



## OpenAIR@RGU

### The Open Access Institutional Repository at Robert Gordon University

<http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

#### Citation Details

**Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':**

IRVING, I., 2013. Curating as practice and profession: an exploration and definition of a contemporary independent curator. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

#### Copyright

Items in 'OpenAIR@RGU', Robert Gordon University Open Access Institutional Repository, are protected by copyright and intellectual property law. If you believe that any material held in 'OpenAIR@RGU' infringes copyright, please contact [openair-help@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:openair-help@rgu.ac.uk) with details. The item will be removed from the repository while the claim is investigated.

**Curating as Practice and Profession:  
An Exploration and Definition of  
a Contemporary Independent Curator**

**Iain Irving**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the  
Robert Gordon University  
for the degree of Master of Philosophy

June 2013

The curator had set up his office in a small wooden cabin on the edge of the village fields. The cabin office was fully insulated and had sustainable energy panels. It was also wired up for communication with HD broadband linked to an ecological server. Inside the office, which was part library and part seminar room the atmosphere was warm and relaxed, a place to step back and think intelligently about connecting and other concerns. There was no dogma, but the service offered an openness, which directed the client towards a variety of ideas - from craftivism to blogging, musicology to design, visual thinking to the visual arts - that would galvanize a solution for their curatorial concerns.

He was there most days either to meet face to face, or by email via his blog. We were able to ask for advice on all things to do with the curatorial, take part in workshops and seminars, attend special symposiums and events, as well as presentations of projects and exhibitions but initially we needed advice on how we should understand and use this service.

*"I am here to help you to make connections in your everyday life, in work or play. They can be philosophical or practical interests they can be physical or intangible outcomes. My service is one of being creative, researching knowledge and of collaboration. Consider it a public service, like a plumber who unblocks the drains, like a roofer who mends the holes, like a computer geek who makes your laptop come alive again," he said.*

*"Okay but how does it work? It sounds religious or at least a bit shamanistic."*

*"Not at all, more mindful than anything, I am here as a curatorial mentor. I have experience, knowledge and skills of curating and its now my chosen role to share them with the community and to help people make useful connections for everyday life."*

*"Sounds good, we need this"*

Continues...

## **Acknowledgements**

This is for Judith, Leon, Ben and Hester.

I would like to thank Professor Anne Douglas, Dr Allan Watson, and Dr Andrew Patrizio for their supervision, guidance and support in this research.

I would also like to thank my assessors Dr Sophie Hope, Professor Paul Harris and François Matarasso and all my research collaborators, participants and colleagues.

## **Contents**

Abstract	p. 5
Introduction	p. 7
Chapter 1. Models of an Independent Curator: Harald Szeemann, Matthew Higgs and Hans Ulrich Obrist	p. 12
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework The Social and Field Theories of Pierre Bourdieu	p. 20 p. 22
Chapter 3. The Cultural Intermediary or The Curator as Cultural Midwife	p. 29
Chapter 4. Independent curators in Scotland: Context, review, analysis and findings	p. 34
Conclusion	p. 44
Reference List	p. 48
Bibliography	p. 50
List of Illustrations	p. 52
Appendices	
Appendix 1. A Survey of Independent Curatorial Practice in Scotland	p. 55
Appendix 2. Oak Trees and Fountains curated project, Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire	p. 81
Appendix 3. “Where is curating if it is not in the Institution? DART Seminar	p. 121

## **Abstract**

Keywords: Curating, Contemporary, Independent, Creativity, Practice, Profession, Bourdieu, Social and Cultural, Language, Metaphor.

(Research Aim) This research sets out to explore and define a Contemporary Independent Curator and his/her practice. This type and method of curating activity occurs in a cultural context by an individual who practices (mostly) outwith a cultural institution. Independent curators can be described in essence as 'wild spirits' (Schumpeter 1952 p. 340) and this research considers the cultural and creative values and opportunities that such a practitioner can bring to artists, communities, industry and audience experiences through their creative ideas, projects and activities. The acknowledged changes in contemporary art practice, the broader sites for exhibiting artworks, the changing nature of collaboration between artists and curators and the development of the broader creative and professional practice of the curator has triggered this important research.

(Research Objectives) My objectives in this research are to make explicit the implicit tacit knowledge involved in the practice of curating, to distinguish between forms of curating that are institutionally bounded and new forms that seek to work between institutions, to characterise the practice of the 'independent curator' drawing on historical as well as current experiences of this form of practice.

(Research Methods) Originating from an enquiry of my own curatorial practice, this research journeys through essays on the mapping of the recent histories of the independent curator (Szeemann, Obrist, Higgs - these curators have been identified as pioneers of contemporary curating and have had creative and experimental practices both in and outwith the institution), it explores the metaphor of the practice of the independent curator as a cultural midwife/cultural intermediary, in an attempt to capture the essence of curating. It analyses findings from a survey of current independent curators based in Scotland conducted as part of the research.

(Research Methods) Although this practice is identified as an individual and independent one, it is not practiced in isolation from others; therefore the social and field theories (thinking tools) of Pierre Bourdieu are adopted as the key theoretical underpinning for the research. Bourdieu is selected from other key theorists (eg. Adorno) because he traces the influence of a person's power and capital through their social, cultural and professional context. Other aspects of Bourdieu's work, importantly his concern with class and education in the appreciation of the arts, are not judged to be relevant to this research. Bourdieu's framing of the individual's emergence through key influences (social, cultural, professional) underpin the analysis of the case studies of the historical models of the independent curator and to the empirical research

conducted with active independent curators in Scotland to identify whether these theories are still valid to the (local) currency of the practice, or that the practice has evolved to adopt a new and enhanced approach in what it is and what it does.

This research will benefit and enable potential curators to identify the specific dispositions of the practice and profession of an independent curator. It will benefit the cultural and creative industries by acknowledging and supporting the significant creative, cultural and economic value of the independent curator. It will also benefit audiences of art in making explicit the experience, integrity and consideration undertaken by this approach to curating. This research will also be of interest to educators and students of art and culture enabling them to learn from the critical and creative decisions involved.

The research is situated within a wider academic and professional discourse on the role, function and value of creative practices, including contemporary curating within business, economy and society.

## Introduction

My own curatorial practice has evolved since leaving Art School in the mid-1980's until now. I would consider what I do, as a creative practice, as curatorial - I sense it - I feel it - I know what it is. The context of my practice initially was one of paid employment, where there was a job to be done. This evolved to being given, by others, opportunities in creative and professional decision making which in the last 12 years developed into a practice, which is autonomous and self-directed. The research developed in this dissertation grew from the desire to identify and define this thing called the independent curator. It initially seemed straight forward enough to reflect on my many projects and therefore determine what it is. But through further critical research it became more difficult to pin down. Therefore the following questions were determined to frame this research and give it focus:

- What is the practice of an independent curator?
- What are its methods and what effects does it make on creative practice and professional context?
- What social and creative issues influence the practice of independent curating?
- What are the current creative and critical methods of independent curatorial practice in Scotland?
- What are the tensions, contradictions and benefits in curating activity that define a current independent curatorial practice?

My research methodologies developed from an initial reflective study of my own curatorial practice and a literature review on the subject of independent curating. Through this review I was able to determine the scope and detail of the practice, both historically and in a contemporary context, which had been published. (eg. Althusser 1994; Greenberg 1996; Marincola 2001; Thomas 2002; Obrist 2003/8; Rogoff 2006; Müller 2006; O'Neill 2007; Hoffmans 2007; Martinon 2012). From this review and a study of models of practice by independent curators, I was also able to identify my theoretical position through sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's thinking tools (*habitus, field, doxa, capital*). Bourdieu's selection was arrived at through a review of literature on theory in the Arts (others considered were Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Alexander Dörner).

Bourdieu's wider theories focused on the relationship between education, class and the capacity to appreciate art, but his theories on the dispositions of the individual became a clear route for my research. Bourdieu's project became the main theoretical structure through which I was then able to identify the social, creative and professional dispositions of an independent curator. This theoretical structure and knowledge of practice enabled me to develop a questionnaire and discussion, which was conducted through a current Scottish based curatorial



platform called Framework. This primary research was crucial in enabling me to identify the *capital, habitus* and *doxa* of a current independent curator, as this would determine what is an independent curator and a predicted evolution of the practice.

The curator's activities and presence in the contemporary art world has been described as 'no longer only being able to eyeball with a connoisseur gaze' (Rugoff 1999 p. 112), which seems to infer that the practice of curating has changed, the (private and) public image of the curator is no longer just one who has one unique and elite skill therefore it seemed in the past decade things were changing. The practice of curating was something other than just relating to the institution of museum or gallery. Therefore there was a need to identify the first independent curator, the pioneer. In time the figure of Harald Szeemann appeared. At the time I was unaware of his life and practice, which now seems astonishing to me. Having worked (but not studied) in exhibition making and curating while he was alive and working, I had no awareness of his work. I doubt that it would have made any difference. I had other role models to admire – Nicola White, Andrew Patrizio, Robin Klassnik, Richard Demarco, and Mark Francis for example - these were important mentors for me. But usefully this research has enabled a longer view of its histories and through my literature review I became aware that the documentation of the history of curating is a relatively new category. Hans Ulrich Obrist and others have identified this fact and attempted to fill the gap with volumes of interviews with curators (importantly just before many passed away it seems) as well as the publication of critical texts and essays on curating (eg. Thomas 2002; Obrist 2003/8; Rogoff 2006; Müller 2006; O'Neill 2007; Hoffmans 2007; Martinon 2012). There was a sense of catch up required for me but also for curating itself. There was an important need to document and configure the practice.

The difficulty in defining the independent curator seemed to be that the people who had been doing it had therefore already defined it. They were what it was.

To define 'independent' in this context is therefore important. Someone who curates independently takes care of his or her own practice. They develop and produce curatorial ideas and concepts through a practice and fulfil these projects in collaboration with other 'exhibition makers' (artists, curators, project managers, fundraisers, marketing managers, technical support, writers, designers etc). They can be self-employed or employed in an independently run and funded organisation. This notion of independence therefore also applies and is inherent to the collaborations and organisations in which the curator practices. An independently run organisation holds the same ethos as the independent individual. Their mandate is to challenge the traditional ways of thinking and seeing exhibition making and hence develop new alternative experiences and methods of practice while being supported by the funding bodies to do so. (eg Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, CCA, Glasgow, DCA, Dundee). These situations are therefore an independent practice. But this independence can also be drawn in and controlled

by the influence of power (from authorities) through conditions of funding, environment, status and public requirements.

Therefore the context of 'independence' in this thesis is one, in which the agents adopt or are given the mandate to seek, instigate, develop and resolve projects through their social, creative, economic and professional abilities and skills.

This led to identifying that the social and field theories of sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's as they would enable a theoretical understanding of an individual in the context of the arts, and therefore to the practice of the independent curator. Bourdieu's broader relevance to the research helps frame an artworld with the issues concerning not just the individual but also the overall effect on the social, economic and political contexts that the curator works within.

Having considered Bourdieu's theories and through his writings, other significant models started to appear which made direct links to the curator. His term 'cultural intermediary' (Bourdieu 1984 p. 359) (see also Hesmondhalgh 2006 and Negus 2002) (or what I might also metaphorically term as a cultural midwife) seemed applicable and could well be the curator - someone who is between things. Between art making and art management. Between artists and audience. Between artists and institutions. Between the object and the word or 'the middleman' as Andreasen and Bang Larsen (2007 p. 20) stated. It also related to a profession, a good job title and so had a purpose and agenda. With further reading, particularly of the work of Theodor W. Adorno, Keith Negus and David Hesmondhaugh, my research began to connect to the cultural and creative industries, and therefore led to identify the practice of the independent curator as a profession.

The need for currency in the practice led my research to participate and work with a Scottish based curatorial platform called *Framework*, organised/curated by Kirsteen MacDonald who had contacted me as she felt there were parallels in her project and my research, so I signed up as a member. Through the activities of *Framework*, which included writing workshops, curatorial seminars and presentations hosted at various venues across Scotland such as Stills, Edinburgh, GOMA, Glasgow and CCA, Glasgow, it enabled me to integrate myself within a group of other self defined independent curators all based in Scotland, This was a significant move allowing me to tap into and understand the current methods and practices of the independent curator in Scotland.

With this I developed a survey and data, which was conducted with these specific group members (as well as others curators from the Scottish arts community), which based its enquiry on questions composed in relation to Bourdieu's theories to determine the issues of background, motivation, influences, skills and experience, improvisation and experimentation, value, sustainability of practice and effect to the respondent's curatorial practice. In essence my research was looking for connections, comparisons and differences to models of curatorial practice. I sensed that Bourdieu's theories spoke a certain truth about the power and influence

that had always (and still does) exist in the artworld, and with that the influence of the curator, whether independent or within the institution. So this survey helped to identify if this was still the case, but if not, what has changed? How do practitioners now define their practice and therefore what is it today?

While this research was carried out, my own versions of curatorial practice were tested through essays, writing, visualisations and exhibitions in curating which allowed me to improvise and experiment with the practice. This work, which included my research blog entries and discussions (see Irving 2009/13) on curating, art and culture; curated projects with Limousine Bull Art Collective at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire and Shadow Curator role and project at Deveron Arts, Huntly, Aberdeenshire; catalogue text for Hurricane Lamb/Gray's School of Art research project at Duff House, Banff and the integration of my research into my teaching role at Gray's School of Art through lectures, seminars and writing workshops, therefore became useful conduits and platforms for my research. Although this activity was not central to my research it enabled a time of creativity and therefore intuitive outputs.

A further opportunity to test out my ideas and proposals for a definition of curatorial practice came through the presentation and discussion at Gray's School of Art/RGU DART IDEAS Research event in May 2012. This allowed me to curate the seminar called "Free Curating: Where is curating if it is not in the institution?" for which I presented a paper on curating as metaphor. Andrew Patrizio was invited to respond to this along with a contextualising presentation of the Atlas curatorial project based on the Isle of Skye by its director Emma Nicolson.

In this research event and outputs, the essence and identification of curating was attempted, where curating was articulated as something between things and at the edges of things, performative, overlaying, intimate and invisible. This discussion also importantly promoted the use of language and metaphor as ways to understand the methodologies of curating. This specific material is presented as an appendix (see appendix 3) to the main text as it is still developing research but important to highlight as a dimension for understanding the practice of curating.

I sensed through my research that there were two means to identify curating; one was through its profession – the doing, while the other was through the conceptualizing of ideas and language, practice – the being. The metaphor also seemed key; it helped to see what was not clear. The use of metaphors in the curatorial was already apparent from exhibition titles to job titles – "trickster" (Czegledy 2002 p. 109), "flâneur or activist" (Kowalski 2010) for example.

In concluding this thesis I will discuss my findings and draw together the ideas and arguments from this primary and secondary research to make a proposed working definition of an independent curator.

This research finally concludes with a short narrative printed on the inside covers, which fictionalises perhaps a new profession for independent curating in society. It proposes a role, which plays on an entropic view of curatorial practice.

