2 Curating

2.1 Introduction

Music festivals and contemporary art biennales are both based on the common concept of the festival.[1] More specifically, they share a common link in the arts and culture festivals that have arisen in various forms over the course of the past 150–200 years, since their advent in the modern era, and the related social transformations of the industrial revolution and European colonialism. For this reason, the first case discussed in this volume will not be an arts festival at all, but rather the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition), which took place in London's Hyde Park in 1851.

This first universal exposition would prove to be a crystallization of much of the ideologies that would come to lie behind music festivals and arts biennales for the subsequent 150 years. Their historical similarities and divergences in the interim years can in this way be better brought into focus through an exploration of the value systems and ideologies imbued in this historical exhibition's infrastructure. The common ancestor allows for a contrasting between the development of the two different traditions in the interim, in turn a way of investigating differences between music festivals and visual arts biennales.

An integral part of visual arts biennales has, at least since the middle of the 20th century, become also a form of experimentation with the organization of the display itself as a practice and integral part of its operation. The complex networks that come together to make up the biennale have often been explicitly thematized within biennales themselves, by artists and artworks, but also by the emerging class of curators who design the structures of their festivals in such a way as to take a position within the knot of power relations that define the parameters of the festival.

1 The Italian spelling will be used (rather than the English "biennial") in discussing arts biennales. This is in order to mark the relationship that these events have with the Venice Biennale, or as art historian Caroline A. Jones says, to mark their formation "against the backdrop of the ur-biennale, *la Biennale di Venezia*" (2012, 69). Note though that original spellings have been preserved in proper names and self-identifications of biennales (e.g. "Manifesta: European Biennial of Contemporary Art").

Music and theatre festivals for their part have less of this critical tradition, though these have also operated as similar, if not more powerful, spaces for negotiating power relations and artistic reputations. This evolutionary difference between the two types of festival in relation to the common ancestor is used to bring clearly into focus the many kinds of relationship between ideology and the staging of arts festivals. They serve as sites of modernist ritual, meant to inculcate certain sets of values, be they nationalistic, aesthetic, or critical, in the festival public.

After having examined the Crystal Palace Exhibition and its implications, Documenta will be analyzed as an example of how this tradition, initiated in those earlier universal expositions, continued in smaller festivals specializing only in the arts in the post-war period. Throughout its history, it has illustrated both the process of instrumentalization of the festival, but also the growth of the practice of curating which would ultimately take charge of it. With Szeemann's Documenta 5, the emergence of the independent curator is examined. Remarkable about the figure of the independent curator is how they see the constitution of the exhibition as a form of artistic practice itself, experimenting with its parameters in order to present their own subjective message. The independent curator is thus presented as a post-modernist shift towards subjective rather than universal narratives. Szeemann also called into question the relationship between curator and artist, in particular as artists were also increasingly working with context as well, with the emergence of conceptual and installation art. What Documenta 5 ultimately shows is the beginning of curatorial practice's self-reflexive approach to the contextualization of artistic work, and an early example of the exhibition as disputed territory between curator and artist.

Examining Documenta 11 shows how this approach to experimentation with the format of the large-scale arts festival can be used to explicitly address the problematic forms of knowledge-production of the modern arts festival. Documenta 11 is an attempt at reframing the narrative of artistic development away from its privileged place in the West, asking the audience to consider the wide range of artistic production happening across the globe as entangled with one-another, taking on a post-colonial perspective. It did this not through completely rejecting artistic production of the West, but rather attempting to reframe it within a new, global narrative. The curatorial approach to Documenta 11 pre-empts much of the critical project that defines curating also today: it becomes about working out a particular infrastructure design that allowed for knowledge to be produced in the event of experiencing art that was not a reproduction of a Western-centric ideology.

As curators explored the conditions of display, the question regarding the nature of the distinction between the role of curator and the role of artist can be addressed. While both artist and curator have become engaged in experimentation with exhibition display and contextualization, the professional profile of the curator is found to be distinct in its need to exist as a balancing act between so many

different stakeholders, be they donors, local or international politics, the working relationships with artists, relevancy to current artistic debates, stylistic innovations, etc., that constitute the event of the festival or exhibition project. Mediating between these different interests while at the same time maintaining an ethical "curatorial responsibility" dedicated to nevertheless staking a relevant and critical position in regards to societal debates is what defines the embattled figure of the curator.

