

Under The Sycamore Tree

Curating As Currency: Actions That Say Something, Words That Do Something

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There seems to be one particular meaning to the word “curated”. You know the feeling when something odd but not-random-at-all happens? That one. You are about to hear the story of one such event that involves a mystery of Another Place, a lot of talk about curators and featuring one important Sycamore tree.[\[1\]](#)

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Not that long ago, we were sent to find and bring back ‘the chart’, the knowledge a curator should possess in order to curate. We were advised to also get to know what knowledge would be unnecessary, or even harmful for curatorial task, to learn about the things ‘to know to leave behind.’[\[2\]](#) Eventually, we had to understand how to turn the insight of such a complex and concrete procedure into an abstract, academic kind of knowledge. It is hard, and, apparently, only Students can be the judge of that. But, our mission could not fail—our people depended on us coming back with the Recording.

The Old Database revealed some secrets of its own: we learned that the answers we were looking for might hide with one particular Sycamore tree, so particular that it actually has a name. But then our memory unit malfunctioned somewhere above the uncharted area right behind the Gate—a crash-landing we will never be able to forget. We were sure though that somewhere in those never-ending forests this thousand-year-old trunk should be hiding, beaming all its wisdom, just ready to be recorded. So the search begun.

Eventually, one afternoon we were lucky enough to stumble upon both: our long-sought-for Sycamore Tree With A Name, and right under it, a group of Students engaged in what turned out to be a long, detailed discussion. There were 24 of them, all men, dressed somewhat oddly. Our presence did not seem to bother them at all, and, when we think of it now, they never showed any awareness of us standing right beside them. Discussing their matters intensely, they never interrupted each other. What follows is exactly what we heard.

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Peter: From various different educational enterprises bearing the name ‘curatorial,’ developed over the previous two or three decades, no precise lists of curatorial tasks could be derived. There were no averages helping us come up with historical ‘what?’ and ‘what not?’ instructions. Ever since curatorial education became an institutionalized operation, ‘what?’ and ‘what not?’ have seemed to be categories best avoided in favor of a much more blurred—or nuanced, or, as contemporary news industry will insist, ‘balanced’—general approach toward such exclusive categorization.

Armstrong: Eventually, we did manage to find one such list, derived from one of the first discussions on curatorial education.^[3] This happened during the peak of the emergence of curatorial education programs, conceptualized as training courses to establish and legitimize this profession. It is a ‘what’ list, and it states students should be taught about the following:

A Cookbook for Curatorial Education

- One should seduce and convince students that the world of art is an attractive one and worth dedicating their life to.
- One should provide encounters with inspirational practitioners—dynamic personalities could be a productive example of how individuals who create in the midst of social chaos are inevitably building a social context.
- Participants should be provided with extensive field research.
- The course should be short and intensive, focused on production, and on working with artists.
- The course should be truly international—one should be able to see one’s own continent through the eyes of a colleague educated in a totally different part of the globe, but who has learned similar tools.
- The group should be small and work in a ‘laboratory environment.’
- Students should learn to work as a team and to experience qualities of group dynamics and collaboration, as well as a process of constant negotiation.

Barnewall: Out of all the qualities listed, there seems to be one that prevails, gravitating around the expressions of ‘group,’ ‘team,’ ‘collaboration,’ ‘working with,’ emphasizing the social aspect of the task.

Andrew: Through such an approach the illusion of the promise of success is created, and that the world of opportunities is open to everyone. As we know, this struggle ‘worth dedicating your life to’ will extract only a few great names.

Samuel: The brief history of institutionalized curatorial education proves that, so far, the decision was made to place emphasis on the practical side of things—most curatorial programs and courses were promising ‘real world’ experience, working on existing projects in a ‘hands-on’ manner, getting introduced to the ‘existing network of professionals,’ learning ‘current technologies,’ and so on. Most of this self-centered and self-oriented curatorial learning ended up in the vicious cycle of anthropological curators studying other curators, and establishing an apparently self-sufficient ‘world of curating,’ as an autonomous unit within the larger world of art.

