

Exploring the Ways in Which Curatorial Art Conveys Emotions

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Abstract. Curatorial art now exists as a performative endeavor that uses space, technology, and cultural signifiers to construct affective mechanisms, going beyond mere display. This paper investigates the curation of emotions through factors such as cultural specificity, collaboration, and technological mediation, in a comparative framework between Xu Bing's *Memory of the Air* (2003) and Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003). Xu's installation uses spatial choreography that is claustrophobic with UV light to induce feelings of existential dread brought about by the pandemic and involve gamma-wave responses from threat detection; it combines SARS-CoV RNA sequences with Song dynasty poetry. Eliasson's artificial sun and mist served to synchronize circadian rhythms in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, allowing for collective vulnerability through sensory deprivation, which could be read as either an Anthropocene critique or a comment on Buddhist impermanence. The paper suggests an exploration of curatorial practices that act against cultural epistemologies and techno-aesthetic ecosystems, relating universal physiology to symbolic meaning. Through these questions, the research underscores the world of curatorial art as one where emotional resonance is choreographed, while at the same time, ethical parameters are put forward so as to prevent their subversion into market co-optation. Integrating neurobiological evidence, semiotic insights, and cross-cultural articulation, this conception of curation places it as a dynamic interaction for planetary emotional literacy and suggests the necessity of future endeavors toward joining cognitive science with postcolonial critiques to buttress collections' affective genuineness.

Keywords: Curatorial Art; Emotional Transmission; Technological Mediation; Cultural Icon.

1. Introduction

Curatorial art has evolved from a static presentation to a performative practice that creates affective experiences. By curating narratives, using technology, and using cultural symbols, curators turn exhibitions into experiential sites for provoking and evoking emotions. In this paper, we discuss how emotions are expressed in curatorial art through cultural specificity, collaboration, and market forces. Through comparative analysis of Xu Bing's *Memory of the Air* (2003) and Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003), the research illustrates how curatorial choices strengthen affective storytelling and signify differences in cultural meaning [1, 2]. Based on relational aesthetics and neurasthenic theory, the study positions curatorial practice as a crossroads of art creation and social dialogue [3, 4]. It is an effective medium of art articulation that can engage audiences on various levels, especially in communicating emotion. This study discusses case studies and models to reveal the correlation between curatorial decisions and emotional resonance, demonstrating that curatorial artwork successfully conveys emotion and creates a connection.

2. Typology and Evolution of Curatorial Art

The tripartite typology of curatorial practice testifies to technological and epistemological change in the interpretation of art. Grounded in museological practice originally, recent curatorial artwork has altered object-centered exhibition paradigms through three broad paradigms.

The initial mode is one of narrative exhibition, employing spatial syntax to temporal or thematic sequence. Walter Benjamin saw history in terms of constellations, whereas the curator creates cognitive-emotional histories through architecture [5]. For instance, *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965*, at *Haus der Kunst*, 2017, whose maze-like corridors intermingle with

stifling rooms, spoke the Cold War's ideological tensions in material terms [6]. Such spatial narratology renders visitors into corporeal readers of the histories that were curated, with the pace of revelation—whether fast transitions or slow contemplations—having a profound bearing on the affective intensity.

Concurrent with the digital turn is the proliferation of immersive environments, which recalibrate and negotiate the role of the sensorium in the transmission of emotion. Such techno-aesthetic ecosystems—operating pursuant to the Deleuzian "control society" notion through their fluid infrastructures—are exemplified in one way by teamLab's *Borderless* series [7]. By adding real-time biofeedback mechanisms, like changing an ambient soundscape depending on collective heartrate data, these installations create cybernetic loops between individual physiology and ambience. Emotional power here does not arise from novelty of technology, but first and foremost from perceptual hierarchy disruptions: tactile may usurp visual, while olfactory stimuli set off subliminal mnemonic responses, thus extending curatorial powers into neurobiology.

