

risk ridicule to ask questions that might be ridiculous, and to risk losing his cultural cachet or intellectual reputation on his self-declared quest to “save a man”—though whether that man is Marco or the reader is never quite clear.

The core of this book is an invitation to question everything, oneself included. Rarely in this work is Marco pilloried without an accusing finger being pointed at society as a whole. Yes, Marco lied extravagantly, but to some degree did most of Spain not lie about their support for the Franco regime after its fall? Was some degree of lying about who the Spanish people were in the past necessary in order for the country to transition to a democracy (i.e., if faced with the magnitude of their crimes, would they have become intractably trapped in the evils of their dictatorship to avoid having to have their self-image as moral people shattered)? If the lie was necessary, why do we condemn it—or do we condemn only “excessive” examples of it? If so, how is “excessiveness” determined? Furthermore, the grandiosity of Marco’s lie might be said to have directly contributed to a national belief in the lies necessary for democratic transition, and facilitated the smaller lies of other individuals—if the lies really were necessary, does this make Marco’s actions in some way heroic? Do the ends justify the means, even if those ends were unintentional?

Cercas poses many questions, and provides as much context and information for each of them as he can, but rarely does he produce an answer. His goal instead appears to be to use Marco as a mirror to demonstrate to his countrymen their own crimes, even if that mirror adds a fun-house exaggeration. A far away view of Marco provides a clear view of a monster who capitalized on tragedy for the sake of fame and glory; the closer one looks, however, the blurrier the picture becomes. To that end, before closing, I would like to praise the cover art of *The Impostor*, which shows a clear picture of Enric Marco as if you are looking at it from across the room, but is impossibly blurry at reading distance. This was a very clever design by Chip Kidd, which impressively encapsulates one of the driving themes of the book.—*Michelle Terriss*

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Curating as Ethics

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Jean-Paul Martinon, reader in visual cultures and philosophy at Goldsmiths College, University of London, seeks to radically transform our understanding of curating and curating practices. He proclaims nothing less than liberation from the shackles of ignorance, banality, paradox, moral philosophy,

and even (conventional) philosophy itself. Beginning with the claim that today literally everyone—not just art museum curators—is a curator, he deploys Martin Heidegger’s “fourfold” and ideas from a wide array of intellectuals to pull away the curtain of ignorance to reveal curating is midwifery, that is, curators are mortal gods intuitively uniting earth and sky giving birth to an unknowable future without any regard to economy (usefulness). Knowing this, curators can more often live up to the full meaning of curating, or if I may put it another way, become “authentic” curators (to borrow a concept from Jean-Paul Sartre).

Martinon’s views and supporting arguments are organized in three parts each with ten chapters. In the highly abstract first part, “Gods and Mortals,” he lays the ontic-ontological groundwork via his adaptation of Heidegger’s fourfold. What we experience as reality is the emergence of matter from dark matter expressing and re-expressing itself to and through mortal gods simultaneously in earth and sky. In the less abstract second part, “Earth and Skies,” Martinon begins to explore how his view of the fourfold sets the general parameters for curating as ethics. He argues curating is not merely for fame or fortune or indeed any “economy” (use) at all, it is—more significantly—an intuitive act of midwifery revealing “an overwhelming worldly exposition of surreal magnitude” “dispensing earthly and celestial re-expressions that, at last, ignores autonomous authorial gestures, sidelines imperious logics, and embraces ... the very event of our time” (240). Curating as ethics so understood goes far beyond ethics in the conventional sense of a set of moral precepts, rules, codes, or the like: curating births a visual dialogical libidinal anonymous unanalyzable “be just” that obligates a response. The third section “Deeds and Ends” is devoted to unraveling paradoxes that can transform curatorial practices regarding saving art, caring for art, preparing art, irritating, fraternizing, communing, dignifying, and much more.

Martinon deploys several important and controversial philosophical perspectives throughout the book. For the most part, these are assumed rather than philosophically defended. Since he objects to standard philosophical methods (see, for example, his Introduction), this is not surprising. Yet readers should be aware there are philosophical alternatives to his assumptions. I comment here on four of these perspectives: his version of conceptual clarification, process philosophy, paradox, and intuitionism.

