



Weissenhof Settlement, Stuttgart, 1927

What does it mean to curate?

Both the roof and any other object of potential danger, by which it is likely that a person could be fatally injured, require that the owner take action... just as the Torah commands us to make a fence on the roof... and so, too, regarding any obstacle which could cause mortal danger, one, not just the owner, has a positive commandment to remove it... if one does not remove it but leaves those obstacles constituting potential danger, one transgresses a positive commandment and negates a negative commandment 'Thou shall not spill blood.'

- Maimonides¹

Law

Legality, mores, and form. The above passage describes "significant form" in the words of Clive Bell, but with very different definition, the latter for pure aesthetic experience, and the other for social relation. The two aren't mutually exclusive of course. What does it say about geometric form? In ancient Israel, roofs were flat, not pitched. Why are architectural handrail laws relatively new?

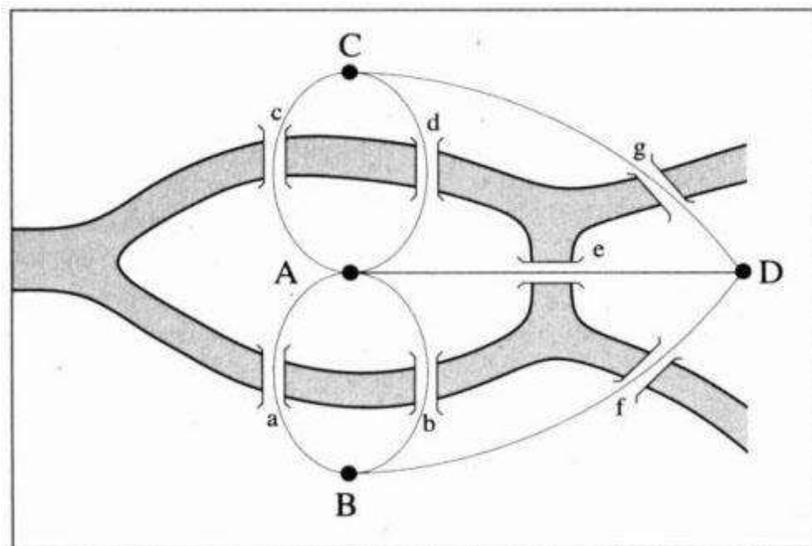
Formal Curators are like Architects insofar as they make architectonic structures while occupying titles in institutional hubs and coordinate labor in a spatial network of Dealers, Artists, Audiences, and Collectors. A museum, gallery, or artist run space is like the American Institute of Architects insofar as they uphold contractual protocols for action. Informal Curators flutter between hubs more rapidly, usually with less

¹ *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Murderer and Protecting Life, 1v1:4, web text, copy | paste*

formal titling, contractual protocol, and/or institutional grounding. The difference between the Formal Curator/law and the Informal Curator/house-rule is a difference of degree and not of kind. Informality and formality are spatiotemporal-material determinations. The time it takes to create international tax and transport laws for art is different than the time it takes to move a work of art from one room to another in a home. Both account for the movement of works of art, but one is stricter than the other.

The Informal Curator has more room for impulsive experimentation because her actions do not necessarily set a precedent for institutional form(alization). In other words, people make and break rules in private homes with much more ease. Regardless both Informal and Formal Curators are responsible for creating social contracts surrounding works of art, some less agile than others, but all in motion, perceptible or not.

Meaning is in constant flux. People find meaning through instances. What does it mean to arrange objects in a home versus a museum? What museum? Is it a thief's home? People find form in universals. What shape is the home? Does it have a pitched or flat roof? If a flat roof, is it a Gropius or an authorless building in ancient Israel? Asking specific questions about form is the first entry point to meaning. Curators continuously shape meaning to indefinitely continue a conversation. It is a dialogical form of expression.



Seven Bridges of Königsberg, Leonhard Euler, 1735

How is the Artist dependent on the Curator / Curator: who is more dependent, the Artist or the Curator?

The problem was to find a walk through the city that would cross each bridge once and only once. The islands could not be reached by any route other than the bridges, and every bridge must have been crossed completely every time; one could not walk halfway onto the bridge and then turn around and later cross the other half from the other side. The walk need not start and end at the same spot. Euler proved that the problem has no solution. There could be no non-retracing the bridges. The difficulty was the development of a technique of analysis and of subsequent tests that established this assertion with mathematical rigor.

First, Euler pointed out that the choice of route inside each land mass is irrelevant. The only important feature of a route is the sequence of bridges crossed. This allowed him to reformulate the problem in abstract terms (laying the foundations of graph theory), eliminating all features except the list of land masses and the bridges connecting them. In modern terms, one replaces each land mass with an abstract "vertex" or node, and each

bridge with an abstract connection, an "edge", which only serves to record which pair of vertices (land masses) is connected by that bridge. The resulting mathematical structure is called a graph.

