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Review

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connection between formalism and right wing politics continued, Bonds notes, during the cold war when the CIA supported formalism in the arts.)

In the short term, Hanslick was unsuccessful in converting many composers to formalism. (Earlier generations of composers, as Bonds points out, were usually resolutely anti-formalist, a point that Hanslick conveniently avoids.) Mahler, Richard Strauss, and the other major composers of the second half of the nineteenth century usually believed that music is expressive and has content. (Contrary to what Bonds suggests, Mahler was pretty resolutely anti-formalist. He wrote that a composition originates in "something the composer has experienced" and his symphonies sometimes have detailed, though not public, programs.)

All of that changed come the twentieth century. Under the influence of Walter Pater and Clive Bell, in addition to Hanslick, formalism began to flourish in all of the arts. Schoenberg, writing in 1909, spoke of the "flowering of so-called absolute music." Other major composers, including Stravinsky, embraced formalism. (For some reason, today's defenders of formalism seldom refer to the composers whose work should most successfully illustrate the contentlessness of music.) Bonds discusses in some detail the growing appeal of formalism, in all of the arts, from the beginning of the twentieth century on. According to Bonds, the heyday of formalism stretched from 1945 to 1970. He believes that formalism began to lose its cachet in musical circles after 1970, and he attributes its demise to the rise of post-modernism. (If this is true, it is the only good thing I have ever heard about post-modernism.)

Prior to the dominance of composers who embraced formalism, Bonds believes, there was a period when composers and theorists alike sought a compromise between formalism and anti-formalism. I think that it is more accurate to say that there was a period when a variety of views about music were current. Some writers embraced formalism, others anti-formalism. It is pretty hard to reconcile views that are, after all, contradictory. It must be said, however, that some formalists, not ones discussed by Bonds, have tempered their views somewhat. In particular, the enhanced formalism of Kivy allows that music can be expressive of certain emotions.

One consequence of formalism is that musical beauty is ineffable. Hanslick certainly believed that we cannot capture in words what makes a work of music beautiful. Contemporary formalists also typically take musical beauty to be ineffable. Bonds pays comparatively little attention to this consequence of formalism. *Absolute Music* is a good book that would have been even better had it paid more attention to ineffability. In my view, formalism is unsatisfactory

precisely because it makes the beauty of music inexplicable.

In the end, Bonds is a little disingenuous when he disclaims any philosophical agenda. By the end of his book, it is clear that he does not have a great deal of sympathy for formalism. He takes it to be "self-evident" that "music is an art of expression" (p. 41). He concludes by saying that "the idea of wholly a autonomous art ... finds relatively few adherents today" (p. 298). In my experience, it is still pretty widespread in philosophy of music circles, as the examples of Kivy and Zangwill suggest. I agree, however, that the worm seems to have turned again, and the fortunes of formalism are in decline. I am not so sure, however, that post-modernism is undermining formalism in philosophy of music. Rather it is threatened by a return to empiricism: a focus on the experience of music and on psychological research into the experience of music.

Bonds has written a meticulously researched and informative book on the history of formalist thinking about music. It is mercifully free of jargon and the sort of "theory" that philosophers often find off-putting. While it is not a contribution to philosophy of music, it will nevertheless be of interest to many philosophers interested in music. It brings to the attention of philosophers a wider range of examples from the history of music theory than commonly comes to their knowledge. Moreover, it deepens our understanding of Hanslick by placing his work in its historical context.

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MARTINON, JEAN-PAUL, ed. *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, xix + 255 pp., 5 b&w illus., £65.00 cloth.

Curating, as a profession, is the assumption of responsibility for the care of methodical collections of tangible things, such as are found in museums. This is a demanding undertaking involving a mixture of practical and scholarly skills. Without a foundation in continuing intellectual enquiry, curating of any kind is sure to be stunted. Various institutions around the world have recognized the merit of attending to curatorship as a scholarly and self-reflective activity, offering graduate courses designed to prepare curators in a range of fields. Among them is the Curatorial/Knowledge program in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, a college of the University of London, aimed at what its website describes as "researchers who are already working in the

field and are interested in theorizing their practice.” *The Curatorial* emerges from this particular milieu. It is a collection comprising an introduction, twenty-seven essays, and a coda by the experienced curator and museum director Charles Esche.

