

The curator as a conceptual artist  
Joakim Hansson  
Novia University of Applied Sciences  
MA-thesis  
2016

## MASTER'S THESIS

Author: Joakim Hansson

Degree Programme: Master of Culture and Arts, Entrepreneurship in the arts

Supervisor: Power Ekroth

Title: The curator as a conceptual artist

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Date 25.04.2016

Number of pages 48

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### Abstract

By using qualitative research interviews I have explored whether or not the curator can be seen as a conceptual artist. The interviews in this study were conducted by a questionnaire to which the respondents answered in writing, the questionnaire consisted of 37 questions. As analysis method for the material gathered through interviews the bricolage method have been used for this study. Other material used for this study includes for the subject relevant litterature and on-line content. The respondents in this study are all active in curating others than themselves in exhibitions. The result of the study leans towards a similarity between conceptual artists and curators in the way they work. The study also includes the view of the respondents on the future of curating, the history of curating, the role of economical and political institutions and how those and other factors affect the work of a curator.

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Language: English

Key words: curator, conceptual art, artist, contemporary art, art, curating

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## Chapter 1

This chapter is about the purpose, what questions are asked in this study, previous research, a short presentation of each respondent, self reflection, qualitative interviews and a description of the method used in this study.

### 1.1. Introduction

The first time I ran into a curator was during the Venice Biennial in 2007. The curator in question was Vasif Kortum, who was curating the exhibition by the artist Husseyin Alptekin at the Turkish Pavillion. I was there as part of the group Cheap Finnish Labour<sup>1</sup>, that helped Alptekin transport five barns from northern Finland to the Arsenale and rebuild them on site. My first impression was that Kortum was a filter for communication between Alptekin and the rest of the world. After watching them work for a few days I started to see their cooperation as a kind of dance and game of strategy. It seemed to me that the artist wanted one thing and the curator wanted another. While the main goal for both of them was to produce a credible installation it seemed to me that they got bogged down in details and almost fought over them.

At the time I didn't realise that there were actually two persons exhibiting at the Turkish Pavillion. I thought that the artist was the only one exhibiting, that the exhibition was the vision of the artist and the curator was a producer who was organising everything in the way that the artist wanted him to. Years later I realised that while the artist was exhibiting his vision of the pavillion the curator was exhibiting his vision of the artists work. In other words, I now see it as two exhibitions having taken place at the same time. I could never have understood this unless I had worked with building the exhibition on site, seen it take place from the very beginning, followed the conversations and the arguments between the artist and the curator, and thought about them afterwards.

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<sup>1</sup> Cheap Finnish Labour is an artist collective where active members of Platform Vasa discuss and develop collaborative projects, sometimes together with other invited artists. (Platform 2016)

Today I see the events that took place in Venice as an example of how a good curator works with an artist while both are under tremendous pressure. Apart from acting as a manager and producer the curator relieved the pressure from the artist. The main objective of a curator, once s/he has chosen the artist/artists to work with, is to help the artist organise everything and make sure they reach a final result. Exactly how do they do this? And is there any difference between how a curator and a curating artist take on the task of curating an exhibition?

## **1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the similarities and differences between on the one side contemporary curators who have a background in an art academy and are trained as artists and on the other side contemporary curators who have a theoretical background from a curatorial programme, an art history programme or similar and their approach to and realisation of the curating of an exhibition by another artist.

I believe that this is a field of study that has gotten far less attention than it should have. The field of curating is constantly evolving and the borders between actors within it are blurring as more and more artists engage in curatorial tasks and more and more curators become involved in the creative process of the artist they are working with. The purpose of this study is to shine a light on the activities of the curators and make an academical contribution of insight into the workings of contemporary curators.

I want to find out if curators can be considered conceptual artists when curating artists.

## **1.3 Research questions**

Curators use different approaches to curating. To understand how curators work one needs to understand these approaches, how they work, what they are, if the curators are aware of them, how and why the curators became curators in the first place. The main question in this study is: Can the curator be seen as a conceptual artist?

Other questions include: What is involved in the process of curating? What does the future of curating look like? How do curators work with the space, the artist, the art object and organising exhibitions? Is there a power relation between curator and artist, if so who has the final say?

#### 1.4 Previous research and literature

The production of artistic based knowledge has become an academical matter since the Society for Artistic Research was founded in Bern, Switzerland 2010 (Society for Artistic Research 2016). There are moments of all artforms and all creating of art where talking of method is totally unproblematic (William-Olsson 2014, p.23). When you are learning a skill - metallographics for instance - there are lots of methods by which someone could teach you how to do just this, but by reducing the making of art into merely a method Magnus William-Olsson thinks that we might also be neutralizing it.

*“Usually it happens through simply annexing and universalizing concepts such as “creativity” or creation. Companies contract “artists” to trigger the “creativity” in their organization. The “artistic process” is studied and described in order for it to be used in science, business and teaching etcetera.” (2013, p.14)*

He finds it important to claim the "particularness" of art, art as its own form of science that gives us knowledge, experiences and insights that we could not get outside of art (2013, p.15). As more educational programs for curators have emerged (Wikipedia 2016) the need for an understanding of what it means to curate art and how it is done has grown. Is there more to curating art than can be formulated as a method? Is the process of curating in itself a process of creating art and could it thus be neutralized by being used in for instance business?

According to Camilla Larsson (2012, p.2) the role of the curator has been institutionalized and professionalized within the international contemporary art field since the 1980's, when educational programmes for curators were established and since when they have been expanded. According to her studies the lecturers at curators programmes are mostly curators - not artists, art critics or art theorists – and the students that have been accepted to

the programmes are ones that have been found willing to adopt to the same ideals and norms that these curators have, which makes her conclude that:

*"It is obvious that they, independent of profession and position, share a similar practice which pertains to an expanded practice which clearly position itself "above" the artistic sphere and assumes the task of commenting and critically examining it. The creation of exhibitions has in a significant way become secondary in comparison with this practice which is termed as "discursive curating"."* (2012, p.60-61)

This indicates that curators don't see themselves as a part of the art world, but as knowledgeable enough to comment on, critique and be an active part in shaping it. According to Larsson (2012, p.51) the students are expected to have developed individual knowledge about art and artists before having been accepted as students. It is therefore very interesting to find out whether a curators background – artistic or academic – affects her or his work as a curator.

## **1.5 Theories of the exhibition**

There is a simplified view of exhibitions as consisting of pictures on walls. These days, an exhibition is much more than that. Contemporary kunsthallen, museums, galleries and other exhibition spaces are constantly faced with the challenges of keeping up with displaying art of their time, art which in addition to occupying the walls might occupy the time and space of the gallery. Installations, art environments and mixed media works in large scale can be said to be the norm today and this has changed the ways in which art is being shown (Maak, Klonk and Demand 2011).

As art in modern times is not limited to being depicting, trying to reflect reality and please the eye, the presentation of art pieces has become a social-, economic-, and political challenge that is affected by for instance philosophical, religious, historical, social and political events. The process of displaying or presenting works of art is becoming more and more complex and long gone are the days when visiting a salon was the most trendy and hip way to experience art. At the same time, the field of art has been professionalized to the extent that it is not uncommon that artists and curators have studied for 7-10 years in order



to prepare for their respective roles.

Neal Curley claims that with the birth of land art and performance art artists started abandoning the gallery and museum space in the mid-twentieth century, yet he calls the exhibition "the ultimate frame" and "the conduit through which the majority of artist's work must pass to be considered a work of art" (Curley 2007). If in fact art becomes art in exhibitions the curator has a very important role in deciding who will have their work shown in an exhibition as they will decide which of the artists that today are most likely to be educated and have an exam to show they are artists, will have their work classified as art. Anton Vidokle argues that:

*"...the relationship between artists and curators is structurally somewhat like the relationship between workforce and management: like the workers, most artists suspect that their "supervisors," the curators, do not really understand the art, that they are controlling, egocentric, and ignorant, and are mismanaging the (art) factory and mistreating the producers."* (Vidokle 2010)

While the curator would not have any art to curate where it not for the artist, the curator, and particularly the professionalized curator, has power over where and how the art is being shown. The artist can of course choose to directly contact an exhibition space, rent it and show his or her work without a curator, however this might have an effect on how the show is perceived. Is it taken as seriously as an exhibition consisting of pieces of arts that have been screened by a curator and found important enough to show?

## **1.6 Respondents**

86 persons were contacted by e-mail and asked to participate in this study, all of them currently or previously active as curators within the European Union, mainly in central and northern Europe. The template for the e-mail that they all received is as follows:

*"Dear X,*

*Is there a difference between curators and artists curating other artists? My name is*

*Joakim Hansson and I would kindly like to ask you to participate in a survey that I am conducting, by which I am looking to find clarity on this matter. The answers to this survey will be the foundation for a thesis on MA level in culture and arts. The institution that I am studying at is called Novia University of Applied Sciences and is located in Finland. My professor and handler is the curator Power Ekroth.*

*My thesis concerns the act of curating. I will examine the possible differences between artists curating other artists and curators curating artists, hoping to find out which the differences and similarities are in their approach to curating. The method that I have chosen to use is written qualitative research interviews with curators and curating artists.*

*You as a respondent have been carefully selected due to your practice. Your participation would mean a lot for the study. I hope you have the possibility to participate. The questionnaire is attached in this e-mail. If you should choose to participate in this study please respond to the questions via e-mail by March xx 2016.*

*Best regards, Joakim Hansson”*

Some of the potential respondents were chosen for this study because I knew of them from before, others were chosen after I had googled major art events that had taken place in Europe during the past 10 years or through social media, namely in a Facebook-thread that was started by my handler Power Ekroth. It read:

*”FB-hive: HILPHE, I need names of artists that curates, or has curated in a more professional way? One of "my" eminent students, Joakim Hansson is writing his MA thesis about it, and I was hoping to be able to give him more names that what I came up with immediately (Jan Christensen, Artur Zmijewski, Christian Jankowski, Carl-Michael von Hausswolff for instance, and the show in Umeå right now at Bildmuseet). Female artists that curates would also be lovely...”*

Approximately a third of the persons asked to be part of this study were found through the public announcement on Facebook, the remaining two thirds were found through my own research. 16 of the persons who were contacted agreed to participate in the study, 15

declined and 55 did not respond. Out of the 16 that agreed to participate in the study, in the end 12 of them sent in their answers. Each and everyone of those who sent in their answers are currently active as curators.

