

DisplayCult—Jennifer Fisher & Jim Drobnick

CRITICAL CURATING CAN MANIFEST IN A VARIETY of forms: thematic exhibitions that address timely issues and promote activist causes; monographic exhibitions that increase the art world's inclusiveness and diversity; curatorial interventions that reveal the operations of power; experiential situations that challenge normative ideologies and animate new forms of sociality and citizenship. As significant and as impactful as these examples have been over the years, critical curating involves more than just artworks, artists, curators, and exhibitions. As curators practicing in post-media genres, academics teaching in universities, and editors of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, we have witnessed how curating can be deployed across platforms, disciplines, and perspectives. Each venue and type of activity affords the opportunity for different critical strategies to be employed.

The themes and topics we conceptualize perform across the burgeoning field of the curatorial. We perceive an essential continuity between the practices of curating, artmaking, teaching, writing, and editing that engages with how the curatorial can generate knowledge. While the representational rhetorics of visual art are important, we are simultaneously interested in how the extra-discursive aspects of exhibitions construct experiences, transmit affects, and mobilize perception. Of particular interest are the performative and relational aspects of display: how the atmospheric charge of exhibitions intersects with sensibilities of the historical, the political, and the social.

What we find compelling about cultivating the field of curatorial studies through our recent work at the journal is how the purview of the “critical” can be expanded from curatorial practice to curatorial analysis. Criticality, especially in the popular inventory of “top ten lists,” has become misconstrued as opinionated projection, heir perhaps to habits of art-historical authority and canon formation. Instead, we find it valuable to foster a criticality that attunes not only to curatorial narratives, but to the experientiality of exhibitions. As editors of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* we have often had to encourage writers to step back from focusing on discrete artworks to consider more broadly the relevance of context, the spaces between objects, and the specificities of location and time. With an emergent field such as curatorial studies, we aim to publish texts that provide informed understandings of the significance of exhibitions and develop theoretical models that explicate the dynamics of display culture. The expanded critical function of the curatorial, then, fosters analysis of the contextual grounds for exhibitions and the conditions of possibility for aesthetic encounters. ¶

Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick form the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult, an organization for creative and interdisciplinary projects in the visual arts.

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