This positions the curator as always in-between so many fields. They are a prophet of new ideas, but also a priest charged with preserving the old. They synthesize creative and managerial strategies in their practice, but must remain critical. Their talking and debate is perhaps pre-instrumentalized by cognitive capitalism's thirst for ideas, but earnest reflection can take place when also considering this aspect in discussion. Balancing between these stakeholders means working actively in the field of management and institutional leadership itself. Ambiguously existing between instrumentalization and critique, the curatorial position is engaged with creating the context, creating situations that resist the possibility of confinement. Rather than allowing previously-problematic concepts to inflate through their integration of their criticism, it becomes about finding place for new beginnings, new stories, ones that better connect with the current transformations of contemporary global reality.

The reason for examining the emergence of curating in the visual arts has been to outline a definition of the practice as a kind of critical mediation that is agnostic in regards to the areas of knowledge that concern it. It is portrayed as a way of considering how mediators can navigate their complex surroundings while maintaining an interest in supporting the creation of artistic experiences that call into question the society in which they exist. Beginning with universal expositions is a way of looking at how the event of art's reception by an audience has since the beginning of the modernist period and the industrial revolution been informed by a mode of display that disseminates the ideology of power to its subjects. Looking at the post-war period, the goal is to trace the emergence of a questioning of this system through experimentation with the very infrastructure itself, however paired with significant misgivings about this project's criticality, as it dovetails with the emergence of criticality and creativity with forms of organization as desirable characteristics of the immaterial worker. A line of flight is suggested that does not work dialectically, but rather suggests a persistence of inventiveness with the creation of critical infrastructure, for suggesting new stories to tell that trace pre-existing but non-normative paths through the network.

The first step in building a curatorial framework for analyzing both music festivals and biennales is to examine the early modern universal expositions that they share as common ancestors. Understanding the ideologies that drove these events, which still continue until today, will provide a key to understanding the underlying

Image 1: SC 1950.82.28. Dickinson Brothers, The Transept, from Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, 1854, published, lithograph printed in colour on paper, sheet: 16 x 19 in., Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts

ideologies that continue to drive both contemporary festivals, and their continued growth in new areas of the world.

In 1851, what would become known as The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations would open in London's Hyde Park. By the time it closed, it had attained the dimensions of a megaevent: over the 141 days the exposition was open, it attracted over 6 million visitors and featuring 17 062 exhibitors (Teissl 2013, 28). Comparing this to the relatively well-visited Documenta 14 in 2017, with 891 500 visitors over its hundred days in Kassel, the size of this huge undertaking can begin to be grasped (Documenta/Statista n.d.). The exposition consisted of four sections, raw materials, machines, manufactured goods, and visual art, and was meant as a display of innovation and progress from all participating nations. Nations were defined here as all those nations that participated in global trade at the time, notably including China (Teissl 2013, 32). The Crystal Palace exhibited a clear desire to present a showcase of all of human production happening at that time. Between the lines, it told a story of global development, one closely linked with the economic and nation-building interests of imperial England.

From its emphasis on presenting the British Empire on an "international stage" to its doing so through the means of showing exemplary production from many different countries on that "stage" that was the exhibition hall, the Crystal Palace Exhibition would share many characteristics of later arts festivals and biennales. While it was by no means the first large-scale festival, both it and its successors would define the festival format's new relationships to capitalist ideology, nationalist sentiment, and a growing educated middle class.

As curator Marian Pastor Roces argues, the true subject of the assembled cornucopia was the concept of capital in all its facets: the capital city, capitalist conquest, even the capitals of letters and columns (as in the title, "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations") (2010, 57). It is not by chance that this attempt at unification and representation took place in London in the mid-19th century: the city at the time was the centre of the British Empire, which had grown to immense global importance in issues of trade and governance. The exposition itself was both celebration and assertion of London as the nexus of power via the means of this mega-event.