A short introduction of each respondent:

Respondent 1 is male and 50 years old. His native language is german and he mainly uses english in his practice as a curator. He has graduated from an art academy (Master of Fine Arts), achieved his latest academic degree in 1997 and has been active as a curator for 20 years.

Respondent 2 is female and 51 years old. Her native language is swedish and she uses swedish in her practice as a curator. She has graduated as a a printmaker and art teacher (Bachelor of Education), she has also studied cultural production, art history and design. She achieved her latest degree in 2016. She has been active as a curator for 13 years.

Respondent 3 is male and 33 years old. His native language is norwegian, but he mainly uses english in his practice as a curator. He graduated from an art academy (Master of Fine Arts) in 2009 and has been active as a curator for 11 years.

Respondent 4 is male and 34 years old. His native language is english and he mainly uses english in his practice as a curator. He graduated from an art academy (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in 2004 and has been active as a curator for 5 years.

Respondent 5 is female and 37 years old. Her native language is swedish and she uses swedish and english in her practice as a curator. She graduated from an art academy (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in 2003 and has been active as a curator for 10 years.

Respondent 6 is male and 51 years old. His native language is german and he uses german as his main language in his practice as a curator. He graduated from an a hochschule der kunst (Meisterschüler in art) in 1993 and has been active as a curator for 26 years.

Respondent 7 is female and 37 years old. Her native language is swedish and she mainly uses swedish in her practice as a curator. She graduated from an art academy (Master of

Fine Arts) in 2010 and has been active as a curator for 6 years.

Respondent 8 is male and 38 years old. His native language is norwegian and he mainly uses english in his practice as a curator. He graduated from an art academy (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in 2000 and has been active as a curator for 16 years.

Respondent 9 is female and 38 years old. Her native language is german and she mainly uses swedish and english in her practice as a curator. She graduated as an art historian (Master of Arts) in 2002. She has been active as a curator for 10 years.

Respondent 10 is female and 48 years old. Her native language is german and she mainly uses german, english and spanish in her practice as a curator. Her educational background is in art history, music history, german literature. Her latest graduation was in 1997 (Doctor of Philosophy) in art history and she has been active as a curator for 19 years.

Respondent 11 is male and 40 years old. His native language is catalan/spanish and he mainly uses catalan/spanish, swedish and english in his practice as a curator. He has a degree in art history (Master of Arts) from 2005. He has been active as a curator for 20 years.

Respondent 12 is female and 29 years old. Her native language is latvian and she mainly use latvian and english in her practice as a curator. She has an educational background in asian studies (Bachelor of Humanities), management of culture (Master of Arts) and has attended the special curatorial program "De Appel". She has been active as a curator for 6 years.

## **1.7 Limitations**

Through this study I wanted to find out how curators work in an open society with few restrictions when it comes to artistic and political expression and freedom of speech. Therefore I made the choice of contacting curators who are or have been active in countries that belong to the European Union and have ratified the European Convention of Human Rights. (European Court of Human Rights 1950). These are countries that can be

considered free societies where it is possible to work in an almost unrestricted manner when it comes to art and related practices. Whether or not the EU in practice is such a place is another discussion. For all ends and purposes of this study the EU has been assumed to be what it is claimed to be.

I wanted for the respondents to have reached a certain educational level as it would suggest that they have documented academic ability to reflect on their work and are able to put it into a larger context. As for the respondents who ended up sending me their answers and participating in this study seven of them have graduated at bachelors or masters level from an art academy or equivalent while five of them have a more theoretical educational background and their range of degrees vary from bachelors level to doctors level.

The number of respondents ended up being a specific limitation to this study. While I contacted 86 persons, I ended up getting answers from merely 12 of them, which might imply that the variation between their answers is not as wide as it could have been. While I was pleased to find that equally as many women as men had chosen to participate in the study I decided not to compare the respondents answers based on their gender because there were after all merely 12 respondents. For the same reason I decided not to draw conclusions about the respondents curatorial work and their attitudes towards it based on their ethnic background, their social standing (in the past / in the present) etcetera. This could however be a new field of study. With 12 respondents I can't be certain that the information that they contributed with to this study is representative of a majority of curators. On the other hand, I had to take the time available to do this study into consideration and interviewing a smaller number of respondents made the gathered material more manageable for me. Considering that 15 +/-10 respondents are enough for a qualitative research interview based study (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, p.156) 12 respondents still fall well within the limitations set up for the method that I have used.

## **1.8 Method**

The method used in this study is a written interview/questionnaire consisting of 37 questions (see appendix). The answers from the respondents have been analyzed using the qualitative research interview method that is described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014,

p.47) as one where the aim is not quantitation but "nuanced descriptions of qualitative aspects" of the interviewees world." I have collected the respondents answers via email, read through the answers and synthesized them. By synthesizing, I mean that I have organized the information around specific themes grounded in the questions I made. Synthesis is "about pulling together information from a range of sources in order to answer a question or construct an argument" in a "wide variety of academic, professional and personal contexts" (Writing Commons, 2013).

Here is an example of a full answer that I received from respondent 4 to question number 16, "What do you think the role of the curator is in 10 years?", and the synthetization that I made:

*"I think that trends in managing, curating and selling art come and go, galleries open and close, institutions change directors and objectives, but the artists generally don't or can't quit. So I think that the recent attention given to curating will fade away and paritally be swallowed into artistic practice. But that doesn't mean curators won't continue to be important. With the rise of curatorial studies programs and a flood of new curators into the world, many will find it difficult to get jobs, and only those with a lot of energy, vision and ambition will manage to do what they want to do. People studying art are often prepared to live their life with little money, to make what they love no matter what the cost. But I've met very few curators with that level of dedication to curating. As opportunities for them become more competitive, I'd guess the flow might slow."*

Analysing this answer, I made the following synthetization:

*"The attention that curating has right now will decrease and curating will be a part of the artistic practice. Curators will continue to be important. There will be an inflation of curators and the competition between them will make their numbers drop."*

After having made the synthetizations I listed the synthesized answers for each question as to have a way of quickly comparing the answers from different respondents with each other. Below is an example of a list with the synthezised answers to question 32, "Does it happen that you use the same concept for a series of exhibitions?". First, there is the

number of the respondent, then the number of the question and at last the synthetization:

- ”1:32 *Yes*  
 2:32 *Yes*  
 3:32 *Yes*  
 4:32 *No*  
 5:32 *Has not happened yet, but some projects have a relation*  
 6:32 *I use variations.*  
 7:32 *No, but it could happen.*  
 8:32 *No, but it is a possibility.*  
 9:32 *Has not happened yet, it might happen if there is a good reason.*  
 10:32 *Not yet, but it it interests me.*  
 11:32 *Yes, some ideas, some issues – conceptual and political are always with  
 you*  
 12:32 *It hasn't happened yet, but my exhibitions are thematically related.”*

When needed, or when the answers have been too complicated to set up in a table like the one above, I have returned to the original answers and analyzed them more thoroughly by using the interview analysis technique *Bricolage* (Kvale & Brinkmann, p.281-282) to test my thesis, draw conclusions and look for similarities and patterns in the respondents work as curators. This is a method that involves carefully reading through all the material in order to get a general impression of it, returning to certain parts of it to establish connections, find similarities and differences between the answers from the respondents and draw conclusions from all of this. As I had used questionnaires, not made interviews face to face or over Skype needing to do transcriptions, while I knew for certain that the respondents had received the same questions in the exact same order it also made it possible for me to work with and analyse the material much more effectively, which was important considering the time frame.

While studying the material I found the bricolage technique very useful as it gave me the freedom to search for answers to my questions by looking at several answers from each respondent at the same time, if I for instance was asking how a respondent relates to the space in which he or she would set up an exhibition the answer to that question might be found or repeated in answers to other questions. Actually, I found that the respondents

would often bring up the room / space in their answers to other questions. Bricolage is not an uncontested technique when analyzing qualitative research interviews. The critic might say that bricolage is not a serious research method, that it is too inconsistent for that. Bricolage is a french loanword that comes from the french "*bricoler*" a verb that means "*to tinker*", which roughly could be translated as "do it yourself" (Wikipedia 2016). However, this ad hoc method of analyzing material was very useful in the analysis of the gathered material for this study. The bricolage method allowed me as a researcher to move freely between different ways of analyzing the content of the respondents answers. By using this technique I was able to find connections and structures in the material that I at first did not see. I could find similarities in thought patterns between respondents and reference my own experience in the field of art. Bricolage demands that the researcher is well acquainted with the field that is being researched, and as an artist and a curator myself I was at least familiar with the concepts that were presented by the respondents in their answers. If I, for instance, would have studied how Russian diesel engines of the 1960s work compared to German diesel engines of the 1990s I would not have chosen bricolage as my technique because I am not familiar with diesel engines from those periods, still, applying bricolage to that material might generate interesting results.

## **1.9 Qualitative interviews**

While I was making this study I strived to have a relation that was as clinical as possible when it came to the respondents, as I wanted to rule out the risk of me affecting the content of the answers before or while they were being given. For this reason I chose to do the interviews in written form. With a response time of two weeks I thought that the respondents would have plenty of time to think about their answers and formulate them as precisely as they could. In order not to get corrupt answers I wanted the interview situation to be as free from stress as possible (Kvale 2014, p.99) while at the same time as free from personal bias from respondent and interviewer as possible. I also wanted to avoid the technical problems that might occur using a telephone or Skype.