## Chapter 1

### Models of an Independent Curator:

#### Harald Szeemann, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Matthew Higgs



(3.1)

The Swiss curator Harald Szeemann (3.1) (1933–2005) has been notably identified as what could be defined as the first independent curator, ‘an inventor of a profession’ (Müller 2006 p. 6) and ‘the genitor of the genre’ (Derieux 2007 p. 8), while other contemporary curators - Hans Ulrich Obrist and Matthew Higgs – have become the hyper active offspring and are highly sought after as pioneers of contemporary curatorial concepts, exhibitions and projects. In analysing the character and the trajectory of these particular curator’s dispositions we can determine a number of things in relation to practice and profession. A line of enquiry here is to ask whether the independent curator needs to be more creative, freethinking, opportunist and maverick in their curatorial practice than the curator in an institution, and therefore asking what are the issues to the practice in terms of creativity, sustainability and power? Perhaps these issues and dispositions might be discovered through analysis of the historical and contemporary contexts of the practice and profession.

Derieux suggests that it is now probable that the art history of the late 20th century is not focused on artworks but on a series of exhibitions (2007 p. 8). This makes us aware that the rise of a new art profession - the independent curator – is significant and has made an effect on this history. An analysis of this individual, role, practice and status of the independent curator within the contemporary art world is one of discourse and interest but is also of some dispute and suspicion. Walter Benjamin suggests that the curator is like a ‘smuggler’ and Felix Feneon proposes a ‘catalyst’ (Derieux 2007 p. 8).

Exhibition making, either in galleries and museums or in non-traditional spaces has become the environment that we experience art. Unless they are a collector and have their own personal museum, we see our art in these public spaces. Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. The public perception of a curator is of a custodian of a

collection, in a museum or gallery. They take care of items, they link, interpret, and present to the public, assisting and provoking ideas and encounters. A curator of this profession and intension exists in all the museums in the world but the practice of a contemporary curator now also requires skills in social media, interpretation and management skills as well as fundamental creative and technical skills. It is an ongoing debate to define the practice and profession of the curator particularly in the art media. The American art magazine, 'Art Lies' has even modestly proposed in 2008 'the death of the curator' (Gupta 2008); so in time a realization of this practice and profession is required. As the methods of art making and presentation have changed it is pertinent to question and redefine the practices of the curators.

In 2005, the photographer Balthasar Burkhard recorded the archive of Harold Szeemann (Derieux 2007 p. 32-38). Burkhard had assisted Szeemann at the Kunsthalle in Bern by documenting the exhibitions that he had curated. The archive photographs show intense shelving, stacking and some organisation of the documents that are created in exhibition making (3.2). The materials look like they have been initially organised into cardboard boxes and given letters and numbers, in an attempt at some sort of method, but in time the piles of books, catalogues, models and images, have become more precarious and chaotic. There are also the trophies of exhibition making in the artworld. The images of Szeemann with artists, the tree of luggage tags from every airport in the world, collected, hung and displayed, the mountain sculpture, gifted paintings and the quotes and statements as inspiration hanging in lines from the ceiling. Looking like art in itself but taking 50 years to produce.



(3.2)

There is a visible passion, an intensity of doing and making things happen. Things must have happened to create such material. Dave Hickey has usefully suggested that 'somebody has to do something before we can do anything' (Marincola 2001 p. 128). They present the obsessiveness of a fan, a lover of the practice, and the environment and people within it.



(3.3)

Szeemann curated his first exhibition, “Painters Poets / Poets Painters”, at the Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, in 1957, at the age of 24. As director of the Kunsthalle in Bern four years later, he transformed the institution producing twelve exhibitions a year, culminating in the pivotal exhibition “Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations- Information”, in 1969 (3.3). In exhibiting works by 70 artists, including Joseph Beuys, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, Lawrence Weiner, Richard Long, and Bruce Nauman, the premise of this exhibition was about opposition – to art, to form, to society, to the institution – the art reflected the tone and activities of society of the day. The exhibition was in essence a gathering and an event. The institution became an artist’s workshop where process and experimentation took the lead, both in curating and art making by taking risks for art, curating and the viewer. Szeemann suggested that “Live inside your head meant nothing less than intellectual cooperation in the forming of the attitudes; it asked the exhibition visitor to take part in the art process” (Müller 2006 p. 20).

The opposition, adaptation and questioning of the institutional structure enabling the artists to develop innovative art practices and ideas is one of Szeemann’s major contributions. Szeemann curated this change. However, significantly Szeemann instigated conflict within the institution, by taking these risks.

According to Szeemann the exhibition came about only because,

“People from the Philip Morris Company and the PR agency Ruder and Finn came to Bern and asked me if I would do a show of my own. They offered me money and total freedom” (Obrist 2008 p. 86-87).

In the exhibition catalogue the company saw a clever marketing parallel with their own policy,

“As businessmen in tune with our times, we at Philip Morris are committed to support the experimental” (Obrist 2008 p. 87)

In consequence they suspended sponsoring any further contemporary art exhibitions, perhaps due to the adverse Swiss and International press, which came with the Szeemann exhibition. Dismayed by the negative reaction to his creative and intellectual efforts with the ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ project from the governors of the Kunsthalle Bern, the Swiss media and the general public, Szeemann resigned and moved on and so by default to become the first independent curator.

With this challenge he immediately set up his ‘The Agency for Spiritual Guestwork’ and co-founded the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art (IKT) in 1969, curated ‘Happenings & Fluxus’ at the Kunstverein in Cologne in 1970, and became the first artistic director of Documenta in 1972, reconceiving it as a 100-day event, which as a format, continues today.

Szeemann’s exhibition making continued until his death in 2005, with further unique exhibitions such as ‘*Bachelor Machines*’ in 1975-77, initiating the first Aperto at the Venice Biennale (with Achille Bonito Oliva, 1980), ‘*The Quest for the Total Work of Art*’ in 1983-84, ‘*Visionary Switzerland*’ in 1991, the Joseph Beuys retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in 1993, ‘*Austria in a Lacework of Roses*’ at the MAK Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna in 1996, and the Venice Biennale in 1999 and 2001 (Müller 2006). Szeemann was a classic child of his time where his left wing politics and ‘hippy’ counter culture attitude are apparent and are reflected in his titles, concepts and ideas for exhibitions.

Szeemann’s resignation from the institution was not just a risk in life and work, but also an important decision for curating. It would in time affect the future practices and professions of the curator. In challenging and adapting the principles of the exhibition by supporting new artistic practices, such as conceptual art and the Fluxus movement, he considerably influenced the production of the exhibition making by inventing the position of the independent worker: the curator, creator, and author of the exhibition, and significantly he preferred to call himself an “exhibition maker” (Müller 2006 p. 6). In shifting the production of art into environment and the duration of the exhibition, he remodeled the alliance between the curator and artist. Again reaffirming the opposition to the establishment of the time but also placing the curator in the same team as the artist. The curator was no longer of the institute but could be one of ‘independence’ like artists, producing their own work from their own ‘obsessions’. In particular, Szeemann is linked to the suggestion that curatorial practice could be considered as “an art of exhibiting” (Müller 2006 p. 7).

Szeemann showed proficiency in his work and life, in that he was simultaneously able to balance personal desires with professional constraints. In asserting his passion and intuition as a curator, in collaboration with the artists and artworks, he established the independent curator’s *métier*. Curators now acknowledge his methods as groundbreaking. They enhanced the



practice, but importantly the support of the institution continued. As the only employee of his Agency, and curating only one exhibition he perhaps reluctantly continued to collaborate with the Swiss institutions. Significantly, the director of the Kunstmuseum in Zurich also employed him as a curator, with independent status. He even had a salary, office space and access to technical support. But this 'collaboration' allowed him to evolve an independent practice that he continued to pioneer (Irving 2010).

If this is acceptable, then the independent status is about creativity, economy and self-sufficiency, it is about independence of structure, thought, creativity and the traditional role of a curator. The institution therefore encouraged the independent curator to develop and practice. The consequence of the perceived death of the curator even in the early 1970s has in essence opened up new pathways and possibilities in which the practice and profession could emerge.

Within his archive it can be noted that Szeemann conserved for himself the materials of curating that would sustain his practice from the public to the private pursuit. This is a significant issue as in this move from the public to the private; the curator retains his intellectual *capital* but also requires organisational and economic assistance to continue the practice. Therefore, the understanding of this specific *capital* and expertise is fundamental to the practice. The tools of the trade; such as mailing lists of artists, dealers, owners, transport companies, funders, charities, critics, magazines, designers, writers, etc; information on budgeting, contracts, loan forms. This knowledge in the commercial sector is guarded and protected but in the public sector, this knowledge is an open source, it requires circulation and digestion to make the practice and profession work effectively but with care.

Moving from analysing the independent curator through the example of Szeemann, I will now consider the practices of two current 'independent' curators, Matthew Higgs and Hans Ulrich Obrist.



(3.4)

Matthew Higgs' (3.4) (born 1964) curatorial practice could be said to have gone full circle with the integration of art and music in his current role as Director of White Columns in New York. His trajectory in the curatorial field over the past 20 years has led him to play a number of creative and professional positions such as artist, writer, publisher, promoter, gallery director, academic, commentator, dj and curator. His initial trajectory from a North England University art education and exiting into a world of self-initiated and self-produced post-punk cultural activities (circa 1985) could be considered as attitude affirming and would be carried through into his professional work. Initially his projects were highly experimental and improvised versions of what he observed, through magazines, exhibitions and knowledge from colleagues. As in all creative practices there requires to be a promotion and then an acceptance by the field players that what someone is offering, plays the game. Higgs, as an individual is a willing player. Building these roles in a constant manner helps to develop a trajectory as a contemporary art professional. He makes experimental projects, which interest him self and thereby developing the cultural and creative field. His continual realigning of his curatorial role through mediated production and location enables him to influence and promote contemporary art worldwide.

This shifting has taken him from artists collectives (City Racing, London) and self publishing (Imprint) into the establishment of curating with the *British Art Show 5* (2000) for the Hayward/Arts Council England, *Protest and Survive* (2000) for the Whitechapel Gallery, London then into the US art establishment of Watts/California College of Arts and Crafts and currently as Director of White Columns, New York.

Higgs was a product of Thatcher's Britain of the late 70's/early 80's when culture changed again with the advent of punk and its more politically advanced and experimental cousin post-punk subcultures, which were a major influence on youth culture. Producing what was seen as radical and subversive to the status quo while also producing significant metropolitan and regional cultural figureheads such as Malcolm McLaren, Vivienne Westwood, Tony Wilson and Peter Saville for example. Taking a lead from counter culture aesthetics, methods and movements, is similar to Szeemann's experience in Central Europe in the 1960's so Higgs found and embraced his attitude (shared with others) to inform his life and artistic and creative production. This attitude of independence, do it yourself and making your own opportunities (what might now be called cultural entrepreneurship, but definitely not at that time) underpinned his work.

Therefore there is a significant observation occurring here which points to the changes and attitudes (artistic, economic and political) in society that the change of creativity, practice and profession of an independent curator (Irving 2010).



(3.5)

Hans Ulrich Obrist's (3.5) (born 1968) practice and professional trajectory is similar to Higgs' in terms of motivation and influence. Coming from a more middle class background Obrist has not obviously embraced the counter cultures like Higgs and Szeemann. Although there is a 'beat like' attitude to his continual early wanderings from project to project. His own formative years were during the mid-80's, which was a time of self driven go getting and power seeking attitude. It could therefore be argued that this is where Obrist's individual drive comes from, he represented the art worker who travelled, had no permanent home, was willing and able to work closely with artists to develop projects outwith institutions.

Following Obrist's Swiss University Economics education he volunteered to help in the Kunstverin Museum, Geneva working alongside the museum curators. His curatorial practice has been an interweaving of self-initiated and institutional roles and projects; hence he has been able to retain his individuality as a well-known curator as well as being accepted into and now a key player in the institutional (Serpentine Gallery, London) structure. His self-motivation also appears to be key in his practice, where he has been continually on the move, as did eventually Higgs, realigning himself within the field. His early association with prominent contemporary artists (such as Christian Boltanski and Fischli/Weiss who were included in Obrist's first documented exhibition *The Kitchen Show* (1991) which was in his St Gallen flat kitchen) enabled him to quickly become a player not just by association but also in his practice as a curator of experimental exhibitions and publications. This early motivation for the alternative and therefore challenging projects also included exhibitions in St Gallen's Monastery library and in Nietzsche's House in Sils Maria near St. Moritz (both 1992).

From this point over the next 20 years Obrist curated over 150 projects and produced a significant series of interviews and publications with artist, architects and curators, which he has declared as an important archive of creative practice. His practice (and life) clearly is a result of his own intuition and tacit knowledge and how he is able to influence the field with energy, discussion and collaboration. The danger perhaps is that what has occurred with Obrist's practice and status in particular is that he has become the epitome of the superstar curator, more famous than the artists that he exhibits. The recent media hype vehicles such as the Art

Review Power 100, has created an influential power list in the art world, claimed to be based on observation not judgement, which Obrist has topped in 2009, and retaining #2 in past years (interestingly Szeemann at #31 in 2002 and Higgs at #43 in 2010) and therefore has been embraced into the current societal obsessions with celebrity (Arts Review 2006/9/10). In these instances it could be argued that the Curator is tainted by the notion of the Über curator, which then becomes about them not the things and experience. This is wrapped up in this Art power social status situation (Irving 2010).

From this narrative and discourse we can now start to identify what defines a successful (both creative and professional) independent curator. Szeemann, Obrist and Higgs have shown significant signs of the sociological benefits as well as creative and tacit traits.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical context and structure for my research was initially drawn to Adorno and Horkheimer theories on the Culture Industry and Alexander Dorner's theories of museum curation, but ultimately Pierre Bourdieu and the more recent Bourdieusean research in the arts by Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy became significant. These theoretical positions were investigated, analysed and applied to my research to understand and identify key theoretical notions occurring in the practice and profession of the independent curator.

Initially the theories and observations of the culture industry by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer were considered as a starting point to understand the initiation and development of the production of art as an industry, which in essence could be believed to be the historical timeline of the current interest in the creative industries. Their theory helped to identify the concept of an 'arts industry', which was influential on the production of art as a recognised economy and as an influence on culture. This was conceived in a time coming out of the Second World War and perhaps there was a need to revitalize culture in a creative and productive way. They proposed the term 'Culture Industry' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944) which they initially conceived as a derogatory term for an art for the Masses which they considered 'impure' in its pursuit of profit and commerce as opposed to the Arts existing as 'an endeavour of utopia, truth and purity and not for mass culture (popular)' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944). Adorno reconciled his proposition as 'actually being a matter of something, that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves' (Adorno 1991 p. 98). However, he further determined that the culture industry was actually worthless as it was uncritical of what was produced and hence only an ideology and not a way towards quality and worth.

This research was useful in terms of understanding the development of the influence and power of the culture industry in society and also in relation to my research questions as it underlines my knowledge of the framework of the industry in providing an important backdrop to the individual players who, within this research are key to understand and observe.

The research was then drawn to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories, which seemed to significantly determine a theoretical understanding of the individual participating in the 'art industry'. Bourdieu's own research into art and culture and significantly for my research his thesis, *The Field of Cultural Production*, on art production present notions of sociological dispositions which propose that an individual's background, education, work, financial status, social endeavours and connections play important roles in considering how and why an individual proceeds in this context.