Since only the connection information is relevant, the shape of pictorial representations of a graph may be distorted in any way, without changing the graph itself. Only the existence (or absence) of an edge between each pair of nodes is significant. For example, it does not matter whether the edges drawn are straight or curved, or whether one node is to the left or right of another.

- Anonymous²

Logistics

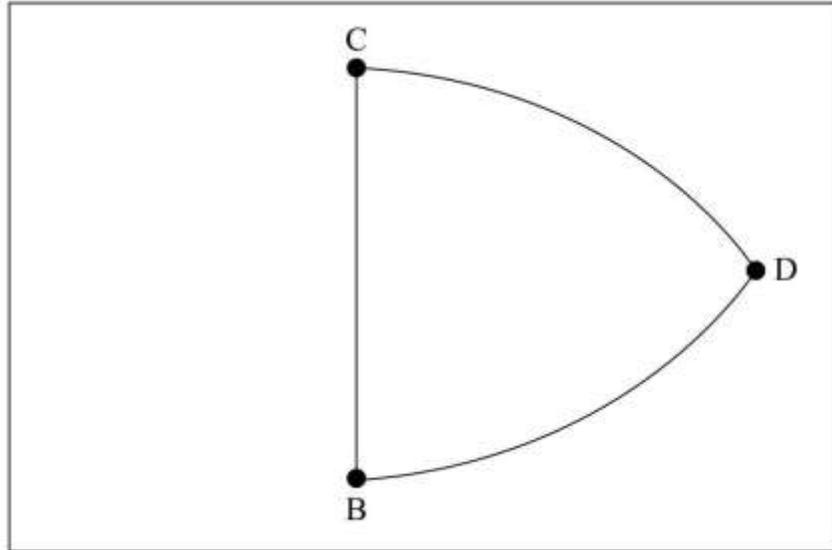
There is no necessary relation between an Artist's intention and an Audience's interpretation. There is no necessary relation between an Artist's process and a Dealer's publicity. There is no necessary relation between a Curator's collection/arrangements and what the individual objects were in situ. Meanings are evasive. Meanings change. Semantic webs change. If a group of people decides to feign absolute dependence, solidifying social contracts, locking Informal Curators into decisive roles, at best this relationship serves a functional yet arbitrary purpose (arbitrary as in arbitration). It becomes like a figure in graph theory, the more static foundation of networks. One major difference between a graph and a network is that a network changes over time, sometimes faster, sometimes slower. In such a space Artists may seem dependent on Curators or vice versa, but dependence is on the surface.

If a relatively static form like a flat roof or an institutional social graph is the first entry point to moral and legal meaning, then after one enters it is the relationship between things inside matters most, e.g. a semantic web of buildings in a city, or objects inside buildings, all with potential for indefinite reconfiguration. While Euclidean designations (length, angle, curve, straight, etc.) still matter when making buildings, exhibitions, sculptures, and paintings, there is always Eulerian space in the way people move between buildings, circumnavigate an exhibition, ship sculptures, and trace the provenance of a canvas.

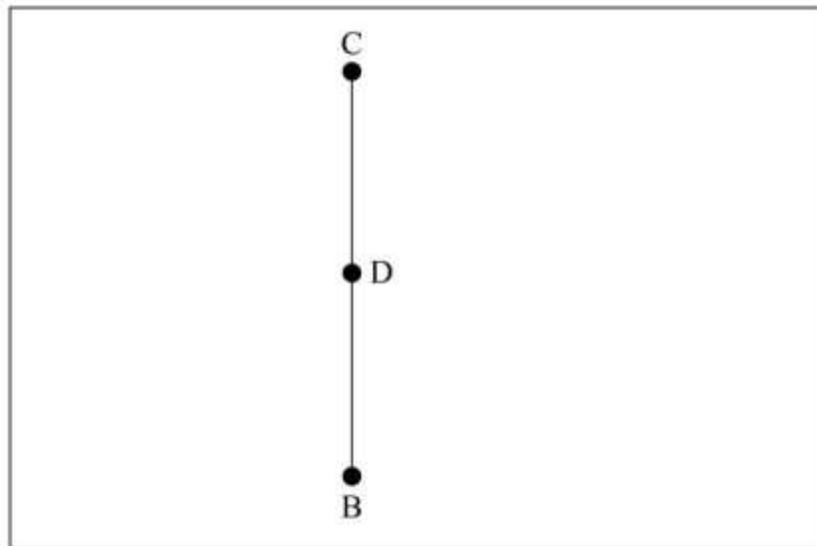
From the view of a Dealer this means that one does not merely sell single objects or even objects in groups. One thinks about and acts on objects and services rendered by Artists, Architects, and Curators. One guides an Audience in a semantic network, as a combinatoric field, with rules for exclusion, inclusion, and reconfiguration. If done correctly, the Collector collects not only objects but also buys into new social relationships. Simply said the Collector, Curator, Dealer, Architect, Audience, and Artist form a five point social network, and each figure may operate it through time.

