge of determining both the works present in an exhibition, as well as the non-artistic elements that constitute it (such as exhibition text, or location), can be seen as constituting via a process of selection and combination (or composing) what we could call the *regime of truth of the exhibition*. If the poem is, after Badiou, only an operation, then it is the regime that creates, determines, and feeds a body into this operation, and thus creates the specific “situated inquiry” about the truth mentioned above.⁹ This truth is the product of all the elements within the exhibition assemblage, and is thus constantly in flux, in a process of transformation, and of permanent becoming.

Thus we can see that, without having to mention the figure of the curator, we can explain the emergence of a specific truth of the exhibition as the product of a collection of forces.

Where then, does the concept of the curatorial come into the picture? Arguably it already has, but under the guise of a different name. For what is curating (I make here a very clear distinction between the infinitive verb “curating” and the noun “curator”, which designates a body) but exactly this process that we have just finished describing?¹⁰ All these decisions about

⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Ed. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print. pp. 85-91

¹⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Ed. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print. pp. 262-264

the configuration of the exhibition assemblage one could just as well name “curatorial” decisions.

Let us look at the emergence of the figure of the curator in a little bit more detail, in order to make this link clearer. The role of the curator, or at least, that assemblage of functions that together make up what we now call a “curator”, emerged from those people charged with the creation of exhibitions of mainly works from the visual arts.

Though there is not enough space here to go into the details of this history, suffice to say that the choosing of certain artworks using specific criteria is already an exercising of what can be called a certain regime of truth. Furthermore what can be seen for instance in the debate surrounding the white cube and its relationship to site-specificity, curators began to be aware that traditionally “non-artistic” factors such as location can also have an important effect on, or indeed take over the interpretation of, an artwork.¹¹ Fast-forward to today, and the contemporary curator is now principally in charge of creating exhibitions, a mandate that situates museums as only one of several locations in which this activity can take place (Smith 19). They thus also take as a means of expression the configuration and composition of many non-artistic factors that come along with different contexts in which artworks are placed.

Remember that this truth of the exhibition was something that was created already, and that preceded the rise of the curator. What changed was that the figure of the curator suddenly began to emerge as important for the constitution of this truth, and, we could say, began to take on an author

¹¹ See O’Dougherty, B, Brian O’Doherty, and Thomas McEvelley. *Inside the White Cube : The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Expanded ed, 1st University of California Press ed. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999. Web. Ahmanson-Murphy Fine Arts Imprint.

function in the discourse. As mentioned in the section on Foucault and the function of authorship, it is important to understand the separation that exists between the authorship function, which in this case we see is gaining a classifying function, and the individual “through which” it speaks, which is largely unimportant.

In other words, the rise of the curator is, more precisely expressed, the *rise of the figure of the curator as the author of some specific curatorial function(s)*. These functions have always existed in different human and non-human forms over the history of art. Before the function of the constitution of the truth of the exhibition was territorialized by the figure of the curator, it still existed, albeit in a different form. Instead of being put together following the intention of the curator, it was created by a variety of other forces acting together.

For instance, in the often-cited example of the 1863 Salon des Refusés in Paris, where, after numerous complaints to Napoleon regarding the large number of works refused by the committee in charge of the *Salon de peinture et de la sculpture*, another exhibition of the rejected works was organized, by royal decree, in parallel to the main salon (Maneglier 173). The curatorship of the exhibition could surely not be attributed to Napoleon himself alone (for he did not complain), and also cannot be entirely attributed to the committee that initially rejected the works from the main salon (for they did not want them to be exhibited), and nor does it make sense to attribute the curatorship of the exhibition to those who complained about the works that were rejected (for their power was also limited in this situation). All parties involved were in fact responsible, and all were acting under the influence of several societal forces manifested in their respective subjectivities.

One could here infer the presence of an immanent curatorship, one created by the interaction of various bodies working together in a sort of assemblage, or in Foucauldian terms, of a specific regime of truth, which saw to it that the rejected in this case be exhibited. It would be a mistake to interpret the modern figure of the curator as the unification of all of these same forces into one person, as there are many forces that do not form part of the powers of the contemporary curator. Control over issues of funding for instance (who paid for the exhibition in the *Salon* example?) is often outside of the control of contemporary curators, and exerts on them its own considerable pressure.

Thus *the figure of the curator is itself the product of external pressures* from larger societal forces that shape it from the outside. One could say that the curator takes form within a set of relations between forces that try to control and seize it from the outside. As in the example of financing above, these forces influence the subject of the curator, without forming a part of their body. It nevertheless exerts a pressure on the body, forcing it towards or away from certain directions.