It is relevant to understand and consider the importance of Bourdieu's theories, as they not only discuss the individual in the field of art but also pinpoint a significant theory of practice in individuals. Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Grenfell and Hardy 2007 p. 28), which determine the *capital, field, habitus* and *doxa* of the individual access this understanding of their position.

I will briefly state the meanings of these terms in relation to Bourdieu's theories.

The term *capital* is generally related to economy and monetary exchange as in the historical invention of capitalism but in the context of my research it is important to recognise that Bourdieu's use of the term is broader and he has stated that *capital* in fact 'defines those forms of exchange which ensure transubstantiation whereby the most material types of *capital* – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa" (Moore 2008 p. 101). Therefore in my research I can identify *capital* as the cultural and social knowledge and skills, which an individual brings to their practice.

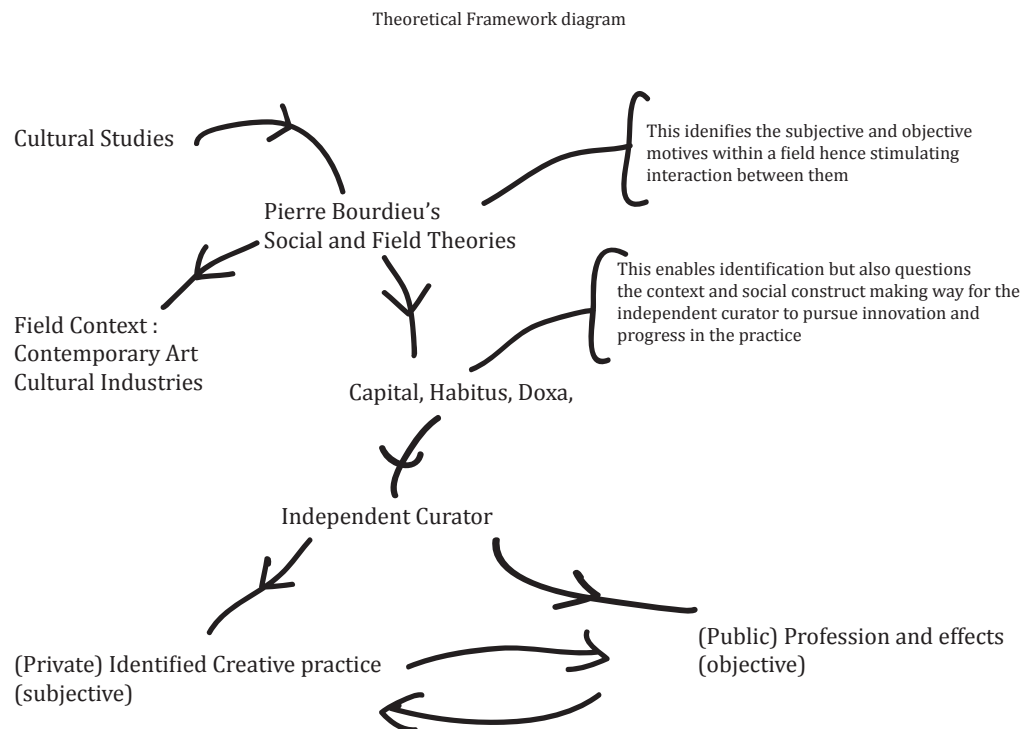
Bourdieu's interpretation of the term *field* relates to social space and the interactions, which happen there. But he didn't just consider this as a convivial image. His use of the term was to describe, quite metaphorically as 'an area of land, a battlefield, inter alia and a field of knowledge" (Thomson 2008 p. 68). The identification and metaphor of the *field* helps my research to determine the parameters and scale of the environment in which the curator occupies.

*Doxa* refers historically to 'intuitive knowledge shaped by experience' (Deer 2008 p. 120) but in Bourdieu's terms '*Doxa* is a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma' (Deer 2008 p. 120). It connects the natural beliefs between people with that of *field* and *habitus*.

Finally, the term *habitus* as Bourdieu states is 'a property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a structuring structure, this structure comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices' (Maton 2008 p. 51). This important concept of *habitus* will be discussed in more detail further in my research but this concept and the identification of a persons *habitus* and dispositions, as Bourdieu states, '(is that) It expresses the result of an organizing action, (and) it also designates a way of being, a habitual state and in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination" (Maton 2008 p. 51).

## The Social and Field Theories of Pierre Bourdieu

The following diagram illustrates the theoretical framework, which has been adopted in my research. It shows the flow and connections, which are made and discussed, within this section.



(4.1)

In Cultural Studies, Pierre Bourdieu's Social and Field theories importantly recognised theories of the dynamics between people and groups of people therefore it is appropriate to apply this thinking to my research. Although his theories are recognised as having close connotations and identity in notions of class and education, this aspect is not directly pertinent to my research. Bourdieu's theories of the individual and their social and professional connections are significantly more important to my defining research.

Firstly, I will briefly consider ideas of his social and field theories (*field, capital, habitus and doxa*) before relating them onto the context of curating. Bourdieu's social and field theories identify the subjective and objective motives within particular contexts, which in turn stimulates interaction between them. This interaction is relational and therefore enables agents to define their position within these contexts or *fields*.

Bourdieu gives a definition of this notion of working in the *field* as –

“A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that determine the positions that they will take with respect to the field, these positions being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constituent of the field” (Bourdieu 2005 p. 30).

The metaphor of the field (such as a football field) helps to capture an image of the power spaces and the players (agents) within it. The agents, it could be inferred, occupy a playing position. Each position carries with it different essential qualities and routes for the agent. The positions that the agent occupies in the *field* are determined by a number of things, which relate to the agents *capital* -

- Cultural *capital* from education, experience and recognition
- Social *capital* through networks of advice and support
- Economic *capital* through status and investment

(Grenfell and Hardy 2007 p. 60 - 61).

Agents who have a stake in the *field* take an objective position but the agent's subjective position in the field is determined by the amount and weight of *capital* they have. *Fields* are constant areas of negotiation, conflict and competition as agents compete to gain influence in the genre of capital to be most affective in their particular *field* (Grenfell and Hardy 2007). For example agents (artists, dealers, curators) in the contemporary art field may use economic and social capital to have some sort of gain on cultural capital.

Bourdieu's significant contribution to social and cultural theory was developed through his empirical studies of museums, the arts and audiences in his key texts – *The Love of Art* (1969/91), *Distinction* (1984), *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996). These studies demonstrated how class, education and social origin structure an individual's experience of culture. In these he identifies the subjective and objective struggle, which exists in the arts and helps us to identify the power structure (and gaps), which the artist (or curator) needs to bridge in their practice.

“The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronymous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. ‘bourgeois art’) and the autonomous principle (e.g. ‘art for art's sake’), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with a degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise” (Bourdieu 1993 p. 40).



In conjunction, Bourdieu has also stated that *habitus* was,

“not only a structuring structure that organises practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes” (Bourdieu 1984 p. 170).

This infers that every individuals background and dispositions are structured or ordered and will situate the individual in their natural *habitus*.

But to help clarify, Karl Maton suggests that,

“Simply put, *habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is an on going and active process – we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making” (Maton 2008 p. 52).

Arguably therefore an agent’s *habitus* can be identified by evidence of their ways of being as well as their previous learning and experience, skills and knowledge, technical and tactical prowess and by also having a “feel for the game” (Maton 2008 p. 54). *Habitus* is therefore our personal development of thoughts and senses and is the relational structure of our social world. It links, connects and consolidates individuals and groups of people. It may even curate us.

-

To briefly illustrate this, I will refer to a project which I curated and managed called ‘Oak Trees and Fountains’ in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland venue, Drum Castle in Aberdeenshire in 2004 (see appendix 2 for further project material).



(4.2)

There were a number of agents in this project; the curator - myself; the artists - David Blyth, Janice McNab, Jim Harold and Victoria Clare Bernie; the funders – Lorraine Grant/Aberdeenshire Council and the Scottish Arts Council and the hosts – The National Trust for Scotland. This scenario, on reflection showed a number of areas (*fields*) in which issues such

as negotiation, conflict and competition were apparent, as the agents tried to gain *capital* for their own agenda.

This project also evolved the adoption of a non-contemporary art institution (heritage) as a site to produce and experience contemporary art in the North East of Scotland in particular. The agents involved were willing to take part in a project which then challenged their own knowledge, skills and decision making (*habitus, doxa, field and capital*), it perhaps was inevitable that issues of conflict and abrasion would come about.

As example –

The Curator offered the hosts and funders an expertise and skill of curating, managing and marketing a project (cultural capital) which was unique to the area and therefore would benefit their own agendas (economic, social and cultural capital) in supporting artists, developing a public programme of events and attracting the public audience to the historic site and its facilities (bookshop, tearoom, gardens, other event). In return the curator therefore gained the funds (economic capital) and site that would enable the curatorial concept (contemporary art in a heritage context) to be made.

In my experience most curatorial projects are a constant dialogue of negotiation, conflict and competition, which tend to become equally balanced and fulfilling in favour of all.

-

Another of Bourdieu's structuring principles, that of *doxa*, which can be defined as "tak(ing) the form of a misrecognized unconditional allegiance to "the rules of the game" on the part of social agents with a similar *habitus*" (Deer 2008 p. 122), is also important to consider as a factor in the creative and cultural *field*. As with *habitus*, adhering to rules for an agent limits the practice and creativity in the *field*, but however in Bourdieu's version of the *field*, which is apparent in the cultural and creative fields, agents do not always agree on the *doxa* or rules. Therefore if one agent decides to change the rules, the others will need to decide (internally and/or collectively) on this change of *doxa*. Within this struggle the agents make use of their power and *capital*, to impose the rules that favour them the most. We generally adhere to the rules of our own game and *field* that we occupy but to enable change, progress, and development in the cultural and creative fields, the individual agents' evolving *habitus* (learning and experience, skills and knowledge, technical and tactical prowess) is the most important and is defining when they want to influence the *field*. What I suggest, might be called an enhanced *habitus* would refer to the agent's creative and intuitive knowledge shaped by experience to influence the *field* of practice. Therefore it is apparent that Bourdieu's thesis is key to determine the position of the individual within the creative and cultural *field*.

Usefully, in summarizing his thinking tools, Bourdieu suggested the following equation as a methodology to evaluate the field.

[(*habitus*)(*capital*)] + field = practice

(Maton 2008 p. 51)

Therefore this can be interpreted as – “practice results from relations between one’s dispositions (*habitus*) and one’s position (*capital*), within the current state of play of that social area (*field*)” (Maton 2008 p. 51) - but the variable of an enhanced individuals *habitus* (intuitive and creative) influence on the *field* is also important to consider.

The context and research studies by Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy in their publication *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* (2007) significantly informed my own understanding of Bourdieu’s theories and in my research of the independent curator by influencing and hence helping to establish a Bourdieusean analysis in this context. Their particular research applies Bourdieu’s theory of practice to the fields of museums (Tate, London and MOMA, New York), painting and photography (Hirst); this demonstrated an understanding of the symbolic capital, position within the field of cultural production and the trajectory of their value over time. Bourdieu’s research method (below) shows an application of a three level analysis suggesting the structure of the field through the interrelationships of the participants and institutions.

“LEVEL 1. Analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power

LEVEL 2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is a site

LEVEL 3. Analyse the *habitus* of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a deterministic type of social and economic condition”

(Grenfell and Hardy 2007 p. 60)

Grenfell and Hardy’s analysis of the institution was particularly useful to consider in relation to the capital of the contemporary art institution and therefore in my research of the relationship between the independent curator and the institution today. Their research makes conclusions that the high volume of symbolic and economic capital derived from the field of power (government/private funding) combined with highly consecrated cultural capital from the art historic field (collection/educational) is formulaic to their achievement and status.

Although they focus particularly on the institution and not the individual their conclusions found that it was through field interactions of the very same fields – culture and artistic consumption, education, government and commerce that the institutions were founded still constitutes the *habitus* of the museums today. Therefore what might be useful to consider in relation to this point is that perhaps a similar established *habitus* exists for the curator; I would

also propose that a specific range of defined criteria be adopted to determine the *field*, *capital*, (enhanced) *habitus* and *doxa* of the individual (independent curator) (see end of this chapter).

It could be argued that capital and power (such as governmental/private funding) is still the most important factor in determining the sustainability of the art infrastructure and without this no other fields would be sustainable (Grenfell and Hardy 2007). But I propose that this doesn't mean that the other important fields (social, creative, cultural and economic) wouldn't exist and have effect.



(4.3, 4.4)

For example, considering the local root level of exhibition making, art students generally have no money when they graduate but lots of collective motivation and creativity. They have developed many useful vehicles for their own and their colleague's work (exhibitions, studios, public/community work, online curating). The proliferation of current Scottish based artist/curator initiatives such as *Transmission* (4.3), *Glue Factory*, *Mary Mary*, *Studio 41*, *Panel*, *Nadfly* in Glasgow; *Collective*, *Embassy Gallery*, *Sierra Metro* in Edinburgh; *Generator* (4.4), *Yuck n' Yum*, *Fleet Collective* in Dundee and recently before their demise, *Limousine Bull* and *Project Slogan* in Aberdeen show that this creativity, motivation and collective purpose exists and in time produces various models, levels and successes of sustainability. These initiatives can invariably become the institutions of power and influence but there is a purposeful and sustainable regeneration of contemporary art practices and professions happening here.

In recent years these Bourdieusean methodological approaches have been applied to research subjects such as fashion (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006) educational management (Gunter 2003), globalized policy making (Lingard and Rawolle 2004) and art institutions (Grenfell and Hardy 2007). However there is no evidence of their application to the practice of curating. Interestingly, the research by Entwistle and Rocamora on the London Fashion Events show has parallels to the contemporary art world.

In their findings Entwistle and Rocamora in summary state that,

“The field of fashion is an elite club, and those that are allowed into it have expectations they must meet. With access to the event comes the responsibility of adhering to the rules which creates a hierarchy of players in this ritual theatre, and expectations of performance, language, and visibility” (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006)

This could well be a discussion of a contemporary art event or opening, where the agents/players enter into a social/professional environment but there being a distinct hierarchy and rules amongst the curators, artists, dealers and other art workers. It is a ritual being played out which has very little to do with the actual content of the exhibition itself.

In conclusion to this section I propose that to determine the dispositions of the independent curator (background, motivation, influences, skills and experience, improvisation and experimentation, value, sustainability of practice and effect) via Bourdieusean signifiers of environment/profession (*field*), individual skills and knowledge (*capital*) and practice (via *habitus and doxa*) the following criteria should be applied. This specific criterion has been informed and determined by way of Bourdieu’s thesis as well as factors from my curatorial research.