In the above diagram, take away the bridges, islands, and land masses, and imagine a building surrounding the figure. Point 'A' is Allan Kaprow who for now is an Audience member. Point 'B' is Fluxus herself. Point 'D' is Seth Siegelaub. Point 'C' is Harold Szeemann. Point 'A' drops out of the figure to form a new relationship between three points, between Seth Siegelaub, Fluxus, and Harold Szeemann. This relationship forms a closed figure without an Audience, where each member can directly communicate with one another. Perhaps this snapshot is a figure prior to an exhibition opening.

² *Wikipedia*, web text, copy | paste



Imagine that point 'D', Seth Siegelau moves between point 'B' and 'C' to act as an intermediary between Fluxus and Harold Szeemann. At the time the new figure snaps into place, Harold Szeemann turns into a Collector.



Now Fluxus must go through Seth Siegelau the Dealer to talk with Harold Szeemann the Collector. In this new graph Seth Siegelau puts his contract *The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement* into action (notably an experimental contract protecting Artists' rights that Harold Szeemann distributed during Documenta V). In this figure there are finite potentials for inclusion and exclusion. The Artist may talk with the Dealer. The Collector may talk with the Dealer. The Artist and Dealer cannot talk directly with one another. The Dealer has a global view of every player, while the Collector and Artist are excluded from certain conversations. This is not to say that the Artist and Collector may never speak with one another. If they do, then simply draw a line from the one node to the other, and then there is a new figure to read into. Perhaps the Architect of the building comes into the graph later on, and then another type of audience, the design/art niche, may emerge.

The purpose of this simple exercise is neither to move into theorem or proof. Rather, it shows that complex computation and mathematics are not a prerequisite to seeing, reasoning about, and using network thinking in art. Proverbial drawings of complex overwhelming tangles of lines are the opposite of the above clarity. Nevertheless tangles do represent our hyper-cognizance of the insane agility, flux, connectivity, dependence, independence, and changing roles at any given point in time. For the time being at best we can use fuzzy reasoning for these large scale networks (perhaps the topic of another text).



Mural Drawing at the Franz Dahlem House, Darmstadt, Blinky Palermo, 1971

What kind of relationship do Artists have with Curators? Artist-Curator or Curator-Artist?

The effect of 'aural ellipsis' in poetry allows that, at certain points, the poem may exist within an indeterminate site of significant verbal experience that is simultaneously physical and mental, objective and subjective, heard a loud and read silently, emanating from a specific self yet also from a nonspecific site of identity, coming toward comprehensibility and disintegrating into incoherence.

- Nick Piombino³

Love

What happens when art from public and semi-public networks enter private collections? Is art curated by Private Collectors in homes? Is the home an informal museum? The degree to which a Private

³ *The Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening in Contemporary Poetry*, web text, copy | paste.

Collector's actions resemble those of a Formal or Informal Curator determines whether or not they curate. Does the collector have temperature controlled storage for art? Does art circulate in and out of storage? Do they conduct research prior to purchases? Do they visit artists' studios? Do they write about the art? Do they arrange displays to make spatial historical, theoretical, and/or critical arguments?

There is no need to locate a precise tipping point for when a Private Collector becomes a Curator. The point is that there are certain ways of acting in a home that resemble ways of acting in a museum and vice versa. This leads to the notion that while some relationships between Curators and Artists are readily available for analysis, there is much potential for the relationship to grow through time. Even stronger, it is necessary for the relationship to grow, lest the lovers become disinterested and divorce. Relationships change as readily as meaning itself.

Call curatorial activities in a home *alpha-curating* and the activities in a museum *beta-curating*. Galleries are somewhere in between in this figure. The home becomes a space for Artists, Curators, Collectors, Dealers, and limited Audiences to experiment with what it means to configure works of art in private. The group may or may not re-introduce these experiments to a public in more formal or informal circumstances. Some of the reasoning in private will come very close to the historical and theoretical leanings of a museum (especially if the Private Collector is an art professional). Some of the reasoning will not resemble what happens at a museum at all.

This experiment is about how specific people feel about their personal spaces. It is about how they live with works of art and with objects in general. Since a large portion of art is lived with rather than visited, this simple redirection leads to a better understanding of art itself. The effect of material ellipsis in visual art is that the work of art may live within a state somewhere between formality and informality as a transitional object...