I was always well aware of the asymmetric power relation (Kvale 2014, p.52) between me as the interviewer and the individual respondents. The material gathered for this study was not gathered in an equal and open conversation, the contact with the respondents was



strictly kept to the questions and related subjects such as clarification and description of the program that I study at. I was also aware that many of the respondents are at a much later stage in their careers than I am, that many of them are professionals in the field of curating and possess great knowledge about it. Since I, as the interviewer, was the one who wanted to gather specific information concerning the field of curating it was I who decided what questions that should be asked, even though I am sure there were aspects to their work that I am not familiar with and therefore did not think to ask them about, which leads me to the subheading for self reflection.

### **1.10 Self reflection**

Since I as an artist and curator myself am somewhat familiar with curating I constantly reminded myself to be aware of how my own background might influence how I interpreted the answers from the respondents. Did I miss something crucial while I was formulating the questions, something that I took for granted? Did my background as primarily an artist, but also as a curator, affect what answers I was receiving as it must have affected how I formulated my questions? Did some of the respondents see me as competition? And, perhaps first and foremost, would the respondents have confidence enough in me to open up and share their experience of working in the field of curating, an experience that is often based on relations and trust in other persons working within the artistic field?

Some of the respondents I had never had contact with before, some of them I had met and was acquainted with in one way or another. Being familiar with a respondent could be an advantage seeing as there already exists a form of confidence, a relation, that might make it easier to get access to the other persons thoughts and opinions. What I had to avoid was reading the answers based on what I knew about the respondents from before, otherwise I might have "contaminated" the material. While I cannot be one hundred percent certain of that all the respondents have told me the truth, I have to assume they have.

By using a questionnaire I kept a certain distance to the respondents and I think it contributed to the validity of the study as my gender, race, appearance, class, age etcetera was not immediately perceived and reacted upon by the respondents and therefore, I hope,

did not affect the answers (Kvale 2014, p.131). I am aware that I by using this method might have missed subliminal information such as gestures, tone of voice etcetera (Kvale 2014, p.132), it was however something I took into consideration when planning this study.

The choice of language for the interviews were English and Swedish, and one respondent chose to answer in Norwegian. The languages used in the study could have been a weak part, since only one respondent is an English native speaker and most respondents answered the questions in either English or Swedish. In the best of worlds the questionnaire would have been made in each respondents native language and then translated into English, by a professional translator, the finances for that solution did however not exist. All material in this study that has been gathered in another language than English has been translated into English by me, out of my best ability.

## **1.11 Definitions**

### **1.11.1 Curating**

The word curator and its interpretation that is relevant for this study stems from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the latin word "curare" which means "to take care of". Originally it was a term used for those who took care of minors or lunatics (George, 2015, p.2). The role has expanded since and the word is now also used to describe the activity that the respondents in this study are devoted to, in other words curating exhibitions and other events within the contemporary art scene.

The role of the curator connected to art started to develop as far back as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the rich began to collect objects in various forms as a past time hobby (George, p.2). The objects included, but were not limited to, geological, decorative or art objects. The objects were displayed in so called "wunderkammers", cabinets of curiosities (Wikipedia 2016). The persons responsible for organising these and sometimes acquiring the objects were known as "keepers". (George, p.2) It was also during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the term curator started to be associated with museums, and then it referred to persons who were organising demonstrations of scientific experiments. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century huge collections of objects arose in the museums of the western world and the different

roles of the museum director, the keeper and the curator were blurred and interwoven. From that time on, the term "curator" has been connected to the management of art in some form.

As far as this study is concerned, the role of the curator is defined as an all-encompassing one when it comes to promoting, organising and finding financing for exhibitions. It includes selecting artists and pieces of art, producing texts connected to art, doing public relations, handling media etcetera.

### 1.11.2 Conceptual art

In 1917 Marcel Duchamp, under the pseudonym of R. Mutt, submitted the *Fountain* to the yearly exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, a society that he himself had been a part of founding (Wikipedia 2016). The idea of the yearly exhibition was to have an un-juried selection process and constituted (by the society's constitution) to include all works submitted by members of the society. The submission *Fountain* was refused that year. The reason for the refusal of it was that it was considered to be a sanitary ware – and one associated with bodily waste – and therefore it could not be considered a work of art, it was as well considered as being indecent. This was a spectacular event for contemporary artists at the time, since a jury-free exhibition had refused a supposed work of art in an exhibition organised by a dynamic artistic centre that had the intention of rivaling even Paris as the hub for art. The jury had ended up in contradicting itself and the whole purpose of the exhibition that they were undertaking with the parole "no jury-no prizes". To the media the jury issued a statement concerning this event:

*"The fountain may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not in an art exhibition and it is, by no definition, a work of art"* (Naumann, 2012, p.72)

There is a discussion on whether Duchamp was the creator of the work or if it was made in cooperation with other people (Tate 2016). Duchamp indeed admitted that the idea of the fountain arose from a discussion with the collector Walter Arensberg and the artist Joseph Stella. This is in my opinion of minor importance, the important thing is that Duchamp did not physically produce the fountain himself by actually molding, carving or casting it. He

chose and submitted a readily available mass produced object with the pseudonym signature of R.Mutt. This broke a long tradition of works of art being intendedly produced as works of art. Maybe relic objects, if one considers those being art, is the closest resemblance of creation process. A holy sword is of course a sword, that has been given its holy function usually by a person from a a clergy of some sorts. The sword can be both a sword and an artefact, it might or might not be produced with either role in intention. It might just end up becoming a relic, like for instance the spear that supposedly killed Christ. It was probably made to be just a spear, but a religious society declared it to have a new function after it supposedly contributed in the killing of a person considered by some to be Gods son. In a similar way this fountain presented by Duchamp was raised to a whole new level from having been an ordinary object with a distinct function. The importance of Duchamps submission of the fountain and its following ascension into a relic like status in the art world cannot be underestimated. In this study some of my claims on conceptual art and who can be an author of such will be based on Duchamps submission of the fountain.

In 35 sentences on art Sol LeWitt (Harrison & Wood, 2004, p.849-851) lists what in his opinion defines conceptual art and he does it along with this statement:

*"In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."*

In the same anthology you can take part of the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth's discussion on whether or not the role of the artist is to merely create special kinds of material objects, or if the artist perhaps could do something more (Harrison & Wood, 2004, p.854-860). Kosuth argues that the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought on the end of philosophy and with that the beginning of art, that while in the past art was concerned with aesthetics it is now important to separate aesthetics from art as aesthetics deal with beauty. Any philosophical school that deals with beauty, and as a result of this deals with taste, is in his opinion inevitably bound to discuss art from the perspective of aesthetics. He considers it important to sever aesthetics from art and therefore cut off most philosophical schools from the discussion of art as they keep discussing it from an aesthetic point of view. Kosuth, who in his own work often references Sigmund Freud's psycho-analysis and Ludwig

Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, once remarked that:

*"The "value" of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art." (Wikipedia 2016)*

Works of conceptual art are sometimes called installations (Wikipedia 2016). Installation art can have many forms, but for the purposes of this study installation art is defined as stated on the website of Tate Modern:

*"Installation artworks (also sometimes described as 'environments') often occupy an entire room or gallery space that the spectator invariably has to walk through in order to engage fully with the work of art. Some installations, however, are designed simply to be walked around and contemplated, or are so fragile that they can only be viewed from a doorway, or one end of a room. What makes installation art different from sculpture or other traditional art forms is that it is a complete unified experience, rather than a display of separate, individual artworks. The focus on how the viewer experiences the work and the desire to provide an intense experience for them is a dominant theme in installation art" (Tate 2016)*

## Chapter 2

This chapter consists of analysis of the material collected from the respondents.

### 2.1 The curator as defined by the respondents

*"... a wooly milky sow who can lay eggs, the term comes from common german and means a person who is a problemsolver, a person or object that only has positive sides, fulfills all needs and meets all demands. The term illustrates the ideal cattle, a sort of hybrid breed of beast combining different merits, for instance the chicken (who lays eggs), the sheep (who delivers wool), the cow (that is milked) and the sow ( who provides meat)."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> "Eierlegende Wollmilchsau" (auch eierlegendes Woll(milch)schwein). Das ist eine umgangssprachliche

This is how one of the respondents in this study described the role of the curator nowadays. A "Eierlegende Wollmilchsau" must be able to handle all tasks related to art. It is, of course, an impossible role, but it still makes a good description of the expectations that many of the respondents say they are met with in their role as a curator. According to them and their experiences, a curator may need to be an expert in technology, economy, art, art history as well as have good negotiating skills, be able to work around the clock, be good at advertising, be able to speak multiple languages and plan logistics, find funding, have a good relation to the artists, handle the media, never get tired, etcetera.

An important note in this study is that not all of the respondents view themselves as curators, even though they are all active as curators within the art world on a part-time to full-time basis. Not seeing themselves as curators is a common nominator for some of the respondents who have graduated from an art academy and are active as contemporary artists aside of their curatorial practice. As for the respondents who have graduated with a theoretical background, all refer to themselves as curators. Eventhough some of the respondents do not see themselves as curators per se, in this study they are considered to be curators because of their practical experience of curating exhibitions or similar cultural events that involve other artists.

It should also be mentioned that this study involves curators whose practice mainly or exclusively is within the field of non-commercial exhibitions. In this study non-commercial exhibitions is understood to mean exhibitions organised with other intent than primarily selling art works as well as being set up in a venue for which the main purpose is not commercialization of art. Commercialisation of art is defined, for the purpose of this study, as artworks changing hands for money or other payment. Some of the curators in this study have worked with commercial galleries, some are open for it and some would never want to do such a thing. What they all have in common is that they at least for the time being mainly working within in the non-commercial sphere curating exhibitions for

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Redewendung, mit der etwas (eine Sache, Person oder Problemlösung) umschrieben wird, das „nur Vorteile hat, alle Bedürfnisse befriedigt, allen Ansprüchen genügt“. Die Redensart veranschaulicht diese Idealvorstellung anhand eines imaginären Nutztieres, das als Hybridwesen die Vorzüge verschiedener Tierarten, nämlich von Huhn (Eier legen), Schaf (Wolle liefern), Kuh (*Milch geben*) und Schwein (*Fleisch*) in sich vereint."

institutions, museums, non-commercial galleries, kunsthallen, artist-run spaces or the public space where the primary intent of exhibiting a work is the communication of an idea, not to sell the art work, even though the works might be for sale then or later on. The curator, however, does not have a primary interest in the works getting sold since his/her commission, if any, is independent from the sale of works and the curator has been contracted based on his or her ability to put together a number of works in order to convey an idea or thought to an audience of some sort.

