

10 SOME THEORIES THAT MIGHT BE USED IN MY CURATORIAL PORTFOLIO: ABOUT Art and Culture part 2

written by Aobing Wang

The Surrealism movement is an ideological movement that arose in the field of art and literature from the 1920s to the 1960s. The core idea is to liberate the subconscious mind, challenge the hegemony of reason, and try to explore the “absolute reality” in illusion and irrational thinking through art and literature. The predecessor of Surrealism was Dada, but it abandoned the nihilism contained in Dada, and turned to systematically explore the subconscious. In 1924, French poet Andre Breton published *the Manifesto of Surrealism*, officially announcing the birth of Surrealism. Deeply inspired by Freud, Breton believes that the subconscious mind is the source of artistic creation, and irrational thinking contains the truth beyond reality. The surrealists represented by it try to create “surrealite”, that is, a higher level of reality, by solving the opposites (such as dream and reality, rationality and madness). The revolution of art and literature is inseparable from the social revolution. In his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton defined surrealism as a pure mental unconscious activity in which people express the real operation of thought in oral, written or other forms, with the goal of breaking the shackles of reason and morality and realizing individual and collective freedom by liberating the subconscious mind. Under the influence of this thought, many new creative methods have emerged, such as artists directly describing dream images, or creating random beauty through collage, rubbing and other techniques (such as Salvador Dali’s “*The Eternity of Memory*”). In the field of literature, it is

shown that creators abandon the control of logic. Leave your hand free to write or paint with the flow of your subconscious mind (e.g., Breton and Philippe Soupault in *Les Champs Magnétiques*).



Salvador Dalí. *The Persistence of Memory*. 1931

References□

Breton, André. 1969. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). n.d. "Salvador Dalí: *The Persistence of Memory* (1931)." Accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79018>.

Breton, André, and Philippe Soupault. 1985. *The Magnetic Fields*. Translated by David Gascoyne. London: Atlas Press.

08 SOME THEORIES THAT MIGHT

BE USED IN MY CURATORIAL PORTFOLIO: ABOUT Art and Culture part 1

written by Aobing Wang

“Relational Aesthetics” and “Surrealism Movement” are my main reading directions when looking for references in art theory. Next, I will introduce the above two concepts in detail and their influence on my exhibition planning.

“Relational Aesthetics” is a theory proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud in his *Relational Aesthetics* published in 1998, which subverts the traditional art paradigm. This theory argues that the core of art is to build temporary social relations, rather than create static aesthetic objects, and has had a profound impact on the field of contemporary art practice such as participatory art, social intervention art and interactive installation. In the theory of relational aesthetics, Boucheux believes that art is a “form within the social interstice”. Between the highly atomized individuals in modern society, art restores the nearly broken interpersonal relationship by creating temporary interactive space. Bucio’s concept of a “microutopia” (an idealized community created temporarily by artistic activity, such as a shared dinner or cooperative game, where participants can experience non-utilitarian communication), argues that the core value of art lies in whether it produces new social bonds, rather than in the materiality or visual impact of the work itself.

As a theory that subverts the traditional art paradigm, the theory of relational aesthetics focuses on the shift from “object” to “situation”, and pays attention to the timeliness and participation of artistic creation. According to Bucio, traditional art forms (such as painting and sculpture) are centered on aesthetic objects, and the audience plays the role

of passive observer. In the theory of relational aesthetics, “context” is the core of artistic creation, and the audience becomes the co-producer of artistic works by participating in the process of art. Artist Rirkrit Tiravanija’s artistic activity *untitled (free/still)* is one example of this theory: the artist himself makes Thai curry soup in the gallery and invites the audience to share the meal. The significance of this artistic act is not the food itself, but the communication between the unfamiliar audience and the artist and the creation of temporary communities. This type of relational work relies on the real-time interaction of participants, and its existence cycle is bound with the timeliness of human social behaviors. A series of behaviors of the audience (such as communication, collaboration, and sharing) directly participate in the composition of the content of the work, while the artist himself provides the basic framework of the relational work.



Rirkrit Tiravanija. *untitled (free/still)*.
1992/1995/2007/2011-

There are many practice cases and application strategies of relational aesthetics theory in the local art field. A series by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, for example, features free candy. By stacking loose candies on the floor or in a corner, Felix re-expresses the non-representativeness of minimalism in a subversive way. The candy in these works can be removed and replaced at will, so the size of the works is constantly shrinking or expanding, which challenges the inherent thinking

of traditional art forms and playfully expands the continuity and everyday nature of minimalist materials.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *"Untitled"* (*USA Today*). 1990



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *"Untitled"* (*Public Opinion*), 1991.

In addition to felix, Sophie Calle's 1979 work *fifth sleeper* is also one of the representative works of relational aesthetics theory. sophie invited strangers to sleep in her bed and recorded their behavior during this period, exploring the tension between trust and surveillance by observing the way strange individuals invade private space.



