

07 Some theories that might be used in my curatorial portfolio: Psychology and Psychoanalysis

written by Aobing Wang

*Note before reading: This blog may be a little long.

My personal curatorial portfolio has two sets of keywords: "Reflection of Reality" and "Fluidity of Time and Space." Taking these two groups of keywords as the main entry point, I started to read the exhibition supporting theory. Next, I will describe the theories that may be involved in the subsequent exhibition.

Reflection of Reality□Dreams are symbolic representations of one's unfulfilled desires in reality, and various emotions in reality appear in dreams in abstract ways

The idea that dreams are abstract symbolic expressions of emotions in reality has been demonstrated in many psychological and neuroscience theories. The core theory is the psychoanalytic theory proposed by Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The 'Condensation' and 'Displacement' mechanism between dreams and reality is proposed in the book to illustrate how people's emotions and desires in reality can be transformed into symbolic symbols in dreams (for example, dreaming of exam failure may symbolize anxious feelings about challenges faced in real life, rather than directly representing the exam itself). Freud's psychoanalytic theory inspired a series of subsequent academic studies on the symbolic and emotional associations of dreams.

The second is Jung's analytical psychology. Jung believed that dreams are a combination of the archetypal symbol of the

collective unconscious and the experience of the individual unconscious. It reflects both the unresolved conflicts of the individual and the common symbols of the collective. In *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, he proposed that "Archetypes are typical modes of apprehension, and wherever we meet with uniform and regularly recurring modes of apprehension, we are dealing with an archetype. "His view builds on Freudian psychoanalysis to further interpret the main clue that dreams are symbolic expressions of the contents of the human subconscious. Both believe that dreams reflect unresolved conflicts in reality, and advocate to understand people's deep psychology through the analysis of symbolic millionaires in dreams. But there are differences. Freud's purpose was to reveal the individual's potential mental trauma through the interpretation of dreams and free association, so as to relieve the symptoms of trauma. Jung, on the other hand, promoted the integration of individual consciousness and collective subconscious through the analysis of dreams and active imagination to help individuals achieve the integrity of "self". Take the dream of being chased by wild animals and eventually jumping into a deep well. In Freudian interpretations, the beast symbolizes repressed sexual impulses or a childhood fear of authority (such as a parent), while jumping into a well symbolizes a return to the source of life (such as the womb), death, and the desire to disappear (escape from real conflict). In the Jungian interpretation, the beast may represent a dark side that the individual does not want to acknowledge, and the act of jumping into the well symbolizes the individual diving into the unconscious in search of an opportunity for self-integration.

In addition to the above two classical theories, there is also Lacan's mirror stage theory which is strongly related to the central point of view of this exhibition. Lacan believes that the formation of human self-consciousness begins with infants recognizing the existence of their own image in the mirror for the first time. This marks the transformation of infants from

“fragmented body” to the fictitious identity of “unified ego”, and forms the basis for the construction of subsequent individual subjective cognition. This theory of Lacan emphasizes the unity of the fictional self and expounds the connection between the subject and the other: Self-identification in the mirror stage is essentially the construction of the self through the evaluation of the other (such as the baby in front of the mirror is told by the parents “this is you”), and this process strengthens the symbolic binding of the relationship between the individual and the other. During the mirroring phase, the infant also uses language and symbolic systems (such as the pronoun “I”) to further consolidate the sense of self-identity, but this process is always based on the dependence of the symbols of others. The theory applies to adult psychology, as exemplified by people’s willingness to get likes and comments on well-groomed photos on social media. Relying on others’ comments to recognize and maintain an idealized self-image is essentially a repetition of the mirror stage.

Lacan’s mirror stage theory reveals the fictionality of human self-consciousness and emphasizes that the self-identity constructed by individuals through others (mirror images, language, social symbols, etc.) is always incomplete. This theory overturns the assumption of “self-unity” in traditional psychology. The unrelenting pursuit of “complete self” in human life is essentially a never-ending symbolic game. Lacan’s theory accepted the concept of “ego” in Freud’s theory, but his focus turned to the influence of external forces such as language and symbols on the construction of individual self-identity, and explained Freud’s theory of “narcissism” as the process of “establishing self through the mirror image of others”. If one compares Lacan’s theory with that of Jung, in which the “self” seeks inner integrity, Lacan’s theory holds that the individual can never be truly complete, and that the oneness he feels is only an illusion brought about by the evaluation of the other.

The above three theories explain the inextricable connection between dreams and the subconscious from the dimensions of individual emotion, collective archetype and symbolic alienation. With these three theories as part of the main theoretical support of the exhibition, I try to answer the main question that my exhibition discusses: What are dreams? In my opinion, dreams are not only a private psychological theater, but also a wrestling arena between the invisible forces of power structure, cultural wind direction and collective memory in contemporary society. So when we fly in our dreams, is it the flapping of our own wings or the performance of being pulled by invisible threads? Perhaps art can give a different answer.

References□

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06 “Space” is not just a venue for curation

written by Aobing Wang

This week's lecture focused on ATLAS Arts. Frances introduced this contemporary art organization to us and explained to us how curators should realize exhibition content as the carrier of stories, artworks and local culture through practice based on three representative projects of ATLAS Arts. The art projects of ATLAS Arts do not directly display certain objects to the audience, and they do not regard these contents as available resources in an overbearing manner when telling local cultural memories. Through their examples, I gradually began to understand the concept of “place-responsive curating”.

