

# Curatorial (as critical and performative) institution

## Tags

**#curatorial**

**#performative institution**

**#curatorial turn**

**#performative curating**

Why:

I'm interested in deconstruction of the term institution, but also in understanding the institution in art as a political bastion of national pride, as in the context of N.M and similar

I'm interested in the development of curation as a critical and performative institution, or as an agency and politically aware subject. An institution should be an agonistic space (as Chantal Mouffe puts it) which allows and accepts opposites, a space of dissensus where the desired outcome is not reconciliation, but dialogue.

I have practiced the speculated ideas here, which are possible only in a democratic society (as Emil Hrvatin put it when he was asked if a contemporary dance institution is possible to be developed in the Region).

## Curatorial as critical and performative

Chantal Mouffe (2019) would argue that all art is political – there is art that reproduces the situation and art that challenges the political order, and both are political. But the art that challenges and changes the situation is critical. I would add that the same can be said for an institution. Every institution is political, some reproduce the situation, some try to change it, to address it, to create a public space where a hegemonic struggle will take place and allow a flow and exchange of differences. Such an institution is critical and curatorial.

One might say it's problematic to assign a curatorial aspect to it, especially in times when a window display at a shopping mall is labeled as a curator's design. However, curating in performing arts faces

a different challenge, or as Malzacher would say “The ambiguous title ‘curator’ should be seen as a self-provocation, a challenge, a self-inflicted and complex task, rather than a possible gain of prestige.” (Malzacher, 2019)

The curatorial turn can also be understood as a negative one, as management roles shifted from artistic directors and/or programmers to curators, and brought changes in the system of production and distribution of arts (Pristaš, 2018), but in this text we approach it as a challenge, an attempt to understand the performing arts praxis of programming-dramaturgy-producing-organizing-reflecting in its broadest sense.

However, the curatorial turn enabled reflection beyond disciplines, across the humanities, and it is no longer understood as a display or presentation of artworks, but an extended practice which strives to be in process, not finished, durational, ephemeral, etc.

Irit Rogoff (2006) addresses the curatorial:

“For some time now, we have been differentiating between ‘curating’, the practice of putting on exhibitions and the various professional expertises it involves and ‘the curatorial’, the possibility of framing those activities through series of principles and possibilities. In the realm of ‘the curatorial’ we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense ‘the curatorial’ is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict.”

The curatorial, thus, enables art to expand and go beyond white boxes or black boxes, to discover, to research, to de-fetishize, to allow and enable the production and display of knowledge in many ways and directions.

Malzacher (2019) relates the curatorial with *performative curating*, a term that is also used sporadically by other curators and theorists. He relates the potentiality of curating with performative actions, suggesting that the notion of performative curating should not only acknowledge the social and other relational aspects of art, but place those aspects at the center of curatorial strategies. He adds:

“If we understand performativity not only as something that is intrinsic to the live arts, but also as a strategy to actively emphasize the very construction of its own reality, to show the process and not merely the product, to playfully acknowledge the artistic as well as the social, political, theoretical context, it becomes clear how this could become a powerful means for curating.” (Malzacher, 2019)

A curatorial institution would then be based on a logic that's different from the normative logic of curating understood in relation to the epistemological link to care; a new logic that is not a management of collectable objects or products (performances), or a creative implementation of economies of display or experience economies. (Lepecki, 2018) The curatorial logic proposed here entails subverting the neoliberal logic of self-care or care of the individual, into the logic of *being together* or *togetherness* through creating the spaces where we care for the other, help each other, support one another, no matter the disagreements. Or, creating spaces of interdependence, as interdependence among multitudes, as self-organization of our diversities. That means taking back control over deciding, producing, reforming the institutional dispositif, reconstructing public spaces, or recreating public spaces into spaces for use in art, not only advocating, but actively participating in making policies regarding working rights, working conditions, etc. These and many other approaches and ways-of-doing are part of the contemporary performing arts collaborative and artistic practices.

Thus, a curatorial institution developed with performative curating as its strategy, i.e. a critical institution, can be instituted, developed and sustained through various approaches, strategies and tactics. Some these tactics of *imagining* and *performing the common* are already embedded practices in the field.

Examples:

Nomad Dance Academy <http://www.nomaddanceacademy.org/>

Autonomy of dance - <http://autonomijaplesu.upuh.hr/>

Kino Kultura project space for contemporary performing arts [www.kinokultura.org.mk](http://www.kinokultura.org.mk)

David Weber Crebs - <https://artclimatetransition.eu/2020/12/17/take-care/>  
<https://www.onomatopee.net/exhibition/and-then-the-doors-opened-again/>

Sarah Vanhee - <http://www.sarahvanhee.com/bodies-of-knowledge>

References:

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Biljana Tanurovska- Kjulavkovski

curating  
in  
context



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