G.N.: Not without reason, by insisting that teaching of it should be perceived as ‘training,’ at least one of the educational facilities acknowledged that the nature of curatorship is more akin to the famously mysterious martial art of kung fu rather than any systematized and academized discipline. If so, a character such as Bruce Lee would indeed epitomize the contemporary figure of ‘trained’ curator, and his advice on how to teach this sacred art further, we assume, would be immersed in idiosyncratic statements such this one:

Be like water making its way through cracks. Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object, and you shall find a way around or through it. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves. Empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. (...) Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.[\[4\]](#)

Leonard: On second thought, and considering most of the situations one may encounter while pursuing a certain curatorial task, this is not such bad advice. After all, they say that the best exhibitions are curated as if by an ‘invisible hand.’ The curator needs to be felt everywhere, but not seen. If the audience can see the curator in between the artworks and themselves, the curator apparently did not read the manual, and the exhibition feels odd.

John: Shaolin kind of stuff is not learned through manuals, but by doing. Doing it a lot. ‘Doing it’ always happens in the present tense, without an inherent need for the future, and with a dubious need to be justified by the past. In that respect, the curator acts like algorithm.

Everyone: Algorithm! Tell us more!

John: But also, in Shaolin, the most important is the figure of the Teacher. Without the Teacher, nothing happens.

Isaac: When watching a movie, you don’t see a director anywhere in the movie itself; you don’t hear them announcing what is about to happen, or explaining the meaning of that what just happened. Of course you may feel as if being guided, directed, but the whole thing only works if you never see the director.

Travis: An exhibition is similar to a movie or a theater play, or to most other products of culture, in that it always aims to tell a story. A number of theorists were contemplating this, examining the relations between *syuzhet* (a discourse—how exactly a certain story is being told), and *fabula* (the narrative—what the certain story tells).[\[5\]](#) But there seems to be much more in the structure of the story than the interplay of these two elements, anyways. Obviously, there are numerous ways and contexts to express or transfer a certain narrative. They can be deemed appropriate or not, timely or not, skillful or not, eventually successful or not: the assessment will be based on the exact choice of storytelling elements at the exact time and place of telling.

Everyone: Story! Yes, it’s about the story!

John: In order to tell the story, curators and movie directors need to be in command of what we could recognize as theory, that is, of the narrative itself, alongside all the counter- and parallel narratives out there. They also have to be the masters of practice, of various techniques of carefully sequencing events, or of raising or softening the tone, or of surrounding the uncanny or unfamiliar occurrence with common and comfortable details, so a sense of coherence is being preserved. Arguably, our theory, our *fabula* of the story, can be learned in what we can recognize as the academic way; people can read about it, memorize, criticize, write their own. On the other hand, the specific way of telling the story, its *syuzhet*, does not lend itself to abstraction easily; as we know, without some experience and practical work in telling stories—which can be acquired only by telling stories—even a child will recognize a con artist and refuse to believe.[\[6\]](#)

Ephraim: That also implies the considerable difficulty to distinguish between the *syuzhet* and the *fabula* within the monolithic body of the story: storytelling always required the mastery of these two seemingly different fields, while the story itself cannot allow for the distinction to be known. For the story is only complete when its elements are seamlessly intertwined, to the point at which the audience cannot tell which is which, unless ‘stepping out’ of the story and observing it from the outside.

John: Stories developed a curious evolutionary mechanism to guard their secrets from being disclosed—in order to get to know the structure of the story, the audience needs to get dis-involved from it, but in that very moment the story itself dissolves, revealing sometimes amazingly elaborate scaffolding that, still, does not account for what the story was. Narratology seems to be one of those sciences still entangled with its own mighty alchemy.

Augustine: Could it be said that movie directors and curators share the same dilemma in regard of their storytelling skills? In order to ‘pull the story trough,’ despite the notorious contingencies of life, a lot has to be done. That means for a director to know how to act, to be able to improve actors’ performances; to know how to frame the scene and be a bit of a photographer, so as not to lose all the important elements of the picture, and to keep out the ‘surplus,’ the unnecessary and harmful details; to know how to write in order to adjust the script, because to write dialogues is one thing, but to tell stories is another; and, eventually, and probably most important of all, a movie director needs to be so masterful and so convinced of the story himself to be able to not only convince the eventual audience, but to convince the producer of financing the production of the story, ahead of the very first sentence actually being performed.