First, Martinon consistently rejects the ordinary meaning of terms to seek out a more profound meaning embodying and supporting his vision of curating. This is true of every major concept in the book: matter, mortals, gods, earth, and sky, to mention just a few. Frequently, the change in meaning is so complete that one wonders why the original term is retained. For example, by “earth” Martinon does not mean something so crass, so banal, so philosophically ignorant as “dirt” or “the third planet from the sun” or anything like that. No. Earth (and earths) is a mysteriously “self-secluding” phenomenon that wrecks “every attempt at revelation of light” yet somehow also “rises up

as self-secluding” to give itself over to sky/skies. Of course, philosophers (and others interested in precise ideas and meanings) frequently engage in conceptual clarification, but many take ordinary meanings seriously and reject the abstract esoteric meanings Martinon espouses and avoid his frequently condescending tone: The ethically impoverished souls, conceptual sinners, who fail to recognize the majestic vision of curating and true methods of philosophy he has discovered! You are a god! Really? Or just rhetorically? More on this later.

Second, Martinon employs a version of process philosophy, which views its subject matter (often, but not always, metaphysics) as a dynamic process rather than a stable substance (or set of substances and their relationships). For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus was a process philosopher who defended a dynamic “cosmic fire” underlying the apparent stability of objects that is epitomized by his famous aphorism “you can never step in the same river twice.” Aristotle, on the other hand, defended a substance ontology in which “accidents” (secondary qualities like color or size or taste) adhere in an underlying unchanging object (a human, a dog, a desk). Martinon’s process orientation is evident. For example, matter “dawns” (11); is a verbal-adjective rather than a noun (11); “expresses and re-expresses” itself from dark matter (53); is an “eruption of the new in half-light reality” (53). The eruption of matter produces earths (whatever gives itself over for enlightening scientific scrutiny) and sky (whatever sheds light to self-secluding earths), opponents who raise each other into being (strife) as a “pure event” without origin or destination (54–55). This dynamism is employed throughout the book. Indeed, the book itself is said to be a curated exhibition (xxiv). But like his rejection of ordinary language philosophy, his process philosophy is assumed rather than defended. No philosophical alternatives are even identified much less evaluated.

Third, Martinon frequently uses the paradox motif. Virtually every chapter includes a paradox or series of paradoxes which the author seeks to overcome. The most important paradox addressed is the curator as a mortal god. What? Mortals and gods are opposites. How could a curator be both mortal and divine? Curators are mortal because death awaits us all, mere humans of limited knowledge, ability, and life span. Yet curators are divine too because “mortals are a poured gift without return to the gods ... [but] who are the gods? The gods are not the opposite of mortals but are mortals themselves” (33). Mortals are gods and god are mortals because “their mutual interdependence is total” (37). How so? The unfeeling gods have everything and desire nothing, so they need mortals who have little but feel and desire much; gods and mortals complete each other. There is no paradox, no negativity; just a “tension” in which mortals / curators aspire to be and obsess over the divine, ceaselessly striving for an end, a completion, a certainty, a future, they can never know or attain. If you struggle with that example, consider a second attempt to resolve a paradox concerning a more practical matter: a curator’s desire to save art. On the one hand, curating art by placing it in, for example, a free national gallery

can save art spatially (in one location) and temporally (rehabilitating it when it deteriorates). On the other hand, this amounts to putting art in “house arrest,” an attempt to force art into a Hegel-like “hallowed teleological end point.” But to save something is not to “snatch it from danger” (which can never be fully realized anyway); but rather, to “set something free into its own presencing,” “to allow someone or something to simply dwell,” “in letting someone or something ‘be’ their own nature” (147). This means we must reject a subject-object duality in favor of the recognition that “what needs saving is not just the art object (or a curated image) but a whole constellation” (148). Indeed, since art is inseparable from mortals, saving art is inseparable from saving mortals. Since mortals are immeasurable and beyond price, so too is art. Saving mortals and saving art are both a gesture of “maintaining the strife between earths and skies while holding up to the divinities what is unhoped for” and has no economic return (149). If this does not make sense to you or intrigue you, this is not the book for you.

Finally, Martinon endorses a form of intuitionism. He consistently begins with, then goes beyond the work of other intellectuals in ways that enlighten the reader but always elude full disclosure because they must be intuited. Of course, he shuns the banal idea of intuition as a gut feeling, hunch, or the “most annoying” characterization of intuition as “a way of acting or thinking that supposedly evades the artifices of reasons and keep people ... in touch with their natural selves” (209–210). This despite his insistence (mentioned above) that “saving” art is letting someone and something be “their own nature.”

No. Intuition properly understood is contemplation of the immemorial, the unhoped for (210). Developing Spinoza’s notion of *sub specie aeternitatis* through the work of Chantal Jaquet, Martinon claims we intuit what appears to evade space and time by adopting simultaneously a finite standpoint and eternal viewpoint. For example, we can contemplate an infinite number of equal rectangles formed by the segments of the intersecting chords within a circle. The circle exists in space and time (finite standpoint), but the infinite number of chords and rectangles do not (eternal viewpoint). How can a finite mind employing finite senses or finite reason contemplate the infinite? It cannot. Rather, intuition is to be affected by an eternal viewpoint (216). Intuition is not something you do or achieve; it happens to you. To let oneself be affected by what defies rationality is difficult, but it can happen if a curator actively opens oneself to the immemorial and unhoped for rather than relying on hunches, instinct, imagination, or faith in an unseen order. Or, for that matter, pursuing only economic ends in curating. Since the immemorial and unhoped for are unknown and unknowable, we can discuss them, argue about them, reason about them, and so forth, but they always remain incomplete, beyond full disclosure. So too are dark matter, mortals, gods, earths, skies, and everything else. Everything is incomplete, beyond full disclosure, because every “thing” is process, not substance. Process takes us beyond the (finite) known past and

present to the (infinite) past immemorial and the future that beckons but is beyond reckoning. Everything exceeds itself. Again, no philosophical alternative to intuitionism or his version of intuitionism is identified much less defended.

Martinon also employs controversial methodologies. I mention here just two. First, he explicitly disavows textual exegesis. Although he recognizes some may object to this approach, his purposes in this book lead him to liberally borrow and adapt ideas and arguments from scholars in whatever ways promote his view of curating as ethics. Creativity, uncovering the new, the unexpected is his objective here. Second, Martinon rejects philosophy as the “highest” knowledge as well as disciplinary boundaries and silos. Again, he acknowledges some will disagree, but he maintains curating as ethics (which includes a much vaster set of activities than merely what art museum curators do) is intuitive midwifery at an intersection of many academic disciplines.

So, who might *Curating as Ethics* appeal to? Two sets of readers are obvious choices. First, the artistic community. Although Martinon conceives of curating as an activity beyond curating art, his examples almost exclusively involve art and art curation. Be warned there are no significant examinations of artwork until page 70 or specific discussion of curating until page 86, but in many chapters—especially chapters in the third part—the entirety of the argument is framed around what artists and art curators do, do not do, should do, or should not do. Also be warned that he usually is criticizing the art community for their focus on “economy” and superficial understandings of what they do and why they do it. Those of us who are not artists nor art curators—despite being curators too according to Martinon—are left to extrapolate, if we can, what any of this means for our curating. Ah, but the book—like everything else—is incomplete: It beckons for another book enlightening the mortal gods outside the artistic community.

The second obvious set of readers is the philosophical community. Although Martinon has strong disagreements with “conventional” philosophy, the book is introduced as “curating philosophy” and is rife with philosophical ideas, assumptions, methods, and authors. Analytic philosophers beware: The philosophical scale is tipped entirely in favor of Continental philosophy. But analytic philosophers can benefit from reading *Curating as Ethics* too. The analytic / continental divide often cuts too deep to the detriment of both traditions. Even if one disagrees with virtually every philosophical claim in the book, one still encounters clever arguments, fascinating ideas, and an omnipresent challenge to dig deeper. I hesitate to recommend *Curating as Ethics* to other readers given how steeped in art curation and abstract philosophy it is. Readers with an interest in ethics might take a go at it, but they may well get lost amidst the highly abstract philosophy and focus on art. Those embracing the conventional view of ethics as a set of religious or secular ethical principles, virtues and vices, codes, and so forth will not find any of their sort of ethical analysis,

discussion, debate, or guidance here. On the rare occasions Martinon mentions “ordinary” ethical ideas (for example, “serving the public good” and “be just”), he does so only to deride the ordinary meaning and practice of ethics and substitute his own abstract fourfold version. To be sure, Martinon demonstrates an admirable command of relevant literature and an impressive vocabulary. He also presents some clever arguments and conceptual twists. Yet I wonder how transformative *Curating as Ethics* really is. I give two examples here.

First, Martinon acknowledges his vision of curating does not eliminate the need for “economies”—the need for curators to make a living, earn reputations, and so forth (166)—nor does it eliminate the need for “ordinary” ethics—the need for ethical principles, maxims, codes, and so forth (109). He merely adds what he believes is another and more important in some sense layer of godly mortals, mortal gods, earthly skies and skyly earths, and so forth. But what does Occam’s Razor leave if wielded here? Is the extra layer really needed? What does it really add? Mortals seeking to be immortal do not thereby actually become immortal. Humans seeking to be gods do not thereby actually become gods. That the concept of “mortal” can only be understood in relation to the concept of “immortality,” and vice versa, is a linguistic and conceptual truth that has no necessary metaphysical or ethical implications. To be a “mortal god” is simply to be a human being honestly grappling with the human condition rather than trying to ignore or minimize or oversimplify the human condition. That is not really a radical or new idea. Martinon’s use of the term “mortal gods” is rhetorical flourish, a heuristic device. The same goes for the other conceptual dualities that populate the book. Otherwise Martinon is reifying ideas, turning linguistic concepts into Platonic Forms or some such, that is, adopting some form of substance ontology that contradicts his process philosophy. Or it is merely clever word play. Everything is nothing and nothing is everything! What? Well, you cannot understand everything without also understanding what is nothing, and vice versa, so everything is nothing and nothing is everything. Everything-nothingness! Intuition will reveal it if you actively open your mind to it. Good is evil and evil is good! Up is down and down is up! And so on.

Second, in the conclusion Martinon divulges that it all comes down to the double play of irony and progeny. Irony, because we “are” time and time frustrates all mortal endeavors and eliminates all values (except the ineffable and impractical value of the fourfold). Progeny, because time also “provides”: Both through our progeny (children) and our curating we can “midwife a time that cannot be envisaged as providing us with a return.” This double play is “thus the game of our time, ironizing our efforts to be, begetting more efforts” (235). But producing children and begetting more efforts has always been the game and will continue to be the game whether anyone adopts Martinon’s fourfold approach to curating or not. And what radical transformative prescription does attention to the double play of irony and progeny produce? “Let’s hear and

tune ourselves to our currently exploited earths ... to our choking skies ... to the anxious and depressed cries of our present-day godless mortals..." (238). That is not a radical or new idea either. It is widely believed and defended without anyone's fourfold.

So, is *Curating as Ethics* pretentious or profound? Transformative or grandiose? I think a bit of all these, but you will only know if you read it.—*Timothy C. Shiell*

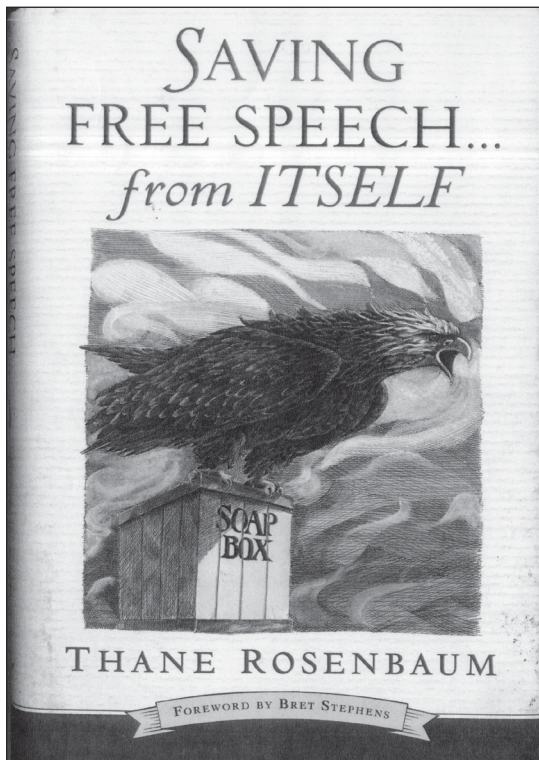
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Saving Free Speech ... from ITSELF

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For hundreds of years, Milton, Mill and innumerable other defenders have insisted that censorship—in theory perpetrated exclusively by government, but

in reality practiced quite successfully by organizations, religious bodies, individuals including parents, and almost everyone else—is anathema, indefensible, and never warranted. One should fight false and evil ideas with truth and goodness. And this made sense until fairly recently, say the nineteenth century, when media began to disseminate information more easily and more widely. By the time we arrive in the mid-twentieth century with global newspapers, easy to publish tracts and books, radio, and television, anyone could foment true horror and misery with the printed or spoken word.



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