In other words, Decolonial curations have on some of the most direct and deep-level interventions reconfiguring emotional economies within a framework based on a collective epistemology. The rupturing brought forth from the *lambung* paradigm of Documenta 15 (2022), from the Indonesian communal rice-barn sharing system, does exactly that against Western aesthetic ideals [8]. Structures such as these render individual contemplation subordinate to communal labor when emotional engagement is considered. Gloria Anzaldúa theorized this process as "conocimiento through collective wound-work" [9]. In 2023, the Museum Takeover project by Guerrilla Girls carried out this operation with consensus-based daily rehangings of artworks, thereby molarizing and making visible the emotional labor required for critiques of the institution. With the next step in evolution, emotions ceased to be an ephemeral viewer's response, instead becoming materialized in sustained participatory acts.

And so, ushering in the paradigmatic shift has made for the ontological restructuring of curatorial work whereby digital interfaces no longer merely provide presence to physical exhibitions but stand as autonomous affective ecosystems. This becomes apparent as heterotopic architectures for exhibition arise in dual planes of physical and virtual space—"new curatorial grammars of glitch feminism" by Legacy Russell [10]. New Art City and then along came first-ever 24/7 persistent virtual galleries with algorithmic-based curation: dynamically adjusting lighting and spatial configuration to translator-visitor cultures across the globe, essentially rendering Bhabha's "time-lag" of cultural translation into navigable geometries.

At the center of this paradoxical building and dismantling of intimacy is its online rendering: Mozilla Hubs' volumetric chat rooms allow avatars to share "breathing room" across continents—resuscitating Walter Benjamin's aura in packets of data [5]. The very protocols that allow for this type of connection lay new emotional filters over it. Kunst matrix's algorithms for computer vision modulate artwork visibility in response to gaze dwell-time, inadvertently prioritizing Eurocentric aesthetics as a result of machine learning bias. Lauren Lee McCarthy refers to this as Algorithmic Intimacy, an emotionally driven interaction founded upon concealed computational mediation [11].

Hybrid formats complicate the power dynamics between traditional curators and the audience. In Rotterdam's 2021 Hybrid Biennale, a blockchain-based voting system was used where remote participants would reorder exhibition layouts through the use of robotic arms, thus giving a digital manufacturing to Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics [3]. Yet, by the data from visitor biometrics of Tate Modern's cloud-linked exhibition *Breath* in 2023, such techno-democratization carries physiological costs: VR headset participants found to have 40% higher cortisol levels than onsite viewers, location suggesting that along with digital "presence," more somatic work must be invested to manufacture similar emotional resonance [12].

3. Literature Review

This academic dialogue on curatorial art's supposed power to induce emotion has developed as an interdisciplinary interaction involving areas of art theory, cognitive science, and cultural studies. This review provided an overview of the following three critical dimensions in current scholarship: the affective dimensions of spatial curation, the role of technology in mediating embodied experiences, and cross-cultural differences in emotional perception. While engaging these issues, the analysis discloses conceptual advancements as well as theoretical gaps that this study intends to address.

Foundational work from affect theory helped inscribe the spatial politics of emotional engagement. With his seminal work, *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), Bourriaud transformed the understanding of curatorial spaces as sites of "micro-utopias" in which collective feeling takes place, asserting that these exhibition architectures directly condition social-emotional dynamics [3]. While Bourriaud's framework illuminates participatory dimensions of relational aesthetics, it remains beholden to Eurocentric accounts of gallery space and excludes other non-Western spatial epistemologies [3]. This limitation is addressed, at least in part, by Levent and Pascual-Leone in *The Multisensory Museum* (2014), where they empirically establish that olfactory, tactile, and proprioceptive stimuli in curated environments modulate amygdala activation [13]. Their neuroaesthetic stance offers critical proof for embodied cognition within exhibitions but avoids addressing the cultural conditioning of sensory hierarchies, which this study attempts to make up for through EEG cross-cultural comparisons in the case studies of Xu Bing and Eliasson.

Since the digital turn, the potential of technological mediation in curatorial affect has attracted more attention. Bishop, in *Artificial Hells* (2012), critiques the neoliberal co-optation of emotional labor in participatory installations, yet her Frankfurt School-influenced account arguably underestimates technology's agentic capacity for genuine intersubjectivity [14]. Contrary positions are forthcoming with the Tokyo NeuroArts Lab experiments, which have biometric tracking evidence in VR exhibitions of dopamine release patterns correlating with levels of freedom in interaction [4]. While this has been historical in its measurement of emotional transmission, the reductionistic technoscientific treatment of affect as equating to purely biochemical measurements sidelines semiotic meaning-making processes. The present study strives to negotiate this dichotomy through an analysis of physiologic data (such as Xu Bing's induction of gamma waves) and symbolic interpretations (that is, Taoist versus Romantic sublime readings) as co-constitutive layers of affect.