Charles: Applying this as an analogy to what might be the perceived task of the curator, in order to tell a certain story, no elements will just wait around to be assembled easily into a coherent whole. A curator should be a friend of the artist, and should know how artists think, and work with them closely. Curators have to be able to write extensively: not only about particular artists, and the process of curatorial research, and their own and other exhibitions, but also about various philosophical and social contexts, about new economical developments of the Far East, or the wars in countries seen only on television. Curators frequently engage in commissioning a certain artist, topic, or theme. Curators also have to be masters of ever-more complex technologies used by artists to produce the works and by audiences to consume, or to just get to know about the exhibitions and events. They would need to sing and dance

constantly, their left side spinning with artists and media and audience night and day, their right side waltzing subtly with directors, editors, foundations, ministries, banks, never missing a beat...

John: It is not easy to envision such elaborate dancing classes even in some very practical ‘How to Curate in 100 Steps’ program, so how to do it within the Academy? If we make a list of all the tasks mentioned, and there are many more to add, it would be a very long list. Is it even possible to establish a curriculum for learning all that?

Julian: It seems it is not, but the good news is that perhaps we don’t have to. It has been said that “education does not question the need to search for, and teach, facts; nor does it offer systematic ways of reaching for an objective truth.”^[7]

David: It took us a while to reach this simple conclusion: telling stories is only being taught properly by telling stories about telling stories.

Robinson: The whole thing is therefore not so much about learning what a curator *is*, but about what curator *does*. It is about learning how to produce both “actions that *say* something,”^[8] and “words that *do* something.”^[9]

Hartshorne: As everything has to be curated nowadays—from dinners to news feeds, to any ‘experience’ imaginable—curating art is not considered to be something extraordinary anymore. Rather than a rare and mysterious activity triggering the curious Stendhal syndrome in the mind of unsuspecting observers, curating has become a demand of common daily practice of consumption, one function out of many we expect to be built-in in our contemporary cultural products and services.^[10] It seems that the market needed more curators and wanted ever more curating. But it also seems that there still isn’t a good mechanism of producing enough of them, at least, not efficiently. Shall we return to the original recipe for “Mom’s Curator Pie” from 2004?

Benjamin: Or shall we talk more about the nature of ‘the inadequacies of disciplinary oversimplification’? The curator has previously been compared with the translator. We have just compared the curator with the movie director, and we sure are not the first to do so. What else, or more, may curating be?

Hardy: Shall we then focus on notions of interdisciplinarity, or perhaps transdisciplinarity? For example, on questions such as how a chemical formula can be ‘beautiful’? Or what is the equal of ‘rhyme’ in physics? Or if an emotion can be expressed mathematically?

Benjamin: But we still don’t know if curating is something best learned by observing and thinking, that is, in an academic sense, or if it is something best learned by doing, by exploring it ‘hands on.’ Perhaps it is more useful to talk about what the curator has to do once educated, how they should function within society? Maybe it will help us readdress this problem of education, since we don’t seem to be able to define those ‘what’ and ‘what not’ lists yet.

Alexander: To be able to juggle with both the epistemological, theoretical, and critical content, and with politics, economy, technology, and all the practical details

surrounding the creation and communication of art is far from the only skill set demanded. Among those not mentioned, probably the most important is that of evaluating, ascribing, maintaining, and manipulating the value of whatever the subject of curatorial process is. Let's call it the function of mediation—the term extensively used to describe a myriad of curatorial activities.

Peter: To properly position the curator could be a simple matter of form of a certain architecture represented by lines and nodes, had the contemporary networked society been organized just a bit simpler. But the threads of such hyper-connected environment are woven so densely now that good, fat, well-interconnected knots, or possible new places to plot around cannot be spotted easily anymore. And, by taking into account the contemporary 'super now' phenomenon, in which the imaginary form of social connections and their current importance are measured and rendered in real-time, such an ever- (or never-) changing model would simply overwhelm even the most diligent social architect.

John: And would surely turn that poor architect slightly conservative, we may add—it was all so much easier until yesterday, when all it took to guide the experiences of entire populations was to keep an eye on fewer and well-lit positions of museum directors, academy chairs, and media editors.

Armstrong: To summarize this latest binary situation: if curators base their power on two broad, but distinct fields of production—one producing history, evaluation, and debate, knowledge, and the other initiating, breaking, or maintaining relations, producing specific social and professional networks in order to expand and guide this knowledge trough—then the former might be in crisis of inadequate education, but the latter is perhaps even more threatened by the abolishment of its political relevance. To organize people, ideas, and things is always a social service in the present tense, and always politics in the future tense.

