

Week 4 | From Myth to Method

written by Luosijie Ding

Why shift from history to myth?

In the previous weeks, I focused on how to translate traditional media or reactive historical works to address contemporary issues. However, this week marks a shift to “myth” as a curatorial approach. This transition is an extension. If historical works provide specific contexts, then myth operates at the level of narrative structures that continue to shape how meaning is produced.

How does narrative continue to operate?

The core of curation is not just to choose works but to construct a narrative structure. Especially in the contemporary context of globalisation, information saturation, and rapid image circulation, narrative has not failed but continues to operate in a more subtle way, affecting how we understand power, gender, and viewing. Myth is therefore not just a cultural heritage of the past but a traditional narrative structure that is still being told, rewritten, and activated.

Medusa is a very direct example. In the traditional narrative, she is often portrayed as a “monster”, and her eyes are regarded as a dangerous force; however, if we re-watch it in the context of contemporary curation, she can also be understood as a narrative node about gaze, gender power, and punishment mechanisms. She is not a natural threat, but in the process of being watched, defined, and mythologised, she is built as the opposite of order. This means curation is not to reproduce an established story but to translate, activate, and reorganise the meaning.

Rural, edited by my village, points out in the introduction that

neither “countryside” nor “myth” can be displayed as a static object. The countryside is not a landscape for the city to watch, and myths are not traditional materials that can be simply displayed. They are embedded in the real power relationship and cognitive structure. Therefore, the ethics of curation are not only how to explain the content but also how to avoid the object being exoticised, landscaped or simplified again.

The curatability of Summerhall

According to the introduction of the manager of Summerhall. Its significance is not only a ready-made art organisation but also its strong adaptability. As a multifunctional art space transformed from historical buildings, Summerhall accommodates visual arts, performances, public projects, and educational cooperation at the same time and keeps close contact with the UoE. This interdisciplinary and inter-institutional structure makes it not only a container for displaying works but also a methodological space that can carry complex narratives. Its historical level, public attributes, and cooperative network all make me feel that it is suitable to place a project about traditional narratives.

week3 | Audience in curatorial ethics

written by Luosijie Ding

From viewing experience to ethical issues of curation

This week, I visited *The Children are Now*, an exhibition in Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, and watched *Children’s Rights: What’s Right?* The video prompted reflections on curatorial ethics. In the work, a boy makes a discriminatory remark about a Chinese person in a school setting. Although the work aims to reveal how children absorb and reproduce social language and power structures, as a Chinese

audience member, I still felt uncomfortable. This made me realise that the critical intention of a work does not automatically translate into a critical effect for all audiences. Whether a work is understood as critical depends not only on the artist's intention, but also on the display context and the audience.

Curator's responsibility in the theoretical framework

This experience led me to consider the target audience of the exhibition. As a public exhibition, *The Children Are Now* faces a wide audience, including adults and children. In a workshop, curator James emphasised that contemporary curatorial practice should balance creative expression and political sensitivity and guide audiences to think rather than impose conclusions. However, when works involve language prejudice and power structures, different audiences interpret them differently. For critically informed viewers, such content may provoke reflection; for children or those without background, it may be misread as acceptable language. Therefore, curators must consider not only "whether to exhibit" but also "for whom" and construct interpretive frameworks through spatial design, texts, or education.

This can also echo the curriculum literature. In *Ethics of Curating*, Meng Shichen pointed out that curatorial ethics is not only a matter of institutional norms but also involves "who is speaking for whom" and how curators face others. This view helps me understand that the curator should not only stay at the level of "the original intention of the work is not malicious" but also must think about the possible secondary harm caused by the work in the exhibition.

Enlightenment to future practice and JIJU Collective

If the future curatorial project is related to traditional art,

historical images, or traditional visual images, the curator should not only present their form and history but also be wary of being simplified into a single cultural symbol in the contemporary context.