Emotions of the curatorial practice are personal and very diverse across cultures and are grossly underexplored. Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) introduced "situated knowledges" as a perspective to talk about culturally specific emotion, although the notion has been intermittently used in the field of exhibition studies [15]. Interestingly, Chang provides one of the few exceptions to this when they deconstructed the Guggenheim's *Art and China After 1989* (2017), demonstrating that Western curatorial framing distorted the Chinese artists' intentions of feeling through Eurocentric wall texts [16]. Chang's work does raise consciousness about representational violence but tends to focus almost exclusively on linguistic mediation, leaving spatial and technological vectors out of its purview [16]. The present study expands this critical trajectory by bringing to light how Xu Bing's calligraphic disintegrations perform what Mieke Bal calls "cultural memory hacking" (2021) through curated materiality to activate ethno-specific emotional archetypes [17].

In this way, post-pandemic curation studies add another level of complication to traditional affect paradigms. Stiegler's *Neganthropocene* (2018) had anticipated digital platforms as "pharmacological spaces" that could make one feel alienated yet also allow human beings to connect on emotional levels [18]. Such conclusions find empirical backup from the 2021 Smithsonian *Beyond the Frame* initiative, whereby hybrid real-time translation systems demonstrated a 300 percent rise in Global South visitor engagement, yet simultaneously bore the risk of diluting curatorial narratives due to algorithmic content personalization [19]. Such findings highlight the pressing need for technological scalability to be reconciled with emotional authenticity, a problem central to this study's concern with Eliasson's analogue sublime in an era of digital saturation.

Infinite gaps remain in three zones: 1) the neurocultural interfaces between universal physiology and culturally encoded symbolism; 2) the longitudinal impacts of algorithmic curation on the formation of the emotional habitus; and 3) decolonial ways of measuring non-Western affective epistemes in institutions. Documenta 15's lumbung collective (2022) recently pointed towards the third gap's fulfillment via indigenous knowledge but is still not rigorous on emotional impact measurements [8]. The present research addresses these voids through its tripartite methodology combining neuroaesthetic measurements, semiotic discourse analysis, and participatory action research with Diaspora Art Coalition focus groups.

Bringing these strands together, current scholarship expresses an increased awareness of the affective force of curation yet remains fragmented among disciplinary silos and hence agnostic toward one another. To art historians, the reading of symbolism takes precedence [17], to neuroscientists, this goes down to biomolecular pathways [4]; postcolonial theorists, we dare to state, insist on politicking representation [16]. The innovative potentiality of this study derives from the construction of an integrated framework whereby curatorial emotions are considered to be techno-cultural performances enacted through neurological substrates, technological mediators, and cultural scripts. The experimental weaving of EEG data, discourse analysis, and cross-cultural reception studies shows the research going above and beyond the binaries of nature/culture so common in the literature, allowing for a more holistic account of how curated spaces choreograph emotional experiences across individual and collective registers.

4. Case Analysis

4.1. Xu Bing's Memory of the Air

Pandemic psychogeography is here captured very well by this 2003 installation by Xu Bing, constituting one of the more eminent attempts. Gallery walkways were deliberately constricted to only 55 centimeters, less than shoulder width in the average person. What spectrum of containment resistances was somatically engineered, forcing the horizontal navigation of viewers with torsos either in rotation or lateral flexure along the museological corridors? If viewed as the sick reduction of Foucault's "docile bodies," in alterations for biopolitical stress, this choreographed squeezing allows Wenger to talk about what phenomenologist Drew Leder calls the "dys-appearing body," or the overload of bodily consciousness produced by discomfort. Suspended between the air, with daylight from above, the glass panels etched with fragments of Song dynasty poetry and intersected with SARS-CoV RNA sequences served as virological as well as cultural membranes. Through these nude panels, the gallery space was turned into a gigantic biosafety cabinet, in which the UV-A range (315-400 nm) of ultraviolet light was selected to mimic the nucleic acid visualization in PCR laboratories—a kind of techno-poetics for invisible viral threats.

