Inscriptions

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Section: Academic articles

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What is meta-curation? Antifragile realism between simulacrum and spectrality

Jan Gresil Kahambing[1]

Abstract

In this essay, I present an alternative philosophical approach to meta-curating. While the debate surrounding the meta-curating of content often centers around technology like post-digital art, I prefer to take a broader perspective and examine its ontological implications. I consider the realist or anti-realist assumptions of meta-curating through Jean Baudrillard's concept of seduction and Giorgio Agamben's idea of spectrality. Both simulacrum and spectrality tend to support an anti-realist approach to meta-curating where the value of the object is made fragile when constantly predetermined by a superficially seductive or spectrally floating context. Against meta-curating as anti-realist, I argue that meta-cura*tion* is realist. As a case, the seductive and the spectral in Zaha Hadid's *Morpheus* in Macao demonstrate that meta-curating does not completely disregard, but rather raises the question of how to establish an antifragile realism prompted by an architectural object.

Keywords: meta-curation; Morpheus; ontology; simulacrum; spectrality

What is meta-curation? This question can be approached initially by the activity of meta-curating. Curating in the museum context is the practice of taking care of an exhibit. Meta-curating expands curating in a wider context and invites an inquiry into the nature of curating itself. Metacurating extends the scope of curating from the curator's standpoint to the museum's standpoint.[2] Current debates surrounding meta-curating puts curation in digital contexts such as the posthuman crisis, interrogating curation's nature as technological mediation, which incorporates neuroscience, genetics, and biotechnics.[3] In this way, meta-curating takes as focal point the system of exhibition and management in any curation.

I here salvage a nuanced understanding of meta-cura*tion*, if only to distinguish it from meta-cura*ting*. The term "meta" is crucial because it signifies both "after" and "beyond" but also "self-reflexivity." The metaverse is a prime example of the concept of "meta," representing a radical push towards posthuman immersion in cyberspace and somatic modifications.[4] Prior to the immersion, however, one can recall that the medium is the message wherein "any medium or technology is the change of pace or pattern that it introduces into human

affairs."[5]   This can be regarded as a proto-posthumanist thought or a "pre-posthumanist approach to media" *as* technology.[6]

To briefly explore the relationship between curating and neurology, let us consider the experimentally demonstrated differential neuronal effects of curating Rembrandt's paintings and their replicas. The experiment showed that the trust and reward centers in our brains are interconnected. When a reliable source warns us that something is fake, the reward center promptly shuts down. This was demonstrated when even an authentic Rembrandt, a work of art that typically brings us with considerable pleasure, as evidenced by the activation of the reward center in the orbital frontal cortex, ceases to do so if we are informed that it is a replica. Conversely, a replica would activate that center if we were told it is genuine.[7] Curating from this meta-standpoint, which reconceptualizes the notion of "truth", has the potential to activate the neuronal switch of verification and excitement. A recent unique perspective on this involves treating curated content or objects within the meta-perspective of language. It highlights the idea that speech acts are governed by maxims or norms of communication, and that curators have the ability to switch between different qualities of a piece of art when necessary.[8]

But how do we define "meta-curating"? We can further examine the initial conception of the term. Egger and Ackermann traced its introduction back to curator Paul O'Neill in 2010.[9] The same source, however, appeared in 2007 in the collection *Issues in Curating and Contemporary Art Performance,* in which O'Neill did not actually coin the term but merely hinted at it when discussing the meta-artist and meta-curator.[10]   And since designing or curating an architectural object may seem like a 'meta' thing to do, this could also mean that curating an architectural work is, from the outset, equivalent to meta-curating an artwork. Be that as it may, O'Neill's essay reinforces Egger and Ackermann's claim that "meta-curating"[11] has not been used since. Additionally, the essay reintroduces the concept in contemporary curating whereby the artist takes on the role of a meta-curator, and the curator becomes a meta-artist when their responsibilities overlap. They participate in each other's practices, often leading to conflicts. Egger and Ackermann provide an updated understanding of meta-curating in a postdigital setting, where the curatorial practice is continuously deconstructed and reconstructed. They propose a self-reflexive tripartite "dialectic of curation, artworks, and audience."[12] In this context, meta-curatorship is seen as "the critical exercise, the articulation of plural narratives and dialogical relationship between public and work or theme of the exhibition."[13]

I propose meta-cura*tion* as an alternative approach to meta-curating. The problem with meta-curating is that the object is not taken seriously or given proper consideration. It is only determined by the value that the curation system justifies itself with. When theorizing curating as meta-curating, the focus shifts from

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[6]Moeller, "Marshall McLuhan: Essentials," YouTube video, 12 April, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v9 72n2hdStys.

[7]Onians, "Neuromuseology," 242.

[8]Dixon, "Lies in Art," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 1 (2022): 25-39.

[9]Egger and Ackermann. "Meta-curating: Online exhibitions questioning curatorial practices in the postdigital age," *International Journal for Digital Art History* no. 5 (2020): 3.18-3.35.

[10]O'Neill, "The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse," 2007.

[11]Egger and Ackermann, "Meta-Curating," *op.cit.*

[12]*Ibid.,* 32.

[13]Queiroz, "(Meta)Curadoria em processos de museologia social," *Museologia & Interdisciplinaridade* 5, no. 10 (2017): 196.

just the curator to the museum itself as a technological medium for contextualizing art or content. This perspective problematizes the fundamental ontology of the object[14] since the context created for instance by a community curating the museum[15] becomes a contested site of interpretations predetermining the background. Whereas Egger and Ackermann say that "because online exhibiting takes place on a *fragile*, often overlooked ground that is being shaken constantly," and thus is "already triggering an ethic of curating,"[16] I take a step back and take this as an avenue to open up theorizing about meta-cura*tion* as an ontological problem.

Meta-curating operates within the parameters of a dialectical framework, which Egger and Ackermann suggest have ethical implications. In an ontological context, it seems that meta-curating functions within a simulated space that is characterized by an anti-realist backdrop, constantly in flux but not due to any realist anchors. Anti-realism means that the access to reality is denied or barred due to reflexive interpretations. The aforementioned tripartite dialectical space of curation, artworks, and audience is characterized by a continuous process of de- and re-constructions, indicating that it is not reliant on a stable reality. Instead, it transforms into an incessantly fluctuating simulated realm, perpetually influenced by the dialectical dynamics inherent in meta-curating operations. The 'meta' in meta-curating is this shallow space that transcends – views in a wider angle – any object's reality persistently conditioned by the manifold projections of the museum's systemic process i.e. the museum director planning, the curator exhibiting, the artist negotiating, visitors interpreting, etc. We see here the anti-realist assumptions of the system's

frequently divergent ideal perceptions of the object, disregarding its ontology or the realism underlying its objectivity.

Our objective is to explore a form of realism that exists despite the meta-perspective. As explicated, such perspective has the ability to reveal the inherent *fragility* of the object within a system of exhibitions, rendering it brittle or vulnerable. Against such inherent vulnerability, we strive to find a quality that can be aptly described as *antifragility*, a concept coined by Nassim Taleb. Antifragility not only withstands the impact of uncertainty but also adapts and grows in response to the challenges posed by anti-realism. Does the metaverse's background of *interoperability*, which connects all simulated virtual objects within the metaversal realm, truly correspond to a reality? [17] Jean-Paul Martinon's *Curating as Ethics* provides a pathway to the ontological problem. He posits that the objects being curated can be seen as "ghosts" that emit an elusive spectrality, representing something unattainable and immeasurable.[18] Here, we can look at the interconnected concepts of simulacrum and spectrality, which are prominently explored by Baudrillard and, as will be argued, Agamben. The focus on content curation appears to be primarily centered around post-digital art, online content, and the immersive curation of the metaverse. However, taking a step back enables us to evaluate the previous framework established by the interconnected elements of the simulacrum (particularly its enchanted form, seduction) and spectrality. By doing so, we can apply this framework to gain a better understanding of the issue of meta-curating.

As we have seen, if the issue can be addressed by engaging in discourse on meta-perspectives through media, technology, or language, it is

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[14] Harrison, Bergqvist, and Kemp, "Introduction," in *Philosophy and Museums,* 1–12.

[15] Kahambing, "Will a Haiyan Museum Heal or Traumatise?" *Museological Review* 26 (2022): 55-65.

[16] Egger and Ackermann, "Meta-curating," *loc.cit.* Italics mine.

[17] I thank Mark Zuckerberg and the META team for the free online course.

