

Week4 - Curating the Archive: Writing the Witch, Rewriting Women

My speculative curatorial project focuses on witchcraft and the persecution of women, a theme that bridges historical violence with contemporary struggles. Witch hunts were physical, being defined by records of trials and pamphlets that created the image of women as threats (Warburton, 2003, pp.97-110). The editing of these pieces will help me show that writing was created as an instrument of persecution, and that, through the lens of present-day art, it is possible to reinterpret these histories.

According to Louise O'Hare's account, Nick Thurston writes that writing is performative and is found as a material in artistic practice (O'Hare, 2012). This implies that documents on witch-hunts are not only historical artifacts to be curated but also aesthetic objects. In contrast, the *Collected Writings* by Bell and King emphasize the curator's power of editorial shaping (Preston, 2013, pp. 26-27). This dialogue raises a crucial curatorial question: Does meaning reside within the documents themselves, or is it constructed through curatorial mediation? This exchange guides my practice. By contrasting the original texts of witch-hunting with feminist reinterpretations, one can find out how the framing influenced the persecution of women.

This is reinforced by recent scholarship. Federici (2018) states that the witch hunts belonged to the mechanism of patriarchal repression, which associates witch hunts with current gendered violence. Yadav (2020) demonstrates that the

problem of witch-hunting lives in India, which is associated with land claims and caste relationships. These works make my project go beyond Europe by making witchcraft persecution a global and current problem.

The criticism of interpretation, as delivered by Susan Sontag, encourages me to foreground the affective experience in interpretation rather than the reduction of meaning (Sontag, 1966, p. 7). This has challenged me to select materials that provoke fear, stigma, and resilience without collapsing them into a single story. Didion reminds us that writing is always political, obliging me to recognize my personal curatorial voice, informed by feminist issues of agency and justice (Didion, 1976).

My project has been enhanced through a comparative analysis of classic and current literature, which has led me to identify writing as a persecutory apparatus, a persuasive tool in the past, and a curative apparatus in modern times.

This will be followed by me trying to merge the witch-hunt texts with the reclaiming female artworks to establish a conversation between the historical silencing effects and the contemporary opposition. I plan to display archival documents from historical witch trials within my exhibition space. Opposite these documents, I intend to arrange contemporary feminist literary works such as *Invisible Women* (Criado-Perez, 2019) and *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Russ, 1984).

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