What was it then that attracted the respondents to curating? The persons involved in this study were attracted to curating in different ways, some of them like respondent number 3 wanted to contribute with something more than just his own works, others like respondent number 2 see art and people as the most important thing. Respondent number 11 wanted to explore the exhibition format and work directly with artists and content. The reasons for the respondents being attracted to curating are as many as there are respondents, but they share a common interest and that is to contribute with their own view not only through the production of an artwork or text but by organising artists and/or artworks into an exhibition or similar activity.

## **2.2 The role of the curator as defined by the respondents**

When the respondents were asked what challenges the curator faces (question number 12) almost each and everyone of them had a different answer, so to get a clear picture of a common view on the matter was not possible. However, to five of the respondents (respondents 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10) having a voice of their own was an important factor that they mentioned as a challenge. Respondent 3 formulated it this way:

*“Avoiding hype. I'm sorry to say most curators are creating and underlining hype. Avoiding generic practice is also a great challenge. It's very difficult to avoid being part of a zeitgeist in a global world.”*

Simultaneously, and contrarily, he mentions that he finds the current artistic discussion “totally out of sync with a reality, a reality on the verge of collapse”. It seems he expects

the curator to keep his or her finger on the pulse of society, to deal with matters that are on the current agenda, yet at the same time not to go where everyone else is going, to put it bluntly, to discuss the zeitgeist and at the same time not be part of it.

While for respondent 4 the answer was:

*“Basically managing to be a diplomat between the creative process, the public and bureaucracy while still maintaining some kind of voice”.*

### **2.3 Respondents thoughts on institutions and economic steering**

What is an institution? An institution can be ( but is not limited to) a museum of modern art (Encyclopedia Britannica 2016), kunsthalle (Wikipedia 2016), gallery, government body for the funding and promotion of art similar or identical to the Swedish “Konstnärsnämnden” (Konstnärsnämnden 2016), a foundation (private, charitable, or other) with the purpose of promoting a special interest (Wikipedia 2016), it can also be a non-governmental organisation (Wikipedia 2016). Art institutions and art financiers come in many shapes and forms as some are exemplified above. What they all share however is the ability to influence what kind of art that is supported, financially or otherwise in a city, region, country, continent and in some cases even globally, hence the institutions have a large impact on what kind of artistic projects can be realised in the geographic area that this study focuses on. Aside from the sponsorship of institutions there is also the sponsorship of art from other sources such as corporate, private, political institutions and think tanks, religious institutions etcetera. The sources for sponsoring and support of culture and art are many. For the respondents the impact of the influence of the institutions is apparent and the institutions not only affect who gets economical support, they also, to some extent, through their economic power and other means influence the role of the curator, a role that is in constant metamorphosis.

The respondents were asked to describe how the role of the curator has changed during the years that they have been active concerning steering from institutions or other financiers.



Respondents 1, 2 and 10 had experienced an increased steering or stronger wishes concerning content occurring during their time as active curators.

Respondent 2 answered:

*“No change when it comes to exhibitions. I possibly see a greater steering when it comes to economical funding for institutions and that the politicians are influencing the art and that they think that art should be useful with themes such as health and culture projects for the young and children.”*

Respondent 10 answered:

*The indirect steering from financial, economical and political is very important to observe at the moment. I'm working on this with talks and discussion in my "Laboratory of Critique and Wideview". There is a huge pressure on (older) institutions who are discussed to be closed, who are forced to sell works from their collections (what they mostly resist). There is a huge indirect influence on programmes, which become more and more regulated by financed projects (for example by private collectors). Many public-private-partnership-models are failing. After the crisis More and more private sponsors withdraw their engagement."*

While respondent 12 also leaned towards this opinion, respondents 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 had no opinion or did not answer the question at all. Respondents 9 and 11 saw no change in steering. No clear conclusion can be drawn from the answers other than that some of the respondents see a political and an economical steering from institutions and other financiers of what projects are financed and why.

Question 14 & 15 focused on how the respondents find that the role as a curator has changed when it comes to practical tasks during their active years as curators and how they feel that the view on the curator from the institutional side has changed. A majority of the respondents found that the work of a curator has received an expanded role. Curators are now active in a broader field than before, even active as consultants for collectors. One of the things that respondent 1 noted was that:

*"...the realm of curating has also seen an incredible expansion in terms of its field of work, in particular in the field of contemporary art, curators work in big galleries, or as advisors in a dialogue with private collectors, or produce additional segments to compliment existing institutional programs."*

Respondent 1 also brings this up:

*"The role of the curator has become more professional, the free curator which Harald Szeeman championed, has become the norm, and lesser a museum curator, or a curator in another institution, who has a completely different set of goals (obviously depending on the nature of the institution). So the profile of what a curator can be has changed, in a way, it has become something anyone can do, like DJing, but that is hard to do successfully („I curate children's birthday parties“ as a character explained in a cartoon in the New Yorker)."*

According to respondent 1 the curators role has expanded to include many new roles and while respondent 10 agrees on this she also adds that the view from institutions has developed in a way that is undermining the role of the contemporary art curator. Curating has become something that "anyone" can do. She mentions that institutions for instance have started to involve themselves in inviting collectors, artists, sponsors and celebrities to curate shows. What this has lead to is that the experts working at the institutions as full-time curators have become expected to organise exhibitions for other "curators" without getting the acclaim for their work. Respondent 10 describes this in her answer to question 15:

*"... On the one side many classical museum institutions are still working with there own curatorial staff but on the other side they invite more and more artists, private collectors, sponsors or famous stars (what means that the curatorial staff has to do their work, but is not part of the authorship)."*

Respondent 10 continues further on in answer to question 15:

*"...the focus is more and more on young emerging curators from abroad, because they are not that expensive, seem to be more international, hip and fashion, smooth with social media. Often the collaboration does not last that long, because finally the „curator-immigrants“ are often astonishingly conservative and won't fulfill not really*

*what was expected: the dilemma: „international in your outlook“ but“ local engaged“; a concept which only works in big cities but not in more regional institutions and areas.*

*Personally I observed that in nearly all institutions I worked for, an indirect downgrading of my position as „curator of contemporary art“ followed (the followers had not only less experience and „expertise“ but also other historical focus areas, more in the 19th century than in contemporary art, maybe pure accident)."*

The expanding role of the curator is thus not only leading to expectations on the curator to be able to do "everything", but at the same time the idea that curating is something that "anyone" can do, at least if they have a professional do the actual work and then get to put their name on it. It's an undermining of the credibility of the curator and a reduction of the curators work into something that anyone with basic interest in art can do. At the same time as respondent 10 is noting that institutions seem to want to draw attention to exhibitions by putting down celebrities names as the curators respondent 9 points out that there are institutions that seem to want the curator him- or herself to become something of a celebrity whose name could draw attention to the institution. According to respondent 9 the institutions are striving to make the curators role more interesting in the eyes of the media:

*"My experience is that institutions are more clear with who has curated the exhibitions and that the institutions try to get media to notice this information. It is like with that conductors of concerts are mentioned, but that information is too seldom communicated."*

These views are however not shared by, or at least not expressed by, all of the respondents in this study, while some have seen an expanded role and a broader field of work for curators during the time they have been active respondent 3 has completely given up working with institutions and is of the opinion that a self-imposed political correctness among curators is narrowing down what curators are able to do. This is how respondent 3 answers to question 14, "How has the role as curator changed, during the years you have been active, concerning practical tasks? This can be production of text, PR, etc.":

*"More self-conscious, even though I hate using the word; politically correct, and generic. It's a conservative time we're living in. ..."*

In the answer to question 15, "describe how the view from the institutions on the role of the curator has changed during the years you have been active", respondent 3 continues:

*"I have no idea. I've given up on the institutions. They obviously can't focus and are totally comfortable about being instrumental."*

The future role of the curator according to several of the respondents is a commercialised one. According to respondent 2 and 5 there is already today a certain steering from financiers and politicians who believe that art should be useful for society. To corporate financiers the measure of arts usefulness is often the same as the measure of how much it can be profited on. Automotive companies have become major sponsors at art institutions such as MoMA, the Guggenheim and Tate Modern (Falkenstein 2009). This is a development that respondent 7 believes will get stronger:

*"In the future I see the mission of the curator as a purely commercial one by corporations in order to create as much profit as possible"*

As respondent 2 sees it this development means that the curators needs to find methods to avoid that art ends up in the clutches of the market. If it does end up in the clutches of the market it risks becoming merely a commodity that can be bought and sold, but for the individual curator to avoid such a development can prove to be difficult. As respondent 5 sees it the future will be difficult for curators to limit themselves to the production of exhibitions and aside of that to work as teachers. With more and more academic programs directed towards producing curators, there will be more and more curators willing to get the work done, commercial or non-commercial. The competition for jobs will get harder. Respondent 4 puts it in the following way:

*"With the rise of curatorial studies programs and a flood of new curators into the world, many will find it difficult to get jobs, and only those with a lot of energy, vision and ambition will manage to do what they want to do. People studying art are often prepared to live their life with little money, to make what they love no matter what the cost. But I've met very few curators with that level of dedication to curating. As opportunities for them become more competitive, I'd guess the flow might slow."*

Respondent 4 is not alone in seeing passion as a necessity in order to succeed as a curator in the future, so does respondent 5. But while respondent 4 seems certain that his passion for curating is big enough for him to be able to continue his work as a curator, respondent 5 is preparing, during her time as a student of an academic curatorial programme to become a curator also "on paper", for a professional life in which she will have to find and create contexts of her own. Working solely with exhibitions is not something that respondent 5 takes for granted that she will be able to do. During the ten years that she has been working in the field of visual arts she has found that it has become more and more common for curators to be offered short term contracts. Just because she is now getting her formal education as a curator she does not see it as a given that she will be able to call herself a curator in the future. She writes:

*"I don't see it as if I am or become a curator after my studies. The title is of lesser importance and the synonym of the word today contains all sorts of arrangements and to pull the strings in some form of creative process."*

This applies that she sees curating as something that is performed. Having the education, the papers where it says you are a curator, is not in her view enough for you to be able to call yourself a curator. On the other hand respondent 8 believes that everyone will be able to call themselves curators in the future. In both cases the respondents see an inflation ahead of them. When more and more curators are graduating from curators programmes, being a curator becomes less and less "special". There will be an abundance of curators. As respondent 10 sees it the future might even develop in a way that curators won't need artists in order to curate:

*"The myriad digitalization projects of nowadays offer a huge amount of future research projects. Many of them might work without artists. Curators will act more artistic. Artists more curatorial."*

Respondent 1 goes even further. He thinks that art might become a part of the entertainment industry and therefore start having a reason for existence, or even become something like a religion. He writes:

*"Both of these ways must not necessarily be contradictory."*

*(See for example Tracey Emin's statement: I need art like I need god.) So following this, the artist or the curator both have the potential to be priests of a church of art.*

*I think there is a real potential here, even if this may sound like a joke. Because there is a strong public desire for things to believe in, many people have become disenchanted with liberalism, and therefore invest themselves into beliefs, often very dubious ones, from Esoteric beliefs to right wing ideologies to Islamism, all of which have similar ideas running through them.*

*Art could be something like a belief system that is based on the idea of building narratives and questioning these narratives, an area of symbolic freedom, but also a symbolic area for freedom. Offering a way to deal with this freedom, art education could be a new form of quasi-religious service, a service that deals with the imagery of the present day."*

His ideas of the artist and the curator assuming a leadership role in a religious context is in a way shared by the contemporary artist Jonathan Meese, who in his proclamation "The Dictatorship of Art" (Benmakhlouf, A. & Wern, A. 2014) advocates that art is what will rule the world. He describes it as a totalitarian rule where art influences every aspect of society and society itself will become art. According to him the time for traditional religions and political ideologies is past, now is the time for art to rule:

*"Art is total leadership, the total power*

*Art rules the world, art is number 1*

*Total art is total metabolism*

*Art is the leader, the total leader*

*No human being, art is no human being.*

*Art is total power, art is stronger than religion.*

*Art is stronger than religion, politics and self fulfillment.*

*Art is not self fulfillment*

*Art is no human politics*

*Art is no religion*

*But every religion is art"*

## 2.4 The curator as composer of an exhibition

Within the art world composition has always been an important factor to consider, to strive for or to actively work against. Even in the antique world the *sectio aurea* was used in art and architecture. One of the most known architectural remains from the greek period constructed in a way that clearly emphasizes the *sectio aurea* is the Parthenon, a temple that was dedicated to Athena who was the greek goddess for wisdom, inspiration, courage, civilization, law and justice, mathematics, art, crafts, war strategy and strength. The ratio of *sectio aurea* is a geometric relationship that in algebraical terms is expressed as "a plus b is to a as a is to b" (Wikipedia 2016). The golden ratio was not something the Greeks were alone in using, it was also used by other civilisations and is still in use today.

Respondent 7 says that she loves to work with the room and that she uses a version of the golden ratio that she herself calls "assymetric symmetry". This means that she doesn't base her composition on the visual impression of a space, she works more with the volume of a space – how it is perceived not only by visual impression but also with balance in mind when it comes to sound and light. In other words, she works with more senses than only visual:

*"I love working with the room. For me it's to the largest part about feeling, but I have several fulcrums that I think about when I work with the feeling. First and foremost it's about sound and light; is it a video that is to be shown or several videos in the same room it's of course selfevident to think about this at first, I also try to think of the room as a volume and where the exhibition space is threedimensional, by that I meand that if I only have twodimensional art pieces I try to find a way of working them out in the room. I have a mantra that is with me always; "assymetric symmetry", that might be related to the golden ratio that I by the way also find to be a very good way of working."*

Respondent 7 can be interpreted as seeing the room as an installation in itself, a three-dimensional composition of visual, audial and other sensory impressions. She actively creates an atmosphere that she feels is balanced by using the room and the pieces of art. She clearly composes the room with an intention of achieving a total impression, sees the

space of the exhibition as a whole, where every sensory impression counts.

Respondent 12 has sometimes worked together with a scenographer, especially in larger spaces without character that she refers to as white cubes. Also she has worked with empty spaces that in themselves might provide a context and mood, merely by their history and design. In the later spaces she has then simply put the pieces of art included in the exhibition into this ready-made environment to see how they communicate, not only with the audience, but also with the space itself. This way of working brings new meaning to both the venues and the works. It is a creative way of seeing how to use a space and to create content out of two by themselves completely different containers – the art pieces and the space.

Respondent 12 is of course not alone in thinking like this when approaching a space from a curatorial standpoint. A good example of working this way is how the artist and curator Jusuf Hadzifejčević worked with the space at Skenderija shopping mall in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the group show "Sub Dokumenta" (Ryan, 2010). Jonathan Blackwood (2015) writes about how Hadzifejčević used empty stores in a semi-closed down shopping mall (it was still functioning as a shopping mall with stores, cafés, nail salons and so on) as exhibition spaces for artists. In my personal opinion this was a shining example of the creativity among artists and curators in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, finding a way of showing art and reaching out from a country that has basically no funding for contemporary art from the state and no art market. The artists exhibiting their work in abandoned shops beside fully working shops took part in a dialogue between the spaces and the objects in them that cannot be underestimated as a political statement by the curator, Hadzifejčević, especially considering the history of the mall Skenderija that was opened at the winter olympics by Tito who had especially invited Sofia Loren as a sort of blingy apparel for this occasion. The Skenderija was once the pride of Sarajevo when it came to modern lifestyle and shopping. Today it is rundown and many of the shops are empty and abandoned. Placing a contemporary art exhibition in this environment can be interpreted as a cry for help, a way of commenting the commodification of art and artists and also as a comment on how unused spaces in the city landscape could come to new life if there was a will and an ambition to look away from the market driven economy that keeps the shops empty, reserved for companies that would be making profit and be able to pay rent. Companies that in the last years have been absent since there is no more



profitable business to be done in this place. This interpretation of *Subdokumenta* is of course my own, but I interpret it this way after having visited Skenderija several times and after meeting with and talking to Hadzifejčević quite a lot about it as part of a documentary film project. There are of course other interpretations that could be made of that exhibition, this is however not the place to get into that.

Respondents 1, 5, 10 and 12 mention that they consider historical connotations when they are curating an exhibition. Respondent 1 says:

*"Another thing is to understand the context of the space, that is to reflect on it also as a specific site, with not only physical but also for example historical connotations."*

In its glossary Tate (2015) explains the word site-specific as:

*"The term site-specific refers to a work of art designed specifically for a particular location and that has an interrelationship with the location."*

It might be difficult to not adapt an installation to the site since working with the room is also accepting the limitations of the room. When it concerns land art this becomes even more evident. When going through the respondents answers, there was no exception from that they all relate to the room/space they curate in. Either through the physical limitations of the space, the historical connotations, the contemporary connotations etcetera. Therefore working site-specific is something that all the respondents in this study either have done in the past or are doing in their current day practice.

Some of the respondents initially approach the space they are going to work with by using sketches, physical down scaled models, 3-D CAD models<sup>3</sup> and similar of both the room and the artworks. Using CAD or a similar older technique such as miniature physical models offers the curator an opportunity to test what the hanging of an exhibition might look like, planning it into the smallest detail so that the execution of hanging the exhibition and working with the space in the end is as long as possible turned into merely a practical affair. This is in line with Sol LeWitt's theory of conceptual art when the execution / manifestation of the work is done as a routine duty. Or as Sol LeWitt himself explains it :

*"In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When*

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<sup>3</sup> Computer-aided design (CAD) is the use of computer systems to aid in the creation, modification, analysis or optimization of a design. (Wikipedia 2016)

*an artists uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”(Harrison & Paul, 2004, p.846)*

Respondent 3 sees the way of organising the exhibition space as working with the space between the pieces, using what he refers to as basic feng shui. He does not only think about how the art pieces relate to each other, but how they relate to the space between them. He is looking for, trying to create, harmony, or the experience of harmony when entering the room:

*”I don’t work with the space. I work with the space between the pieces. Basic Feng Shui<sup>4</sup>. Coordinating a show is mostly about balance. Curating a show should be about meaning.”*

The majority of the curators in this study strive for that the exhibition that they create should communicate some form of meaning or question to the viewer which leads us to the next theme, namely about the curator as a communicator.

## **2.5 Setting the theme and keeping the rhythm, the curator as communicator of art**

The present day curator is often given the task by an institution to organise an exhibition, it doesn’t matter if the curator contacted the institution for this or if the contact was initiated by the institution. The result is the same, the curator gets to organise an exhibition consisting of X number of artists with X number of pieces. Often the exhibition, especially if it is a group exhibition has a theme, or message or question it wants to raise. For instance the Survival kit 6 in Riga, Riga Latvia in 2014 had the theme ”Utopian City” and when the main curator, Latvian Solvita Kreese, was asked in an interview how she related to the theme of the festival she responded:

*“Looking back at the history of utopian ideas, we end up in the relatively recent past. There we can find surprising modernist visions, the splendour and failure of the dominating ideology, and searches for alternative living spaces and awareness of places through the framework of various subcultures. But all of us today, most likely*

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4 Feng shui is a chinese philosophical system of harmonizing everyone with the surrounding environment, according to Wikipedia (2016)

*have our own vision of a utopian city – a city that doesn't exist, but which we'd like to think up or inhabit. This takes us to heterotopia – a world which isn't homogenous, but is saturated with existing differences side by side, an interspace, which is located somewhere external, parallel, behind the looking glass, which is simultaneously physical and mental, and which by its existence, makes utopia possible.”* (Survival Kit 2015)

Kreeses statement is quite typical for how a curator of a major exhibition, festival or biennial tends to express themselves. The statement is open and basically any type of / themed work of art could be fitted into the setting that she describes. She is not the only one who works this way when setting the theme of a larger show. In 2009, when curator of the Venice Biennial was Daniel Birnbaum, the title was "Making worlds", which he himself commented like this:

*”The title of the exhibition expressed my wish to emphasize the process of creation. A work of art represents a vision of the world and if taken seriously it can be seen as a way of making a world. The strength of the vision is not dependent on the kind or complexity of the tools brought into play. Hence all forms of artistic expression were present: installation art, video and film, sculpture, performance, painting and drawing.”* (La Biennale, 2009)

Birnbaums theme too is mostly non-political at first glance, but if explored it can be very political in either direction. It seems to be important for a biennial, festival, or any other form of curated exhibition, big and small, to be political in at least a hint of a direction since it attracts or selects artists (depending on how the artists are selected) with as many opinions and expressions as there are artists, and can lead to a great discussion between the works if it is curated with care. The main problem for huge exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial, as I see it, is that they basically try to recreate the museum or white cube on a humongous scale. And in that process loses focus, there is no longer one exhibition, there is a series of connected exhibitions through a vague theme.