The field in question is not the curatorship of collections generally, nor even of art as a whole, but solely contemporary art. Helmut Draxler, in his chapter, “Modern Art: Its Very Idea and the Time/Space of the Collection,” is one of the few contributors to mention art beyond the contemporary. Further, as so often occurs in discussions of contemporary art curatorship, the focus is almost exclusively on display. Thinking clearly and methodically about issues raised by exhibiting contemporary art is certainly a worthy goal, but to do so to the exclusion of other, equally pressing and problematic curatorial issues (such as systematics and conservation) reveals a certain myopia and complacency. Most of the contributors to this collection relentlessly over-theorize this one area while ignoring others. Furthermore, that many of the chapters originate from people in a single institution who share certain obsessions may well have exacerbated a tendency to monotony. At least fifteen of the thirty-one contributors are associated with Goldsmiths.

Where is the philosophy in this book? Philosophy is prominent in its title. Its use there might lead a reader to expect some consistent and competent appeal to philosophy, whether analytical, continental, or both. The chapters contain plenty of theory, but precious little philosophy. According to the “Notes on Contributors,” only three of the thirty-one claim formal acquaintance with the discipline. I therefore take “Philosophy” in the title to be employed colloquially, much as one might speak of a particular club manager’s philosophy of baseball. As for “The Curatorial” in the title, you may wish you had not wondered. In his editor’s introduction, Jean-Paul Martinon confides that “the curatorial” is “quintessentially of our time and, inevitably, a difficult thing to define” (p. 3). However, he soon attempts a set of definitions: “The curatorial is a jail-break from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one’s own subjectivity, . . .” and so on for a further seven lines ending in “etc.” (p. 4). So “The Curatorial” appears to be a miscellaneous selection of ideals that it might be unkind to point out have long been associated with romantic, youthful self-assertion of the early Wordsworthian “Bliss was it in that dawn” kind. The hopefulness of youth has much to be said for it, and youthfulness certainly characterizes the majority of the contributors to this book. Indeed, at the time of publication

nine of the contributors were recent Ph.D.s or graduate students, all but one of whom studied at Goldsmiths.

What about the acknowledged philosophers? One of these is Stefan Nowotny, currently a lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths. In “The Curator Crosses the River,” he writes of Gaius Julius Hyginus’s Latin fable of *Cura* (“Care”) and the creation of humankind from clay (earth: *humus*), cited by Martin Heidegger as “an ancient fable in which Dasein’s interpretation of itself as ‘care’ has been embedded” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, ¶42, p. 242). Here is a taste of Nowotny’s philosophical prose. “Hence, what we might imagine to open up in the interruption of *Cura*’s journey is not simply a new set of orientations, a new imaginary, but rather a new field of possible explorations into both the objects and the potentialities of disengagement: the uses and disputed status of pictoriality, the materiality at hand and on the ground, creativity and the ways it is enabled or absoltized, contingency and animation, orderings of ‘high’ and ‘low’ and their horizontalization, the (re- and de-) configurations of the human, non-human and the *humus*, the debates about the origins and properties of common names, the fragile commonality of those involved, concerned, making claims, etc.” (p. 63). He calls—like others in this volume—for yet another new epistemology (“... to be young was very heaven!”), sharing with his editor faith in the power of a concluding “etc.,” etc.

There is something admirable, as well as naïve, in the way that the hope and high energy of youth can even lead to proposals to harness exhaustion. One of the Goldsmiths student contributors, Leire Vergara, considers “An Exhausted Curating.” This, she writes, “should be about acknowledging what is considered today to be possible within the field. Not unlike Deleuze’s proposition for the exhausted, that is, someone who is caught by exhaustion is also able to exhaust its own exhaustion, an ‘exhausted curating’ should unravel its own exhaustion as a way of stimulating new possible forms of curatorial production” (p. 74). Is “exhausted curating” an epistemological novelty, or the contemporary equivalent of counting angels on a pinhead?