[18] Martinon, *Curating as Ethics,* 108.

also possible to explore alternative approaches to meta-curating in various non-digital contexts. Therefore, prior to involving posthuman subjectivities, neuroplasticity, and techno-somatic interventions in the process of curating, it is essential to examine the realist or anti-realist assumptions underlying what could be considered as forms of meta-curating. This refers to situations where the object is determined by a systemic perspective, as discussed in Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum and Agamben's notion of spectrality. It can be argued that for both philosophers, the perception of reality becomes fragmented as it merges with simulated or spectral dimensions. While Agamben's concept of spectrality does not imply complete dissolution, unlike Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum, it still serves as a disruption to the real, albeit in an alternative manner such as diffracting the present through the lens of the past and the future.[19] Suffice it to say that the connection between the two is couched in a 'meta' perspective. As Baudrillard argues, "the medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan)" creates an "intangible, diffused, and diffracted" real, redirecting like a "genetic code" that mutates into its "spectralized" form – "the real into the hyperreal."[20] The hyperreal, of course, is "a simulacrum that dominates everything and reduces all 'ground level' events to being nothing but ephemeral scenarios."[21] This dispossession of the ground is what can be pointed out in Agamben as "the spectral" that "articulates an *alter*native."[22] In this path, a free fall of 'anything goes' – any alternative signification that, via the hyperreal's logic, no longer bears any relation to reality – follows into the abyss of spectrality.[23] This spectrality can be seen as originary (a primal mode of haunting that dispossesses reality as it is),[24] and, in what follows, able to outline a bizarre ontology.[25]

In order to substantiate this ontological rejoinder, we will focus on a specific architectural object. I am referring to Zaha Hadid's *Morpheus* building in Macao, which is known as the world's first free-form exoskeleton-bound high-rise. The building is enveloped in a grid of steel and features 40 stories of glass with a fluidity inspired by Chinese jade carving.[26] While the sustainable steel used in Morpheus is supplied by the same company that provided materials for Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the building has its own distinctive visual identity and is often described as "weird architecture."[27] Zaha Hadid, also known as the "queen of the curve,"[28] and her dynamic associate architects blend urbanism and design to create transformative spaces that harmonize with their sur-

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[19]Kahambing, "Final and larval spectrality," *Neophilologus* 105, no.1 (2021): 19-26.

[20]Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* 30.

[21]*Ibid.,* 32.

[22]Ross, "The secret agency of dispossession," *Études britanniques contemporaines. Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines* 53 (2017). https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.3739.

[23]Kahambing, "Butler *avec* Agamben," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2020), 8. Agamben here can be said to have hinted a free falling function of spectrality.

[24]Kahambing, "Inhuman Rights," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2019), 71-79.

[25]Kahambing, "Derrida and/to Žižek," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 13, no. 3 (2019), 1-16.

[26]Quackenbush, "Morpheus Hotel," *Time,* 22 August, 2018, https://time.com/collection-post/5366744/morpheus-hotel-macau-china/.

[27]Shaw, "How the Zaha Hadid-designed Morpheus hotel in Macau found solutions to an unusual set of challenges," *South China Morning Post,* 18 June, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/interiors-living/article/2151019/how-zaha-hadid-designed-morpheus-hotel-macau-found.

[28]Moore, "Zaha Hadid: queen of the curve," *The Guardian,* 7 September, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/sep/08/zaha-hadid-serpentine-sackler-profile.

roundings.[29] The name *Morpheus*, referring to the Hellenic deity of dreams, is fitting as it signifies the nature of transformation and metamorphosis. Hadid's fluid and flowing architectural style, in this respect, can be associated with the concept of continuity.[30] While architecture is distinct from art, Morpheus combines the two, creating a building that is more like a work of art.[31] Rather than simply being a simulation or a harmless representation, Morpheus transcends its status as a static structure by embracing a captivating form, transforming it into a magical veil for an object. Meta-curating expands the concept of curating beyond individual works of art or objects to include larger entities such as heritage sites, skyscrapers, and plaza squares. 'Larger' means that the curated object is no longer confined to the museum but even outside it as one would say that one curates a food festival, which here precisely implies meta-curating.

Baudrillard points out that, rhetorically, the veil is not just mere appearance: "the neutral is never neutral; it becomes an object of fascination. But does it then become an object of seduction?"[32] He then cites Nietzsche's meta-curating stance based on a non-sensical veil: "we do not believe that the truth remains true once the veil has been lifted."[33] This argument suggests that simulation is seduction's disenchanted form, and commutatively seduction is simulation's enchanted form. Says Baudrillard: seduction "is what remains of a magical, fate-ful world, a risky, vertiginous and predestined world; it is what is quietly effective in a visibly efficient and stolid world."[34] Seduction enhances the dullness of simulacrum since it heightens the magic of the veil. Baudrillard states that "this perspectival simulation – for it is merely a simulacrum – something emerges that, for want of something better, we express in terms of *touch,* a tactile hyperpresence of things, 'as though one could hold them'."[35]

Informed by Baudrillard's logic of Seduction or "Enchanted Simulation,"[36] we can perceive Morpheus as a *Trompe l'oeil* (French for "deceive the eye"). The seeming continuity that Morpheus allures resonates both inside and out, its seductive features "particularly startling – both within and without," in which a staged "42-storey building, wrapped in an aluminium exoskeleton with a wavy figure-of-eight piercing its midriff, is enough to cause passersby to stop and gape."[37] I delve into this observation by initially asking two of my Korean friends in Macau for their comments on Morpheus. Kim Jihye's first impression is attracted to the outside whereas Lee Nara opines that travellers "will enjoy their eyes" with the "colorful, luxurious, and artistic" aesthetic: "I can't believe that it was made out of metal and concrete." Lee is aware that Morpheus was designed by the same architect of Dongdaemun Design Plaza in South Korea where she is from. Commenting on the Morpheus experience, Lee's friends relish the pool, food, art paintings, bicycles,

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[29]Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, "Zaha Hadid Architects," https://www.skyscraper-center.com/company/418.

[30]Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, 159-160.

[31]Wallace, "Zaha Hadid's latest work is a skyscraper but not like you would expect," *Vogue,* 10 August, 2018, https://www.vogue.com.au/vogue-living/design/zaha-hadids-latest-work-is-a-skyscraper-but-not-like-you-know-them/image-gallery/5b6fb96382e32fedc11a01f6f2e97981.

[32]Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 44.

[33]*Ibid.,* 59.

[34]*Ibid.,* 180

[35]*Ibid.,* 63

[36]*Ibid.,* 60.

[37]Peters, "Morpheus Cotai, Macau," *The Telegraph,* https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/asia/macau/hotels/morpheus-hotel/.

glass elevators, and snacks in the lounge. Inside its life, the flow that signals change is exposed that, for instance, the culinary philosophy adopted in its fine dining is based on the *Book of Changes*, the oldest classic Chinese text *I Ching*.[38] However, there is no inherent essence here, as the transformation is meta-curated to present an emptiness in the present flow of perspectives. Baudrillard states that there is "[n]o nature in *trompe l'oeil* […] everything is artifact."[39] The subject that gets caught in the miasma of presentations revels "in the guise of trivial objects, that creates the effect of seduction, the startling impression characteristic of the *trompe l'oeil*: a tactile vertigo." [40] In this vertigo, the subject vanishes and loses herself in the what Baudrillard calls the superficial abyss or simply the horizon of appearances that gives the impression of the real. In seduction, one risks "this loss of reality that the *surreal* familiarity of objects translates."[41] Giving in to the seductive abyss of the unknown indeed jeopardizes one's position, a fatal position when reality is "suddenly left behind."[42] Experiencing Morpheus, the Glasgow born Hongkonger travel writer Lee Cobaj felt like entering *001: A Space Odyssey* and further remarks: "Left and right is a fleet of glass lifts — diamond-shaped with bleeping lights — skimming up and down two towers; it is an Eighties video game made real."[43] The distinctiveness becomes conspicuous when there is something more enchanting than mere simulacrum. As Cobaj declares, "the Venetian and the Parisian, with its half-size Eiffel Tower plonked out front […] I've seen all this before — in Las Vegas, and, er, Europe. I have never seen anything quite like Morpheus."[44] The "sublimity" of the hotel's architecture captured the attention of two French "culinary wizards" – the French-born Monégasque chef Alain Ducasse, and Pierre Hermé, the "Picasso of pastry" – who added to the interior attraction by bringing "Gallic gastronomic magic."[45] Ducasse elaborates: "I was immediately seduced by this ambitious, intriguing, mysterious design project of architecture."[46] The flow continues, as what Ducasse offers reflects his culinary philosophy of always creating something new as a synthesis of his travels. The sights, sounds, and tastes make sense in a convergent way, merging the observer into what it is focused on, which is just seductive zero point. Baudrillard says,

> Instead of fleeing before the panoramic sweep of the eye (the privilege of panoptic vision), the objects "fool" the eye ("trompe l'oeil") by a sort of internal depth – not by causing one to believe in a world that does not exist, but by undermining the privileged position of the gaze. The eye, instead of generating a space that spreads out, is but the internal vanishing point for a convergence of objects.[47]

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[38]Valles, "Food & Beverage: YÍ offers one-of-a-kind tasting menu at Morpheus," *Macau Daily Times*, 26 October, 2018, https://macaudailytimes.com.mo/food-beverage-yi-offers-one-of-a-kind-tasting-menu-at-morpheus.html. One can posit the link of Daoism and Deleuze here.

[39]Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 61.

[40]*Ibid.*, 62.

[41]*Ibid.*

[42]Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies,* 14.

[43]Cobaj, "A futuristic odyssey in the Far East," *The Times,* 8 December, 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-futuristic-odyssey-in-the-fareast-fxstdrppc.

[44]*Ibid.*

[45]Fung, "Review: Michelin maestro and 'Picasso of pastry' make Morpheus dream a reality," *South China Morning Post,* 28 July, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/travel-food/article/2156727/michelin-maestro-and-picasso-pastry-make-morpheus-dream.

[46]*Ibid.*

[47]Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 63.

In the entrance, an immediate greeting by what Cobaj described then as a "Ukrainian goddess wearing a minidress made of mirror shards" still welcomes guests today,[48] who will then direct your gaze to one pivotal perspective: "If you look up, you can see into the void."[49] The true face of seduction, then, is not the veil but the veiled void, the sweetness of a sweet nothing. Baudrillard notes that the attraction of "the void lies at the basis of seduction."[50] That is to say, the artificiality of the simulacrum, of symbolic exchanges, is dry, while seduction's void makes it appealing. Morpheus as the flagship hotel is "special" but only because it is the first building with an internal void or conversely, "without a single internal column."[51] As a deflective point to crisscross the gaze, looking closely at Morpheus' central gap divulges it as an avant-garde building with "the mesh, nodes and" – not just one but – "three organically shaped voids."[52]

Here, a bridge to spectrality can be assembled not only because the building houses absurd dreams (it is located in *City of Dreams* Macau) as homage to an elusive deity of anti-ceremonial religious or social significance, but also because the building has no original reference like Parisian's Eiffel Tower. In which case, Morpheus is an empty signifier, a parametric object of computational complexity thriving in the hyperreal. If Morpheus is a *trompe-l'oeil,* then it exudes a spectral nature. As Baudrillard notes:

The *trompe l'oeil* – falser than false – the secret of appearances [...] bypasses by the low-level representation of second-rate objects [...] no longer objects [...] blank empty signs that bespeak a social, religious or artistic anti-ceremony or anti-representation [...]: *these objects are not objects* [...] but ghosts [...] haunted objects, metaphysical objects [...] objects without referents, stripped of their décor – [...] isolated, decayed, spectral objects, disincarnated from all narrative, they alone were able to trace an obsession with a lost reality [...] simulacra without perspective.[53]

The spectral mechanism lurking in this space is clamouring amidst the loss of reality. There is more to the façade as Safa Rodas, the former Filipina head chef of L'Attitude at Morpheus and currently the head of Aurora at Altira, pointed out when we were walking along the Venetian casino sidewalks that the building was designed by the late Iraqi-British architect. As if meta-curating the building, she draws attention to what lingers within the unique appearance, implying that it must hold a deeper meaning *because it was designed by Hadid.* And, true enough, we find a realist pathway in this act of curating amidst the spectral.

Jacques Derrida could be a start for discussing spectrality when he invokes the apparition of the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the 'disadjointing' of realism, postulating that hauntology displaces ontological (previously metaphysics-centered) presumptions.

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[48]Thanks to the Ukrainian Yuliia Privalova for this information.

[49]*Ibid.*

[50]Baudrillard, *Seduction,* 77

[51]Ambler, "Melco resorts' $1 billion gamble on its flagship Morpheus hotel," *Forbes,* 15 June, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamelaambler/2018/06/15/melco-resorts-1-billion-gamble-on-its-flagship-morpheus-hotel/?sh=6262fa94bc2.

[52]Wing-Size, "4 avant-garde buildings in Macau designed by renowned architects," *Style,* 19 June, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/travel-food/article/2150951/4-avant-garde-buildings-macau-designed-renowned?module=hard_link&pgtype=article.

[53]Baudrillard, *Seduction,* 60-61.

[54]Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* 1.

However, Derrida's "out of joint"[54] revenants (or even Lacan's ghosts with unfinished businesses) have more or less a "complicated relationship" to realism and should thus not be downright labelled as anti-realist.[55] Agamben has a clearer realist tone here. His notion of spectrality straightforwardly drives the relevant point home: "spectrality is a form of life, a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything is finished."[56] Morpheus was finished posthumously in 2018 after Hadid passed away in 2016. Agamben directs a spectrality in spaces, rendering epistemic prolepses and retrospections, of seeing the future and the past in an object.[57] Though the building is also neo-futuristic, Rodas' simple curating gesture of Hadid's imprint retroactively redetermines the contours of the structure and its existence. Hadid's life ended, final, so we can retroactively think about its specter. But it is also larval, in which the pretence to go on still exists, as can be seen in Hadid's many posthumous projects. However, in her interviews, Hadid does not focus too much on identity and shrugs 'whatever' regarding any issue, unconcerned, for instance, about being a female in a male-dominated profession. The spectrality of a place cuts through the existential subject drawn with it and impresses upon the subject that all are bound by it.[58] By 'all,' Agamben means "whatever,"[59] but universal as "all peoples and all languages, all orders and all institutions, all parliaments and all sovereigns, the churches and the synagogues"[60] can be spectralized. Strangely, for Agamben, the specters of a place are not immediately visible to its residents or unsuspecting tourists. Instead, they are seen by wanderers and exiles who are far from their homeland. These individuals personally experience the emptiness of pretending to live and contemplate the lifelessness of a city, beneath its alluring illusions. Moreover, Agamben's concept of spectrality has universal implications for ontology, as it highlights a void that extends beyond the realm of the living. His "transcendental whatever" is a "flat ontology," where all objects matter equally, however "inessential" or empty they may be.[61] That is to say, "whatever" (*quodlibet*) is not about "whatness" (*quiddity*). Agamben is not oblivious to the realist object-oriented thought, especially when his 'whatever' can be linked to Tristan Garcia's "no-matter-what."[62] One can say that spectrality is a modality that functions as a *how* after the dissolution or the final specter of essence,[63] a larval mode of aesthetically profaning[64] – or seductively veiling, in Baudrillard's term – a deity or truth that is not there. Not everything is exhausted as it were in a formalist way – or by way of descriptions, characterizations, or appearances – because there is life in it, no matter that it is posthumous.

Through Agamben's "whatever" that can translate into a spectral aesthetic, one can de-

[55] Reynolds and Sebold, Review of Michael Marder's *The Event of the Thing: Derrida's Post-Deconstructive Realism. Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews,* 2010, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/the-event-of-the-thing-derrida-s-post-deconstructive-realism/.

[56] Agamben, "On the uses and disadvantages of living among specters," 475.

[57] Kahambing, "Final and larval spectrality," 23ff.

[58] Kahambing, "The specter of narration and hypocrisy," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 28, no. 1 (2020): 207-220.

[59] Agamben, *The Coming Community,* 1993.

[60] Agamben, "On the uses and disadvantages of living among specters," 476.

[61] Leung, "The one, the true, the good… or not: Badiou, Agamben, and atheistic transcendentality," *Continental Philosophy Review* 54 (2021): 75-97.

[62] Garcia, *Form and Object: a treatise on things,* 2014.

[63] Agamben, *Use of Bodies,* 2015.

[64] Agamben, *Profanations,* 2007.

tach Hadid's connection to ideas of continuity from the radicality of the spectral break, since not every fluidity functions seamlessly in its realist connotation. Since Agamben's 'whatever' underlies an ontology, it cannot be exhausted simply with ontologies of seamless flows, or any metaphysics of becoming. Baudrillard also stands against a continuous flow of 'becoming' philosophy as just market compulsion, not bearing in mind the stops and disjunctions of deaccelerated existential discourses and struggles.[65] Lui Chak Keong, an architect from Macau, discusses the concept of infrastructure that holds both collective and individual memories. The connection between heritage sites, buildings, and houses with the local community, tourists, and wanderers is a fundamental aspect, despite being overshadowed by superficiality. Yuen Wai Ip, a Macao artist, depicts in some of his paintings the seduction of Macao portraying a seductive woman, often interpreted as Wai Ip himself, within the sensual world of the booming progress of the early 21st century. However, this progress is ultimately futile and devoid of meaning. When asked about the stark difference between artists and architects, Lui comments that the latter might not be freer due to the owner's demands, but Hadid tried to incorporate her memory of her visit to Macau. We can only speculate it as a retrospective gaze into the future of what would be prospectively erected as Morpheus. Lui recalls:

> One time, I was in a talk about Zaha Hadid's meeting for that hotel [*Morpheus*]. Before the beginning of that project, she narrated that at the start of her professional career, she worked in Hong Kong and during the weekend she passed by Macao. Her memory of Macau was a visit to the Lou Lim Ioc Garden with Chinese style in the Macao Peninsula. She recalled that the stones and the cave [forms] left her very fascinated. You see the [*Morpheus*] building in Cotai? Maybe she tried to make that form, I don't know. But during that speech, she referred to her memory of Macau.[66]

The mixture of Chinese jade in the exoskeleton of Morpheus and void in cave-like form is not spontaneous but has to fuse in resonance with Hadid's life, particularly her memory of Lou Lim Ioc Garden's environs. If everything runs in perfect sensual flawlessness, such historical memory shared and uniquely lived by people will not encounter an ontological hiatus, but the development that Wai Ip illustrates does not come without a price. Ontology is a conduit by which one can highlight the question of Baudrillard's realism in the enchanted simulation of seduction.[67] It is true that, contrary to a 'meta' understanding of an icon, for example in religious iconography as saturated towards something beyond (e.g. the deity revered or represented by the image),[68] the icon of seduction in Baudrillard is superficial, pure appearance, and nothing else but a plane void – and Morpheus *is* the city's "new icon."[69]

By the same token, Hadid, the youngest influential designer of the past thirty years, styled as "the new Vladimir Tatlin"[70] points to an *ostranenie* or defamiliarization, where the uncanny offers new perspectives of seeing reality and, as I argued elsewhere, even inaugurates a spectral *unhintergebar* (the German for

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[65] Baudrillard, *Seduction,* 38.

[66] Lui, "Architecture and Memory," 2022.

[67] Graham Harman, "Architecture and object-oriented ontology," *Architecture Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2021): 53-74.

[68] Jan Gresil Kahambing, "Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of the icon as an apologia for Quiapo's Black Nazarene *Traslación*," *Prajñā Vihāra: Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 20, no. 2 (2019): 13-31.

[69] *The Macau Post Daily,* "Morpheus, city's 'new icon', opens today," 15 June, 2018. Accessed 20 March, 2023. https://www.macaupostdaily.com/index.php/article4722.html.

[70] Harman, *Architecture and Objects,* 18.

"the unsurpassable") or spectral transcendental, in Kantian terms, that grounds the possibility of the conditions of experience.[71] Tatlin of course is the name behind the ambitious Tatlin Tower that was never built, a testament forged by "steel, glass and revolution"[72] meant to test the Eiffel Tower as the icon of modernity. Although Hadid is often associated with the method[73] of parametric architectural philosophy, Hadid's teacher and an architect of deconstructivism, the French-Swiss Bernard Tschumi, is perhaps the fitting reference for a breakthrough regarding a realist concept of architecture in Hadid, in which there are *concealed obscure objects* amidst the spatial effects.[74] The occasional hints of Hadid's deconstructivist influences in this work sporadically capture the realist zest of spectrality. Morpheus, in this spectral sense, can be read as "fairly revolutionary by nature."[75] In all the weirdness of Hadid's architectural designs, it thus still begs the question of whether there is hollowness all the way, totally devoid of an underlying essence.[76]

Through the posthumous logic of spectrality, I claim that a life thrives in Hadid's designs, which may not be easily visible. An underlying realism can be construed even within a simulated, seductive, or spectral system of curation. Herein resurfaces what Taleb aptly refers to as an ironic existential flourishing within the superficial, to which he calls *antifragility*: "we are doomed to be deceived by the most superficial part of things, the packaging, the gift wrapping. This is why we don't see antifragility in places that are obvious, too obvious."[77] For instance, Rodas' first Asian kitchen stint in Macao, following stints in Paris and New York, testifies not just to the hard work (which began at home in Maasin, Southern Leyte and continued to Taguig) but to the antifragile property of evolving or excelling within unfamiliar situations and difficult redirections. Riddled with tensions, antifragility "has a singular property of allowing us to deal with the unknown, to do things without understanding them—and do them well."[78] However, this is not a romanticized gritty plasticity, albeit closer perhaps to the Daoist conception of *rou* 柔 or suppleness. The realism of the antifragile represents more than resilience. The resilient "resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better [...] behind everything that has changed with time: [...] success, corporate survival, good recipes (say, chicken soup or steak tartare with a drop of cognac), [...] even our own existence."[79] Many of these antifragile aspects and other signs of spectral lives are not documented or merely taken for granted but can be brought to light for a retroactive and proleptic view when meta-curated.

Curation involves the guided display and presentation of an exhibit.[80] Meta-curation suggests a connected reality where objects, including architectural ones, refer to a complex and unfamiliar network of interconnected objects. One can indeed imaginatively recon-

[71]Kahambing, "Heidegger's spectral abyss," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2022): 302-330.

[72]Ching, Jarzombek, Prakash, *A Global History of Architecture,* 716.

[73]Thanks to the Portoguese architect Miguel Ornelas Dos Santos for this insight.

[74]Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology,* 249.

[75]Peters, "Inside Macau's new Zaha Hadid-designed Morpheus hotel, much more than just a casino," *South China Morning Post,* 24 June, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/travel/article/2151989/inside-macaus-new-zaha-hadid-designed-morpheus-hotel.

[76]Harman, *Weird Realism,* 2012.

[77]Taleb, *Antifragile: things that gain from disorder,* 55.

[78]Taleb, *Antifragile,* 18.

[79]*Ibid.,* 17.

[80]Schubert, *The Curator's Egg,* 2009.

ceptualize content-curation not to the content per se but to the spectral navigation of hyperlinked realities.[81] However, the hyphen as a link is a differentiation, a metaphorical stance that supports the realist underpinnings of curation, pattered with reversible maneuvers. And reversibility is seduction's way of moving the stand-still of boring simulacra. When the social order is only bound within a senseless transactional display, one, dare I say, loses the liberating elements of a (r)evolution.[82] Morpheus's inessential coming-to-be is seductive and spectral as a revolutionary character when it adds realist hues to stale artificiality. For Baudrillard, as much as for Agamben, that there is no essence in things must not mean that a spectralized form cannot affect reality, for the void has more potential in drawing existences for a test than of an actual commodified thing or exchange. Does one only stay in Morpheus for a mere transaction? The *City of Dreams* is a commercial complex, but its reality is hyphenated, coupled but also truncated with seductive and spectral tensions. It does not matter whether the discussion starts with spectrality or simulacrum. An antifragile ontology seduces and spectralizes the matter of meta-curation at hand.

Therefore, while meta-curating refers to philosophical issues related to the pre-determination of the object, meta-curation implies an ontology. For example, the diverse and vibrant lives of individuals who are captivated by Morpheus' allure, their culinary experiences enriched by a variety of foreign flavors ranging from bitter to umami, the challenges faced by Hadid in architectural design, and much more. All of these spectralized lives or experiences, however, still retain an obscure consistency. After all, the "curator's true *raison d'être*," says Hans Ulrich Obrist, "remains largely undefined. No real methodology or clear legacy stands out in spite of today's proliferation of courses in curatorial studies."[83]

What we can conclude, nonetheless, is that meta-curat*ing* begs the question of the operational definition of meta-curat*ion*'s uncanny antifragile realism made possible in this case by Morpheus, an architectural object beaming with seduction and spectrality. Meta-curation forwards the following questions: Do all the formalist details exhaust Morpheus' ontology in all its void and excess? How is the void able to affect the actual? There is much room for imaginative thinking here. This essay merely speculates, rather than fully exposes, food for thought that can be surmised in thinking about the presumptions – deficit or verified – of meta-curation prior to its vast potential in a digital and post-digital setting. By linking the notions of simulacrum, seduction, and spectrality, what emerges is an inquiry into the weird void that provides potent clues for the meta-curation of antifragile reality.

Acknowledgments

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[81] Martinon, *Curating as Ethics*, 125ff.
[82] Baudrillard, *America,* 83; 109.
[83] Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating,* 5.

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