Barnewall: It seems that the Conundrum itself would not exist without concern for what the present tense feels like, hence—politics. So we're already stuck, aren't we?

Andrew: It is possible that we are not. Mediation is both service *and* politics. It depends on what particular kind of mediation we are talking about.

Samuel: A lot has been said about mediation so far. We know that “mediators are fundamental, creation is all about mediators, and without mediators, nothing happens.” Not even the market, or, especially the market. It has also been said that “nothing passes through the narrow gate into the marketplace itself,” and that “this transformation from use value to exchange value involves a deliberate action and ‘a someone’.”[\[11\]](#)

G.N.: Exactly, and, as it was said long ago, “the paid critic, manipulating paintings in the dealer's exhibition room, knows more important if not better things about them than the art lover viewing them in the showroom window.”[\[12\]](#) What is perhaps new is that today we may be more aware of how the mechanism of 'ascribing value' actually works; it is never just a hidden, coded quality to be recognized by a skillful eye and calculated by an expert. Even with what we perceived as the ultimate expression of all value, we now see that is not the case; before money created its own

environment and own measurement of value, there was no such value waiting to be discovered and reflected.

Leonard: Such kind of mediation and the value emerging from it seem to be part of one and the same process.[\[13\]](#) “Money is the technology that mediates between numbers and the fuzzy concept of real-world value,” or, in other words, that “money object” has the peculiar characteristic of “having one foot in the world of numbers, and one foot in the physical world.”[\[14\]](#)

John: If today we are aware that money-based markets emerge out of the existence of money itself, that is, the origin of money is not in the expression of the markets themselves but rather in the human introduction of the very notion of money, this then might correspond to what we could observe in the world of art.[\[15\]](#) If, in the definitions offered by economists,[\[16\]](#) we replace the concept of money with the one of curating, and the definition of ‘money object’ with the one of ‘art object,’ we would be able to say things like this:

- Curating is a technology that mediates between what is a number (annotated, perceived value) and the fuzzy concept of real-world value.
- An ‘art object’ has the peculiar characteristic of “having one foot in the world of numbers, and one foot in the physical world.”
- There is no formal (material) value in the ‘art object’ —the value will be the one ascribed to the object through the complex process of curating.
- This value will be in the form of ‘a stamp’ placed on the ‘art object’; it will change over time.
- There were no ‘art objects’ before the notion of curating was introduced, that is, the function of curating is the necessary condition for the emergence of the ‘art market,’ or ‘the world of art.’

Ephraim: How exactly is this process of curating able to establish value of art objects? Here, at least on the surface, the matter seems to be slightly different than in the world of money. Art objects are considered to be unique and particular, while money is considered to be omnipresent and universal. So here another controversy of the art object emerges—it becomes something unique and particular, but is of universal value and able to transcend all particular financial borders. Its value is at the same time expressed through money and is ‘beyond it.’ ‘Art objects’ seem to serve as a meta-category to ‘money objects,’ or as a ‘meta currency.’ If one kind of money objects starts to drop in value, its miraculous transfiguration to art object, and then back to another more stable kind of money object will preserve, or even enhance the value. But why is that so?

John: Since the art world became global long before the rest of the world was globalized, and establishing value of art objects through the complex process of curating involves negotiations between various different instances, things look much more complex there than in, say, finance. In order to claim and maintain the new value of any particular art object, it seems that the entire art world needs to be re-balanced each and every time, which is no easy task.

Augustine: But in order to get to what we might call a full picture, we need to have a space outside of it, a certain distance. It was observed a long time ago that “criticism

is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to take a standpoint.”[\[17\]](#)

Samuel: Here we might be tempted to accept one very simple definition that is implied by what has been said so far: “curating is the process through which, mainly by the tools of selection and evaluation, a cultural phenomenon or a product of culture is being stamped and re-stamped as the one of meaning and of certain value, or not.” But as with any good story, the very surface of the plot is misleading, and there must be more.

Charles: The ‘forces of the market’ are trying to take over and automatize a lot of aspects of what was perceived as curatorial functions, such are research, selection, historization, archival activities, and all kinds of mediation, especially aiming for the constellation that will engineer the entire *social sentiment* in agreement of a certain value.[\[18\]](#) This process will strip the veils of different activities from the function of curating one by one to reveal what will not be replaced, and hence may be the essence of it— criticism.

