



## Semiotics x Curating

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### TIMELINE:

Deadline  
for Abstracts:  
**May 15, 2024**

Notice of acceptance  
of the Abstract:  
**May 31, 2024**

Deadline  
for submission of  
full papers:  
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Curating has been defined as an intermediary practice that utilizes acts of selection and arrangement to facilitate interpretation – that is, to support individual and collective meaning-making – and add value. Since the mid-1990s, the practice has gained increasing scholarly attention and has emerged as an autonomous field of study that examines the rationale, mechanisms, and impacts of different multimodal display strategies deployed both in the physical and digital domain with a particular focus on identity and ideology, tracing their social, political and cultural implications. Since the field's inception, there have been notable and productive cross-overs between semiotics and curation. From a curatorial perspective, these have included the conception of the museum as a discursive, intertextually organized space, the recurring analogy of the curator as translator, the debate surrounding the "grammar of the exhibition" positing curation as syntax, and the understanding of the exhibition visitor as a Model Reader. Conversely, semioticians have analyzed the semiotic power of the exhibition space, and utilized different semiotic approaches to decode museum communication, ranging from in-gallery wall texts and label copy to digital promotional material. Notwithstanding, while the semiotics of visual arts has a long tradition, the study of curation as a semiotic system with substantive effects on signification, meaning-making, communication, and interpretation is still relatively underdeveloped and has only been the subject of isolated contributions.

This special issue is the first publication dedicated to the intersection of semiotics and curating. Its aim is to expand and enhance existing understandings of the semiotics of curation by examining its theoretical elaboration, methodological perspectives, and manifold applications in diverse sectors, where curating is now ubiquitous, but effectively used to serve diverging purposes, among others, to personalize access, signal distinction, amplify ideological positions (propaganda) and generate wealth by inflating value. Its ambition is to explore how semiotics (with an emphasis on interpretation, framing, translation, engagement, enunciative assemblages, image-acts, storytelling, open text, multi-modality, and metafunctions) can be used as a valuable toolkit to unpick and grapple with the intended and unintended consequences of human and algorithmic curation on personal and collective sensemaking and valorization processes.

Given semiotics' rigorous approach to meaning-making, this special issue's driving premise is that the field's varied concepts and methodological approaches can be leveraged to make headway on several persistent and emerging curatorial questions and impasses, including but not limited to:

- cultural institutions' contemporary "narrative paradox" (pitting institutional authority against user agency) following New Museology's audience-centered and participatory turns, which has put museums and galleries in the delicate position of negotiating conflicting mediation briefs: e.g., advocate for social justice using often-didactic activist approaches (in support of movements such as Me Too and BLM) and, at the same time, enable visitors to make their own meaning by giving them interpretive freedom and control;
- the tactical use of different physical and computational curatorial techniques in today's culture wars to shape narratives around hot-button issues, which are increasingly polarizing public opinion and influencing public policy;
- the merits of the foundational idea of contemporary curating as a transparent practice (by contrast to traditional exhibition making), and whether the different traces used to make the "hand of the curator" visible to the public succeed in signaling the curator's presence and intervention;



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- the enduring conception of curating as a translational practice, and if/how related mediation approaches can make referential art practices, such as Black citational practices, legible to audiences with diverging skills, knowledge bases, cultural backgrounds, belief systems and frames of reference;
- the rise of digital curation, and how different virtual display formats, mediation strategies, and storytelling tools affect the interpretation of born-digital and digitized artworks and cultural heritage in screen-based, mixed reality, and fully immersive experiences;

Aiming to expand and enrich semiotic thinking through transdisciplinary approaches, the issue seeks connections and bridges with media, cultural and visual studies, art history and design, architecture, and museological theory, to name a few. We invite submissions by scholars, researchers, and practitioners who delve into diverse themes, perspectives, and approaches related to semiotics and curation with purely theoretical or empirical research into curating's semiotic labor and effects.

Prospective authors should submit an abstract of 250-300 words by email to the guest editors, Stéphanie Bertrand ([bertrandstephanie@gmail.com](mailto:bertrandstephanie@gmail.com)) and Sotirios Bahtsetzis ([bachtset@uth.gr](mailto:bachtset@uth.gr)), including their institutional affiliation and contact information. Acceptance of the abstract does not guarantee publication, given that all research articles will be subjected to peer review.