The exposition took place in an enormous temporary construction of glass purpose-built by the architect Joseph Paxton and taken down after its closing. Historical accounts of the building describe it as a vast palace of cast iron and glass reaching as far as the eye could see, a kind of temple to the exposition of all those artefacts from around the world presented within (see Image 1). Its spatial organization would reveal much of the hidden motivations and significance behind this grand event. What the Crystal Palace Exhibition constructed was nothing less than a prototypical modernist architecture, one which claimed the power of definition of global networks and their relations.

Through the construction of its unique architecture of crystal-clear transparency, it created an entire system in which the cultures of the world could be subsumed and ultimately brought to heel under the imperial power of its host. The palace's transept afforded within the building clear views over all the exhibits, putting them into a grand narrative of industrial progress and triumph before the visitor's eye. The transparent-yet-impermeable glass walls linked the building with the park and the capital city itself, the definitional centre of the exposition, while also containing it. Its spectacular dimensions were a concentration of the city's aspirations at profiling itself as the central figure on the global stage, spreading "peace and stability" to its colonies around the world.

This capacity to define a view and vision for a city and its relationship to the rest of the world, as well as the concrete economic impact that such a grand event provided to London, proved to be an irresistible model for many major Western seats of imperial power at the end of the 19th century wanting to stake their claim of superiority and centrality on the global stage. Following closely after London, and in a bid to stake its claim to superiority over other American cities, New York

initiated its own universal exposition in 1853, complete with its own replica of the Crystal Palace. The building, placed in what is now Bryant Park, would dwarf its surroundings, and introduce a new dimension to New York's skyline (Koolhaas quoted in Roces 2010, 55). An exposition in 1855 in Paris would quickly follow.

The number of cities who would come to host such events would from there only grow, including by the end of the century expositions across both Europe, the USA, and Australia with the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition.[2]

2.1.1 The Scopic Regime of the Crystal Palace

London's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 can be understood as a point of concentration of so many relationships between society and practices of display, one that would come to be a central influence on later arts biennales and festivals up until today. In order to understand its significance, it must be understood that the exposition's mode of display is part of a larger deployment of capitalist-modernist ideology. This means understanding the exposition and its construction as an architectural materialization of a certain ideology relating to both the city and its international relations, particularly relations of coloniality (Roces 2010, 52).

To do this, one must first examine the relationship between what is put on display and the conditions of display themselves. In his article "The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary," art historian Donald Preziosi details the nature of this relationship. For him, the Crystal Palace Exhibition was exemplary of a typically *modernist* system of display, one that would come to establish the basis of art history and exhibition practice in the century to follow.

To say that this system is modernist is to understand it as insisting on a particular worldview, one founded on enlightenment principles of rationality and sense, but also on a self-understanding of Europe (and specifically England), as the foremost innovator in these issues, in other words implying a narrative of teleological progress, with Europe in the lead.

This kind of generalization about nation states comes from the particular status that works in the exposition would have. Imagining once again this grand collection of works of art and industry from so many countries brought together, Preziosi argues that:

> The artwork (and perforce any palpable cultural artifact, object, or practice) is taken to bear a relationship of resemblance (a metaphorical—and hence substi-

2 The Paris Treaty of 1928 would later come to regulate the frequency and list of responsibilities of these universal exhibitions. Enforcement of the treaty is managed by Bureau International des Expositions, also based in Paris. The bureau includes a list of "historically important" universal expositions that predate its founding on its website (Bureau International des Expositions n.d.-a).

> tutional—relationship) as well as a part-to-whole relation (…[an] index) to its circumstances of production. (Preziosi 2010, 38)

The objects are placed into the Crystal Palace, and are made then to represent something about the conditions of its production, and by extension the culture of its producers. This means that "the art object's visibility is a function of its legibility as a *symptom* of everything and anything that could be plausibly adduced as contributing to its appearance and morphology" (Preziosi 2010, 38). He uses the metaphor of the pantograph, an instrument used to extrapolate drawings to different scales, in order to illustrate this pars pro toto relationship. The exposition, for its part, underlines these relationships via the exhibition concept formed by this ideology, wherein:

