

Spring 2022

# TURBA

The journal for global practices in live arts curation

A photograph of a person lying face down on a wide, light-colored stone staircase. The person is wearing a light pink t-shirt, black shorts, and black high-heeled shoes. Their arms are extended to the sides, and their legs are also extended. The staircase is the central focus of the image, with a red carpet visible at the bottom edge.

Why curate  
live arts?

## Mission Statement

### **TURBA: The Journal for Global Practices in Live Arts Curation**

**TURBA: crowd, multitude; uproar, disturbance, tumult; swirl, twirl, move around; soil, earth.**

*TURBA* is the first journal for the study, theory, and praxis of curatorial strategies in the live arts. The live arts are broadly defined as those arts in which contingent, momentary acts and events, performed by human or other autonomous agents, are crucial to the aesthetic perception and the emergence of meaning in ephemeral time-based work. They include, but are not limited to, dance, music, sound art, theatre, performance art, verbal arts, circus arts, live media arts and inter-arts performance works. With this journal, we aim to create a platform for the exploration of ideas, concepts, constraints, expectations, and contingencies which guide and drive curatorial practices in these fields.

Within the live arts, the term “curation” is used in a manner that is largely, but not entirely, analogous to its use in the visual arts. The Latin root of the word “curation” is *curare*, meaning “to take care of” or “to heal.” Live arts curators mediate the intellectual, societal, and aesthetic contexts, as well as the presentational models, which support the development, dissemination, and reception of artistic work. They negotiate relationships between artists, artistic works, audiences, administrators, archives, the media, and society. With *TURBA*, we aim to foster a community of critical discourse about live arts curation across traditions, genres, communities, generations, cultures, disciplines, and aesthetics.

We seek to connect, amplify, and contextualize movements and voices, thus making *TURBA* a seismographic observatory for the impact of the live arts on societies and cultures around the globe.

- 1 In the visual arts, the term “curator” describes two different roles/professions: 1) someone who cares for, acquires, and manages an existing collection; 2) someone who conceptualizes a temporary exhibition of artworks. Both correspond to curatorial roles in the live arts, but the first category --persons ensuring the persistence of a live arts tradition, an artist’s body of work, or a particular type of live art--are not usually called “curators”. Instead, they are usually called griots, opera directors, dance archivists and reconstructionists, Brechtians or Shakespearians, guardians of temple music etc. *TURBA* explicitly aims to include critical discourses around their work and practice, too.

Cover image:  
Julie Deschenes

# TURBA: The Journal for Global Practices in Live Arts Curation

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# TURBA: The Journal for Global Practices in Live Arts Curation

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Tawny Andersen, Sandeep Bhagwati, Dena Davida, Victoria Carrasco, Barbara Scales, Yves Sheriff

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## A Festival without an Audience? A Case Study of the GAN&GAN Performance Art Festival I Jiangxi in Mainland China (*excerpt*)

Raimund Rosarius

The whole 2018 GAN&GAN festival was thematically put under the topic of “earth.” This is not telling for readers foreign to the local context and necessitates historical details: Two factions of the Chinese Red Army had fought a fierce battle in the region, suspecting the local population to support either of them. The result was bloodstained earth and rivers filled with corpses to an unthinkable extent that the local population is said to not eat fish since that time. Due to its mineral composition, the region’s soil is colored in a distinct red. This poor soil led to famine and further suffering of the region during the cultural revolution. Due to its history, one that contradicts the narration of a Communist Party united in cause, the region is not developed for tourism, although its preserved historic sites would predestine it for such an exploitation. This leaves the population poor but many historic sites untouched from the tourism industry’s earthmovers.

Reflecting the site’s history and materiality as a prerequisite for each work was thus obligatory. Apolitical content and performance apathetic to the site’s history would disqualify itself if bloodstained red earth is to be dealt with. Aligning the performances closely to the site results in a limited production mobility from a utilization viewpoint. Trying to answer the question, Why curate live arts? I have been building up toward the argument of curating *for* the artists as the main motivation. This argument is derived from the context of GAN&GAN but extends to a universal context of curating live arts as a facet that is often overlooked when audiences and art (pieces) are the focus of investigation on curating. What traces of curation remain for the artists? For the curation of GAN&GAN, a teleology of motivation toward artists must be narrowed, as the curation was not *for* the artists in the sense of economic progress, strengthening individual artist profiles or exposure among other exploitation aspects.