**An Independent Curator requires –**

- A historical and current knowledge and alliance with the field of power (BACKGROUND/INFLUENCE)
- Recognition in the field as one who curates (VALUE /INFLUENCE)
- A social and professional position in the field (EFFECT/SUSTAINABILITY OF PRACTICE)
- A proven track record of successful (social/ cultural/economic/political) curated exhibitions and projects (VALUE/EFFECT)
- A location in the field where one curates (INFLUENCE)
- A relentless work ethic (a way of life) (MOTIVATION)
- A creative ability to interweave knowledge, experience and risk (SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE)
- An instinct and ability to change outputs for precision and success (IMPROVISATION AND EXPERIMENTATION)

These criteria are applied to empirical research conducted with current independent curators and is analysed and discussed further in this research.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Cultural Intermediary or The Curator as Cultural Midwife**

This chapter further considers the practice of the independent curator in today's context of institutional power and a socially driven structure of the contemporary art world. The discussion will determine the position of the curator within a social and cultural context while also attempting to determine what the work of a curator is and what motivates them to do what they do. The notion of a cultural intermediary or metaphorically as cultural midwife, is a position that is significant, but there is also an ambition to identify the practice in its own right, that it is something which people do, and not just within the confines of the art institution and service.

The role of the curator, as comedian Stewart Lee recently put it is 'like someone stirring turds in a toilet bowl with a stick. If something is being curated it already seems fixed and decayed' (Lee 2011). A stimulating metaphor but is an old fashioned idea of the curator. It is that of the expert in the museum just shuffling around the collection, trying to breathe life into old artifacts, just like retelling old jokes. This stereotypical view of the curator, especially from someone like Lee, (who's observation seems abit predictable) needs some assessment and reconsideration for today.

In fact Lee is not too far away from the Ancient Roman historical role of the curator as a public official in charge of various departments of public works including sanitation.

As David Levi-Strauss states,

"The *curatores annonae* were in charge of the public supplies of oil and corn. The *curatores regionum* were responsible for maintaining order in the fourteen regions of Rome. And the *curator's aquarum* took care of the aqueducts. In the Middle Ages, the role of the curator shifted to the ecclesiastical, as clergy had a spiritual cure or charge. So it could be said that the occupation of curating - between the management and control of public works (law) and the cure of souls (faith) - was there from the beginning. Curators have always been a curious mixture of bureaucrat and priest" (Levi-Strauss 2006).

But today's curators are and need to be doing something else. It is said that in times of austerity, creativity blooms. Creativity is perhaps our default survival mode. If we can be creative we can help ourselves - it is already having an effect in schools, business, government and hospitals. The public services have discovered that creativity in the work and learning place is crucially more economic as well as social and definitely political. Being creative leads us to "happiness" and we all want to be happy in our life and work. But what is being creative? Is it just about making something with your hands? Or is it something deeper such as the merging of logic and chaos, levels of experimentation and the creation of something new from polar effects.

Creativity can be just rewarding to yourself, giving a sense that you have engaged your mind and body in the activity and maybe share it with others if that matters. Sociologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi rejects the classical notion of the 'creative genius' and puts forward that creativity appears from a particular supportive environment. He argues that creative outputs appear from individuals who have worked hard over the years to master a particular 'symbolic domain' such as art (or curating) and are encouraged by supportive individual, groups and organisations (Gauntlett 2011).

This is interesting, as the core impetus of curating is a certain creativity, which then needs to be managed and supported to exist and be experienced by the audience. As our creativity evolves in one direction or another we become an identified "expert" in the activity or practice. With the midwifery analogy lurking on the horizon, there is a need to consider how curating, creativity and connecting can have an effect on the community.

To introduce the term 'midwife' in association with the practice of curating is to perhaps get closer to the natural awareness of the independent curator while they work in collaboration with other exhibition makers. The term implies nurturing something into life. A midwife (male or female) is not seen as the central participant but they are intrinsic in producing the result. They are experts in this situation and have the tacit knowledge to make certain important decisions as events progress. Therefore it seemed that this metaphor was very appropriate to the curator. They have a fundamental role in the development and production of the 'cultural product' and have the important tacit knowledge and (subjective and objective) skills to employ for the benefit of the projects.

With reference again to the Oak Trees and Fountains project, which I curated at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire in 2004, it could be said that I played the role of the cultural midwife in its production. In reflection there were a number of 'births' as the project developed and became public. The concept came from a discussion with Lorraine Grant, Aberdeenshire Arts Officer to curate a project in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland. There was some initial coaxing required in terms of the benefits of showing a number of contemporary artists in the context of Drum Castle in our discussions with the National Trust. They became particularly interested in the possible increase in visitor numbers and fundraising, but we also needed to satisfy them with our past experience and how artists would produce their work for their environment. Therefore there was a need to trust us as the curators that the work would be worthwhile and not inappropriate to their own standards and requirements. This was also important to us as curators to know what our parameters were and how much we were allowed to do but also as time went on, how these parameters could be pushed to improve the quality and experience of the project. The introduction of the selected artists was also a situation, which could be interpreted as midwifery. The artists selected had already accepted through the public call for artists that their research methods and creative practice would be 'opened up' and made visible for the context of this project. Therefore our nurturing of the artists to adopt particular

sites and materials for their work could already be 'controlled' and guided for the benefit of the complete project. As their work developed they seemed content to rely on our 'safe hands' to help them produce their work. In turn when we needed them to produce (or push) visuals, information, texts, interviews and their finished work they were obliging, as we perceived that we were on the same team, working together to make things happen. Therefore in this project it became important that the collaborators of the project worked in synchronization, as a team but we were also able to step change when required and there was a certain rhythm to its production. In reflection this natural awareness, maybe is why some projects are more successful than others, as this notion can be experienced when it goes well.

Bourdieu introduced the term 'cultural intermediary' which relates to his comments on the 'new petite bourgeoisie', a new faction of middle-class workers that has grown in size and influence since the middle of the twentieth century. It refers to those workers engaged in 'occupations involving presentation and representation . . . providing symbolic goods and services' (Bourdieu 1984 p. 359).

This term helps in one way to identify and define the occupation and role of a number of 'agents' within the creative and cultural industries context, who have entered the industry with personal ambition and with tacit knowledge, creativity and skills. In time they have gained specific detailed experience, which can establish but in time weigh down their activities. This term might also direct these ambitions into the status quo, the systems and procedures, which exist in the production and controlled consumption of projects. Any creativity and invention can be quickly absorbed into the over-organized and staid mainstream. But there is also a convenience to the cultural intermediary title, which implies that there is culture to mediate, a job to be done, which will never end, until culture ends. So the role can be seen as a good thing, helping to organize and connect the activities, while also becoming a unique conduit between the producers (artists) and consumers (audience).

There are two ways to consider this idea that the curator is a cultural intermediary - one that he/she is within the 'institution' and another that he/she is 'independent' or 'freelance'. Interestingly, Bourdieu also points out that, 'agents endeavour to produce jobs adjusted to their ambitions rather than adjust their ambitions to fit already existing jobs, to produce the need for their own product by activities which may be initially voluntary... but aim to be imposed as public services' (Bourdieu 1984 p. 359). The habitus of a cultural intermediary could therefore be expressed again as in-between production and consumption.

Therefore, what is this significant role of the cultural intermediary, which Bourdieu identifies? Who is determining that role? Is it given, applied for or is it self-appointed? Bourdieu points out that this role can be created by the practitioner or adjusted to their ambitions rather than adjust their ambitions to fit already existing jobs. By producing the need for their own product by activities, which are maybe initially voluntary, they aim to impose them as 'public services', which are then officially recognised and more or less become completely state-funded,



in accordance with a classic process of professionalisation.

Negus states that, “In Bourdieu’s formulation, cultural intermediaries are characterized as occupying a position where ‘jobs and careers have not yet acquired the rigidity of the older bureaucratic professions’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 151). Entry into these occupations is usually via networks of connections, shared values and common life experiences. Gaining access to work is less dependent upon a meritocracy or assessment and recruitment according to formal qualifications” (Negus 2002 p. 511)

Essentially, the much often repeated statement ‘it is not what you know but whom you know’. Therefore it could be stated that the cultural intermediary/midwife is now an identified integral position in the gap between production and consumption, where a role can be created which suits the ambitions (chosen practice, work load, collaboration, payback) and that is in itself identified as of significant importance in the flow of production to the potential consumer within its field.

There is hence a shift from a unidirectional model (artist to consumer) to one where the cultural intermediary/midwife is continually making links, looking for opportunities, interpreting and articulating the work of the producer to the demand of the client or audience. Working with these demands brings the creative, economic and social practice (*capital*) together where one is interdependent of the other (Negus 2002).

But surely today’s cultural intermediary/midwife is one who is not only a creative problem-solver and team player but that their own practice is their *métier*, ‘a way of life’. The importance of their practice to them makes it highly authentic and believable. Most curators (and artists) would believe that their practice is their way of life, their *métier*, or essentially ‘finding the element in our selves’ as Sir Ken Robinson has said (Robinson 2010 p. 251).

At this point it should be asked, what understanding does identifying the cultural intermediary’s have on the definition an independent curator? The cultural intermediaries identity appears to exist not only in the individual but also in a team of players, whose job it is to carryout various creative, logical and professional tasks. This job description rings true for the institutional curator, as well as in an independent curator but the independent curator’s practice also requires the notion of cultural and economic entrepreneurship.

Helpfully, Pierre Bourdieu has noted that the curator’s cultural meaning and value to the making of art and artists: the subject of the production of the artwork – of its value but also of its meaning – is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the *field*.

“Among these are the producers of works, classified as artists...critics of all persuasions...collectors, middlemen, curators, etc.; in short, all those who have ties with art, who live for art and, to varying degrees, from it, and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a worldview but also a

vision of the art world is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art” (Bourdieu 1993 p. 261)

Therefore, to progress and sustain a curatorial practice the individual needs to develop creative models of curatorial practice, not only within the perhaps financially supporting traditional ‘institutional’ *doxa* but ones which stimulate the individual *habitus* of the curator to benefit our everyday life in our communities. By planting the practice of the independent curator/cultural midwife into the heart of our social and cultural communities, the latter could identify and authorize a legitimate role of the curator, as a catalyst, and one who gives socio-cultural value to our lives.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Independent curators in Scotland:**

#### **Context, review, analysis and findings**

In this chapter, with the context of models of independent curators, Bourdieu's social and field theories and the position of the cultural intermediaries/midwives in mind, my research methodology will now apply the various strata of interaction via Bourdieusean analysis as well as factors from my curatorial research, between the *capital*, *habitus* and *doxa* of an (independent) curator, field of power (position/influence) field of culture (curating), field of location ((Scottish) environment) and field of economy (cultural industries), to create and develop my research findings in relation to the current practices of independent curators in Scotland.

#### **Context and Criteria**

My research survey was carried out following a period of research into the models and contexts of the independent curator and a study of Pierre Bourdieu's social and field theories. To restate, Bourdieu's theory was adopted as a key theoretical underpinning for the research because of its hypothesis of the influence to a person's power and capital through their (*habitus*) social, cultural and professional context.

The survey questions acknowledge the determining criteria of an individual's *habitus*, and they were composed to verify the following issues of the respondent's curatorial practice - background, motivation, influences, skills and experience, improvisation and experimentation, value, sustainability of practice and effect. These issues give details of the respondent's personal and professional context, their perceptions of the motivations, influences and ambitions of their curatorial practice and their concepts of the value and effect that their practice produces. They also were asked to respond in agreement or disagreement to my core statements about the practice of an independent Curator (see previous criteria list p. 28).

The following section states the context and criteria followed by a discussion and statement of the findings.

The core focus group were a number of individual participants of the *Framework* curatorial group (<http://framework.parallellines.org.uk>), during August and September 2011. These respondents were considered as the core group as they had all marked themselves out as independent curators by attendance and participation at *Framework*. The core group consisted of 12 people from the group.



(6.1)

The survey was distributed to this core group on 4th October 2011. 91% (10 of 11) responded positively to complete the survey and 45% (5) had fully completed the survey by 21st November 2011.

There was also a second distribution of the survey to individuals who were not part of the *Framework* group but who were working in a curatorial position either purely independently or in an organisation in Scotland, which was of an independent status (i.e. those whose main funding did not come directly from Government such as museums and major galleries but who's programme is developed through various funding sources and is therefore needs to be fluid). These potential respondents were all based in various parts of Scotland including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Shetland, Orkney, Stornoway and Huntly. This group consisted of 34 people. The survey was distributed to this group on 11th October 2011. 68% (23 of 34) responded positively to complete the survey and 29% (10) had fully completed the survey by 21st November 2011. Overall there were 33% (16 of 45) of full replies.

The *Framework* curatorial group participants were an effective core focus group for this research as the structure had come together through the identification of a current need to recognise the diverse, innovative and ambitious practice across Scotland, alongside the lack of a sustained platform in which to jointly discuss curatorial practice and define this work within a wider international context. What was clear with the core group was their self-identification as those who curate and hence were ambitious to make their position clearer within the contemporary art context, working in Scotland but also having an International standing.

Most were still developing as a curator, mostly being a few years out of higher education but each one was looking for new opportunities and a new identity for their curatorial practice. The wider group of respondents were mostly established as curators or exhibition makers. They had progressed into paid employment after many years of unpaid and voluntary practice

primarily because they were excited and motivated to do it. Their motivations were stimulated from working directly with contemporary art practice, through artists, galleries, and artist led initiatives. To get to the heart of their curatorial practice my survey questions were strategically structured around the concepts of *field, capital, habitus and doxa* to focus on an essence of their curatorial practice as opposed to the economics of curating as purely as a profession (salary, employment conditions, structure etc)

-

The following findings have been drawn from the curating survey (appendix 1) conducted and are reviewed below, for common values and ideas. Following each section there are concluding statements on each criteria.

### **Background**

***Can you briefly tell me about your background, where, when and what subjects have you formally studied and how did you start your curating?***

Most of the respondents were formally educated in Universities and Art colleges in UK and Scotland. The courses were predominately art practice biased and most went on to do PG/MA in specific art/curatorial practice. Some had started in art history/ museum/ languages/ cultural studies areas. What stood out was that no one stated any relevant activity that was pre-higher education having an effect on his or her chosen practice, therefore it could be suggested that curating like art practice requires an social/ cultural knowledge based approach to be meaningful with a degree of maturity and experience of the art world and its workings.

### **Conclusion**

Studying a formal Arts Degree and Higher specific Arts/Curatorial qualifications places the practitioner into a creative and semi-professional context where curatorial practice is identified and experienced. Potential curators are intellectually and creatively drawn to this practice and develop collaborations with other artists during higher education. This initial exposure to curatorial activity motivates involvement with self-initiated projects and leads to become more formally involved with galleries and art projects. There is a pattern of the curators finding their own element or position through this process. They become involved in a context of similarly educated and experience partners, which creates its own environment and interest groups.

## **Motivation**

### ***What motivates you to curate and what are the benefits to you personally in curating?***

To the majority of the respondents, their curatorial practice began as a necessity; it was something they wanted to do, transpiring during their courses, such as organising degree shows and course projects. Some made the early realisation that they didn't want to make artwork but wanted to realize the work of others in exhibitions and projects. This experience from organizing student shows, artist run spaces in Scotland and internationally (following study abroad) seems significant in the respondent continuing or pursuing the curatorial practice route.

Few identified that their practice was called "curating" at the time. It was art practice or arts management; latterly more newly qualified respondents used the term curator and were comfortable with it. It took time for others to make the jump and publicly state that what they were actually 'curators', even though they had been practicing curating and producing exhibitions and projects for themselves and institutions for a time. There was a significant personal drive for the respondents to develop the ecology of the activity, through opportunities, formal posts, temp posts or creating own opportunities with other colleagues. Some began to realize that their art practice was and is now curatorial and made the conscious decision to declare that curating was their creative practice.