I am deeply inspired by ATLAS Arts' curatorial thinking. They start not from “what I want to say,” but from “what the land is willing to say.” Lauren Gault's work “CUINNEAG/BUCKET” in the lecture was very special. Using only an empty basin and a fossil to represent time and landscape, it does not attempt to interpret local cultural symbols, but communicates through the regional memory attached to the object. And the curatorial method of place-responsive curating gives me new ideas about my personal curatorial projects. Non-mainstream urban space is not a kind of “complementary culture”, these Spaces themselves have their own unique regional cultural memory. This reminds me that curating is not a simple application of curating methods in a certain space, perhaps it should be a reflection of the dialogue between regions and curators.

05 Sleep Walkers' discussion and reflection on curation

written by Aobing Wang

Last week's discussion focused on the ethics of curating and the innovation of curatorial forms. In the morning we will focus on Jean-Paul Martinon and Maura Reilly from the pre-class readings. We first exchanged our understanding and feelings about the core points of both. Martinon's views reveal the deeper responsibility of curators as "cultural midwives." When the exhibition space is no longer limited to the "White Cube", but spreads to a wider range of shopping malls, parks and even virtual platforms such as social media, can the ethical issues of curation still rely solely on the norms of art institutions? Reilly's "curatorial activism" infuses a manifesto for curatorial ethics with a program of action: she argues that when 80% of museum collections are still dominated by white, male artists, curators are complicit in "open dialogue." Based on her views, we have a new thinking question in the discussion: What kind of curatorial form can make the cultural subject of the exhibition directly participate in the narrative construction, instead of being "represented" by occupying the right of narrative subject? After active discussion among the team members, we believe that the seemingly opposite perspectives of the two scholars are actually pointing to the ethics of contemporary curatorial work. On the one hand, the openness of flow is on the other hand, the urgency of change is on the other hand. Martinon uses speculation to structure the "ontological dilemma" of contemporary curatorial ethics. Reilly's activism directly addresses longstanding structural oppression in the art world.

The afternoon discussion revolved around our "The Sleepwalkers" group's own curatorial manifesto and expected curatorial form. JL first focuses on some indicative formats of contemporary curatorial exhibitions. During the group

discussion, we will first discuss the group's declaration of curatorial ethics. Since we want every sleepwalker to participate in the group discussion, each person can only contribute one idea. I propose Accessibility & Openness, that is, art should be open to all, and we need to consider multi-sensory and digital accessibility strategies to ensure that exhibitions are friendly and open to people of different abilities, languages and backgrounds. The opinions put forward by other students are also very interesting, such as Genuineness – sincerity and consistency between the works and the curatorial ideas. Although we are sleepwalkers, what we do is sincere and real, maintaining the original intention of artistic expression and maintaining the depth and intention of the works. We then discussed the curatorial forms of interest. Nonlinear Narratives and Multiple Storylines have been proposed, that is, visitors do not need to follow a single set tour order, but form completely different experiences of the exhibition according to their own moving routes. After the discussion we were inspired by a common item called a kaleidoscope. We assume that the exhibition has many entrances and exits, put an installation art in the center of the exhibition that can be reached in all directions, and then set the surrounding path into a similar style of passageway, and the audience can randomly choose a different route to enter. Of course, this scheme is still not perfect enough and needs further discussion and improvement. In the following courses, we will continue to supplement the details to support this scheme.

References□

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- Reilly, Maura. *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018.

04 Unconventional exhibition space

written by Aobing Wang

* Cover image: Fran Cottell, Collecting Time: the Living and the Dead, 2005

This week we were privileged to hear from Fran Cottell. In the pre-class readings, I learned that Fran has launched a series of art installations and performance projects under the theme of “House Project” since 2001, among which the work that impressed me deeply was her 2005 work Collecting Time: the Living and the Dead, which Fran himself described in detail in his lecture. In this work, Fran changes the layout of the room to encourage the audience to re-experience the everyday environment from a non-everyday perspective. She regards her home as the field of an overall installation, not only paying attention to the work itself, but also paying attention to every detail in the field, such as life dynamics, architectural structure, and the audience’s movement and interaction in the space.

Fran’s “House Projects” break the traditional solidification of art exhibition space, transform the private family space into an exhibition space with a critical perspective, build the connection between art practice and daily life, and emphasize the interaction between art exhibition content and reality rather than the material properties of the exhibition itself. I think this is a curatorial practice that is very much in line with contemporary curatorial trends, so I have tried to combine the theoretical framework therein with the curatorial theme of “Dreams and the subconscious” (which, as I wrote last week, is the theme I would eventually like to

pursue). Within the framework of the exhibition “Dreams and the Unconscious Mind”, Fran’s series of House Projects can be read as a kind of spatial psychoanalysis that simulates the fragmented, non-linear perceptual logic of dreams. As Fred mentioned, dreams are the manifestation of people’s subconscious desires after they are operated through the displacement and condensation mechanism.

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