

Act VII: Detecting / Distilling Care in Curating / the Curatorial

In thinking about the delusion of care, there is a need to think auto-critically about my own field, curating and curatorial practice. Curators are fond of and quick to refer their practices to the etymology of the term curating, which is from Latin *curare*, "to take care of," and its past participle *curatus*, "one responsible for the care." This is fair enough for every curator, person in charge or manager of a museum, gallery, or art exhibition, to relate their practices to the notion of care, which is surely in some way care. But here too, I would like us to take some time to think about what this care in curating might actually mean.

My primary concern stems from what I call the "curatorial complex." The "curatorial complex" is the tendency wherein or whereby most or everything is carefully trimmed to fit the orbit of the metaphor. Especially in contemporary independent curating, not only are many a subject that is dealt with metaphorically, also the notion of care as that which is fundamental in curating and curatorial practice tends to be reduced to that realm of the metaphor. This is in no way to say that there is anything problematic about using figures of speech to non-literally relate to things or actions. Quite to the contrary, as we all know that metaphors enrich artistic works both textually and aesthetically, and in using metaphors we can simplify and make accessible and comprehensible some very complicated notions. Take for example, "time is money" or "the world's a stage." While "money" and "stage" aid us significantly to understand the complexity of both time and the world, respectively, it would be absolutely problematic to reduce time only to money and the world only to being a stage. Thus, my first concern of the "curatorial complex" that reduces care to a metaphor. In an era where curating has come to mean everything and nothing, where curating is reduced to the sheer act of selecting, where curating is a matter of choice and display, Martinon and Rogoff's proposal of the curatorial comes in as a welcome expansion of the field and what it can do:

"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 explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge. So to drive home a distinction between 'curating' and 'the curatorial' means to emphasize a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatisation and performance." Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Preface," *The Curatorial - A Philosophy of Curating*, Martinon (ed.) (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), p. ix.

This is of particular interest because by employing the notion of the curatorial, one expands the "space" of care from selection and display to also encompass enactment, dramatization, and performance. By this, I would like to understand that all "events" that have been considered extracurricular to curating like discursive programs, symposia, public programs, performances, reading spaces, and more are actually crucial components of the exhibition itself, as the artists and topics at stake receive manifold trajectories of exploration.

In exploring all that is staged, and treating this as an "event of knowledge," through varying channels and mediums, provisions are made for the artist, the art, and the themes in terms of presentation, maintenance, cultivation, protection, dissemination, mediation, and other epistemic, moral, and legal considerations that one can call "care."

Though the curatorial offers a widened space of care for the practice, in thinking about curating/ curatorial, I had to think about the debates on Créolité versus Creolization. Not in content or meaning, but in the framework of processualism, and in the relation of the static versus dynamic embedded in the concepts of Créolité versus Creolization, respectively. When Manthia Diawara asked Édouard Glissant about Créolité, aboard the Queen Mary II in 2009, Glissant responded that:

"When you say 'Créolité' you fix its definition of being once and for all in time and place. Now I think that being is in a state of perpetual change. And what I call creolisation is the very sign of that change. In creolisation, you can change, you can be with the Other, you can change with the Other while being yourself, you are not one, you are multiple, and you are yourself. You are not lost because you are multiple. You are not broken apart because you are multiple. Créolité is unaware of this. It becomes another unity like Frenchness, Latinity, etc., etc. That is why for a long time now I have developed the idea

of creolisation, which is a permanent process that supersedes historical avatars.” Manthia Diawara and Édouard Glissant. *Conversation with Édouard Glissant Aboard the Queen Mary II* (August 2009).

I am interested in thinking about curating in a state of perpetual change, in a process, curating as a multiple concept that develops and adjusts self in time and space. With the notion of the curatorial I see an adjustment in function, but which comes across still as static in space and time. But with what I will like to call curatorialization. I would like to propose the possibility of a curatorial practice that is malleable in form, space, and time, that in its multiplicity of existences expands the scope of curatorial practice itself. In this case, instead of understanding the music selection process of the DJ in a club as an act of curating, one would imagine a curator implementing the structure of the DJ within a process of making an exhibition, which is to say thinking of the audience of the exhibition as a DJ would think of the dancers on the dance floor. This necessitates a deep understanding of the space, deep listening of the bodies that occupy the space, and a deep mastery of the way moods change with time across an evening of a DJ-set. There is a constant adaptation taking place. As soon as the DJ notices that the floor has come to a standstill, he needs to react, he needs to catch the attention of his dancers and needs to keep them on the move.

In using this analogy to exemplify what I mean by curatorialization, I am in no way trying to equate the curator to a DJ, but I am trying to imagine ways of expanding the field of care of the curator's practice - a care for the artist, and art, but also a deep sense of care of the audience at the disposition of the curator. What I am proposing is that besides moving from the act of just display/staging (curating) to enacting, dramatizing, and performing events of knowledge (curatorial), curatorialization would have to also mean employing other strategies that open up cracks and caveats of care that we might not have explored until now, and that constantly adapt themselves to the needs of the artists, art, and audience, as well as times and spaces - and most especially over extended periods of time before and beyond the exhibition itself. Exhibitions are often always conceived as static beings. But it is this thinking of an exhibition and finding ways of vivifying an exhibition, its processes before, during, and after the act (display, staging performances, and symposia) that I would like to think of as curatorialization. For those of us that have to carry the burdens of historical disenfranchisement, I would actually like to push that notion of curatorialization to actually also relate to the notion of marronage.

