

Report - Curationism by David Balzer

Notebook: Curationism

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Location: Ottawa Division, Ontario, Canada

The book has two sections:

"Value", in which a chronology of the curator is the primary focus

- a Roman departmental functionary to
- a Catholic priest in care of souls
- a 16th - 19th century employee in care of objects
- an early 20th century museum employee in care, but also becoming expert in the presentation, of objects
- a late 20th century, perhaps independant, impressario, imparting value to all he/she (mostly he) touches, gathering and, perhaps, commissioning, art from artists and presenting it in ways that enthrall their patrons.
- an early 21st century professional in one of two roles
 - a recently well-trained MA curator with relatively little influence, perhaps interning as a gallery assistant or doing some other poorly paid job
 - a star curator, one of few who have made a large name for themselves as artists in presentation

Only in the second half of the 20th century does 'curate' become a verb.

The book does a great job of relating the changing practice to the changing art & social & economic times of the last two centuries.

"Work", in which the hyper-professionalization of the art world as well as our own shifting definitions of labour are addressed.

It then presents 'curationism' as "the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being. I contend that, since about the mid-1990s, we have been living in the curationist moment, in which institutions and businesses rely on others, often variously credentialed experts, to cultivate and organize things in an expression-cum-assurance of value and an attempt to make affiliations with, and to court, various audiences and consumers. As these audiences and consumers. we are

engaged as well, cultivating and organizing our identities duly, as we are prompted." (p7-8)

Finally, how does this affect society?

"How much curatorial work did you do today? You got dressed, perhaps laying out various options in the manner of an installing curator. Perhaps, for lunch, you went to Chipotle, Subway, Teriyaki Experience or one of any number of food chains that now ask you to select your ingredients to compose your meal. (Subway got in early on curationism, calling their sandwich-makers 'sandwich artists' in an amusing, telling marketing of the artist-curator relationship as parallel to that of the server-customer.) Perhaps you purchased something from an online retailer like Amazon or Everlane, consumer-curatorial work that will result in subsequent emails from the retailer suggesting other products you might like. Perhaps you updated your profile on a dating website or app, further streamlining your identity to attract the right people and repel the wrong ones, curatorial work that will also result in further suggestions of who you might like. Perhaps you spent some time on Facebook, organizing a photo album of your latest trip, or updating your cover photo to something cute and clever, an addition to your digital exhibition of personal and cultural imagery. Perhaps, on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Chat, Google +, or a sex app like Grindr, Scruff or Tinder, you curated connections, making new ones, perhaps hunting by geographical location, and/or favouriting/deleting/blocking existing ones. Perhaps, finally, you unwound with Netflix, Hulu, Mubi or another film- and TV- watching service incorporating your every selection into further selections tailor-made for your tastes." (p116-117)