> Its exhibitionary order was the ideal horizon and the blueprint of patriarchal colonialism; the epistemological technology of Orientalism as such.[6] It was the laboratory table upon which all things and peoples could be objectively and poignantly compared and contrasted in a uniform and perfect light, and phylogenetically and ontogenetically ranked. (Preziosi 2010, 34)

The collected artefacts of the exposition could be studied, and put into various categories and respective histories. The process of putting these objects in to their systems and ranks, into their relationships with each other, is the double-edged sword of the modernist system of display exemplified by the Crystal Palace Exhibition. The display of these many forms of difference showed a diversity of cultures, but on the precondition of their reduction to legibility within the system at hand, in this way forming the titular "crystalline veil" of Preziosi's article, which both renders visible and occludes simultaneously.

The display and domestication of difference is argued to be the way in which the British/European identity and narrative of industrial and societal progress and forward motion from a particular past into a specific future is constituted through the manufacture of the Other. In this way, the project of art history becomes about "staging and envisioning thought—about nations, individuals, ethnicities, races, genders, and classes *on behalf* of social agendas" who have vested interests in controlling the narratives of both the past and the future (Preziosi 2010, 39). This social agenda follows what Preziosi calls modernity's "core problematic," namely "*the orchestration of orderly, describable, and predictable relations between subjects and between subjects and objects,*" the orderliness being achieved through the "laboratory-like" and neutral container of the modernist system of display (40).

The functioning of the Crystal Palace becomes then about control and authority over a narrative about the past and the (better) future. Central to the formation of this narrative is not just the inclusion within it, but also the way in which this inclusion is included, in this case through the making of "orderly" relations, or

ones that flatten forms of difference into "seemingly endless flavors of the same ice cream" (Preziosi 2010, 45). It becomes thus fundamentally a mechanism of de- and re-contextualization of materials, whereby art and industrial production from many different countries are taken out of their contexts, and placed into a new one, the exhibition. It would become this format that would come to be copied across countless museums and galleries far and wide.

The Crystal Palace, as the solidification in a building of a particular ideology, can thus be said to produce a *scopic regime* of the exhibition. This regime is constituted along the axes of both subjectification-via-architecture (both physical and social), as well as de- and re-contextualization of the exhibited objects within.

2.1.2 Modernist Exhibition Practices and the Commodification of the Musical Work at World's Fairs in England

Before examining the implications of this model for cities as a mode of self-identity, it must be shown that the same system of "objectification" and domestification of the exhibited material at the Crystal Palace Exhibition was also at work in the field of music. Philosopher Lydia Goehr, in her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992), provides the necessary historical background in order to show this, and forms an important reference in understanding the transformation of the status of musical performance.

Goehr argues that around the turn of the 19th century, musical performance underwent an important transformation in its self-understanding. Whereas music was previously understood as inseparable from its performance, a shift towards music being understood as one of the fine arts alongside painting, sculpture, etc., meant a need for it to be conceived of as a more enduring product, something that could reliably persist from performance to performance (rather than every performance being understood as "based on" e.g. a tune or melody, as is often the case in jazz) (Goehr 1992, 99–100; 152). The result of this change was a renewed emphasis on the score as the locus of "musical work," or that which is able to preserve the continuity of a musical identity across multiple performances, regulating its derivative interpretations through what Goehr calls an "*open* concept" (89).

Along with this transformation came a shift in the role of the composer, who was now able to mix aspects of the immateriality of musical performance with its commodification (i.e. ability to be separated from the act of its production, here in the form of the score) in new ways, such as the ability to more strongly assert their authorship over the work across its various realizations over time.

This shift in the ontological existence of music from its performance to its existence as a musical concept and score created by an author and now relatively stabilized across performances would thus begin to be subjected to a similar set of forces as those being applied to the products of other forms of skilled labour (Goehr

1992, 152).[3] These forces are namely the modernist-rationalist technologies of display and the scopic regime that would define the format of the universal exposition. The musical work could now fit into a museual ideology just like other objects, its performativity having been stabilized by the concept of the musical work.

This process has been examined by musicologist Sarah Kirby, who has researched the modes of exhibition of music in London's early universal exhibitions. She has found that at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, music was found, on account of its performative nature, too ephemeral to be "shown," leading to only musical instruments to be exhibited (their commodity status easily corresponding to a museum logic). By the 1873 exposition however, a solution was reached by those concerned with the representation of music at these events to put on daily concerts at the Albert Hall of "high class" music for the duration of the exposition. She argues that this musical exhibition of sorts gave a sense of permanence to the musical offering, effectively arresting the transience of its performative existence in the same way that Goehr argues in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* above. Though concert programs varied somewhat, works were performed many times over during the 6-month duration of the exposition, achieving a level of permanence of the musical "objects" that she argues were attempts at subverting their performative nature (Goehr 1992, 224). Importantly, Kirby reports as well that works were played in the hall even when nobody was actually listening, further underlining this aspect of the work-as-object. (Kirby 2018, 3–7)

This "objectification" of music, and its ontological shift from a performative to work-based artform, meant that its presentation at universal expositions could be subjected to the same processes of subjectification and taste-making that defined the status of the objects that has been examined with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition. The display of these musical works meant that the instability and capriciousness inherent to performativity existed at cross-purposes to the self-reflexive, rationalist/modernist approach to the modernist exhibition, which led to the former being subjugated to the rationality of the score.

Just as earlier expositions served the negotiation and establishment of the reputation of objects, so too then could—through repetition and therefore quasi-permanence in presentation—these musical exhibitions serve the negotiation and establishment of the reputation of new musical works and, by extension, their authors (who were the composers, not the orchestra, whose performative labour became that of fidelity to the musical work).

3 This is to say nothing of the larger deployment of the concept of authorship that would occur over the same time period across both the arts and literature. While the concept existed of course beforehand, it would take on new meaning in its relationship to the concept of "work" that it stabilizes. See here *What is an Author?* (Foucault [1969] 1998).

Discussing how the musical canon could take on the qualities of permanent exhibition at universal expositions is not in order to begin an argument for the analysis of music at world fairs and its relation to canon-formation, as is Kirby's focus. Rather, the interest in showing this linkage is to highlight how universal expositions played an important part in the establishment of a system where artistic production is commodified so as to conform to a system of normative knowledge-production. In exposing the power of capital in forming this system of knowledge production, a first step has been established in highlighting the nature of the relationship between knowledge and power in these large-scale cultural events.

2.1.3 The International Narrative of the Festival

The success of the Crystal Palace Exhibition's capacity to objectify, and thus commodify, a range of human industrial and cultural output means that it still provides a basis for the exhibitionary order as it is familiar to us today. As seen in the previous section, this objectification was also found to be capable of extending to music, which is often understood of as performative, and therefore not commodifiable in the same way as other objects able to be separated from the act of their production.

Alongside this drive for objectification, and for control of difference that is so crucial to the functioning of the universal exposition, art historian Caroline A. Jones points out how universal expositions have contributed to a lasting understanding of "*art as experience*" (2010, 69). She connects the universal exposition to an even earlier phenomenon, namely grand tours of Europe as an early form of mass tourism primarily by British, but also by other wealthy continental European nobility, wherein they would visit important cultural sites and works on the continent in search of the origins of their European cultural heritage (Jones 2010, 73–74).

The modernist scopic regime deployed in universal expositions is connected to this history of art-as-experience through the exposition's relationship to internationality, which will also be an important aspect of the biennale and festival as they develop. In the act of collecting this "representative" assortment of objects from across the world together in one place, organizers are able to bring the world to their audience. Recontextualization however then happens on the terms of the organizers, who are able to design the experience of the relation between the elements on display, stringing it into a new narrative of their own devising.

This aspect of creating a survey of international goings-on, putting on display the best that they have to offer, becomes closely linked with the national identity of the host nation, and the cosmopolitan urban centre that houses the exposition. A bringing-together of cultural artefacts from many other places allows for a definition-in-relief of the host city's identity. The ability to study relationships, differences, and similarities allows for the construction of a relational self-identity, one determined through the construction of a narrative of self and other. Jones likens

this to a city and a nation's desire to put itself (back) on the map: via a collecting and displaying of the "map" itself, the city attempts to insert itself into the diagram by seizing control of the narrative.

The (back) in (back) on the map is furthermore key in understanding the relationship between the universal exposition and subsequent perennial arts events such as festivals and biennales via the notion of experientiality. Putting a city (back) on the map involves not just a definitional act, but also the possibility that this definition must be maintained, that it can fall off the map, and only through sustained definitional effort stay on it, creating a loop of sorts. Significant about this looping is its repetition, and thus the importance of its experientiality by its audience; the definition of the city must always be (re)performed, e.g. every two years via a biennale. The uncertainty of the claim to representation requires its persistent decoding, the *process* of looping it and decoding its paradoxes becoming central to its existence.[4] (Jones 2011)

These aspects of reoccurrence, self-definition, and surveying would come to be core components of universal expositions subsequent to that in 1851, as well as later arts festivals and biennales, as will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter. They would also prove to be viral concepts that would appear in various forms of both expos and arts events across the world to this day. This is because this aspect of international self-definition, combined with the knowledge-economy hunger for the production of reasoned understandings of international relations, would prove to be important aspects of various modernities globally.

This can be seen by looking at how the universal exposition spread after the initial Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. This quickly led to fairs in 1855 in Paris, 1862 in London, 1867 in Paris, 1873 in Vienna, 1876 in Philadelphia, 1878 in Paris, 1880 in Melbourne, 1888 in Barcelona, etc.[5]

Just as these earlier waves of emergence of expos, festivals, and biennales within Europe occurred out of necessity when certain historical conditions were met, so too can the emergence of a large number of new festivals around the world be understood in the same way. Examining the list of 21st century "world expos" (the equivalent to earlier universal expositions), the lineage detailed above continues until today in cities caught up in nation-building, who are still very interested in the format, with e.g. Expo 2015 having taken place in Shanghai, Expo 2020 taking place in Dubai, and a Specialized Expo having taken place in Astana in 2017.

4 This loop can be related to philosopher Timothy Morton's reading of modernism, which he not only equates with capitalism, but with a specific viral meme he calls *agrilogistics*, which he argues begins far earlier in human history. See Morton 2016, 84ff.

5 See https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/all-world-expos for a list of historically-significant world's fairs since 1851.

In other words, this explosion of new festivals around the world can be understood within a framework of a modernist aspiration towards self-definition, networking, and putting a city (back) on the map, expressed through cultural production (in the arts). What this implies is a model of multiple modernities, where the concept of modernism is detached from its relationship to the West, where it is best known to have flourished (Eisenstadt 2000, 2–3). Timothy Morton expresses this same sentiment adroitly in writing that:

> Although the desire for it first emerged in America, it turns out everyone wants air conditioning. … Likewise obesity isn't simply American. Americans are not like aspartame, ruining the natural sweetness of other humans. (Morton 2016, 15)

The point being the decoupling of the accoutrement of modernism (air conditioning, arts festivals) from where they first occurred, usually in the West. It is more broadly an aspect of the Anthropocene, a trait of the concept of the modern human most generally, not reducible to one particular culture or nation. This implies a very different relationship between the festival format and its role in developing countries, one that does not per se need to position itself towards the festival as a "Western" import, but rather as part of a larger, self-determined strategy.[6]

2.2 The Anatomy of Festivals and Biennales

2.2.1 Fest/ival

The previous section presented the Crystal Palace Exhibition, as well as subsequent universal exhibitions, as a precursor to the practices of museology and art history that still inform our understanding of artistic work today, serving as an important cardinal point for mapping the origination of festivals for arts and culture since the mid 19th century.

Before examining arts festivals from the late 19th century until the present, it is important to acknowledge that universal exhibitions should not be thought of as the sole progenitor of contemporary festivals. For instance, theatre festivals in ancient Greece also prove to share many similarities in terms of their array of economic and societal functions with contemporary events (English 2011, 65–66). Theatre scholar Jennifer Elfert furthermore positions the contemporary (theatre) festival within a longer history of the German Festspiel, a format strongly tied with a projection of sovereign power of the Germanic states in the 16th and 17th centuries, and later as a catalyst for German nationalist sentiment as of the late 19th and early

6 "Developing" is meant here in the very concrete sense of investing in the modernist aspirations of self-definition and nation-building.