### 2.5.1 The respondents view of conveying the message

When asked for this study on "how the respondent as a curator conveys the artists' thought/idea, if there is one, behind a piece on display to the visitor?" respondent 3 answered:

*"I don't. The viewer should struggle. If anything I complicate and obscure it. Placement is everything. If a piece is brilliant it shines through anything."*

This attitude was not shared by the majority of the respondents. Eight of the respondents stated that they work with additional means than just the placement and art piece in itself in order to communicate the idea, these means includes, but are not limited to, texts, pedagogues, guided tours etc. Hence there is a strong tendency among the curators in this study to be concerned with that the idea of a work reaches the audience. Respondents 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 12 answered along these lines, when looking at the educational background of these respondents four has a theoretical background and four have a background from an art academy. Respondent number 9 for instance answered:

*"The most important thing is the meeting between the piece and the visitor, with this I mean that the piece in itself in one way or another talks to the visitor (that the piece has the possibility to trigger emotions). Often it is something visual or in the form of sound or similar. Thoughts and keys to deeper reading of the work is best done via texts in printed form / separate brochure that the visitor can read during the meeting with the work or before/after. However I am usually opposed to too explanatory texts on the work signs or long texts on the wall. The texts should be informative but at the same time open enough for the visitors to have room for their own reflections and views of the piece."*

Looking at this answer which is representative for many of the respondents who were particularly concerned with conveying the artists idea to the visitor it is clear that the original idea of the artist matters, but the piece should also be left open for interpretation. The curator however has a huge possibility to influence this interpretation by how the work is presented and complemented with texts, guided tours etc. By deciding how the work is presented and how it is complemented with additional information the curator can, like respondent 11 answered, change the meaning of the work:

*"It depends, you can find many ways. But as a curator it is a matter of respecting the artwork and the artist position. But "respect" can be something that is different than the original idea of the artist. The exhibition is the time/space where the artwork will "work" and you have to be aware of it. You need to put all the elements, create a mood, define a structure and do everything to facilitate the contact with the artwork."*

So what respondent 11 is saying here is that respecting the artwork is not necessarily the same as conveying the original idea of the artist, instead the work needs to fit in the context it is in and as such it can be given a new meaning and that it is in the exhibition that the artwork needs to "work". The opinion that the original idea of the artist is not the most important thing is shared by respondent 8 who says:

*"I don't necessarily care about the artists thought, it is the message that I myself am occupied with creating through the choice and combination of pieces that is important."*

Respondent 8 is using the art pieces in a show as a sort of ready-mades. Respondent 8 uses the pieces by other artists in shows that he curates as objects, he gives the objects new meaning and the important thing is now his interpretation of them, in other words how he wants the objects to function. The art pieces are now subordinate to his idea of the exhibition in question. To further understand this a clarification of what constitutes a ready-made is needed. Marcel Duchamp was, along with 2 friends, editor for the avant garde magazine "The blind man" and in the issue of May 1917 the ready-made was explained this way in an anonymous editorial, with reference to Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain":

*"Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, and placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object." (Tate 2015)*

Respondent 8 works much like Marcel Duchamp when he turns the act of choosing into a creative act and gives the art pieces a new meaning in the show that he curates. This is totally in line with Duchamp's way of cancelling the original function of an object. When presenting the art object in an exhibition in which respondent 8 has a combination of

pieces that makes the base for his message with the exhibition he has created a new meaning for the piece as part of a larger piece with its own meaning and message – the exhibition. What respondent 8 is doing can be compared to what a DJ is doing when making a remix<sup>5</sup>, as remixing is not only limited to music. Marcel Duchamp was remixing when he started to use ready-mades. In a similar way respondent 8 and to some extent respondent 11 are remixing when they put works from an artist or artists into a new context subordinating the idea of the artist or artists to the new idea of the exhibition as a whole. Like respondent 11 said the exhibition is the time/space where the art piece needs to work and in that time/space he as a curator creates the mood and defines the structure in which contact with the artwork can be made.

### **2.5.2 The respondents view of how to convey their message with an exhibition**

The respondents were asked how their thought/idea behind an exhibition is conveyed to the visitor. Again the thought goes to Duchamp when respondent number 6 answers that he does this through the combination of the pieces that are part of the exhibition. This is reflected in respondent 12s answer that she conveys meaning through the placement of objects and works. Texts and guided tours were however the most common way for the curators in conveying their message to the audience. In question 27 the respondents are asked if they see texts as a part of an exhibition and all but respondent number 7 agrees on that texts are a necessary part of the exhibition as a whole. Respondent 7 sees texts as an addendum to a piece, not a must. She however agrees on that texts are an important part of an exhibition. But then, how important is it to the curators that the visitors understand the message of an exhibition?

The majority of the respondents find it important that the audience understands what the curator is trying to communicate with an exhibition. However, there needs to be room for interpretation by the audience. Respondent 12 also thinks it is important that she as a curator gets feedback from the audience and that she finds out how the audience interpreted the exhibition. As a response to the question of how important, and if important, it is that the main idea or message of an exhibition is understood by the visitor she answers:

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<sup>5</sup> A song can be remixed by a DJ, changing old material into new material (Wikipedia 2016).

*"It is important, since the exhibition is made with a message and it in a way serves society. However, it is also important to learn what exactly the visitor gets from the exhibition, what is the story that she/he has understood, because from that I can also learn."*

Respondent number 1 on the other hand thinks it's not necessarily important that a message is received by the audience, he however see it as unthinkable to have an exhibition where the curators line of thought can't be followed.

## **2.6 Changing an art piece for an exhibition.**

When confronted with the question of if it is ok, as a curator, to change an existing artwork that is part of an exhibition all respondents said it was either ok straight off or ok if it was done in conversation and agreement with the artist or the owner of the work if it for instance is a painting and the artist is dead. Many respondents were doubtful to the whole idea of changing a work, but if it had to be done it should be done with the cooperation of the artist. Respondent 11 however was of the opinion that it was ok as long as if it was done with the best intention in mind for the artwork and the artist. He stated:

*"No problem with it if you are doing it with respect, if you are doing it because you think that this is the best for the artwork and for the artist. It depends of many factors and conditions and sometimes it's fine to just focus on a part of an artwork if it means that the rest will come later."*

When it comes to using only a piece of an artwork, a reproduction of a detail of a painting, only the sound from a video, a few photos of an enormous photographic work etcetera the general consensus among the respondents was that it was ok if it couldn't be avoided, the artist should always be consulted if possible and in most cases the artist would have the final say. Respondent 1, 12 and 7 brought up the case of a work changing during the production of an exhibition. If a work being produced by an artist for an exhibition as part of a commission or otherwise connected work starts to deviate from the initial plan the

respondents would discuss with the artist in order to sway him/her in the right direction. If the work would turn out to be completely contrary to respondent 7 values she would exclude the work, respondent 1 would exclude the work if it stopped making sense and respondent 12 exemplified with a recent quarrel with an artist concerning a commissioned work that did not turn out the way as respondent 12 had expected it. In the end respondent 12 convinced the artist to agree on changing the piece to fit the exhibition. Respondent 12 brought up the complex power relation between curator and artist in her example and concluded:

*"Thinking about the future I would certainly be more careful and aware of how the choice of the artist is happening, how the project develops, as well as how the discussion over a possible change happens if necessary."*

The relationship between artist and curator when it comes to altering pieces is problematic, the curator is the one putting an exhibition together, often with several artists and pieces included. If a piece needs to be changed in order to fit in the exhibition it can lead to lengthy and heated discussions. Who in the end has the final word seems to point towards the artist, but at the same time the artist is in the hands of the curator since the curator might exclude a work that does not fit. Like any professional relation, like the one between maker and seller for instance, there is a symbiotic relationship. However without the artist there will be no works to exhibit, but without a curator an artist can still exhibit the works. So does this mean that the curator needs the artist more than the artist needs the curator? No. There is such an abundance of artists to choose from, there are far less curators around so far. But this is changing as was described in chapter 2.1 where respondent number 10 stated that in the future curators might not even need artists, since many research based projects can be done without an artist and that in the future curators will work more like artists and artists will work more like curators.