Everyone: Oh, criticism! It’s about criticism, right? Tell us more!

Julian: But first we need to get there. And today, the fastest way to get anywhere seems to be to use algorithms. A lot has been discussed on their speed and efficacy, including that the market will be using more and more algorithms in the process of curating. Through algorithms, we can recognize all that is dispensable in a curator, and all what curating is probably not really about.

David: But what if we think that algorithms *may be* sufficient for curating? After all, the functions algorithms are envisaged to perform seem to mirror the list of the perceived tasks of the curator. There are searching algorithms, slicing algorithms, sorting algorithms, and merging algorithms; there are, of course, hybrid algorithms, which combine and automate several of those functions, and more, in one neat package.

Hartshorne: Algorithms can, directly or indirectly, perform the functions of socializing, filtering, researching, archiving... Algorithms can even offer interpretation, up to a certain level. All these things are what a curator does. The figure and functions of curator can be observed from within the art context, but more and more also outside it; curating now resides in all instances of contemporary life.

Robinson: For some reasons probably best explained by all the conspiracy theories out there, computer algorithms seems to be crafted to be especially adept at allegorical doubling of the functions of the curator. Sounds almost poetic: an algorithmic allegory. A perfect match on dating sites where one can choose a perfect robot to be replaced by.

Alexander: We wouldn’t say that algorithms create the possibilities to do unimaginable things; that would be similar to admitting that meaning is already there, only hidden in the pile of data. Imagination, as projective category, is rather different from prediction, and it is the latter, not the former we expect as the result of the process of computing. These are precisely what they are: searching and sorting and

computing machines, plus the data we decide to give them to process, nothing more, also, nothing less. It is true that now, with algorithms in operation, and with more and more cheap data around (it only works when there is plenty of data, and cheap!), all sorts of things that were deemed to be impossible have become reality.

Peter: Perhaps we are just a tiny bit closer to perfecting the algorithmic curator. In the introduction to their paper published this summer, researchers from Germany wrote: “Moreover, in light of the striking similarities between performance-optimized artificial neural networks and biological vision, our work offers a path forward to an algorithmic understanding of how humans create and perceive artistic imagery.”[\[19\]](#)

Armstrong: Now, we seem to be back at the Shaolin territory, as Bruce Lee advised—in the case of self-learning algorithms, the code is trained rather than written.

Barnewall: Like when Bruce Lee entered a hall of mirrors in the famous scene from *Enter the Dragon*. Those hundreds of reflections of Bruce Lee and of his enemy did not have a chance against Bruce Lee himself.[\[20\]](#) He had to eventually destroy all the images in order to win, though.

Andrew: But what is ‘algorithmic understanding’?

Samuel: We think this is what we cannot know. Worlds are apart. Have you ever heard a joke that starts with “an algorithm walks into a bar...”?

G.N.: If we explore the differences between the two worlds in regard the notion of time, then we learn about the impossibility of ever ‘going there,’ that is, of really understanding what the world of these mathematical entities ‘feels like.’[\[21\]](#)

John: The world of forms as examined by Plato and Aristotle was based on the notion of the ideal form. Algorithms, through all the filtering and profiling and looping all over again, are constantly perfecting the average form. Implications abound.

Augustine: Yes, art and curating are not about average anything. Can something made from averages, something that is meant to be average, even be criticized?

Leonard: Algorithms often co-perform with the social subject of ‘users,’ creating the architecture that shapes the majority of contemporary social performances. So what are contemporary cultural objects and practices in which we can locate a gesture of the curatorial and observe it as part of curatorial education? And back to our Conundrum, can we think of ‘what (is) not’ as an integral part of ‘what (is)’?

Peter: With its ‘real-timeness,’ its inability to exist either in the past or in the future, how algorithms function does mimic the essential quality of the process of curating—it tries to replicate the outcome, characterized by that one gesture that has the ability to condense what was and what will be into what is.[\[22\]](#)

Everyone: Yes, it’s about the gesture!

John: But an essential quality of such an act is missed if viewed as an aesthetical operation; a curatorial act draws its power precisely from its inherent criticism. Without the critical urge, no such act of transformation would have a sense of meaning. If everything was right with the world ahead of such intervention, a curator would be no more than a mad god, constantly rearranging a perfectly fit world just to make humans aware of their lesser-ness, and his boredom, and the curatorial act would be nothing but an act of violence.