Gérard Maillet, *fifth sleeper*, 1979

Because of its subversion of the traditional art paradigm, the theory of relational aesthetics has been criticized and disputed. For example, Claire Bishop once criticized Buscio for ignoring the existence of conflict and power differences in his theory of relational aesthetics and romanticizing social interaction into a “consensus utopia”. On the other hand, relational art is often packaged as an “experience commodity” by the art market, and audience participation is reduced to the consumption of the commodity. This controversy is mainly found in the field of interactive installation art (such as TeamLab), which is criticized as “Instagram art”. In addition, the strong timeliness of relational art works is also its limitation: such works that rely on immediate interaction are difficult to be permanently collected by museums, and their meaning will collapse with the disappearance of the context. For example, if felix’s candy pile is not used by the audience, it will lose its metaphorical connotation.



TeamLab Museum Tokyo

References

Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.

Fraenkel Gallery. n.d. "Sophie Calle: #image-86649." Accessed June 25, 2023. https://fraenkelgallery.com/artists/sophie-calle#image-86649-gallery_s-1.

Guggenheim Museum. n.d. "Wassily Kandinsky: Composition 8 (July 1923)." Accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/1512>.

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). n.d. "Mark Rothko: No. 3/No. 13 (1949)." Accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206>.

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). n.d. "Felix Gonzalez-Torres." Artists. Accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.moma.org/artists/2233-felix-gonzalez-torres>.

teamLab. n.d. *teamLab Official Website*. Accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.teamlab.art/>.

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 unremitting 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□

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function." In *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, 75–81. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

02 About dreams and the unconscious mind

written by Aobing Wang

*This is the theme of my open toolkits course last semester. I'm so interested in this that I'm blogging about it this week. The following is the text.

About dreams and the unconscious mind

If dreams and the subconscious are taken as the narrative theme of the exhibition, the role of the curator will not only be the organizer of the art works, but also the "guide" to guide the audience into the "dream" and deep into different levels of consciousness. As a kind of mapping of the human subconscious, dreams provide a way of perceiving beyond the logic of reality (dreams are often chaotic and illogical). This makes the curatorial practice with this theme need to break through the traditional curatorial framework and build a more immersive and emotionally resonant exhibition atmosphere and space for the audience with a more experimental curatorial approach.

Dreams are the source of inspiration for the exhibition narrative

Dreams have the characteristics of fragmentation, symbolization and nonlinear narration, which is very consistent with the popular surrealism, abstraction and experimental expression in contemporary art. Artistic creations inspired by dreams often present sensory images of subconscious flow. On this basis, the curator can introduce the audience into an immersive experience similar to a dream through space layout, light and shadow application and multi-

sensory curatorial design.

Subconscious and audience experience

In addition to the display and spatial layout of artworks, curators also need to explore how to stimulate the subconscious experience of the audience. In the exhibition, specific sensory stimuli (such as light and shadow changes, environmental smells, white noise, etc.) can be used to trigger the audience's memory of a specific scene, making it enter a fragmented retrospective state for a short time. In addition, cultural resonance with the audience can also be created through symbolic symbols, cultural background narration and other forms. In contemporary art curation, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are also applied in curatorial practice. This kind of high-tech display can simulate the dream experience for the audience more directly.

References:

Carl Gustav Jung, and Delin Xu. 原型与集体潜意识 = *the Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* / Yuan Xing Yu Ji Ti Wu Yi Shi = *the Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 上海三联书店, Beijing: Guo Ji Wen Hua Chu Ban Gong Si, 2011.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams ; and on Dreams : (1900-1901)*. London: Hogarth Press, 1995.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. 1925. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

01 What do we know about curating□

written by Aobing Wang

In the afternoon workshop, the temporary team members shared their experiences or hobbies in curation-related fields. Among them, I was very interested in the curatorial work that one of the team members participated in. When planning an exhibition that changes with The Times, do curators arrange visits according to a timeline? I think there are many examples to answer this question.

As a cultural practice, the essence of curation is obviously not simply the selection and display of exhibits. Brian O'Doherty pointed out in *Inside the White Cube* that curators build not only a physical space, but also an ideological container. The concept of "White Cube" separates art from social reality and forms the illusion of neutrality through the display strategy of de-contextualization. This critical perspective explains the mechanism of curatorial power: the curator shapes the audience's cognitive framework through taxonomy and narrative arrangement.

On the mind map produced by the workshop, it is obvious that many words extend around "Communication". With the development of economy, the core orientation of contemporary curatorial practice has gradually changed from exhibit orientation to audience orientation. More and more curators seek to construct a dialogue between exhibits and audiences through display methods and technical means in exhibitions. In fact, as early as 2012, Claire Bishop demonstrated the case of "participatory art" in her book *Artificial Hells*, and this form of digital curation, which transforms the role of the audience into a co-producer of the exhibition, has been pushed to a new dimension with the development of modern technology.

Reference

Bal, Mieke. 1996. *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. New York: Routledge.

Bishop, Claire. 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso.