

Participatory curating

Tags:

#participatory curating

#collaboration

#social experience

#community

Why?:

I was tempted to think on what would be participatory curating since “participatory” is researched, used, promoted and criticized very frequently both in arts and cultural policies. Three concerns which are most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960s formed the starting point from where I would understand and think on the notion of participatory curating or co-curating. Those concerns are – activation; authorship; community. Alongside these I would include collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience of the co-curated event.

Focus on:

Participatory has different dimensions and angles from which can be understood but what I am interested in is the social dimension of participation, with the emphasis on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience (Claire Bishop, *Participation* : 2006) rather than activation of the individual viewer,

What can be understand as participation in art and culture?:

- *‘The position that the work occupies in the production relations of its time’ W.Benjamin*

One of the first texts to elaborate theoretically the political status of participation dates from 1934, by the left-wing German theorist Walter Benjamin. He argued that when judging a work’s politics, we should not look at the artist’s declared sympathies, but at the position that the work occupies in the production relations of its time. Referring directly to the example of Soviet Russia, Benjamin maintained that the work of art should actively intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the processes of production: ‘this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, the more readers or spectators into collaborators’. (Walter Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer’, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–34 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003) 777.

- *Participatory art*

From the 60s to today where art relates to the audience as the producer of the art, or which physically engages the viewer in a work of art.

What Claire Bishop (2006) brings is another dimension of participation of art through her interest in those artistic practices since the 1960s that appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life: intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Hélio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper); drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy (Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys); organizing

a garage sale (Martha Rosler); running a café (Allen Ruppersberg; Daniel Spoerri; Gordon Matta-Clark), a hotel (Alighiero Boetti; Ruppersberg) or a travel agency (Christo and Jeanne-Claude).

She says that although the photographic documentation of these projects implies a relationship to performance art, they differ in striving to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception. Their emphasis is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience.

- Participation in cultural policy

Participation is a concept which is also related to cultural policy.

Since the 1960s, there have been efforts to democratize culture using various measures which facilitate distribution and access to works of art, projects and products. Since the 1970s, through a cultural democracy approach, cultural diversity has been affirmed and promoted and efforts have been made to eliminate boundaries between high and popular culture. In time, other concepts were added, such as access to culture, cultural animation, mediation, local cultural development, audience development and the like. It is evident that cultural participation belongs to 'many areas of cultural policy' (Bollo et al., 2012: 8) and that these issues inevitably turn the cultural policy focus to the formulation of it 'in relation to the cultural needs of the population in their everyday lives' (Kangas, 2004: 24) instead of it being defined in relation to external aesthetic standards' (Kangas, 2004: 24). Hence, cultural policies are directed to the issue of 'equal access and participation in cultural activities' (Kangas, 2017: 12). However, the term 'cultural participation' has changed through time, and definitions then as well as now have depended on authors and contexts in which participation is discussed. The traditional understanding is that participation is attendance at cultural events and consummation of cultural contents, and in 'most developed countries as counting visits to museums, galleries and various kinds of performance' (Bollo et al., 2012: 8). Over time, the concept spread across the borders of high and institutionalized culture and included, as pointed out by Kangas (2017), active (e.g., playing) and passive participation (e.g., listening to the concert). (In A. Zhuvela, and D. Vidovic)

Participatory curating (directions of thinking and developing):

Participatory curation emphasizes collaboration and the collective dimension of social experience through the common work, with the concerns - to act together, share authorship and create a community.

Participatory curatorial¹ work is a political action that creates possibility to extend relations and take them into consideration, develop them, reflect on them, produce and allow questions, to try different tactics, strategies etc. Participatory is based on communication, on deliberation, reflection, agreement, disagreement and negotiation.

¹ "Curatorial work no longer concerns solely the display of artworks and the task of exhibition-making; it is now also understood as a practice centered on longer-term, less object-orientated, discursive-educational projects that involve various people as instigators and actors (~discursivity ~collaboration ~participation ~educational turn ~performativity). Subsequently, curatorial work—which may also be read as a reaction to authorial and consolidated forms of exhibition production—has become more conceptual, increasingly concerned with process-knowledge- and research-based endeavors. Likewise, expanded curatorial work enters into social and political discourses, inasmuch as many projects—with their thematics, research or statement—wish to contribute to socio-political realities, to understand or even change parts of the world around us (~collaboration ~participation)" on <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/>

Participatory curating is the creation of contextual liaisons of aesthetic, social and political knowledge between involved parties where:

1. Curator(s) and artist(s) are prior collaborators, and this relationship is the basis; the artist and their work are essential, and the audience is invited in the co-curating of 'an event' or program to actively intervene in, which is on contrary of the 'subjectivisation of the spectator(ship)' (Pristas)
2. Where acting together as action is taken in order to refer, or change, address the socio-political, economic, cultural and artistic context. To act is not a reaction, but directly intervening in the creation of better working conditions for artistic work to be produced. (producing, presenting and disseminating)
3. An environment is created as to communicate and interact with other art, cultural and social practices
4. Participatory curating is related to the creation of the environment of negotiation, discussion and concern of the artist and artistic works, sometimes directly (working/discussing together with the artists), sometimes indirectly (through references on some artistic practices and works).

Examples:

- Pleskavica festival – creation of the festival through engagement of the artists and participants (as audiences) https://www.culture.si/en/PLESkavica_Festival; <https://vimeo.com/24910254>; <https://vimeo.com/25078264>; <https://vimeo.com/25272747>; <https://vimeo.com/25163387>;
- Co-curated festival – Locomotion and Kondenz 2011 https://www.facebook.com/Kondenz-LoCoMotion-2011-285816338103213/about/?ref=page_internal; http://old.lokomotiva.org.mk/Materijal_2011/HTML_2011/Lokomotion_4.html;
- Kaaithatre <https://www.kaaitheater.be/en/theme/how-to-be-many>; <https://www.kaaitheater.be/en/articles/duo-agnes-quackels-and-barbara-van-lindt-to-take-over-general-and-artistic-coordination-of>
- Zeitraumexit – audience is participating in communication about the program and its creation <https://www.zeitraumexit.de/social-body-building>
- Ama Josephine Budge, The Apocalypse Reading Room List, [The Apocalypse Reading Room List | Free Word](#)

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