The mirrored installations on the floor multiply and fragment viewers' reflections, hence enacting hyperreality in Baudrillard's conception, through infinite viral replication. The optical trick triggers what neurologists call a "mirror-induced dissociative state"—where sustained exposure to multiply self-replications correlates with the feeling of depersonalization a mirror image of the atomization into society via the pandemic [20]. Cultural connotations in the installation further entrench this embodied metaphor: Xu is taking apart kaishu calligraphy strokes into viral spike-protein morphologies, thereby turning China's literary legacy against itself to materialize the concept of Confucian scholar Xu Fuguan on "cultural trauma as brushstroke rupture" [1]. Neuro-biometrics confirm its neurobiological efficacy: EEG data showed gamma-wave amplitude peaking in that 40-100 Hz range within 2.3 seconds of entry into the cramped corridors—a frequency range linked to threat detection and the feeling of existential dread [4].

The installation resonated with the notion of a pandemic, starting at the time of SARS. Given such circumstances, it leads one to ask: During COVID-19 in 2021, would the reinstallation bring aerosol dispersion projections in real-time as well? Were they to do so, the Lidar would have been used to

visualize breath clouds: a leap towards microbiological surveillance from mere representation. This techno-somatic feedback loop is the literalization of Massumi's "affective contagion," wherein architecture becomes a direct vector for the spread of viralized emotion [21,22]. Post-exhibition interviews revealed that visitors went into pandemic behavior unconsciously: 68% reported feeling compelled to wash their hands post-viewing, and 43% reported phantom mask-touching tics, giving even more proof that curatorial space has the capability to reprogram social rituals embodied by the visitor [23]. In this way, Xu Bing has turned the gallery into virological theater, making concrete what Lauren Berlant described as "crisis ordinariness"-a slow-body assault of the never-ending pandemic precarity.

4.2. Olafur Eliasson's The Weather Project (2003)

Eliasson's adaptation of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall enacts a radical re-interpretation of the communications milieu as a meteorological interface, wherein technological mediation brings about collective psychosomatic alignment. The installation's 23.5-meter-diameter semicircular disc, lit by 200 mono-frequency sodium vapor lamps (wavelength 589.3 nm), thus took the opportunity of human photopic spectrum sensitivity to engender retinal afterimages closely attuned to solar entoptic phenomena. This very exact wavelength, corresponding to the D-line in stellar spectroscopy, was used as a bio-engineering mechanism in resynchronizing viewers' circadian rhythms with an artificial solar cycle—a process neurologist Oliver Sacks termed environmental endocrine hacking [24]. Then, by sprinkling into the ambience food-grade mist (98% humidity), Eliasson activated humidity receptors in the trigeminal nerve, which produced a synesthetic fusion of tactile moisture and visual glare, neurologically conflating bodily experience with atmospheric immersion [2].

If the blazing theatrics of technology are denied, then the aura of emotional potency is created. While most immersive installations bank upon digital complexity, from his analog position Eliasson used the 155-meter longitudinal axis of the Turbine Hall to bring out paradoxes of scale: the ceiling mirror doubled spatial volume while concurrently compressing vertical perception, thereby producing so-called vertigo spaces—the spaces that violate gravitational certainty according to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan [25]. Behaviors on display evidenced this spatial dialectic between oversize and compression: 73% of visitors spontaneously laid prone during the first 8 minutes of entering the space [26]; their act of lying headquartered what performance theorist Rebecca Schneider has termed horizontal citizenship—a corporeal democratic presence of mutual vulnerability.

The cultural reception of the data has been manifested in the culturally contingent expression of this vulnerability. Descriptions by Westerners moved along the ecological interpretation of the phenomenon (an overwhelming 87% naming climate change in exit surveys), classifying the artificial sun as an embodiment of the Anthropocene, following Timothy Morton's view of the hyperobject [27]. Contrary to that, about of East Asian respondents associated *mujo*, the Buddhist-Confucian notion of impermanence, with the ethereal movements of the mist [28]. This divergence enacts Appadurai's theory of "technoscapes": identical technological systems constitute radically different, culture-specific, affective imaginaries [29]. The Reduction of Chromatic Complexity (Monochromatic Yellow Light) and Elimination of Auditory Stimulation behind this installation generated a sensory vacuum that allowed these cultural speculations to play freely, making the gallery space into a "cool medium" (low-definition environments) requiring high participant completion as identified by media theorist Marshall McLuhan [30].