To state otherwise would be to undermine the view that individual humans do not lie at the center of their history, but rather that their history is the product of a relation and confrontation between forces.¹² Thus, one can, in the tradition of Foucault's discourse analysis, attempt to examine the history of the word and the role, in order to come to a conclusion regarding why it has become necessary, at this point in history, to incorporate many aspects of this curatorial act that determines the regime of truth in which the

¹² Foucault discusses this topic in the beginning of a lecture at the College de France in 1983. See Foucault, Michel. *The Courage of Truth : The Government of Self and Others I*. Ed. Graham Burchell and Arnold I Davidson. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print. Michel Foucault: Lectures at the College de France. pp. 4-5.

artwork is constituted, in the figure of the curator. Such an analysis would go far beyond the scope of this text, though I will however venture here a hypothesis as to why this has become the case.

Fundamentally, the relationship between curator and the actualization of artistic truth is a question about community. The creation of a specific context (or assemblage) is simultaneously also the creation of a specific community, in which the actions of certain forces will be called into question at the bidding of certain others that remain largely opaque. The community thus gains a collective subjectivity that sets it apart from the group. This process can be seen as well in the context of the fractal-like relationship between the planes of immanence and transcendence discussed above. The central question thus becomes “for whom is it curated?”, in other words attempting to understand what coming community the curatorship attempts to create. The curatorship will always create a community, as it is, whether human or not, fundamentally a form of subjectivity. As was seen in the analysis of Foucault’s *Order of Discourse*, this community will act to ward off powers and dangers of the outside (52), or after Deleuze, preserve and enhance its constituent relation in the face of its permanent degradation and transformation.¹³

To address this question, which ultimately deals with the relationship between community and art, I will examine the philosopher Jacques Rancière’s view of the issue, as it opens up several interesting questions in this regard.

¹³ See Deleuze’s lectures on Spinoza, in particular the lecture on 13.01.81 in Deleuze, Gilles. “Spinoza. Cours Vincennes (1978-1981).” (1981): n. pag. Web.

6. Curating and Community

In a lecture entitled “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art”, Rancière submits a theory of aesthetics of artistic creation based around the concept of the *aesthetic community*. The theory revolves around Rancière’s view that there is, in every work of art, a fundamental rupture between the artistic creation and its effect on its audience, or said otherwise, between the complex of signs and the complex of perception (6). In every aesthetic production, there is always a break between the community who created the work, and that which receives it.

This phenomenon is often described as that of the spectacle, which has become the topic of many debates as to how to subvert it (the author mentions Debord’s *Société du Spectacle* and Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* as examples of attempts to subvert this problem of the spectacle). Rancière argues that one must accept this fundamental disjunction as the natural state of human interaction,¹⁴ and attempt to use it productively in order to effect political change through art. Instead of fighting against it, as in the case of Brecht and Debord, one should accept that this act of translation will always occur when dealing with aesthetic production, and should thus be used positively in order to achieve a desired result.

For instance, Rancière mentions the reading of the *Torso*, a partially broken Greek statue, by the art historian Winckelmann as a “masterpiece of Greek art, which also meant the supreme expression of Greek liberty” (8). He saw the statue as a paragon of perfection as he perceived it, regardless of

¹⁴ This concept is more clearly expressed in Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso, 2009. Print. pp. 16-17.

the fact that what he saw deviated heavily from the original, in that it lacked its original head and arms. The community that created the statue has long since disappeared, and all that remained was a mutilated stone statue that can then be “rebuilt” by Winckelmann with words, fundamentally creating something completely different than the original (8). The materiality of the statue thus became only the substrate onto which Winckelmann built the statue created by his perception. His account, in turn, also served to influence the reception of the work among a certain group of people (those influenced by Winckelmann’s account, whether directly or indirectly), and thus fundamentally change that of which it consists. This linguistic layer of the statue was effectively added onto it, changing what it is, without having to actually disturb its stone surface.

Turning back to Rancière, he believes that instead of art critiquing society by means of a direct engagement with the problem at hand, creating a “straight relation between aims and means” (11), a more powerful form of artistic critique can be by intentionally creating a break between any sort of link between cause and effect in the artwork. This is a throwback to the Kantian conception of art, namely one where beauty can only exist apart from any concept¹⁵. He argues that so-called “critical art” failed to create any of its intended political mobilization, and serves rather to strengthen the very regimes of which it is critical. It failed due to its intentions of being too concrete and identifying its aims too clearly; it was exactly this “straight relation” that proved to be its undoing.