The findings on the motivations to curate and hence what were the personal benefits showed an overwhelming need to work in collaboration with others, particularly the artist, as this brought the curator nearer to the artwork. A fixation on the artwork as a thing of value and a source of knowledge enabled the respondents to discover, and promote an intellectual discourse through the exhibition/curating process. Many also expressed the 'enjoyment' in the creative and practical process, the problem solving and logistics of the process. The intellectual benefits of reaching into a subject and through the curating process revealed new perspectives to artwork, which were then disseminated to the audience, hence the sharing of the knowledge. Therefore the key motivations were the creative and logistical processes with the intellectual re-reading of the ideas of art into something that was a new attitude and experience.

## **Conclusion**

Curatorial practice and the curator is motivated by the closeness experienced to contemporary art and artists. This closeness or compatibility manifests as excitement and creative stimulation in being a collaborator with art as well as being involved in the critical discourse

which art produces. This involvement motivates the curator to produce more encounters whether passive or direct. There is a suggestion that the curator's role is more pro active in developing critical debate than an artist. The rebirth or unfolding of curatorial projects with attention to new formats and ways of seeing and experiencing art evolve the practice and the discourse of art in context.

### **Influences**

***Can you tell me what exhibitions/projects influenced you when you began curating and what continues to influence your practice?***

The influences on the respondents own curatorial practice came from personal first hand experiences of exhibitions and artwork, whether it was good or bad. These experiences have stayed with the respondent as some sort of marker of creativity, value and the possibilities of curating and art making. It was also crucial that on-going practice would be improved and produces enhanced experiences through continued creative development. There was also a strong influence of recommendations for exhibitions/ideas from artists, friends and peers. This knock on effect of what is 'good and bad' could create a circular (repetitive) motion of particular types of projects and experiences continuing to be produced therefore becoming boring, bland and introverted.

Particular self experiences in various countries with other artists and curators was influential in creating new ideas and connections. Also important were the use of new formats through which curating can be viewed and experienced (such as physical and virtual spaces), personal experience gained from others' practices and their ways of thinking, determining new connections and therefore an understanding of making projects relevant. The need to continue on from the work and influence of others in terms of creativity and ideas was apparent (hence creating a history of the practice) but there was significant understanding also in the need to improve the practice for enhanced knowledge and experience.

### **Conclusion**

The creative and critical practices of others (contemporary artists, contemporary curators and peers) have major influences on the curatorial interests of the curators. The need to see, experience and diagnose others' creative and managerial processes, conceptualizing, methodologies and physical outputs are important in knowing what, how and why you curate. The territories of experience and influence are well within the field of contemporary art, where the practice reflects itself

through further curated projects. This currency of creative and critical knowledge is important to sustain in curating further projects.

### **Skills and Experience**

***Do you think that you have relevant skills and experience to curate, what do you believe these to be?***

An overwhelming majority believed that they had the skill set to curate. Many learnt on the job, reeling off the need for skills in research, managing, communication, writing, mediating, funding etc. Many expressed the need to have these skills, as they are essential, pragmatic and enabled you to get things done. But a few challenged these and questioned the requirement to have this skill set acknowledged as such, as this would give way to new methods of production, thinking and ultimately experience. By determining these predominant skills there was a danger that it would neutralise the mode of working therefore by breaking these would challenge the preconceptions of what curating is.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary curatorial practice requires elemental skills of intellect, creativity, socializing and practicality. These qualities are gained through previous work or training but mostly they are learned through experiences of project making. It is expected that the curator will have the fundamental skills which make the projects happen but they also need to display instinctive decision-making and creativity. This is vital to instil confidence with the artists and collaborators in producing successful new projects. Knowledge of what is currently happening in the field is essential for motivation. Current curators are confident with their skills but look to the artist as someone to give this acknowledgement. The ambition for improved intellectual and academic skills are evident as this is a way in which the traditional modes of operation can be challenged and overtaken.

### **Improvisation and Experimentation**

***Does your practice involve methods of improvisation and experimentation, if so how and why do you implement such methods?***



There was an overwhelming agreement that curating has high levels of improvisation and experimentation to achieve creativity and new formats of outputs. This practice of improvisation and experimentation led to new methods of process, which were thought to produce risk and unexpected results for the better. As in art practices the need to be open and initially uncertain so that creativity will be produced/result was important. But there must also be a sense of control in the openness particularly in the institution, as it is less open to the potential of failure. This method of creativity supports the artist in their creativity of art making and ultimately the curatorial experience. It helps to bring out the artists intentions and to escape the normalised formats and methods of a curated project. There were strong ideas of the journey or the bespoke nature of the process of projects as it was important to break from the comfortable solutions, thereby leading to a more interesting working process and therefore outcomes. The responses to experimentation and improvisation were interesting but contradictory in terms of counteracting the pragmatic methods and attitudes of the skill set required.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary curatorial practice requires experimentation and improvisation. There are intrinsic creative responses, which the curator makes in collaboration with others to develop and formulate the outcomes. These conditions enable the creativity and interest of the curator to be fully enhanced and so producing the best curatorial outcome. Experimental and improvisational methods also produce significant outcomes for the artist, dynamic synergies with the artwork, fully enhances the audience experience, draws most value from resources and most importantly creates new curatorial methods to be tested and adopted.

### **Value**

***What do you believe is the value of your curatorial practice in creative, cultural, economic, social and/or political terms? What are the values to you personally?***

The values of their practice could be categorized by being in public and in private. There was a general agreement that the creativity of the projects, including the artists and audience, would produce value for economical, social and political reasons. This was important in the sustainability of the practice, its recognised value from others, the expectation of others, that the curator (or as one mentioned, editor) had integrity and passion for the (local) context/scene/production. The private value was considered an important space and time to be innovative, to be creative and to explore the innovative possibilities, ideas and experiences in curating. Therefore curatorial practice had value for the individual to explore their creative

interests and enquiries. The value also came through the investigation of the ways art can cross into other spheres and have relevance by creative projects creating history, legacy, product and new innovation.

### **Conclusion**

The values of curating are two-fold, even opposing. They manifest in the private experience byway of the creative, intellectual and 'free' activities of the curator. They also exist in the public experience where curatorial practice is the trigger for production to enhance the broader environment.

### **Sustainability of practice**

#### ***How do you continue to do your practice?***

With the sustainability of their practice the emphasis was on paid employment as this freed up the thinking space, motivation to work with others and produce innovation. This employment gave a level of comfort and buoyancy to practice independently and to create new work. A high level of doing things in what ever way is available was also prominent, in scale, self-funding and a do it yourself attitude. But having money (income, savings, grants) enabled sustainability of day-to-day existence and of projects. Working with others, discussion, collective work, awareness of other's doing their practice sustained enthusiasm and motivation to practice.

### **Conclusion**

Curatorial practice is a creative and intellectual activity, which is maintained by the curator's passion and need to curate. Similar to an artist's self produced economy, the independent curator will support their practice through related and non-related paid employment. The personal payback in practicing curating sustains the practice.

### **Effect**

#### ***When and how do you know when your curatorial projects are effective and rewarding?***

Considering the effect and success of their practice was again through an in private and in public context. What was particularly important was making the artist 'happy', when it all goes according to plan, but also an element of the unexpected that was unanticipated made it successful. A process of self-reflection and assessing in relation to self made aims and goals

enabled a private understanding of the practices success. In public it was the general audience and peer feedback responses, further discussion, not being ignored for work produced and the possibility of follow up projects and working together that evidenced this success.

### **Conclusion**

In private, making the artist happy is key to the practice. In public the practice requires feedback on the work produced as evidence of some sort of success (or failure).

### **Conclusions of the survey**

In this survey I also proposed some core criteria in which I asked for agreement or disagreement from the respondents to the core requirements of an independent curator based on Bourdieu's hypothesis of the influence to a person's *capital/habitus* through their social, cultural and professional context. This drew out the following findings -

An Independent curator requires –

#### **AGREE**

- A creative ability to interweave knowledge, experience and risk
- A relentless work ethic (a way of life)
- A instinct and ability to change outputs for precision and success

#### **EQUAL AGREEMENT**

- A social and professional position in the field
- A proven track record of successfully curated exhibitions / projects

#### **DISAGREE**

- A historical and current knowledge and alliance with the field of power
- A recognition in the field as one who curates
- A position and location in the field where one curates

In reflection of these responses, the overall agreement is that the core dispositions of an independent curator is someone who could be said to have high motivation and ability to be creative with knowledge, be confident and instinctive with this ability but also have high skills in judging quality as projects are developed and completed. The suggestion is also that they need a certain position in the *field*, which is both social (private) and professional (public), which in time therefore encourages a personal ecology of practice and profession. What is also significant from these responses is the disagreement of acknowledgment of *capital* in association and position within the formal or established structure of the curating field.

This enables us to determine that in reflection of their practice and profession an independent curator is self-conscious of their position of power (*capital*) and will detract from positioning themselves higher than the artist. They infer that their creative practice is the most important aspect of what they do and combined with influential knowledge and experience of the activities of the field they see that this is their position. The fact that they appear not to agree that the positions of power and the position of 'the curator' were important and correlates with the respondent's reluctance to be named as 'a curator'. It also therefore appears that the curator's title but not practice was an issue of careerism and status, which the majority were against.

Crucially, this survey enabled a repositioning of the core criteria in my definition of an independent curator.

## Conclusion

To conclude, what has become clear from this research is that even in attempting to define the subject it is still difficult to bridge the perception and the reality of the practice from those who do it.

Linking back to my initial research aims and questions which were to define an independent curator byway of questioning the practice, methods and effects, social and creative issues, current creative and critical methods and the tensions, contradictions and benefits in independent curating, this research has enabled an informed and systematic deconstruction of independent curatorial practice,

My own curatorial practice evolved in a sporadic but creative and beneficial way, but now it seems things are different (more opportunities, acknowledgement through recent discourse and academic curating courses), or are they?

My research methodologies have formulated a definition of an independent curatorial practice primarily through Bourdieu's thinking tools (*capital, field, habitus and doxa*), that we derive our practice and profession on the nature of social experience and our connection with others. Bourdieu's theories on the social dispositions of an individual underpinned my research and gave meaning to the understanding of our connections (*doxa, habitus, field*) influences (*doxa, capital*), power (*capital*) and skills (*habitus*). Bourdieu's thinking tools validated a theoretical framework to apply to the current practices of the independent curator and hence determine their understanding and if indeed they are relevant to this current practice.

By identifying that a curator's *field, habitus, doxa* and *capital* can determine a curators practice (private) and profession (public) there is something to be gained in how a curator can then adapt their *habitus* to initiate and apply their skills, knowledge and social connections to produce their individual practice.

My research methods and findings enabled me to identify and quantify a curator's *habitus*, as the important factor in their practice but what became more difficult to pinpoint is how to identify the influential social dispositions that an independent curator working in the field of contemporary art. The artists, peers and professions with which the curator connects can imply these. As a curator, there is need to be between things, working in the space between. These social traits therefore can be read as subjective and sometimes 'invisible', as they are a construct. This is evidenced in the curating survey findings, which are positively weighed towards the conditions of the practice, which are socially and creatively produced. This is subjective in nature therefore is not confrontational and is without conflict, even without authority, but the agreement is that it is required and important for the enhancement of the practice.

The other undeniable Bourdieuian aspect of independent curatorial practice is the influence of *capital*. Public exhibitions and projects require money and power as well as social

and creative *capital* but it could be argued that the success of curating and its outputs arrive from a combination of the creative and the economical, and blending of the private and the public - the practice and the profession.

These two apparent aspects of independent curating may appear to be opposite in their purpose therefore the notion of an intermediary or as I have put it more metaphorically, midwife, adds another important observation to the practice of an independent curator. This dimension seemed to go unsaid from the responses in my curating survey. The curator is evidently the intermediary between the artist and the public and this is evidenced by the curating survey responses, which mention assisting and supporting the artist (appendix 1 p. 71), as well as enabling the public to experience the exhibition or artwork (appendix 1 p. 68). Therefore this aspect of intermediary between practice and public is inherent for all curators.

When asked, today's independent curator challenges the perception of a curator (and curating) by questioning its current procedures and role. The practice has always been seen as one that takes care of things (objects), but this now also, it appears, to apply to the social aspects of the practice by taking care of the (happy) artist (appendix 1 p. 75/76), the creative aspects in taking care of production and discourse (appendix 1 p. 60) and in the professional aspects of taking care of the business of curating which leads to peer and public acknowledgment (appendix 1 p. 62/63/75/76).

In questioning the tensions, contradictions and benefits, my research found that independent curating requires elements of risk, experimentation and even serendipity particularly within the practice (private) as a means to stand out from the traditional curators role. This area of tension, which could be seen as abrasive or an area of resistance between the independent curator and the profession can be seen to be a route to new practices and new public experiences of curating and artwork.

In analysing the definition it is undeniably important to consider being 'independent' in this context. Being independent is not being independent of others. To be independent you need to be connected, known, part of a larger field of curating activity. To be a curator doesn't mean that that is what you are called, in fact it seems that it's less problematic, with your peers if you are not. Szeemann did not just call himself 'an exhibition maker' as some sort of self conscious positioning, even in the late 1960's he may already have perceived the future role of this new profession. My curating survey shows that this is also the case; to be independent is also to be free of the traditional curator's legacy and 'the dominant ideologies' (appendix 1 p. 69).

Independence is also a state of mind in practice whether working in or out with an institution. Being independent of the institution enables the curator to develop experimental and innovations of practice, such as the ones by Szeemann, Obrist and Higgs. But this independence of ideas, thought and creativity ultimately becomes attractive and compelling to the institution and the independent curator is invited into this environment, and with it comes power through association and capital. This then changes the practice and it becomes a

profession. This again becomes clear through the analysis and mapping of the Szeemann, Obrist and Higgs models. They showed an essential acknowledgment and understanding of the field of play, but they also prioritised their freedom before entering into the profession and connections with the institution, which enabled them to control their position in the contemporary art system. They essentially played the game but within their practice enhanced their own *habitus* by being innovative and developing their curatorial practice from within the institution.

The practice it seems, still wants to be 'free'. But as my curating survey suggests there appears to be a danger zone (which could also be identified as this area of abrasion/resistance), which if crossed into has positive and negative effects on the practice and also the practitioner and their relationship with others (artists, curators, public). These effects can be advantageous (subjective) in terms of changing the rules and so initiating new ideas and creativity in a more public and professional environment and those associated with it, or a disadvantage (objective) as a compromise to the existing methods and traditions while even abandoning the importance of one's credibility and integrity with dependable peers.

The independent curators who are not directly associated with an institution are therefore able to act with a subjective freedom and enhancement of practice, which allows them to experiment and 'escape (the) normalised methods of curating' (appendix 1 p. 69). If they are in association with an institution they become bound by the 'publicness' of the situation, where the projects will require being objective, compromised and negotiated in their development, delivery and presentation.

In essence today's independent curators express that they are more disconcerting about playing the game, as evidenced in the responses to my analysis. It seems by showing a mirror to current practitioners they prefer to ignore these positions of power and in place have faith in their creativity, risk and their ability to side step these systems. Therefore this may lead to a certain doubt in applying certain aspects of Bourdieu's thinking tools (*capital*, *doxa* and *field* but enhancing the awareness and notion of *habitus*) in this context. But it could also be ultimately argued that within their own peer systems there is a certain Bourdieusean influence present in relation to *doxa* and *capital* and within which will ultimately determine their position, values and success.

To finally conclude, my research now allows me to determine that the independent curator works in and between fields of social, creative and professional activity – practice and profession. What appears to be unique is the identification of a curatorial 'practice', and that its existence is crucial to the independent curator as their *habitus* or as a way of being. Curating is no longer just a profession within the institution (although not isolated from it) but now readily exists outwith these confines as a more fluid set of opportunities and contexts. The independent curator therefore needs to position themselves within this network of opportunities and connections to receive recognition, value and sustainability to their chosen and dedicated

practice. The public profession is the collaborations, the gaining of experience and the recognition as a curator from the field. Therefore there are a number of identified requisites, to exist as an independent curator, which are listed below as a working definition, that can be evaluated by both the potential curator and the collaborator (artist, industry, institution, public) to enable an understanding of the specific dispositions which are required and can be expected to receive from the independent curator.

An independent curator requires -

### In Practice (private):

- To be creative with knowledge
- To be independently spirited
- To embrace risk and serendipity
- To expect that curatorial practice is a way of life and being
- To create a position and location in the field where one practices
- To be acknowledged by peers as one who curates with sensibility and passion

### In Profession (public):

- To be socially connected to the profession
- To sense, produce and communicate connections
- To be acknowledged as one who can curate with creativity and integrity
- To develop and sustain personal experience of practice and profession in the field
- To diplomatically challenge and reposition curatorial practice with knowledge
- To develop a productive (individual and intermediary) position in relation to the profession and the its field of power and influence



## Reference list

- ADORNO, T and HOCKHEIMER, M., 1944/2002. *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford Uni Press.
- ADORNO, T., 1991. *The Culture Industry*, London: Routledge.
- ANDREASEN, S and BANG LARSEN, L., 2007. *The Middleman: Beginning to talk about mediation*, in O'NEILL, P. (ed). *Curating Subjects*, London: Open Editions.
- ART REVIEW., 2006. Issue 5, November, London: Art Review Ltd.
- ART REVIEW., 2009. Issue 36, November, London: Art Review Ltd.
- ART REVIEW., 2010. Issue 45, November, London: Arts Review Ltd.
- BOURDIEU, P., 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul.
- BOURDIEU, P., 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P., 2005. *The Political Field, The Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field*, in BENSON, R, and NEVEU, E. (eds). *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Cambridge: Polity.
- CZEGLEDY, N., 2002. *The Myth and Mischief Maker*, in THOMAS, C, (ed). *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*. Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press.
- DEER, C., 2008. *Doxa*, in GENFELL, M. (ed). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. London: Acumen Press.
- DERIEUX, F., 2007. *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier.
- ENTWISTLE J and RACAMONA, A., 2006. *The Field of Fashion Materialized*, Sociology London; Sage. Available from <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/40/4/735.full.pdf+html> [cited 29/01/13]
- GAUNTLETT, D., 2011. *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to You Tube and Web 2.0*, Cambridge: Polity.
- GRENFELL, M and HARDY, C., 2007. *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*, Oxford: Berg.
- GUPTA, A., (ed). 2008. *Death of the Curator*, Texas: Art Lies, A Contemporary Art Quarterly, No.59.
- HESMONDHALGH, D., 2006. *Bourdieu, the media and cultural production*, Media Culture Society, London: Sage, 28 p. 211 – 231.
- IRVING, I., 2011. *The Village Curator*, in AGNEW, M. (ed.) *Hurricane Lamb at Duff House*, Aberdeen: RGU IDEAS Research Institute.
- IRVING, I., 2010. *Evaluation Report: Essays on Independent Curators - Appendix 2*. Unpublished PGCert, Robert Gordon University.
- KOWALSKI, MJ., 2010. *The Curatorial Muse*, London: Contemporary Aesthetics. Available from: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=585> [cited 02/11/10]

- LEE, S., 2011. *Joking apart*, London: The Financial Times Ltd, FT.com. Available from - <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a8066bc2-6b9e-11e0-93f8-00144feab49a.html#axzz1KIVZEgXH> [cited 26/05/12]
- LEVI-STRAUSS, D., 2006. *The Bias of the World: Curating After Szeemann & Hopps*, New York, The Brooklyn Rail. Available from - <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2006/12/art/the-bias-of-the-world> [cited 06/05/12]
- MARINCOLA, P., (ed). 2001. *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative.
- MATON, K., 2008. *Habitus*, in GENFELL, M. (ed). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. London: Acumen Press.
- MOORE, R., 2008. *Capital*, in GENFELL, M. (ed). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. London: Acumen Press.
- MÜLLER, H.J., 2006. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz
- NEGUS, K., 2002. *The work of cultural intermediaries and the enduring distance between production and consumption*, in *Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge; 16: 4, p. 501 – 505.
- OBRIST, H. U., 2008. *A Brief History of Curating*, Dijon, Les Presses du Reel.
- ROBINSON, K., 2010. *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, London: Penguin.
- RUGOFF, R., 1999. *Rules of the Game*, London: Frieze, 44.
- SCHUMPETER, J., 1952. *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*, London: Unwin University.
- THOMAS, C. (ed)., 2002. *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*. Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press.
- THOMSON, P., 2008. *Field*, in GENFELL, M. (ed). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. London: Acumen Press.

## **Bibliography**

- ALTHUSER, B., 1994. *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New art in the 20th Century*, New York: Harry N Abrams.
- BILLING J, LIND M AND NILSSON L (eds)., 2007. *Taking the matter into common hands*, London: Black Dog Publishing.
- BOURDIEU, P and DARBEL, A., 1991. *The Love of Art*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- BOURDIEU, P., 1996. *The Rules of Art*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- CURTIS, P., 1996. *Private View*, exhibition catalogue, Leeds: Henry Moore Institute.
- DE CERTAU M, trans RENDALL S.F., 1984. *The Practice of everyday life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- DORNER, A., 1947. *The Way Beyond 'Art: the Work of Herbert Bayer*, New York, Wittenborn, Schultz Inc.
- FARGERBERG, J., 2009. *A Guide to Schumpeter*, University of Oslo, Available from: [http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence\\_Fagerberg.pdf](http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Confluence_Fagerberg.pdf) [cited 29/01/13]
- GARNHAM, N., 2005. *From Cultural to Creative Industries: An analysis of the implications of the "creative industries" approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom*, International Journal of Cultural Policy, Vol.11, No.1, London: Routledge.
- GREENBERG, R, FERGUSON, B and NAIRNE, S, (eds)., 1996. *Thinking About Exhibitions* London and New York: Routledge.
- HESMONDHALGH, D., 2002. *The Cultural Industries*, London: Sage.
- HOFFMANS, J., 2007. *A Certain Tendency of Curating*, in O'NEIL, P, (ed). *Curating Subjects*, London: Occasional Table/Open Editions.
- HUGHES, L., 2005. *Do we need new spaces for exhibiting contemporary art? A critique of curatorial practice in relation to the viewer's engagement with contemporary art*, London: Journal of Visual Art Practice 4:1.
- HYDE L., 2006. *The Gift*, Edinburgh: Cannongate Ltd.
- HYDE L., 2008, *Trickster makes this world*, Edinburgh: Cannongate Ltd.
- IRVING, I. 2009-2013. *Iain Irving Research and Projects*, self-published research website. Available from <http://iainirvingresearchandprojects.wordpress.com>
- JENKINS, S., 2010. *As they bow to London's arts mafiosi, the Tories still handcuff the provinces*, London: The Guardian. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/21/london-arts-mafiosi-spending-cuts> [cited 02/11/10]
- KARABA E AND YIAKOUMAKI N (eds)., 2004/7. *Feedback #4: Ideas that inform, construct and concern the production of exhibitions and events*, UK: Feedback.
- KRZYS ACORD, S., 2010. *Beyond the Head: The Practical Work of Curating Contemporary Art*, Available from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11133-010-9164-y>

[cited 10/08/2012].

LAKOFF, G. & JOHNSON, M., 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

LEWIS, J., 1990. *Art, Culture and Enterprise, Politics of art and the cultural industries*, London: Routledge.

LIPPARD, L, (ed)., 1973. *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art world from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

MARTINON, J P. 2012. *Theses in the Philosophy of Curating*. London: I.B.Tauris: Available from: <http://www.jeanpaulmartinon.net/Site/Books.html> [cited 12/05/12]

McGUIGAN, J., 1996. *Culture and the Public Sphere*, London: Routledge.

McMASTER, Sir B., 2008. *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, London: DCMS.

MONTMANN, N, (ed). 2006. *Art and Its Institutions, Current conflicts, critique and collaborations*, London: Black Dog Publishing.

MOSER, G., 2008. *Do curators need university curatorial programs?*, Visual Arts Foundation, International Contemporary Art, Available from -

<http://www.mjfdesign.net/terri/4bdocuratorsneed.pdf> [cited 20/02/10]

NAIRNE, A, (ed)., 1999. *Prime*, exhibition catalogue, Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Art.

NICKAS, R.. 2008. *Theft is Vision*, Dijon: Les Presses du Reel.

O'DOHERTY, B., 1999. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

O'NEILL, P. (ed)., 2007. *Curating Subjects*, London: Open Editions.

O'NEILL, P., 2006. *Curating: Practice becoming common discourse*, Leeds Metropolitan University, slashseconds.org. Available from -

<http://www.slashseconds.org/issues/001/003/articles/poneil/index.php> [cited 29/01/12]

OBRIST, H. U., 2003. *Interviews volume 1*, Milan: Charta.

ROGOFF, I., 2006. *Smuggling - An Embodied Criticality*. Available from -

<http://transform.eipcp.net> [cited 12/05/12]

SANDALS, L., 2009. *Trade Secrets: Swapping Curatorial Confidences*. Toronto, Canadian Art.

Available from: <http://www.canadianart.ca/features/2008/11/20/banff/> [cited 15/05/11].

SARDAR Z and VAN LOON B.,1999. *Introducing Cultural Studies*, New York: Totem Books

SCHÖN, D. A., 1993. In: ORTONY, A, (ed). *Metaphor and thought*. revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SENNETT, R., 2008. *The Craftsman*. London: Allen Lane.

WITTS, R., 1998. *Artist unknown, an Alternative History of the Arts Council*, Warner Books, London.

ZEISKE, C and SACRAMENTO, N., 2010. *Artocracy: Art, Informal Space, and Social Consequence: a curatorial handbook in collaborative practice*, Berlin: Jovis Verlag.

## **List of Illustrations**

3.1

REPRODUÇÃO, 2010 'Harald Szeemann' In: CURATING CHANNEL 2010. *Meet the curator selected Renan Ahmad*. Brazil: Novos Curadores. Available from: <http://www.novoscuradores.com.br/artigo-blog/conheca-o-curador-selecionado-renan-araujo> [Accessed 12 February 2013].

3.2

BALTHASAR, B., 2005. *The Szeemann Archive*. In: DERIEUX F., 2007. *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*. Zurich: JRP|Ringier. p.32/39

3.3

BALTHASAR, B., 1969. *The sidewalk in front of the Kunsthalle, Bern is demolished in an action by Michael Heizer during the exhibition When Attitudes became Form 1969*. In: MÜLLER H-J., 2006. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz. p. 12-13.

3.4

UNKNOWN, 2010. 'Matthew Higgs and Martin Creed'. In: COLLECTIONOF 2010. New York: Collectionof. Available from: <http://www.collectionof.net/detail/248/issue-13> [Accessed 12 February 2013].

3.5

UNKNOWN, 2013, 'Hans Ulrich Obrist'. In: ELECTRONIC BEATS 2013. Offenbach: Deutsche Telekom. Available from: <http://www.electronicbeats.net/en/author/hans-ulrich-obrist/> [Accessed 12 February 2013].

4.1

Theoretical framework diagram

Image credit: Author, 2013.

4.2

Interior of Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire with Janice McNab artwork

Photo credit: Stuart Johnstone, 2004

Exterior of Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire.

Photo credit: Stuart Johnstone, 2004

4.3

UNKNOWN, 2013. 'Transmission Gallery'. In: THE SKINNY 2013. Edinburgh: The Skinny.

Available from: [http://www.theskinny.co.uk/venue/7344-transmission\\_gallery](http://www.theskinny.co.uk/venue/7344-transmission_gallery) [Accessed 12 February 2013].

4.4

WILLIAMS, B., 2010, '*DROMOS, Generator Projects, Dundee, 2010*'. In: SOUTH LONDON ART MAP 2011. London: South London Art Map. Available from: <http://www.southlondonartmap.com/magazine/issue-1/preview> [Accessed 12 February 2013].

6.1

Framework Forum, 24/09/11, CCA, Glasgow

Photo credit: Framework, 2011.

Available from: <http://framework.parallellines.org.uk>

## **Appendices**

### Appendix 1.

A Survey of Independent Curatorial Practice in Scotland

Questions and answers

### Appendix 2.

Oak Trees and Fountains curated project, Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

Reflective essay and archive images

### Appendix 3.

“Where is curating if it is not in the Institution?”

DART Seminar, Grays School of Art, Aberdeen

Research paper and DVD

## **Appendix 1**

### **A Survey of Independent Curatorial Practice in Scotland**

#### **Context and Criteria**

The survey questions were composed to determine the following issues of the respondent's curatorial practice - background, motivation, influences, skills and experience, improvisation and experimentation, value, sustainability of practice and effect. These issues would give details of the respondent's personal and professional context, their perceptions of the motivations, influences and ambitions of their curatorial practice and their concepts of the value and effect that their practice produces. They were also asked to respond in agreement or disagreement to statements about the Curator, which were informed by Bourdieu's theories.

The core focus group was based on individual participants of the Framework curatorial group during August and September 2011. These respondents were considered as the core group as they had all marked themselves out as independent curators by attendance and participation at Framework. The core group consisted of 12 people from the group.

The survey was distributed to this core group on 4th October 2011. 91% (10 of 11) responded positively to complete the survey and 45% (5) had fully completed the survey by 21st November 2011.

There was also a second distribution of the survey to individuals who were not part of the Framework group but who were working in a curatorial position either purely independently or in an organisation in Scotland, which was of an independent status (i.e. those whose main funding did not come directly from Government such as museums and major galleries but who's programme is developed through various funding sources and is therefore needs to be organic). These potential respondents were all based in various parts of Scotland including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Shetland, Orkney, Stornoway and Huntly. This group consisted of 34 people. The survey was distributed to this group on 11th October 2011. 68% (23 of 34) responded positively to complete the survey and 29% (10) had fully completed the survey by 21st November 2011. Overall there were 33% (16 of 45) of full replies.

The Framework curatorial group participants were an effective core focus group for this research as it had come together through the identification of a current need to recognise the diverse, innovative and ambitious practice across Scotland, alongside the lack of a sustained platform in which to jointly discuss curatorial practice and define this work within a wider international context. What was clear with the core group was their self-identification as



curators and hence were ambitious to make their position clearer within the contemporary art context, working in Scotland but also having an International standing.