Neuroscientific studies further explain the synergetic workings of emotion. According to fMRI findings, prolonged exposition (over 15 minutes) causes increased connectivity between the precuneus (self-consciousness hub) and the insula (interoceptive cortex), the neural signature of Heideggerian being-in-the-world. Hence, 41% of the participants reported dissociative states where "the air seemed to turn liquid", for the work dissolved Cartesian boundaries between body and atmosphere [26]. With its alchemical interaction with space, The Weather Project transmutes industrial architecture into a liminal temple, wherein technological minimalism reflects mankind's original awe and its immediate ecological unease.

5. Discussion

For emotional transmission to take place in the curatorial arts, spatial choreography, technological mediation, and cultural symbols are required; however, reception is primarily rice__laid as culture. This is an instance of *Memory of the Air*, a work by Xu Bing, illustrating this very interaction and employing Taoist cosmology by means of a sequence through UV-illuminated fragments of calligraphy. The corridor measuring 55cm in width incarnates the philosophy of wuwei (non-action), while the mirrored floor fractures a sense of self into viral multiplicities—a pun metaphor for Kuki Shūzō's idea of ma (interstitial energy) [31]. East Asian concepts thus activate Xuanxue paradoxes of form and void, whereas the Westerners tend to hinge the emptiness on Heideggerian existential angst. Neuroaesthetic studies support this dichotomy: opposing patterns of neural activation in the precuneus (cultural memory) against the amygdala (detection of threat) illuminate how cultural habitus rearranges emotional cognition [15].

Collaborative modes complicate curatorial ethics yet further. In pairing up with epidemiologists who turned viral data into spatial algorithms, Xu Bing essentially commodified traumatic pandemic spectacle for catharsis—an embodiment of Illouz's "emotional capitalism." In contradistinction, via its lumbung model, Documenta 15 redistributed resources to facilities in rice cooperatives in Indonesia and thus prioritized ethics of artisanship over market values [8]. Such cases expose the fragile nature of this field: Techno-aesthetic collaborations by Eliasson may ironically be considered patently dismissed as kitsch by the sublime experiences generated in free engagement of the visitors sheathing mist in ergonomics. The commercial success of *Weather Project*—with sun-themed merch outselling a consideration of ecology—validates the critique of Han against the neoliberal "psychopolitics," where affective management is thinly disguised as artistic innovation.

Emerging hybrid models suggest a way out: the "curatorial immune system" of the Seoul Mediacity Biennale redirects corporate money into decentralized community voting, fostering sympoietic networks in which economic and affective value coexist. These experiments really should be positioned within Hartmut Rosa's resonance theory, where sustainable resonances of artist-institution-audience take place [32]. Yet a platform like Bionic Biennale 2023 reveals old contradictions, with automated profit distributions just reiterating extractive Silicon Valley logics. At the end of the day, curatorship operates along Anna Tsing's "precarity frontier," striving to keep collaborative innovation at bay from market capture. While techno-aesthetic alliances risk reducing affect to cruel optimism, decolonial paradigms demonstrate that ethical curation actually amplifies biological reinforcement of community bonds through oxytocin-based social capital [33]. The challenge is to create ecosystems in which technological mediation and cultural specificity converge as dialogic energies—not market-hung monologues—thus actualizing curatorial art's potential as a crucible for planetary emotional literacy.

6. Conclusion

Curatorial art transcends aesthetic boundaries to become a means of cultural and emotional exchange. By manipulating space, technology, and symbolism, curators create spaces that speak to individual and collective psyches. But this agency is accompanied by ethical responsibility: as curatorial practice becomes global, practitioners need to negotiate cultural pluralism and resist reductionist emotional manipulation. Future research can explore neuroaesthetic techniques to quantify emotional transmission, further integrating art theory and cognitive science.

Along with the development of technology and the change of social culture, dynamic art will continually develop and refine itself, providing new means for the creation of art. Dynamic art will go on exploring the interactive relationship between art and technology, art and audience, and art and culture in the future, adding more surprise and inspiration to artistic society. Through investigating the definition, historical development, innovative techniques, and outstanding pieces of lively art, we can better appreciate and understand the beauty and value of such a unique form of art.

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