What is however suggested is a new way of addressing politics in artistic production, namely by anticipating an effect, instead of specific aims,

¹⁵ “[N]ur die allgemeine Mitteilbarkeit [...] sollte im Geschmacksurteile der Vorstellung des Gegenstandes zuerkannt werden[.]” in Kant, Immanuel. “Kritik Der Urteilskraft.”

Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1790. Print.

that the work will have on both a real community as well as the community it intends to create (12). In this situation, works thus anticipate the reality of what they provoke, as well as explore the tensions created between this ideal world and the current one.

The link to be made to the issue at hand regarding curating is in exactly this issue of the community to which the production of art addresses itself. If we accept Rancière's position that translation is inevitable, and that there will always be a process of translation between one unique individual and another, then this question of "for whom is the artwork curated?" becomes "to what coming community does it address itself, and what is the relation it creates between this coming community and the present one in which it exists (which differs from its audience)?"

The answer to this question is that curating is the link, or indeed the interface, between the coming community and the production of art. It takes on this function in that it acts as a sort of translation process between the audience and the production of art, exerting on said audience a certain pressure to become exactly this coming community that it intends.

Thus the connection between the community and art is one mediated by the curatorial. The curatorial is the membrane through which the one must always pass in order to reach the other, and is exactly the process of the constitution of meaning through the linking of specific discourses together with one another. As we have seen before, this curatorial process does not seek to express any "objective" form of artistic truth, but rather one that is an expression of its subjective interests, which are in turn shaped and formed by forces of the outside. This process of actualization of a specific aesthetic regime that shapes a community as the result of societal forces could be called the *political regime of aesthetics*.

What this theory of the curatorial explains is exactly the means by which, without the need for two subjects possessing the same universal categories, or relation between the planes of immanence and transcendence, or after Bourdieu, a common preexisting institution to form the “pure gaze” of the spectator on the artist’s production (*Rules of Art* 288), an artistic truth can be created, while simultaneously creating a community that actualizes it, as the one necessarily implies the other.

7. Conclusion

In order to return to the introduction of this text, with its intention of addressing the topic of meaning in the musical discourse, it would be sensible to outline exactly my intention in addressing this topic of the curatorial to a musical audience, in order to state clearly how I perceive this text as addressing a particular problem in the musical discourse. The terms and categories I employ in this text are ones not normally used in the study of Western music, rather they relate, when not entirely philosophical, to the fields of visual arts and literature. I am thus attempting to change the way that the music discourse understands and reflects upon its activities, and thereby change with it the manner in which music is produced. This text lacks the scope to address these potentialities in full, though precisely this concept of community is worth reviewing once more.

Where the concept of the curatorial, and in particular the question of “for whom is the artwork curated?” can be of use is precisely by identifying the coming community to which a given work addresses itself. It can also be seen as a radical shift away from the “avant-guard” or “critical” positioning of many composers still working today, an aesthetic that, as was shown in the reading of Rancière, does not achieve the goals of its critique due to the

explicitness of its program (this is the “straight relation between aims and means” that Rancière describes in his text).

By identifying the coming community that is created along with every musical truth, there exists the possibility of an understanding of musical aesthetics that is not based on the concept of the universal subject, but rather based on the coming-together of many forces of the outside that shape and “hollow-out” acting subjects whose relation to the truth of a musical work is determined by their relation to the coming community that the work attempts to create (on behalf of “curatorial forces”).

This theory is thus a move away from any universal conceptions regarding the “universal power” of music, etc. It moves away from any interpretation that understands music as something that can be addressed to a shared category of perception, and towards a theory of the construction of meaning based on its surroundings. I will leave this last point undeveloped, as it would take a great deal more space to demonstrate precisely what I am only implying here, though I hope to complete this thought in a further text in the future.

In applying my call for a curatorial awareness of the constitution of truth in the musical discourse, one that can help better grasp the relationship between producer and audience, producers of music in this field will hopefully be much better positioned to identify the implications of their practices on their respective audiences, as well as the relation of these audiences to communities. Thinking curatorially, producers must anticipate an effect of their work, anticipate a coming community that will seize the work in new and unexpected ways. In doing this, many existing challenges in the field have the potential to be either solved or bypassed.

I have spent this text making a series of comparisons and imports of theories that have been well developed in the fields of visual art, and

literature. It is hoped that these inroads made into the musical discourse by those of philosophy and art theory can have fundamental implications for musical production and understanding. Furthermore, I hope to see the expansion of these tendencies towards the downfall of the regime of the universal category and the alienation that comes with it in the field of institutional music, and thus a new engagement with the relationship between work and community.

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