Respondent 9 writes that since the institution she works for often creates new pieces for the exhibitions that are shown, she is often involved in the creative process and the actual production together with the artist. Here the border between artist and curator is blurring and in the activity of creating a piece the two roles merge. According to the respondent the artist however has the final say. There can though be intense discussions leading to that either the curator or the artist backs off and that they in the end meet in a different place



than was intended from the beginning. This indicates a dynamic role of the curator in the process of creation. Respondent 9 does not see that she makes changes to a work in this process, she is merely influencing the artist. On occasion the opinion of respondent 9 has directly influenced how the final art piece has turned out:

*"Recently I worked with an Austrian artist who created a big architectural installation for a room of 350 square meters in size. On the new movable walls we would hang other art pieces by him (paintings, sculptures etc.) and six videoworks would be projected on them. The artist had an idea about the details in the films being marked on the physical walls in the installation, milling out lines along the edges of the details. When the time had come and the technicians started milling, my stomach turned – the illusion would be lost. I stopped it all and engaged in a conversation with the artist. This could have turned into a strong disagreement between us but we had a good conversation that lead to the artist also changing his mind and the milled lines were spackled."*

This is a good example of that the curator actually can have a clear impact on how a work is not only displayed, but also on how it is made. The lines that respondent 9 is talking about would not have been just a detail in how the work would have been shown, since it was an installation being made for a specific site the lines would have been a part of the piece itself and therefore cannot fall under just how the piece would have been shown in the room. This steering of works and how they are not only shown but in some cases made is something that some curators in this study do. It is an active component of curating and it becomes very apparent if the curator works site-specific.

When the respondents as part of question 26 were asked what constitutes a change of an artwork there were few clear answers and few of the respondents were willing to define what a change to an artwork is. Respondent 7 for instance answered:

*" I am not in the position to say what constitutes a change in another artists work, that must be decided by the one who created the work"*

When answering the question respondent 7 assumes the role of an artist by using the phrase *"...in another artists work..."* this is however not unexpected since the respondent is

also an artist herself and as such easily can identify with being the author of a work of art. Respondent 6 was of similar opinion, that the artist him or herself decides what constitutes a change. The remaining respondents did not answer the question of what a change to a work is. No clear result can be extracted from this other than that the respondents who did answer are both artists that curate other artists.

## **2.7 The curators view on what makes a successful show**

Questions 28 through 34 concerned the respondents view on what makes a successful exhibition, how to work when the exhibition is being built and using a concept multiple times. In order for an exhibition to be successful, according to a majority of the respondents, it needs to communicate with and inspire the visitors. The exhibition also needs to be involving the proper artists in it's context according to respondent number 1:

*"...I think a show needs an understanding of what it wants the viewer to experience, it needs to communicate that in an adequate way, and it needs to deliver that. A student show cannot be a biennial, and the other way around, but it shouldn't attempt to be one. But then again, a student degree show designed to look like the retrospective of life's work of a young artist can be a lot of fun at the same time - but then the format is different, as you understand you are seeing a kind of pastiche. So it's a lot about formats, scale, proportion, perspective, etc..."*

While respondent 1 is concerned with the right person at the right place, respondent 11 is more concerned with how the show is experienced and how it talks to him emotionally, respondent 11 answers:

*"The one that moves you and comes back to you."*

Neither of the respondents are alone in their views on what makes a successful exhibition, one common point that most of the respondents make in addition to that the show must communicate is that the cooperation between all involved persons in making the show must be good. If the cooperation is bad, or divided the show might turn out bad. Since the curator, possibly along with assistant curators or producers, is the one that

coordinates the building of an exhibition much of the responsibility of the success of an exhibition (in addition to how the art works are perceived by the audience) lies on the shoulders of the curator.

The respondents were almost equally divided by 7 versus 5 when it came to the question of if a bad concept can be saved by a nicely done presentation. 7 of the respondents were of the opinion that a nicely done presentation cannot save a bad concept. One of the respondents that saw it that way but also was leaning a bit in the other way was respondent number 10:

*"No, maybe cover it a little bit, but vivid viral art might save it."*

While respondent number 8 who were of the opinion that a bad concept can be saved by a nicely done presentation said:

*"Yes. That is exactly why the curator also needs to be esthetically aware and practical minded, be proficient in software, design aids and have a certain understanding for technical solutions"*

What respondent 8 is saying here is basically that when a concept fails the curator needs to be able to step in and provide an aesthetically pleasing presentation and in order to be able to do this the curator needs to have a skillset similar to what is normally connected to the artist.

Respondent 4 believed it was possible too to cover up a bad concept with a nicely done presentation, but also said that the bad concept usually shines through a nicely done surface:

*"Yes, but people can generally sense this doubt subliminally."*

Respondent 3 was of a more dystopian attitude towards saving a bad concept with a nice presentaion:

*"Save it into oblivion. Sure. Most exhibitions suffers under this notion."*

Among the answers from the respondents who did not think that a bad concept could be saved by a nice presentation, perhaps respondent 1 was the clearest in his answer to this:

*"Nope, never. The best it could achieve is sex without love, temporarily pleasing, but quickly forgotten and finally without consequence."*

When setting up an exhibition all of the respondents were open for a dynamic way of working, this was shown in their answers to question 31 that concerned the attitude towards following up sidetracks that might occur during the production of the exhibition. Respondent 7 referred to the setting up of an exhibition as as a process much similar to the process that takes place when making an art piece:

*"I see the construction of an exhibition as a work of art that can change during the way. I don't believe that one could or should plan everything in advance, I think one should let things happen during the way. However I don't think that one should change concept in the middle of the process, that would be a very prolixious move"*

Respondent 3 saw the road leading up to an exhibition as a circular process connected to religious beliefs:

*"I try to follow the plan. I never do. But mostly I end up with the origin, though the process has changed the authentic motivation. It's a circular process. Why is hard to say. It must be because I'm Buddhist. To not allow insecurity in the long term commitment of curating a show would be absurd. People that promotes such standards of security scares me. I'm plastic."*

Respondent 6 had a pragmatic attitude towards the process of making an exhibition:

*"Change is possible. And will be done if it makes the project better."*

Respondent 10 had the following position:

*"Including sidetracks and other inspirations is part of the process. Curating is always*

*„ping pong“.... with situations and ideas and in dialogue and discussions with the artist. If I would know the show from the beginning I would be bored from the beginning. If I would be bored how shouldn't the spectators.*

*Of course in institutional contexts and big shows you have to find an end and define the solutions to get them realized but I'm open as far as possible."*

The answers from the other respondents were of similar opinion, thus it is clear that curators are open for adapting to unforeseen situations when constructing an exhibition.

Question 32 and 33 concerned the recycling of a concept for an exhibition i.e using the same concept for a series of exhibitions. All of the respondents had either done that or were open to it in varying degrees. When it comes to concepts or variations of concepts carrying over from one exhibition to another the respondents were open for this and most also had experience of it, like respondent 11 for instance who answered to question 32 in the following way:

*"Yes, sometimes institutions ask for it. And There are some things that are with you all the time, some issues, some ideas, some political and conceptual positions."*

This answer connects to the earlier question concerning steering from institutions and it seems, by the answer of respondent 11 that institutions seem to look for concepts that already exist and then ask the curator to repeat those concepts in a similar exhibition. Also that personal political and conceptual positions carry over from one project to the next is a possibility, this of course is not strange since each person has their own personal interests and political views that sometimes most certainly must spill over into their curatorial practice.

Respondent 2 stated that she uses the same concept several times but that since the exhibitions involve different art pieces the exhibitions become different in the end, even though they are based on the same concept:

*"The exhibitions still become very different and it depends on the objects being shown."*

The respondent who was most reluctant to reusing a concept for an exhibition was

respondent number 5:

*“It hasn’t happened yet, but it would be practical (haha). Still one cannot abandon that some things you do have a common ground.”*

## **2.8 The definition of art by the respondents**

What is, according to you, required of an idea and by extension a piece to qualify as art? This was how question 21 was presented to the respondents. In chapter 1 of this study Under definitions conceptual art and installation art are described in more detail. However to definitely explain what is art is not possible since the concept of art is in constant change and the perspective of what is art is affected by what culture the person defining it is part of, from what perspective the person is judging what art is. As Thomas Adajian mentions a quote by Kendall Walton in chapter 5 with the conclusion of his article “The definition of art” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012) :

*“It is not at all clear that these words – ‘What is art?’ – express anything like a single question, to which competing answers are given, or whether philosophers proposing answers are even engaged in the same debate.... The sheer variety of proposed definitions should give us pause. One cannot help wondering whether there is any sense in which they are attempts to ... clarify the same cultural practices, or address the same issue.”*

Bearing this in mind as a caution as to trying to define art. Here are 3 of the respondents, who have a background in art academies and answered the question, view on what constitutes a work of art:

Respondent 1:

*“An artwork requires some sort of manifestation. It needs to be able to kick off a story, a*

*line of thought, or trigger a sensory experience. It may not have to do anything at all, but it requires a sense of presence. It can be absent, but I need to know it is there in a way, and be it as a ghost.”*

Respondent 3:

*“Art is not based on ideas. Art means "to do". You have to make it. Nothing more. The context turns it into a piece. This question is totally irrelevant. What makes an idea relevant is an interesting question. What makes a notion so special it should materialize as a piece? That is interesting. The label is not interesting.”*

Respondent 8:

*“That I decide that it is art (thus, one can use objects or references that are not art in the first place, it is my assembly that makes it art)”*

Here follows 3 examples of answers from respondents with an educational background in theory.

Respondent 2:

*“That one goes in for professional artists who works in a competent and interesting way and who also raise interesting questions”*

Respondent 9:

*"Roughly it is the context and if the author considers it art that decides what is art. After that comes the evaluation of it, if one thinks it is good art or not. The question of*

*what qualifies as art is very complex. To me it is important that a work of art has been created in a context in which the author works out of a strong motivation of some sorts, in which the works can be viewed with these prerequisites. That is at least a good start for something to be significant as a work of art."*

Respondent 12:

*"I think it is not so important, since I can also work with archive materials and objects that are not necessarily art. Thus I try not to think about whether something is art or not, but what it can tell, what potential does it have to tell something."*

When going through the answers a tendency towards that curators with a background as artists had a clearer definition of what constitutes a work of art was found. Curators with a more theoretical background seem to trust the artists they involve in exhibitions to define what art is, this is most apparent in the answer by respondent 2.