They were less established as curators, mostly being a few years out of higher education but each one was looking for new opportunities and a new identity for their curatorial practice. The wider group of respondents were mostly established as curators or exhibition makers. They had progressed into paid employment after many years of unpaid and voluntary practice primarily because they were excited and motivated to do it. Their motivations were stimulated from working directly with contemporary art practice, through artists, galleries, and artist led initiatives.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **1. Background**

Can you briefly tell me about your background, where, when and what subjects have you formally studied and how did you start your curating?

Participant 1 - I studied Time Based Art (BA hons) and Electronic Imaging (MSc). I began organising events and screenings during my time at Uni, which then developed into curating my Masters group show. I went on to form the curatorial collective.

Participant 2 - I studied a Diploma of Visual Arts then completed a Bachelor of Contemporary Art (both practical and theoretical) and then completed a Masters of Cultural Heritage specializing in Museum Studies. The Masters had a strong international focus. I began curating when I was in college, organizing our graduate exhibition and then continued to organize exhibitions for friends and friends of friends.

Participant 3 - I studied Fine Art and fell into curating by working on artist-initiated projects.

Participant 4 - Foundation in Art & Design BA (Hons) in Fine Art, MA in Curating Contemporary Art. I was keen to go to art school but quite soon into my degree I realized I wasn't as interested in making art as I was in the ideas that surround the production and presentation of it. I found myself collaborating with other people and helping to realize their projects rather than my own, running the college gallery and organizing various events including our degree show.

Participant 5 - I completed an undergraduate in International Relations and masters in tourism and cultural engineering. I recently completed masters in creative practices. My first

formal experience in curating involved supporting the curatorial research and selection of works for a major exhibition. I was also involved in developing a workshop about curatorial practice.

Participant 6 - M.A. Hons French Language & Literature followed by post-graduate diploma in Museum & Gallery Studies. Not sure I really was aware of 'starting' – joined artist run gallery committee, got part-time job as Exhibition Assistant. First job as 'curator' was at major art gallery.

Participant 7 - I studied Fine Art Drawing & Painting. I chose the course because it had the most 'expanded' cross-disciplinary approach. After graduating I was involved in artist-led group. This was my first solid experience of curating and exhibition making. My body of work became increasingly focused on how the public would encounter the work and thinking about context. In retrospect (only) this body of work was a clear step towards and indicator of the relevance of my developing curatorial practice.

Participant 8 - I studied Religious Studies and English. I landed a job working in the art department of a feature film. I then worked as an assistant film producer and film and art festival organizer.

Participant 9 - I studied a degree and MFA in Fine Art and had been organising and curating exhibitions after my degree with fellow studio artists. I have always had an interest in curating and completed an MA in Curating. After completing an internship I am now studying a PhD.

Participant 10 - I opened a small project space in the house I was living in at the time working with friends on projects be they exhibitions, talks, workshops or screenings. I joined the committee of artist run space. This is I think when I really started to 'curate' and engage properly with what it means to work within the dissemination of culture and it was at this point that I stopped producing my own work.

Participant 11 - I studied Economics and Social Anthropology. I guess I started curating when I managed a venue's artistic programme and got interested in contemporary art.

Participant 12 - I studied History of Art MA (Hons). I became aware of curatorial practices, in a general way, and looked into the methods and discourses of exhibition making on my own i.e. out-with the curricula. I started curating by simply getting in touch with some of my favourite artists from around the world, with whom I could share concerns, as well as realise an opportunity to study their work closely.

Participant 13 - I undertook a Communication and Cultural Studies Degree. Course provided relatable skills for my chosen profession but is neither a Fine Art nor Curatorial course. Subjects included Photography, Video Production, Multimedia, Postmodernism, Semiotics, Sociology and Representation. I undertook internships and also worked as a freelance technician. Curatorially, I have benefitted enormously from the practical experiences I have obtained. I view a very good working knowledge of other art forms such as literature, film, dance and music as being of equal importance when working with contemporary artists. I am lucky to have amassed a good library and retain a good memory for the culture I have consumed.

Participant 14 - I studied Drawing and Painting followed by an MFA in Fine Art and Public Art. I worked as an artist and also worked p/t in arts organizations, including volunteer to gallery coordinator. As an artist I did several residencies. It was during my time on residence that I saw the real potential of what curating could be. My art practice latterly had become about creating structures to connect people, ideas and place. I realised that curating could deal with and interrogate this in a much more fundamental way. Curating then became what I wanted to do and I secured my first f/t curator role. I see curating as an expanded form of a creative practice. I would not class myself as an artist or artist/curator as my practice now is curating.

Participant 15 - I studied Fine Art. After graduating I practiced as an artist and worked as an exhibitions researcher. I worked full time in the exhibitions department. I was predominantly involved in curating and programming design exhibitions, events and projects, both locally and internationally. I was a committee member of an artist run space..

Participant 16 - I studied Art History. I worked in a programming team. In this role I was involved in curating and managing a touring programme of exhibitions, events and projects. I was Acting Exhibitions Manager involved in curating and programming design exhibitions, events.

## **2. Motivation**

**What motivates you to curate and what are the benefits to you personally in curating?**

P1 - I enjoy organising events and distributing art amongst my peers and the public. I like to see artists realise their projects and also present art in interesting locations and formats often outwith the gallery context in turn hopefully breaking down the barriers between the art sector and wider society. The benefits of curating for me is that you get to make things happen.

P2 - My passion for contemporary art motivates me. I am fascinated by the endless possibilities of what contemporary art can be, how it's produced, who produces it and how it is interpreted. I find it really challenging but also extremely rewarding curating, as it really explores the process of discovering or re-discovering contemporary art and how displaying or (re) presenting it in particular ways influences how it is interpreted. I love how curating intersects with psychology and that it is essentially about sharing what you are passionate about with other people. I get a great deal of satisfaction from researching and pulling together different ideas of concepts to make a whole. I also enjoy the organizational element – communicating with different artists, finding out about what they do and how they do it, sometimes guiding them towards helpful sources of research for their practice (particularly when it's an on-going relationship). I enjoy the practical side of organizing the logistics of putting on exhibitions or events – completing a project and presenting it to the public. I like exploring how the finished product can be presented to the audience in mind and bridging the gap between what the artist has created, what they want to say and the possibilities for audience interpretation. I like climbing into the mind of both the artist and the audience (if such a thing is possible).

P3 - My motivation stems from wanting to see or be involved in things, which were not happening at that time. As I progressed I felt that I could do more if I was not working on my own as an artist and this excited me. I know feel that I can work more effectively in my current role and feel able to be more pro-active than I did as an artist.

P4 - Working directly with artists, collaborating with other curators, organizations and institutions and thinking about other ideas through art.

P5 - I see curating as an exercise where I initiate a process circulating around an unresolved question I have usually regarding a social issue, where through artists and artworks, I am able to reach into “suprarational attachments” such as values and political ideals that are absent or difficult to discuss in an academic or social context. The personal benefit is that through the process, my assumptions are revealed or broken down and new perspectives enter, allowing me to become intelligible to myself.

P6 - Interest in art, ideas and artists. Enjoy seeing artworks come together with spaces and people. Benefits always-new ways of thinking and new attitudes and ideas. Access to difference and diversity. Travel. Talking. Thinking. And how I make a living

P7 - Commitment to developing artists' practices through well-tailored and supported opportunities. Interest in criticality in art practice for artists and curators as well as for the public, this focus is rewarding intellectually.

P8 - I enjoy managing a larger project from inception to delivery. The personal benefits to date means I have been exposed to a diverse range of people, artwork and places that have in turn allowed me to develop and carve out a career for myself.

P9 - I have an interest in developing cross-disciplinary projects and working with communities as well as artists in a collaborative / participatory process. Personally, curating enables me to develop and improve my knowledge of curatorial, artistic and other forms of knowledge and expertise such as social science, geography and philosophy.

P10 - My motivations are very diverse. I think if I where to try and locate the core of my interest it would be in the production of discourse and the sharing and creation of knowledge in hopefully the most equitable manner possible. I'm not so interested in a careerist view of curating and as such it is difficult to conceptualise a benefit. If there is one it is in my continued development and education.

P11 - I like working with artists. I guess I like working with people of all sorts. But artists are in particular rewarding (although sometimes difficult) to engage with.

P12 - Working with artists allows me direct experience with artwork, which is very important to me, not because it is necessarily better, but certainly different. A dialogue can take place, and I have found talking with people and engaging with works to be infinitely valuable. I am motivated to explore curating critically – expanding upon traditional modes, and accepting the role as both inherently problematic as well as a particular set of skills. What motivates me to curate is the possibility to engage with art and artists (and their own modes of production) within this critical field. What motivates me to do this is my own acknowledgement of the importance of a critically discursive field, which can problematize, question, promote and illustrate contemporary concerns – art and curating are, to me, such fields.

P13 - My life surrounds a fascination with art so the benefit and motivation are recursively embedded into my life. If I am not working, I am looking at art and if I'm working I'm trying to look at art. I believe I am closely (but still with a critical stand point) connected to the art that has been happening across Scotland in the last two decades. I remain curious to figure out emergent practice and equally to find out more about art from further afield. Art provides me

with a constant desire to travel to seek out art. As my job has a budget to spend on travel, this is an enormous benefit for me.

P14 - What motivates me are the questions that continue to arise from each project and overall a continuing desire to create different, unique structures that connect people, ideas and place. Context, and the unique shifting co-ordinates of working in a creative environment always lead this. Local co-ordinates can include organisational aims; teaching and learning objectives; our internal and external audiences; the site-specific nature of galleries. National/international co-ordinates include contemporary practice and practitioners across art, design and architecture; and specific social, educational, cultural and economic issues. As I see curating as an expanded creative practice, the personal benefits are fulfilment from this form of creativity. Creative practice has always been an important part of my identity and this happens to be the route it mostly manifests itself.

P15/16 - We want to be involved in creating and producing interesting research and objects in the world, being part of an intellectual dialogue to do with visual culture -and its dissemination to public audiences. We want to excite our imaginations by working with like-minded practitioners in order to contribute to this dialogue.

### **3. Influences**

Can you tell me what exhibitions/projects influenced you when you began curating and what continues to influence your practice?

P1 - Initially I looked towards the Situationists and also the Happenings of the 1960s in particular Allan Kaprow's work. I also saw Hans Ulrich Obrist and Olafur Eliasson's 'The Experiment Marathon Reykjavik' at the Icelandic National Museum. I particularly engaged with how these movements and this exhibition encouraged audience participation in an artwork and incorporated other fields of expertise. Audience participation is still at the heart of my curation however now I am more interested in how a work can be viewed in multiple formats and platforms and how this is contorted through display often employing open source methodologies within familiar formats from other industries.

P2 - I was always inspired by the exhibitions at the Australian Centre for Contemporary art...and Juliana Engberg continues to be a source of inspiration today. I always loved how the architecture of ACCA would change and hold every exhibition in a completely different way. I have always considered Engberg to be simultaneously very international and very Australian – in the way she seemed to place just as much emphasis on the international artists exhibited as

the Australians, and also how emerging (and sometimes controversial) artists were given such room to explore and experiment within the space. However, I feel I am returning to people I find inspirational because they push the boundaries or curate exhibitions or organize projects as (it seems) a kind of natural response to something. I find Ellen Blumenstein particularly interesting in the way in which the organization or hosting of events (Salon Populaire) celebrates the intersection of contemporary art with other disciplines and within a social environment.

P3 - When I began my peers influenced me mostly and a sense that it was possible to take matters into your own hands. Now I am still influenced by artists mostly.

P4 - Going to art school and trying to make art was probably more influential than any exhibitions or projects that I saw. I'm interested in the transparency of the production, and reception, of work and this seems to have followed me through various positions and projects.

P5 - After graduating from college, I came across an exhibition curated by Dan Cameron, *Living Inside the Grid* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City about the way that our lives operate within the grid (New Museum of Contemporary Art 2003). The grid featured largely in courses I had taken in college that examined modernity and its sociological and historical accounts. The exhibition resonated from the bringing together of different artworks that were, to me, expressions of multiple perspectives of how the grid influenced people's lives, in a manner that I derived personal meaning from. My chance visit to *Living Inside the Grid* helped me realise the potential of curating to explore social issues through artworks that would, in turn, be interpreted by other people in personal ways. While I might not see the exhibition now as a model for my own projects, it was significant because I went out feeling that all I wanted to do in future was to make exhibitions, and it directed what I would eventually pursue. Specific projects that influenced me to see that independent art projects possess greater credibility in responding to social concerns, because of fewer constraints (of reputation or bureaucracy) that allow them to react critically and more swiftly: *A Vision for Tomorrow* (2006, Singapore). Curated by p-10 and scab, it was a small exhibition that I saw as a symbolic alternative to the way that culture was led by economic interests in Singapore. It was presented to coincide with the first Singapore Biennale. Projects by Cemeti Art House (Jogjakarta, Indonesia). Though existing for over 20 years, it still seeks to think about how their projects respond to the community. For example, their new platform, *Art & Society*, focuses on process-led initiatives that question the relationship between art and society.

P6 - I saw a show called 'The Status of Sculpture' at the ICA in 1991 (with Robert Gober, Cady Noland, etc.) which really struck me – had never seen anything like it before and I loved it. So much that I asked to write a seminar paper about it, which I did. Next was undoubtedly

Lawrence Weiner at Transmission. What continues to influence me is just art that I see really, and discussions with friends and peers about what they have seen.

P7 - Documenta., Alistair McLennan's practice. European museum shows about 60s – 80s feminist and minority group artists (Often with visceral, experiential offer to the audience, physical commitment from the artists, or approaches, which looked at iconography of modern life differently/, took control of this medium). Continue to be influenced by artist's practices at forefront. I am becoming increasingly influenced by writing as part of my practice and from others, which has meant a return to past interests in beat poetry, Scottish oral tradition, South American and Spanish poets.

P8 - I can't think of one exhibition or project that particularly influenced me at the start of my career. Although I did feel I could deliver and produce something a lot more interesting than a lot of bad or poorly produced exhibitions I visited! To deliver good quality high art that challenges and speaks to a wide public. To show difficult work, to bring artists and public together to explore ideas. I guess are some of the reasons that I am still motivated to continue putting together exhibitions and working with artists.

P9 - Would be difficult to say that there were any exhibitions/ projects that influenced me when I began curating, as initially curating was something that happened as part of my art practice after finishing my degree. An early influence though would probably be the exhibitions I saw in Sheffield and the artist-run exhibitions and events that were presented there. Exhibitions at the Site Gallery Sheffield, in particular 'Immediate, New Art from the North', which presented young artists from the North of England, and Art Sheffield 03, in particular the exhibition by Georgina Starr, Bunny Lake Drive-in. Artists and curators who work in particular places and localities with an interest in community and collective action currently influence my practice. Deveron Arts, Sophie Hope (Greenwich Peninsula), Jeanne Van Heewijk (The Blue House), Free Art Collective, Helix Arts, Crumb (Newcastle University), Circa Arts, Stephen Willats....