*Only a product of censorship? Apu's Performance "Going out"; GAN&GAN festival*



*Another Artist-Curator-Scholar Hybrid: Li Ximno in her performance Guihuizhiwend that translates into "Casket" literally; the GAN&GAN festival*



Poster from the theatre festival curated by Amitesh Grover

## There Will Be Trouble: Curating Theatre in India (excerpt)

Amitesh Grover

A theatre festival is in public space, but it is also as public space (Kwon, 2002). Theatre festivals are good at creating specific densities of narratorial complexities. They accelerate, interrupt, exhaust, and enthuse communities. They alter social temporalities. In a world in which space for disagreement and dissent has begun to erode from society, festival-making could become a restorative act. It could return the public to the realm of imagination, to freedoms, to processes, and to experiences that are being expelled from society.

Festival-making could be a process of offering protection, attention, and amplification to voices, identities, and silences under threat outside. In this sense, festival-making is public-making; it reserves the power to conjure publics pushed out of sight, it can take up the tumult that seethes under state or social censor and give itself the mandate to create “trouble” (hence the title of this article).

Let me take as example my experience around curating the recently concluded International Theatre Festival of Kerala (ITFoK) held in January 2020. For the purpose of this article, I set aside the pragmatics and economics behind the festival (that is for another article). Instead, I will highlight how the process of festival-making became a resolute effort in interweaving continuities and disruptions, “directing” the event into myriad speculative “scenes” that unfolded day after day. Could festival-making pursue public-making without producing a “center” (read “theme”)? Could it transcend borders formed by discipline and claim philosophical kinship across multiple art forms? Could it not be overdetermined from the start but remain open to a speculative inquiry about the kind of “acts” that might be understood as theatre and performance today?

## The Queer Communion: Ron Athey Retrospective (excerpt)

Amelia Jones

Masks on, shivering from top to bottom, we huddle on the narrow sidewalk outside Participant Inc. gallery on Houston Street in New York City. We are masked. As safe as we can manage from the global flows of COVID-19 (because of the virus, regulations in the city necessitate innovative solutions to the prohibition on crowds congregating inside). We are waiting for the three-part performance by Ron Athey and collaborators Hermes Pittakos, Mecca, and Elliot Reed—Performance in 3 Acts—which is staged in relation to the exhibition I curated, *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, a retrospective of Athey's now over 30-year performance art career.

Moving outside, I return to the select group of queer performance fans standing in the cold, waiting, while a cut-up version of Genesis P'Orridge's Esoterrorist text (borrowed by Athey in collaboration with P'Orridge before her death) is projected through the front window. Anticipation mounts. I am not sure what to expect with this COVID-friendly arrangement, which I assume will be disappointing in contrast to the vivid energies of being in a room with Athey performing live.

With the first of the "3 Acts," Elliot Reed performing a solo word action, I am wondering anew about the limits of this COVID solution because we cannot hear the words outside. However, it quickly becomes apparent that the energy



"Queer Communion: Ron Athey", Curated by Amelia Jones, Feb 14 – April 4, 2021  
Photo: Amelia Jones

of the bodies performing behind the glass front of the gallery vibrates to the outside via the vivid footage being projected through this ephemeral wall. We don't need the audible words, as Reed hovers like a hologram in our field of vision, sometimes in full view, at others cutting to a close-up side view of his face, reading. Reed is an intense and tightly wound performer, whose work I first saw a few years back at the legendary Patrick's Cabaret in Minneapolis where Athey and his troupe had performed *4 Scenes in a Harsh Life* in 1994 to the opprobrium of far right critics in the US government. Athey and I watched together as Reed performed in homage to Athey at this 25-year anniversary of the 1994 event. Here, in New York in 2021, Fogel's brilliant on-the-spot editing of video from multiple cameras produces an equally electrifying, if differently manifested, bodily experience from that of engaging Reed directly in the same space. The vehicles passing noisily on the street behind us, the icy wind whipping past, the pedestrians walking on the sidewalk and briefly blocking the view, become elements in this real-time experience that, in the most interesting way, begs the question of whether this is a live event or not.