This is also related to the formation of the group JIJU Collective. “JIJU” comes from the pronunciation of “sojourning” in Chinese, reflecting the shared cross-cultural condition of members living and studying in Edinburgh. It reminds me that audiences are never homogeneous; cultural differences shape interpretation. Curatorial ethics, therefore, is not about finding a single correct answer but about sustaining a reflective and responsible practice within diverse viewing contexts.

week2 | How Historical Works Become Contemporary Art

written by Luosijie Ding

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From “Translation of Traditional Media” to “Collocation of Time”

Curating does not change the traditional media itself but, through the reorganising of space, narrative, and viewing mode, makes historical works enter contemporary perception. This idea mainly discusses how the media can be reorganised. However, the core question is, why can some historical works or historical images themselves still enter the context of contemporary art and contemporary curation?

Terry Smith’s understanding of contemporaneity is needed here. What Is

Contemporary Art? He described “contemporariness” as “multiple ways of being in time at once”, that is, multiple time states coexist. Thus, “contemporary” is not just the present in time but a state in which different historical levels meet, overlap, and continue to function in the present. In other words, whether a work is “contemporary” depends not only on when it was created, but also on whether it can still respond to today’s problems and be reactivated in the new context.

How historical images are reproduced in contemporary times.

The significance of John Tunnard lies in providing an earlier reference: his works show that historical works may continue to be related to contemporary issues because of their treatment of landscape, psychological experience, and modernity’s tension.

But if Tunnard emphasises the conceptual continuity of historical works, Rego further shows that historical images can be rewritten directly by contemporary art.

Paula Rego is a clear example. Her “The Betrothal: Lessons: The Shipwreck is clearly based on Hogarth’s Marriage à la Mode; that is, it is not simply a reference to historical style but a recreation of historical narrative structure. Historical images are no longer preserved objects here but have become materials for contemporary artists to speak again.

Under this framework, contemporary art does not always create brand-new images, but it can also generate new social significance by misappropriating, rewriting, and recounting historical works.

Historical art can not only be re-displayed but also really participate in the generation of contemporary art because of its conceptual continuity and image reproducibility. Traditional art is no longer just a legacy of the past but a part of the current cultural production.

week1 | Translation of traditional media

written by Luosijie Ding

The traditional turn in contemporary art

In the context of contemporary art, “tradition” is no longer just an object to be preserved or inherited but gradually becomes a resource that can be reactivated and translated. More and more artists are no longer satisfied with the continuation of tradition but actively put it into the contemporary context and generate new visual and conceptual expressions through reconstruction, misappropriation, and reinterpretation. For example, Xu Bing’s gobbledygook presents unreadable “pseudo-Chinese characters” in the form of traditional block printing and borrows the most traditional language structure to reveal the uncertainty of language and cultural authority. This kind of practice shows that “tradition” is not only a formal resource but also an important thinking object in contemporary art.

However, in this process, in addition to the artist, the role of the curator can not be ignored. Carolee Thea pointed out in *On Curing: Interviews with Ten International Curators* that the curator is not a neutral organiser but a mediator between the works, artists, and the public. One of the important significances of curation is to transform the meaning of the work by providing context so that the audience can understand the path to enter the work. For me, this “transformation” is also a kind of “translation”: it does not change the work itself but transforms the originally closed artistic experience into a cultural experience that the contemporary public can understand through space, narrative, and viewing methods.

Let traditional media enter contemporary perception

MoMA's Woven History: Textiles and Modern Abstract does not show textile simplicity as an accessory craft but puts it into the history of modernism and abstract art to re-understand, emphasising how textiles connect the body, daily life, and visual structure. Such a curatorial way breaks through the habit of viewing textiles as a "traditional skill" or a "static sample" and transforms it into a contemporary medium that spans art, design, and social history.

Sleeping Beauties: Awakening Fashion of the Metropolitan Museum of New York puts historical costumes in an immersive environment through images, sounds, smells, and space so that the audience can not only "see" the costumes but also enter their materials, fragility, and historical life through a multi-sensory experience. Therefore, traditional costumes are no longer just preserved objects but are reorganised into an experiential event.

Judging from these cases, the so-called "translation" does not package the "traditional media" into a more fashionable form but reappears in the experience that was not easily perceived through the curatorial context. Based on this, my research will continue to focus on "the connection between tradition and contemporary".

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