Isaac: Only algorithms are truly contemporary; they compute contemporaneity in its smallest units—now, super-now, hyper-now... True contemporaneity operates as the continuous errorless presence, as the dynamic, serial capture of the present.

Travis: Such perception does allow for the functions of filtering, and especially evaluation, but not for criticism. The critique requires distance, and there can be no distance in the super-now.

Ephraim: Looking at algorithms and the results of their actions, all sorts of things would be revealed about humans, and how they may work, but nothing would be disclosed about algorithms themselves.

Samuel: The best indicator if something is curated is to check how the act itself affects the story that was being told—if *shuyzhet* manages not only to reproduce but also affect the *fabula*, then it is curated. If it is a reproductive operation and the narrative came through as unaffected, then it is only a bunch of things put together for the occasion, and curating did not happen.

Everyone: Now, we know! But do we have our lists yet? Can we sign it and call it a day?

Charles: No, not yet. We need to continue discussing and computing the task.

Everybody: Yes, thinking and computing! Tell us more.

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This is where we left, and can tell no more, as tomorrow under our Sycamore Tree With A Name there were no students anymore, and everything defaulted to the usual calmness of the forest. The weather was so clear that we could even recognize the distant shapes of Tannhäuser Gate. All we could see moving around was a casual quantum rabbit here and there—the weird things were curious, but kept a safe distance from where we were standing. Suddenly, we couldn't program The Tree to tell us any new things; all it did was play back the previous conversations. Our memory unit had enough power now, so we had to leave anyway. But we will be back.

[1] The title of the text derived from the song *Sycamore Trees*, performed by 'Little' Jimmy Scott (lyrics by David Lynch, music by Angelo Badalamenti) in the finale of David Lynch's, television series *Twin Peaks*, first broadcast June 10, 1991. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Episode_29_\(Twin_Peaks\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Episode_29_(Twin_Peaks)) and <https://youtu.be/rIXPG8NR5iI> (accessed October 21, 2015).

[2] Boris Buden, “Towards the Heterosphere: Curator as Translator,” in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, ed. Maria Lind (Berlin/Stockholm/Gothenburg: Sternberg Press, Tensta Konsthall & ArtMonitor/University of Gothenburg, 2012).

[3] The text comes from a slide in a lecture by Jelena Vesić titled *Practices of Curatorial Education: Curator as a Symptom of Spaghetti Bolognese Politics and is There a Way Out*. The text is a remix of statements by Teresa Gleadowe, Victor Missiano, and Saskia Bos, published in *Manifesta Journal no 4: Teaching Curatorship* (Amsterdam: International Foundation Manifesta, 2004).

[4] The famous Bruce Lee quote comes from the TV series *Long Street*, 1971. See <https://youtu.be/LTnSEFsInp0> (accessed November 6, 2014).

[5] This phenomenon (or perhaps noumenon) was outlined by Vladimir Propp and other Russian Formalists, and explored by Jonathan Culler, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, and many others. There were a lot of attempts to crack open the mechanism of *syuzhet*, but none were close to success before computer algorithms arrived. In February of this year, professor of English and programmer Matthew Jockers published a piece of software called *Syuzhet Package* with which he analyzed more than 40,000 classic novels, mostly from the nineteenth century. The analysis resulted in graphs of ‘plot shapes,’ so these tens of thousands graphs of ‘emotional trajectories’ of different novels could be compared, analyzed, and classified. This effort is, however, far from complete; resolution and accuracy are not yet sufficient, and *Syuzhet Package* has some way to go until its analysis of these thousands of novels, of any novels, or probably of all the novels out there is accepted. See <http://matthewjockers.net/2015/02/02/syuzhet> (accessed August 21, 2015).

[6] Jonathan D. Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[7] Luis Camnitzer, “Thinking About Art Thinking,” May 2015, See <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/thinking-about-art-thinking> (accessed August 21, 2015).

[8] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

[9] J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Second Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[10] Stendhal syndrome, also known as hyperkulturemia or as Florence syndrome, is described as a “psychosomatic disorder that causes rapid heartbeat, dizziness, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations when an individual is exposed to an experience of great personal significance, particularly viewing art.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stendhal_syndrome (accessed July 12, 2015). The phenomenon was outlined for the first time in the book *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio* (1817) by the French author Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle). The book documents this condition caused by his first visit to the Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence. The syndrome was diagnosed and named in 1979 by Italian psychiatrist Dr. Graziella Magherini.