In the binary of "fight or flight," it is often fight that is considered the active form of resistance. But in the history of slavery in the Caribbean and Latin American slave enterprises for instance, in Barbados, Brazil, Jamaica, or Suriname, but also in the Indian ocean, for example in La Reunion, marronage served as a possibility for slaves to escape from plantations and create maroon communities in the peripheries of slave enterprises: be it the "petit marronage," in which people escaped for a short period of time to then return or "grand marronage," in which they escaped permanently, at the heart of it all are strategies of resistance, which sometimes led to rebellions across some colonies. In their hideouts, the maroons could challenge the plantation system by the sheer act of absence, depriving the plantation of its workforce, attacking the plantations or negotiating their freedom and autonomy, but also encouraging or inciting others to follow suit. But what is also fascinating about the act and space of marronage is the ability to retreat-both as a concept of pulling back and also a notion of caring for oneself and your kin. In my proposal of curatorialization as marronage, I will like to imagine a space like SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin, Khiasma in Paris, RAW Material Company in Dakar (just to name a few) as spaces of retreating -not as metaphor- to organize, congregate peoples, knowledges, and things we care about and intend to care for.

Another example of an effort of extending that space of the curatorial and thereby offering a care beyond the metaphor can be observed in Jonas Tinius's and Sharon Macdonald's paper "The Recursivity of the Curatorial." Irrespective of the historical shortcomings of anthropology as a discipline, and problems inherent to the notion and practices of anthropology, it is worth taking a glance at their proposal of the "Recursivity of the Curatorial." with regards to the relation between anthropology and curatorial practice in the following excerpts:

“Recursivity differs from reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to reflection on one's own position, and in our research contexts could indicate anthropologists coming to new understandings of themselves through reflecting on others, or other people thinking about anthropologists and thus coming to understanding themselves. Recursivity, however, is about a "recursive sequence of revelation" in which the relation between two perspectives "is constantly redefining the partners in the exchange, the objects of exchange, and the very concept of exchange" (Sansi 2018: 123). As such, recursivity is performative and implies action. It refers to an ongoing mutually-affecting relationality between things, people, thoughts,

and forms of knowledge. This is not just a combination of reflexive processes but the generation of something new. [...] Yet, there are specific ways in which this recursive generation of knowledge plays out in different fields. In the case of the relation between anthropology and curating, and to return to the mirror-image metaphor of the ricochet effects of recursivity, we are dealing with a socio-epistemic exchange." Jonas Tinius and Sharon Macdonald, "The recursivity of the curatorial," ed. Roger Sansi, *The Anthropologist as Curator* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 42-43.

Two things I would like to take with me from this proposal as a possibility of enabling spaces of care are: a.) this relationality of perspectives, between things, people, thoughts, and forms of knowledge, between disciplines like curating and anthropology that end up being more than the sums of the parts that make up the relation, and b.) the socio-epistemic exchange that can be generated in such relations and spaces.

That said, one must be careful with the trend of "curator as ethnographer, which one is to stumble on oftentimes. Due to obvious limits in time and funding, curators tend to delve rather superficially into certain subjects. In the past decades, in which we observed trends of Western curators wanting to do exhibitions on artists from the non-West, one sometimes - especially after the revolts in North Africa- observed that a curator from New York for example, would fly to Cairo for 3 days, come back, and do an exhibition about Egyptian art. I and my colleagues too often get emails from curator colleagues with the question: "I am working on XYZ, please send me a list of African artists working on these issues." It is not, problem, per se, to seek advice from colleagues, but when this becomes a methodology, then it becomes problematic. There is something about shopping for artists like in a supermarket in such curatorial practices, and the concern that arises is that the care needed to get into a profound conversation and relationship with artists falls by the wayside. Also, this practice of "remote curating" wherein a curator sits on his desk in place A and works with artists in place B without ever doing a studio visit, or even just an online studio visit, is part of this trend of the "curator as ethnographer."

The result too often is the production of epistemic violence within the practice of exhibition-making, as the complex sociopolitical or aesthetic phenomena with which many artists are concerned with can neither be discerned within 3 days of visiting 40 artists in Pakistan or Cairo, nor upon a Skype studio visit. Too often this leads to yawning generalizations, and unreliable assertions. The critique of bias often ascribed to ethnographers, as their practices tend to be dependent on certain particular informants, observations, and limits in comprehension, can also be the case with the "curator as ethnographer"

I would like to end this section on curating on the note of caring and curing. In the whole fascination about the etymology of curating in care, often the notion of cura-as in "healing"- is forgotten. Of course, because it is quite a huge claim to make that art can be a healing element. But how can we imagine curating as a process that might eventually lead to some kind of social or spiritual healing-not just of symptoms that surface, but a more holistic notion of healing that refers to the roots of our societal concerns and troubles.