In her contribution, “The Expanded Field,” Irit Rogoff, an experienced scholar who directs the Curatorial/Knowledge program, proclaims an “epistemological crisis, exiting from previous definitions, refusing former meanings, refusing moral inscription, refusing the easy stability in which one thing is seemingly good and the other potentially threatening” (pp. 43–44). This so-called “epistemological crisis” according to Rogoff “seems a much more fertile ground from which to think the notion of an

emergent field. An epistemological crisis would allow us to think not competing interests but absent knowledges, it would allow us to posit a proposition that would say that if we were able to find a way to know *this*, it might allow us not to think *that*. So it is a question of the loss or sacrifice of a way of thinking, as opposed to the cumulative proliferation of modes of operating" (p. 45). Leaving aside the question of precisely who Rogoff's "us" and "we" might be, I am left wondering whether there is, in truth, any epistemological crisis whatsoever, rather no more than a failure to think clearly. To declare an epistemological crisis need be no more than a maneuver to interject panic-mode theorizing.

In spite of the skepticism bordering on the curmudgeonly that I feel in the face of the aggregated relentlessness of these essays, I acknowledge that there is an issue here well worth exploring. The most effective means on offer in this volume would appear to be, by turns, the most poetical and the most empirical.

The most poetical account is provided in the first essay to follow the editor's introduction. This is "On the Curatorial, From the Trapeze" by the ever-interesting Raqs Media Collective, founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shudhabrata Sengupta, based in New Delhi. Its members elide distinctions among artists, curators, and what they charmingly term "philosophical agents provocateurs." In their contribution, they construct a series of thirteen meditations, each headed by the initials of pairs of words chosen to take the reader through what they term "a book-ending of successive alphabetical extremities, A-Z, B-Y, C-X, D-W, E-V, right up to M-N, as fly bars from which it suspends 13 word-pairs" (p. 17). The first is "AZ Advantage ~ Zeitgeist," the last "MN Morphic ~ Nirvana," and they define each term. They show that there is still plenty of mileage in the much discussed blending of art making and curatorial practice, at least in the absence of philosophy and probably in addition to it. They present a fine balancing act between analysis and poetic allusion, posing such questions as "How to irrigate a mine-field?" (under "CX Collision ~ Xeriscape") (p. 19). They conclude: "The acrobat on the trapeze has to let go of the fear of reaching for the other's hand. What is at hand is the liberation of forms from themselves. We could call this possibility, the curatorial; at least for now" (p. 23).

Not until the final chapter, "Coda: The Curatorial," is a mature voice of experience and empirical reason raised, that of Charles Esche, the director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and the co-curator of the 2014 São Paulo Biennial. He succinctly summarizes the prevailing working conditions for curators that inevitably lead them to

compromise their ideals as they have to meet a host of often conflicting expectations on the part of artists, patrons, and bureaucracies. "If we are honest," he writes, "we curators generally grease the wheels of whatever vehicle will allow us to make our 'project' and then hope against hope that we can still produce a critical surplus while keeping the funders happy" (p. 243). In his experience, curating entails a "balance of negotiation, stubbornness, submissiveness and clear thinking" (p. 243). This may not be philosophy, but it is none the worse for it, being the result of the clear thinking he advocates. Esche calls for the retrospective analysis of exhibition projects, a rare enough practice that he sensibly proposes need not be confined to curators' voices alone, but that can involve others. "Curating as an act needs to become less visible as the curatorial as a system of collective knowledge production takes the stage" (p. 244), his vision of "the curatorial" being the simplest and most persuasive offered in this volume. Esche's essay alone rescues *The Curatorial* from my temptation to apply to it Richard Wollheim's strictures on a book by T. J. Clark: It "theorizes into existence something which, as far as I can see, is unsupported either by evidence or by general plausibility" (Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 10). In the absence of philosophy in this book, the Raqs Media Collective's "verbal acrobatics" (Martinon's apt phrase) and Esche's elegantly argued position derived from careful reflection on experience will have to do.

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TANSMAN, ALAN, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, University of California Press, 2009, 368 pp., \$57.95 cloth.

TANSMAN, ALAN, ed., *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Duke University Press, 2009, 496 pp., 24 illus., \$99.95 cloth.

There are at least three reasons why everyone interested in visual arts and/or literature—not to mention fascism and/or Japan—should read Alan Tansman's insightful study *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, which definitively documents and masterfully analyzes Japanese uses of aesthetics to inculcate fascism from the pre-war years to the end of World War II and after, namely, his discussions of fascism, the power and appeal of Japanese aesthetics and arts, and the functions and power of art in general. (There may be more, but I am trying to keep this short.) In addition, there are at least four