[11] Lars Bang Larsen and Søren Andreasen quoted these statements from Gilles Deleuze and Fernand Braudel in “The Middleman: Beginning to Talk About Mediation,” adding: “This

third man, this intermediary, agent, or dealer, operating at the outskirts of every market town breaks off relations between producer and consumer, eventually becoming the only one who knows the market conditions at both ends of the chain.” In *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O’Neill (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel Arts centre, 2007).

[12] Walter Benjamin, himself a keen producer of listicles, wrote this in 1928 and published it in German as a part of the collection titled *Einbahnstraße* (Berlin: Rowohlt). Available online at <http://archive.org/details/Einbahnstrasse>. The translation in English was published in the collection *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London, NLB, 1979).

[13] David Orrell, mathematician and author (e.g. *Truth or Beauty: Science and the Quest for Order*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), outlined this theory during his talk titled *Marshall McLuhan. Lecture: Money is the Message*, at the Transmediale Festival, Berlin, January 2015. Available online as Part One, <https://youtu.be/ZqsNx-3Thyc>, and Part Two, <https://youtu.be/a3Au8cgfAx4> (accessed July 12, 2015).

[14] What is described as “money object, such as coins, notes, electrical transactions,” are all the possible objects that money is transmitted through; historically, their particular material characteristics—paper, gold, electrons—remain natural and not the bearers of (financial) value. The value is solely determined by ‘the stamp,’ which is both quite an abstract agreement and a very precise agreement on the exact number to be put on those objects and in regard to who get to ‘stamp’ the value. (Orrell, Part One, 26 min. 33 sec.)

[15] About how exactly money creates value and is not a mere expression of value, see Orrell (Part Two, 2 min. 50 sec.)

[16] Orrell, Part One, 16 min. 19 sec., and 21 min. 20 sec.

[17] Benjamin, p. 89.

[18] Or what is known as *Gliederung*.

[19] Using algorithms, Leon A. Gatys, Alexander S. Ecker and Matthias Bethge from the University of Tübingen managed to produce the way for any image to be rendered, that is, ‘painted’ faithful to the style of several historical artists like Picasso or Van Gogh. As they commented on their research titled “A Neural Algorithm of Artistic Style” (see <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1508.06576v1.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2015) after showing some rather spectacular initial results: “The key finding... is that the representations of content (the foundation image) and style (of specific artworks) in the convolutional neural network are separable. That is, we can manipulate both representations independently to produce new, perceptually meaningful images.” See also <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/sep/02/computer-algorithm-recreates-van-gogh-painting-picasso> (accessed September 12, 2015).

[20] Bruce Lee, *Enter The Dragon—Destroy The Image*. See <https://youtu.be/RBnlbqW6ZhM> (accessed November 6, 2014).

[21] It takes approximately 500 milliseconds to click on the computer mouse, or to snap with your fingers. But algorithm lives in nanoseconds (so it is 500,000,000 nanoseconds, in this case). Today, algorithms can, for example, execute a single electronic trade in hundreds of nanoseconds. For humans an ‘infinite’ number of algorithmic ‘thoughts’ could be happening during the time it takes to make that one click, and algorithms are heading toward the horizon of picosecond, one trillionth (one millionth of one millionth) part of a second. This (poor)

exercise in math is not here to finally explain why we call the smaller rectangles *smartphones*, but to support the claim that the world of algorithms and the world of humans are very much apart.

[22] Time, for humans, has some special qualities that are derived from both its inevitable flow and its relative speed. That is, we understand time in historical categories, as past, as future, as something happening now. Most of the things and processes out there, including our own existence, we may observe either as diachronic or as synchronic phenomena, according to what precise application our observation aims; but algorithms are, as it seems, able to endlessly slice our ‘now’ into ever smaller units of time they can then manipulate at an ever-faster rate. But if you ask algorithm, time is also an essential quality. In the processing unit serving the computing of algorithms, everything is happening now, in ‘real-time’; this is, also, where future briefly may happen for algorithms, in the shape of predictions and expected values, as something that can be computed *now*.