[...]

Separated by glass, which functions as wall/closed door but also as screen for these dream images, we watch Athey and all perform live, exploding with intensity, even via the separating glass of "social distancing" required during COVID times. The parts of the performance themselves are stunning and provocative, but the COVID solution if anything makes the event *more* profound in that it points not only to the costs of trauma but also to the pleasures and dangers of the vulnerable body (both key themes of Athey's work as a whole). It reminds me that COVID social distancing, if nothing else, is an acute reminder of the dangers of bodily flows. As I experience it, the performance is definitely *not* "not live"; rather it manifests as *life/liveness* in mitigated form. A perfect metaphor for COVID times.

## Why Curate Live Arts in Africa?

'Funmi Adewole

The power and significance of curating for the live arts is its focus on the presentation of performance in relation to theme, whether historical, philosophical, aesthetic, cultural, or political. I write this particularly thinking about its significance for African artists and arts organizations. Here, I think the development of this practice has the potential to be an intervention for a number of reasons. Firstly, as an industry practice and artistic discipline, there is a dialogic component to it which can, if used with awareness, generate rich discussions between artists, audiences, and institutions and produce academic scholarship. Speed is necessary, as Africa is a fast-changing continent. Up until the 1990s, much of the focus on culture and arts in Africa was on ritual, ceremonial, and social contexts. However, and increasingly, the arts in Africa are being practiced with professional circles linked to commercial markets and civil society and the global creative economy. There are overlaps, fusions, and ruptures in the creation of performances in the varied contexts in Africa, which are complex and require discourses that go beyond debates as to what is modern and what is traditional in comparison to temporalities of the Global North. The concept of “performative curating” is particularly relevant for curating in African contexts. As Florian Malzacher argues, when the emphasis is placed on performativity in curating of the live arts, performance is presented as existing in a “porous reality that refers to many other realities.” Furthermore, curating can be a flexible and agile practice. It is less rigid than programming as a mode of presentation, which is usually associated with building-based arts. It is possible to curate performance in your front yard, at the national theatre, and in an international arts festival. Engagement with the arts from Africa requires sophisticated facilitation and framing.

## Book Review



*Taking the Temperature: Crisis, Curating, and Musical Diversity*, 2nd edition. Edited by Brandon Farnsworth, Anna Jakobsson, and Vanessa Massera. Zurich: *OnCurating.org*, 2021.

*Taking the Temperature* has many resonances that the editors and their many interviewees explore. In a global pandemic, having a temperature can be a disturbing sign of illness. As ‘temperatures rise’, debate becomes ‘heated’ and positions polarised. Forests burn, ice caps melt, and the climate crisis cannot wait. ‘Taking’ one’s temperature concerns deviations from a ‘healthy’ norm. Is curation a medicine to return us ‘back to normal’?

Not according to the contributors here. Written as a mechanism for imagining this community of composers, musicians, festival directors, network leaders, pedagogues, writers (including two of *Turba’s* founding editors), and artistic directors of institutions from across the Nordic countries and Quebec, as an alternative to the gathering planned – but unavoidably cancelled – at Oslo’s *Ultima* festival to discuss issues of diversity in contemporary music, the publication’s motto could come from Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable*: “You must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on.” Indeed, as declaimed in Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia* (1968-69), alongside a delirious reworking of the *Scherzo* from Mahler’s Second Symphony and a tribute to the recently assassinated Martin Luther King, this legend’s continuing topicality underscores the ‘Crisis’ of the anthology’s sub-title. The #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements have made all too clear: this can’t keep on going on – as before, as usual.