No clear common ground on what constitutes a work of art could be found in this study. A respondent who answers in a way that can be referenced to the answers of both the curators with a theoretical background and the curators with a background as artists is respondent 7:

*"For "something" to qualify as art in my opinion requires that the person who has created the "something" identifies himself/herself as an artist and also considers what has been created as art. Preferably this "something" should by the artist have the intention of being displayed or communicated to someone else. If it then is good or bad art is a completely different discussion to me."*

What is considered as art has many answers and it depends on the situation, the person seeing or experiencing it, the context, the point in history etcetera. It is not possible to give a clear and all-encompassing definition of what is art.



## Chapter 3

### 3.1 Final conclusions and analysis

The curator has gone from its traditional role of being a sort of cataloguer and librarian to become a very important figurehead in the audience oriented art of today. The curator now has a, compared to earlier, much more expanded role in the contemporary arts field. Curatorial practice when it comes to contemporary art and in particular installatorial art stretches well beyond the traditional and initial role the curator, the role of caring for artworks and mounting exhibitions in museums for instance. The present day curator involved in contemporary art exhibitions does much more: they select what art to be shown, what artists to include in the show, the curators are involved in the financial aspects of the production both by raising money and seeing to that the budget is kept, curators handle media relations, political relations, corporate relations, contact with museum directors, collectors and sponsors. In short the modern day curator acts as a sort of diplomat between artists and the society. But the curator is not only an intermediary in the form of a sorts of art-diplomat as shown in this study, the curator sometimes takes on an authorial role in the creation of art pieces or in changing art pieces, depending on curator with or without consent of the artist, to fit an exhibition being made as is the case with many of the respondents in this study.

It could be argued that curators use artists as a workforce in order to realize the ideas the curator has, to some degree this is the case with respondent 12 for instance who actively stepped in and asked the artist to change the commissioned work that she had ordered for an exhibition, when the work didn't match with the original idea that she had commissioned the work from. Respondent 9 works with the artist when art pieces are being created and sometimes sways the artist in a direction she sees fit for her employer. Respondent 7 sees the exhibition itself as a piece of art and in that it is a work of art that she composes using the art works of other artists when working with the room, respondent 7 can be seen as making an installation out of other artists work. Does this mean that she negates the original idea by the artist who made the work in the first place? No, since that

idea is also still being communicated as one of many layers in the exhibition. But there is a similarity to how Duchamp worked with readymades, giving existing objects a new meaning. Respondent 8 however works along Duchamp's lines when curating other artists stating that he doesn't necessarily care about the artist's original idea and that it is his idea as a curator that is the important thing. Respondent 10 states that for some curatorial projects artists might not be needed since the projects are research based. This indicates that research based projects could be made completely by the curators, respondent 12 supports this by stating that, in response to question 28, some of the exhibitions she has enjoyed greatly are research and text based exhibitions where no artworks have been present.

A majority of respondents in this study were attracted to curating in the first place because they wanted to influence what was being shown and they were of the opinion that they could contribute on a larger scale as curators. This was more apparent with the curators who also have a background as artists but generally most of the respondents shared this "call to arms" when it comes to curating.

When looking at how many of the respondents have answered when it comes to working with the room I have come to the conclusion that many of them see the room as a space to be filled with works in order to communicate an idea, the individual works in some cases become subordinate to the greater whole and I interpret this as that it is the composition of the works and the relation between the works in the space that is the important thing. The ones composing the space are the curators, they furnish the galleries, kunsthallen, museums and biennials with artworks selected by them and placed by them in order to communicate an idea, emotion or similar. With modernity came also the heavier dependence on theory in art, this trend has continued until today and will most certainly continue in the future. The dependence on theory to justify works of art forces the persons who want to study art at an academical level to become more proficient in the theories of art, the artists who have attended art academies in what is now the EU, especially in the western part of the EU, in the last 20-30 years have studied much of the same theory, however maybe not as in-depth, that students who have studied art history or art theory as a main subject. This of course must have influenced the artists to think outside the blob of clay in front of them or beyond the canvas. Art today as it is being taught in the academies of most countries in the EU relies on that the students also have a theoretical understanding of art and art theory; a

common ground on which to stand, a common language. This has led to that artists and curators have become more similar in their way of working and that a clear distinction between the two is not as easy to make anymore as it perhaps was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when curators were tied to museums acting as a form of librarian or guardian and caretaker of a collection, while the artist was completely occupied with coloring a canvas for instance. The world has changed since then and so have the so previously distinct roles of the artist and the curator. If we however live in a time where the theory comes before the art and the art is dependent of a theoretical explanation to justify its existence, then art as something poetic, unexplainable, emotional and instinctive is dead and we then live in a post-art world. In a secularised and educated society it is perhaps not so strange that the mystic shimmer surrounding art is fading, especially when it comes to spectacular religious art like Michelangelo's "The last judgement" in the Sistine Chapel for instance or similar art which often depicts completely illogical events and creatures that base their credibility as proof, of other worlds or dimensions than our own, on the faith of the person looking at the work. When Hegel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century said:

*"Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place."* (Danto, C. A., 1999)

Hegel can be interpreted as meaning that art had stopped being a container of religious truth. If art no longer stems from faith and instead is based on theories to justify its position then the artistic world has changed from being a mythical place to a logical place where the idea itself matters more than how the idea is represented. This also means that anyone can be an artist and anything can be art as long as there is a theory to back up the piece being presented. So with modern times it is absolutely possible for a curator to assume the role of an artist and vice versa.

The conclusion of this study is that contemporary curators do sometimes assume the role of auteurs, they do create art pieces using other artists' works but this is not always the case and not always the motive of the curator. The creations made by curators are more similar

to the remixes made by DJs or collage techniques used by artists remixing other artists works into something new, perhaps something that was not initially intended, but something done through a conscious act of creating a mix of works in order to trigger new dialogue and possibility for new interpretation of already existing works. This conclusion rests on conceptual art as described earlier in definitions and on that reusing works for new purposes is possible and it takes no regard of copyright or morals. It is possible that curators are artists themselves independent of if they come from a theoretical or more practical background, it all depends on the individual curator and the context they work in. The answer to the main question of this thesis whether the curator can be seen as a conceptual artist is thus: perhaps, this answer however needs more development. Usually a curator works in less direct ways than an artist and has to consider a broader field, since the curator often works with several artists at the same time. The curator can be both a meta-artist and an auteur since the curator selects works and place them in a context, often in a context that the artist maybe didn't think of at first. In that way I see the curator as a possible auteur and meta-artist. A curator sometimes works in the same way as an artist working with readymades. It is a semi-creative role as I see it, the physical (or non-physical) works are already made, they exist, what the curator does is putting the works in relation to each other and giving them a meaning, or at least a new meaning in a context that might be different from what the works were intended for in the first place. Often the curator can define the context by choosing which works to include in an exhibition and by this hopefully starting a discussion between the works and artists included in the show. That discussion can in itself be seen as a sort of conceptual work of art created by the curator.

### **3.2 Further research**

Further research in this field could include a deeper comparative study made with curators within a more limited geographical area. Also further study could be made in exploring how the gender of the curator affects how the curator works when selecting artists and works of art. A study into if and how creative processes are involved in organising cultural events other than exhibitions could be another interesting subject for further research. Also a thorough study of how the digital age we now live in and the tools used for communication via social media in this age affects culture is necessary. A study of what can be considered an auteur of art in the future is also an interesting field.

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## Appendix

### Interview questions

1. Age?
2. Sex?
3. Native language?
4. What language do you mainly use within your practice?
5. What is your educational background?
6. What year did you take your latest degree?
7. Why did you become a curator?
8. How long have you been active as a curator?
9. Have you worked with institutions / galleries as a freelance curator?
10. What is your opinion about curating commercial exhibitions vs. curating non-commercial exhibitions?
11. What does your cooperation with artists look like in practical terms?
12. What challenges does a curator face?
13. How has the role as curator changed, during the years you have been active, concerning indirect steering from institutions and financiers or similar?
14. How has the role as curator changed, during the years you have been active, concerning practical tasks? This can be production of text, PR, etc.
15. Describe how the view from the institutions on the role of the curator has changed during the years you have been active.
16. What do you think the role of the curator is in 10 years?
17. When you curate a group show, how important is it with gender equality for you? Please develop your answer with examples from some exhibitions that you have curated.
18. When you curate an exhibition, how do you work with the space?
19. Is it important to you that a curated exhibition is rational? Motivate your answer.
20. When you curate an exhibition and something unforeseen happens that endangers the whole project like for instance that the budget is suddenly cut by half or artists drop out, do you adapt to the situation or do you cancel the exhibition? Please motivate your answer, if possible with examples.
21. What is, according to you, required of an idea and by extension a piece to qualify as art?
22. How do you convey the artists' thought / idea, if there is one, behind a piece on display to the visitor?



23. How is your message / thought / idea with an exhibition, curated by you, conveyed to the visitor?
24. How important is it that the main idea, "the message", of an exhibition is understood by the visitor? Is it even important? Please motivate your answer.
25. What is your position, when curating, on using only a part of an artwork for an exhibition? For instance using only the sound of a video, reproduction of a part of a painting, etc.
26. What is your position on, as a curator, actively changing an existing work in an exhibition that you curate? Please motivate your answer with the inclusion of your definition of what constitutes a change to an artwork and, if possible, examples from your practice.
27. Do you see texts about the works in an exhibition as part of the exhibition as a whole? Motivate your answer please.
28. What is, according to you, the most important part of an exhibition? Please develop your answer.
29. What constitutes a good / successful exhibition?
30. Can a nicely done presentation save a defective / imperfect concept?
31. When you have formulated a concept for a show does it then happen that you follow up sidetracks that come up in the middle of the process of setting up the exhibition – or do you follow the plan that you originally made? Please motivate why.
32. Does it happen that you use the same concept for a series of exhibitions?
33. If you have put up the same concept for an exhibition several times, but with different artists each time, what is your experience of this?
34. Is it important to you, as a visitor, that you understand the message or idea of an exhibition curated by someone else?
35. Is it important that you, at the opening, understand the signification of an exhibition that you yourself have curated?
36. How does critique (positive and negative) of a show you have curated affect your opinion of the quality of your own work? Please describe from both a short-term and long-term perspective.
37. What makes a curators' practice credible?