This applies especially, the editors suggest, to the Eurocentric concert tradition, governed by its regulatory principle of *Werktreue*, the overriding authority of the ‘musical work’. Elaborated notably by Lydia Goehr in her *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, the tradition’s exposure here through issues of diversity brings to light its only-too-real curators and their working assumptions.<sup>1</sup> Curatorial discourse then acts, perhaps, as a ‘talking cure’, a means to question past certainties as well as future prospects. It is diagnostic.

Judging by these contributions, the contemporary music field is, at long last, reckoning with its long resistance to diversity. This broadly takes three forms, with a decreasing consensus: issues of representation; of genre or medium; and of contextual production.

To begin with, the silencing of women, BIPoC, and LGBTQI+ composers in classical music's canon has become an existential embarrassment. Everybody agrees (apart, perhaps, from some wealthy patrons, as Kasper Holten observes). It cannot go on. Several interviews address this directly with representatives of networks and organisations established over the last decade precisely to challenge the sector on issues of gender, sexuality, and racial equality.

Secondly, attempts to understand contemporary music as the legacy of a single genealogical line is untenable. It cannot go on. And yet it goes on. John Cage overturned this already in 1954, claiming that "anything goes", that any and all sound can be 'music'. This cuts to the heart of curatorial privilege, of selection, of establishing musical 'autonomy', of categorising, of judging 'quality', of determining a music's meaning and significance. Most welcome and emphasise this resulting heterogeneity, especially practitioners: blurring boundaries of genre, of music and Sound Art, and of music with other arts. Some interviewees are more equivocal. It provokes doubt and anxiety. Sandeep Bhagwati describes "a certain despair that I have sensed in the New Music World...about questions such as - what comes after the long century of new techniques, novel approaches, breaking with traditions? Whatever is new can now only be incrementally new - not radically. This goes counter to the basic premise of the scene itself."

This equivocation is particularly noticeable in comments on socially-oriented curatorial practices, echoing debates in the gallery arts since the 'social turn' of the late 1970s. Should 'quality' not come before the political? Astrid Kvalbein, for example, expresses her concern "that socially and politically inspired art becomes banal but also hard to criticize, because it is so well intentioned." Must we continue to treat the aesthetic and the social as separate, hierarchically organised relations? And so it goes on.

In cancelling conventional concert practices, lastly, the pandemic's impact has brought into question all of the habits by which music is taught and made meaningful for audiences. From accounts here, wholesale reform is needed. "I feel that we have to separate ourselves from all kinds of inherited ways of thinking," says Juliana Hodkinson. "That goes for everything."

This issue provoked some of the most encouraging responses. Whilst the surrogate value of livestreaming and other online formats was acknowledged, many respondents insisted that the pandemic had demonstrated comprehensively the value of live events, establishing community and human contact. Digital fatigue, technical and production inequalities, contrasts with the phenomenology of liveness, the inappropriateness of concert practices for virtual space, the challenges in

getting attention online – all showed the risks of becoming slaves to the algorithm.

Several artists and festival curators emphasised the need for a significant rebalancing towards local and regionally meaningful programmes. “Maybe we as artists need to create things that are really small scale in our neighbourhoods, in our back alleys, and to start to value the betterment of every square inch of our world rather than striving to have as many followers as possible,” says Terri Hron. “How can we sustain our local community and each other on a one-to-one basis?”

Is substantive change coming, or will arts leaders insist that “the show must go on” and on, and on? Gabriel Dharmoo notes how this attitude of some during the pandemic showed an unhealthy determination contrasting with many artists who “felt a strange sense of relief when things slowed down.... Many of us want to reflect and take stock.”

This is the book’s invitation. It is a timely publication; it invites us to take our time. It takes the temperature of the musical waters, finds them bracing, and still dives in. The curatorial is a curative. Curating and music both fundamentally concern unavoidable change, caring for what ages, dies, and passes across time, across generations. In changing, we do not – cannot – remain the same. “You must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on.”

[*Taking the Temperature* is available as a free download from *OnCurating.org*: <https://www.on-curating.org/book/taking-the-temperature-crisis-curating-and-musical-diversity.html#.YJAXwC1Q1pT>]

1 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev.d ed., Oxford: OUP, 2007.



## Angela's Farewell (excerpt)

Angela Conquet

What it means.

To be the host of so much vibrancy. To be the shadow that watches over.

To be the privileged. To be immersed in so much thinking in the making.

To wonder what you have not done yet. To doubt. To falter. To try again. To fail even better.

To stay creative yourself. To be a leader. One has to. To write yet another grant. To hold the breath as you press submit.

To work nights and weekends. Many. To not be allowed a bad day. To deal with everyone's bad days.

To give up. Whenever no longer possible. But not too often. Not possible.

To find joy in little things. Like when that account finally reconciles.

To welcome new people in. To try to be everywhere, see everything, do all the things.

To be so busy you can't even witness the master teaching 1 m away from your office.

To sneak into a rehearsal and sit in the darkness for hours. To know, deep down, what you are doing all this for.

To lie down on the floor that is not for you. You are not an artist.

To give too much or too little. To have your comfort zones biting back at you.

To cry when no one sees you.

To listen belatedly how to listen. Some things do arrive too late.

To force yourself to accept that words like *resilience*, *vibrancy*, *excellence* can be a thing.

To ensure tokenism is never a thing.

To listen to a generously supported artist tell you that you have done nothing.

To say nothing.

To present, sometimes, a piece that is really a masterpiece and to know that it is before its time.

To surreptitiously watch the audience watch the dance and to know you knew it all along.

To lose breath. As you watch a good show or articulate a new strategic plan.

To be told that what you thought were vibrant words mean nothing, and that no bureaucrat will ever get it. To limit one idea to one sentence. But how can you, when you are surrounded by thinkers whose thoughts move at bullet train speed and you want to capture it all?

To be too tired to celebrate when it all works out.

To grow tired. To want to go. To not worry anymore.

To let go. To part. With you. To really go.

To leave you in good hands.

I miss you.

## “Why curate live arts?”

Bertie Ferdman



*Why curate live arts?* – the prompt for the collection of essays in TURBA’s inaugural issue – feels particularly prescient in this very moment of unprecedented global tragedy. While the realm of possibility regarding digital spaces and convenings has expanded, and with it the possibility for access more widespread, the desire and need for live in-person social exchange has also become stronger. Post-Covid-19, the caring for live arts will encompass not only innovative ways of replicating the live experience to audiences who cannot afford

in-person tickets, but also an awareness and special attention to this need for safe, inclusive, and equitable in-person human connection and social interaction.

Curating live arts in this historical moment will itself be a way to rehearse, practice, experiment, and try out new forms of gathering or coming together. The practice of curating live art now will allow for the negotiation of imagined and material spaces, and with this the responsibility to activate such spaces as inclusive and egalitarian. As perceptions of convening change, curating live arts as an evolving practice provides an opportunity to ask: What are the different possibilities / frameworks / juxtapositions of what we might call a common or shared or safe space? What are or should be the terms for “gathering” in public, as a public? What considerations do we need for communities, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, to feel welcome, invited, implicated?

The development, mainstreaming, and expansion of “performance” into the realm of both visual and performing arts over the last decade, until right before the pandemic, had already established the role of the curator as a mediator of artistic sensations and a producer of experiences. This role will continue to expand and evolve. As Peter Eckersall and I write in our recent book, reviewed in this issue of TURBA, *Curating Dramaturgies: How Dramaturgy and Curating are Intersecting in the Contemporary Arts*, “curators think about how human interactions with art are productive in the sense that they can moderate and remake the social conditions of our daily lives (2021: 3).” Beginning in 2017 and over the course of three years, we interviewed fifteen diversely placed arts professionals who are at the forefront of rethinking and consolidating the field of contemporary

performance. Through their insights, thought processes, and curatorial practices in live arts, we learned how “curatorial thinking can open new pathways to understanding human experience and address key questions about the world such as inequality, climate change, racism, technology, and authoritarian politics (to name a few of the many issues that art is dealing with (8-9).” Curating live arts involves a dramaturgical – or contextual – thinking about interdisciplinarity, community-building, and innovative festival formats that will help us re-imagine and think differently, not only about art, but about the contemporary moment moving forward. Curating live arts post-pandemic will hopefully enable us to discover meaningful ways of being together and sharing space.

## A precarious balance between disaster and miracle (excerpt)

Extragarbo (E. Coulon, C. Ferrigolo, G. Giorgi and E. Lazzari)

*The performing arts festival Il Divertimento per li Regazzi ["Entertainment for Kids" or "Fun for Kids", translators' note] took place on 6th and 7th December 2019 at Il Cerchio, a cooperative located in Sacca Fisola, part of Giudecca island, in Venice. The event was curated by the collective Extragarbo and was produced in collaboration with IUAV University's Student Senate.*

Edo: What is the *genius loci* of *Il Divertimento*? In our project the fact that we considered the space as a subject was crucial. However I wonder whether it is really useful to define a theme in advance when you are starting to plan something. In this case, was it useful in regard to what we've done? We ourselves have suggested a theme. It was the title: *Il Divertimento*. The theme may be interpreted in different ways: at what point does the theme affect the process? at what point does the process affect the theme? Methodologically, it happens when need and desire drive you to do things. We could also say that a word is also a vector of creation, a note that you may instill into what you are doing.

Cosimo: I agree with the fact that fun was a theme, that our aim was to advocate for fun and to revalorize it in order to restore its emotional value. It was an umbrella theme, something like an area where things happen without violence. Where things are called to react to stimuli.

Edo: A suggestion.

Cosimo: An atmosphere...

Edo: An atmosphere that institutes something! It was about putting an intuition forward, making a creative space available to somebody, though without claiming ownership over it. Sharing an intuition and making sure that it can grow to become something self-sustaining.

Gaia: That is one of the focal points of the project: creating an atmosphere that enables things to get going, to happen. Not a theme that levels out everything but, on the contrary, something that opens up possibilities and generative processes.

Edo: With specific paths.

Cosimo: Tim Ingold speaks of a form of inquiry that has nothing to do with trying to illustrate what you have theorised or what you've planned, as is the case in a scientific experiment. In his opinion, inquiring consists in opening a door and watching where the corridor leads. Letting yourself be guided by the tracks you chose to follow without wishing to be sure you know where you're going.<sup>1</sup>

Edo: For me, the curatorial attitude is to open that door. This is the very gesture. The curator's task is to make sure that you can go through that door, so that you are free to decide how you will proceed along the path.

Gaia: That's right! That's a beautiful image, isn't it?

Edo: It is about putting yourself on the line, embracing uncertainty.

1. T. Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, Abingdon 2013, p. 7.

## Submissions Policy

*TURBA* invites submissions engaging with any tradition, genre, community, culture, discipline, artistic expression, or aesthetic in the live arts. The journal is particularly interested in featuring compelling, experimental, politically engaged, and transformative content that fosters critique and debate, expands knowledge, and provides socio-cultural and historical context for the evolving practices of live arts curation.

*TURBA* is open to a wide range of genres and formats. Contributions may include: academic papers for [double blind] peer review, critical essays, dialogic exchanges and transcribed group conversations, manifestos, reviews of publications and symposia, analyses of curatorial paradigms and events, poetry, images, notations and graphic representations, etc. They may also interweave such styles and epistemologies if this heterogeneity helps to better illuminate their subject matter.

**Academic papers to be peer reviewed should be a maximum of 6000 words** and should be accompanied by a 250-word abstract. Please do not include your name in the article or the document's metadata. Submit a 50-word biography on a separate page with accompanying image(s).

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*TURBA* welcomes writers in any language to submit texts, including texts previously published in other languages. Such texts must be accompanied by an English abstract and the first draft of a translation into English. Should the text be selected for publication, we will, if necessary, work with the author(s) on a final English version. The original language version, however, will usually be posted on the journal's resource pages.

**All text submissions should be submitted in Microsoft Word in 12-point Times New Roman and formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style.**

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