P10 - There are many influences running through my practice in quite direct ways. I shall list them here in no particular order: Jan Verwoert, Charles Esche and everyone at the Van Abbe Museum, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Geert Lovink, Gavin Wade/ Eastside Projects, Internet Culture, Hito Steyerl, Liam Gillick, Boris Groys, Dave Beech (Freee)

P11 - I met Iain Irving quite early in my curating career. He drew attention to an exhibition called Private View curated by Penelope Curtis. That interested me at the time, juxtaposing heritage with contemporary art. I then got interested in community, more like an anthropologist, but working with artists and art almost as a tool.



P12 - I remember being a teenager still and watching a pretty bad channel 5 programme about the Tate Modern re-hang. It was that which illustrated the opportunity of presenting narratives beyond canonical presentations and chronology. I then studied exhibitions of varying complexity in their narratives and concepts – though what I would call quite traditional in their execution, they did allow me to understand, or try to understand, some quite complex theoretical concerns. Working with Deveron Arts seemed to open my eyes not just to their particular methodology, but to others as well. Where I had often been influenced by rather dense and explicitly theoretically minded exhibitions, I now prefer to critically reflect on these mediations as symptomatic of a dominant narrative. The Feral Trade Café project at Collective in Edinburgh was influential in terms of how a spaces identity can be determined by practices, which are often not art at all but exploit or disrupt its mechanisms.

P13 - I had spent ten years going to London for big shows at the Hayward, Royal Academy, Serpentine, Tate and the Whitechapel and shows in Scotland at the Fruitmarket, Third Eye Centre/CCA, Stills and the National Galleries. But it was shows at Transmission, The Collective and Inverleith House by the likes of Richard Wright, Martin Boyce, Alex Frost, Cathy Wilkes and Callum Innes that were especially important to fostering a sense that I could become involved in this career. I continue to look at artist run and emerging practices to keep abreast of art that could be considered under the radar..

P14 - Grizedale Arts approach was a huge influence on my choice to become a curator. Experiencing a programme without a gallery helped me see what the spectrum of a curatorial practice could be, with the emphasis not solely on the output but on the process; and the output often unknown when the project was embarked upon. It also taught me that through setting specific questions in a programme, work could find unexpected answers. It gave me a good grounding in working with other artists and how the curator develops a bespoke way of working with each person. This was the first time I had worked with artists at different stages of their career, which stood me in good stead for creating a democratic curatorial practice of working with students through to established practitioners. It also put an emphasis on working with a wide range of sources. What continues to influence me is others creative practice; ways of thinking; new connections; making projects relevant.

P15/16 - From early-on, we had access to large museum exhibitions curated in the established tradition of working with collections and bringing works and ideas together in new configurations. We both also regularly visited the Museum of Scotland. I visited ‘Sensation’ at the Royal Academy in London.....Post graduating, we recall the following exhibitions and projects: ‘Re-design’, exhibition curated by Nipon Design Centre. Various artist led exhibitions

and projects taking place at Transmission Gallery (ie. Atelier van Lieshout). Designers block 2003, 100% Design (design trade fair/exhibition in London) Design Mai, Berlin 2004 (design fair) We are interested in the crossover between museum style presentation and something more experiential in terms of exhibition production.

#### **4. Skills and Experience**

Do you think that you have relevant skills and experience to curate, what do you believe these to be?

P1 - I have the skills as I am passionate about contemporary art and am driven to create projects, which engage audiences in its production.

P2 - I think I have the relevant skills and experience to curate in a very practical sense (e.g. exhibition or events) – organization, an ability to research, excellent communication skills, an understanding of art history and theory, an engagement with the visual art sector...however I sometimes doubt whether I have the right intellectual skills – am I researching enough? Am I researching or developing ideas and concepts within the right framework? Am I using the right methodology?

P3 - If I have I have learnt them on the job. I know I can make things happen and I think this is the most important thing whatever field you are in. I also know I lack formal education and try to bring in specialists when I need to.

P4 - Yes. I understand the process of producing work, and am also aware of (and interested in) the more academic ideas and political issues that surround the presentation of it.

P5 - Ability to sustain conversations with artists and understand their intentions for their works. Sensitivity to artistic practices in the area. Patience, commitment to “follow-up” and work out logistics, and guts. Ability to recognise and articulate what I want to do, and what I am uncertain about. I am still trying to acquire these.

P6 - Having made lots of exhibitions helps! Being able to talk about art to a public is also important – if not actually vital. Managing teams – directing crews etc. Ability to mediate project to institution and public. Interested in art and artists!

P7 - Yes, but I see it as a continuing learning progression. For me to curate I feel I need to be up to date with real world and art world issues and practices, so in order to be able to continue

to curate it would be necessary to keep the other integral research areas of the practice current. I have a broad portfolio of other skills, which help in the project management and human interaction of exhibition making.

P8 - I find the term curator is overused and often misused today. The notion of 'curator' seems to try to outshine the importance of the artist. To my mind to be a good curator you simply need to have a good eye and understanding of the field of interest to yourself and/or gallery plus the ability to manage and organise a large-scale project and team.

P9

- 1) Research skills
- 2) Knowledge of historical and current strategies and methodologies of curating
- 3) Interest in current artistic and curatorial practice
- 4) Willingness to chase 'lost causes', to "pursue" and artist if you think their work fits into your project
- 5) Negotiation skills

P10 - I think it would be difficult to ascribe a certain set of skills or experiences as being those of the curator as this runs the risk of naturalising a specific extant mode of working. We need to be working to break the preconceptions of what curatorial practice is or could be.

P11 - I don't have formal curating skills but my background in Social Anthropology helps me to analyse community; to assess situations among people. I have many years dealing with artists; and I have a keen interest to bring locality together with globality. I am interested in sense of place, but also in international working at the same time. I also have experience in art fundraising, which comes handy at times.

P12 - I believe that I am certainly learning as I go on, particularly as I am very young. I often try to engineer a framework wherein I can work with artists in producing a satisfying outcome that is the result of a dialogue, rather than a simple 1+1 formula. In being so involved with critical dialogue, I find it is necessary to always have a certain presence of mind that can both respond to others as well as pick up on relevant pieces of information. I have also always given myself rather large goals, and pursued them with the intention that anything is possible. Acknowledging this field of possibility is key to emergent practice, if it is to oppose or be critically aware of dominant modes of operation. As well as creating a space that nurtures creative dialogue, it is also important to garner trust through being simply very reliable and practical – being resourceful, and following through with your commitments.

P13 - I have the skills and the experience based on a track record. In terms of a skill-set of managing staff, art handling, artist liaison, production, negotiation, collaboration and leadership, I am confident that I am well placed. Instinct and commitment are also massive parts of the job. Seeing art and having the instinct to present it for your audience is an essential component. The job requires high levels of commitment to instil confidence in the artists you work with. I am not sure you learn these...

P14 - Curators come at curating through many different routes and experiences, which is what makes it interesting and varied.

These are some of the skills required:

An overview

Insight

Good ideas

Ability to make connections

Project management

Financial and administrative skills

Writing skills

Communication skills

Funding skills

Interest in contemporary practice

P15/16 - We have never trained as 'curators'. In what we do we need to be thoughtful, imaginative and organized.

## **5. Improvisations and Experimentation**

Does your practice involve methods of improvisation and experimentation, if so how and why do you implement such methods?

P1 - Yes I am often borrowing techniques employed from other disciplines or sectors also sometimes these work sometimes they don't

P2 - All of my practice involves methods of improvisation and experimentation!! As I never undertook a contemporary art-curating course I am, in a sense, experimenting with my whole career. I have never really studied different methods within curatorial practice and it's never really become an issue. I have reached a stage where I have curated projects out of personal interest or demand; the focus has been on research through actually staging the exhibition or event. Experimental activities such as hosting discussion groups with different topics, inviting a

mixture of artists and professionals from other disciplines have often provided a framework for further research or developing exhibition ideas, but this is not something I do as standard for each exhibition or project – it depends on how that project or exhibition starts and continues to develop. In other words, so far I have always developed things rather organically.

P3 - I never begin thinking that I want to improvise, but it often happens because I am drawn to experimental working. Trying to never do the same thing twice or approach things in the same way twice. This is what gets me out of bed in the morning.

P4 - Yes, in that I regularly collaborate with other people (both artists and curators) and groups to push myself out of a comfort zone and to discuss a wider spectrum of ideas.

P5 - Yes. Improvisation and experimentation occurs in different ways, for example having call-outs to bring people together to collaboratively develop a project; developing curatorial projects that eventually feed into a work-in-progress artwork; testing out how writing relates my curatorial practice. My curatorial process is one in which I begin from a point of uncertainty and become intelligible through the bringing together or intervention of different artworks. If I knew the outcome (i.e. did not have to improvise and experiment), the project would no longer be meaningful for me. Improvisation also has to take place because more often than not, my plans fail and I have to adapt.

P6 - Constant improvisation and experimentation. For example in placing of work in exhibition. Why? to achieve most appropriate and engaging effect for artist(s).

P7 - Yes, some projects more than others. In exhibitions of existing works you don't know how things will work until they are together in the space and both improvisation and experimentation may be employed in the presentation of the space and the works and in the interpretation. This would be towards highlighting synergies between the works, designing the experience of the visitor to maximum effect, being sensitive to the works and bringing about understanding of them as the artist intended or highlighting something surprising about them. In new commissions where I am actively involved in the production of the work, or in live event series, improvisation and experimentation are integral to the practice. This would be to provide the best support and flexibility to the artists involved, to optimize the experience for the visitors, to best use resources, to raise ambitions and scope of the project, to be opportunistic.

P8 - Without question, you continually improvise and experiment. Its the nature of trying to deliver a project by working with the artist, the constraints of a budget and the gallery space

itself- what is or not possible. Negotiation, improvisation and experimentation are all key factors in delivering any exhibition.

P9 - I would hope so. My current research involves a large amount of experimentation and I am sure improvisation as I try to work with and within a set community and group of people. When working with people, both of these are important, as you are obviously not sure how things are going to pan out. A need to have a plan B or feel comfortable in shifting things in case the original idea does not work or needs modifying

P10 - To an extent yes I think experimentation is very important. I guess it is difficult for it not to be. I am always thinking about how artwork is received and displayed. So I am always trying to think through how exhibitions and institutions function. I think it is very important to always be thinking through these questions to try and escape a normalised method of curating. I have reservations with the idea of improvisation as I see it tied into troubling ideas of creativity and genius.

P11 - Yes, all the time. Every project is very different, and I try to stretch myself to make sure they are different. Sometimes it's a festival, or a parade, or a street action, or a knitting workshop. A father's day or a walking museum. Why? Because I would get board with myself, if I implemented always the same method.

P12 - Improvisation and experimentation are the founding principles of my practice. Improvising is how we construct our daily routines, as well as conversations. It is a way around comfortable references to theory, and an entry point into the field of possibilities, a way of exploring new dimensions. In this sense, it is generative. It is also highly relational in that, as mentioned above, it requires one to be attuned to a situation and its constituents and stakeholders. I believe in developing a non-indexical curatorial practice, as I believe that through the conversations held between myself and artists, engaging with issues and our work, we can, through a free agonism rather than filtered institutional idioms, develop a relevant taxonomy, leading to a relevant discourse, which allows us to focus our creative potential on an outcome/process that is shaped by mechanisms distinct from those that comply with dominant ideologies. Here, there is a level of self-organisation. An additional effect of this is that a situation can be produced which allows a public to engage with the outcome through unexpected terms – neutral behaviours do not seem to fit. This method of course, is still quite experimental in its nature – I have so far tried out a few methodologies that I have developed.

P13 - Yes – whilst I commence an exhibition with a living artist with a rigorous concept of what the exhibition could be, I view curation as a form of collaboration and this can spur an

artist (and curator) into new directions. Therefore I am always happy to go on a journey with the artists to realise work – I actively encourage site visits and endeavour to do studio visits to ensure the work responds to the specificity of our site and I have a sense of their working methods.

P14 - Yes, my curatorial practice does involve methods of improvisation and experimentation. Evolving a project with different parties often involves proposing an idea, then developing it through dialogue and evolving understanding. It can also be dictated by practicalities. Improvisation and experimentation is bespoke to each project. As some of the works in the exhibition programme are new commissions and evolved over different periods of time, the works develop also. Contemporary practice by nature involves improvisation and experimentation.

P15/16 - We are constantly experimenting with the traditions of curating and presenting new work. This is a very risky approach but potentially leads to a more interesting working process and what we believe to be more meaningful outcomes.

## **6. Value**

What do you believe is the value of your curatorial practice in creative, cultural, economic, social and/or political terms? What are the values to you personally?

P1 - I believe curators should be there to facilitate ideas and projects, an instigator for getting things off the ground. I also think curators can set artistic discourse and shape how contemporary art is seen. I see curators as editors who are able to display a work or an idea in its best light thus pointedly communicating what the artists wants to get across.

P2 - I highly value my practice as a creative activity and believe it has a place culturally as a way for myself and other emerging practitioners to explore this creativity. In turn, I think that all cultural activity has positive economic, social and political value, no matter how public or invisible. In terms of economic value, I have recently started taking my curatorial activity more seriously – work that I was previously doing 'for free' I have started reducing and have been watching the amount of time spent on curatorial activity compared to other employment demands. I feel that this somehow has a direct link to the quality of work I produce – obviously the more time devoted to researching, developing and organizing projects, the more successful that project will be to me (and hopefully to artists and audiences I am working with). I hope that

I have achieved a balance with my work in terms of the social and political value. I don't have any plans or strategies for operating – socially, economically or politically – but I think it's important to be aware of operating within these areas and to respond honestly and with good intentions...

P3 - Hard question...I believe experimenting and taking risks is central to what I do and this needs to happen, it is more difficult to do this in a bigger organization. So, I am happy to work in the scale of organization I do. Big enough to get things done, small enough to be nimble and take risks.

P4 - I don't think I can say what the value of my practice is to others, but I get a huge amount from working with a range of artists, curators, writers and producers, and thinking about ideas through art.

P5 - I hope that my projects are channels to raise awareness and provoke questions of political and social issues, and a platform for artists to develop their own practice. Personally, my practice is a means of allowing me to respond creatively to how I perceive the world. I think that in today's environment where sources of authority that I used to hold on become irrelevant and I am confronted with a myriad of contrasting views from different cultures, it has become difficult to retain an understanding of what ideals I have, why I have them, and to articulate them. I think that curating provides me with the emotional, intellectual and imaginative space to ask what ideals I have and if they should matter.

P6 - I think that's for others to say ... not sure I can answer. Personally, a key value is the creation of a zone for reflection, for the generational and dissemination of ideas – diverse ideas – out with a 'market' situation, where the experience is free (i.e. at no cost) and indefinite.

P7 - I think that I have had an impact on the local art scene, in supporting artists and other arts facilitators, making a stronger, more supportive and organised community of artists and galleries and increased the instance and possibility of us reaching outside of that within other sectors of the community (both in terms of art community further afield and local non-arts communities). I also think that my work has raised the ambition and profile / connectedness of what we do. Part of my curatorial practice could be argued as taking part in advisory roles and in mentoring younger curators/ arts workers / artists. In this my focus has been on quality, fairness and criticality as well as sharing practical skills and advice, which I have built up / continue to build up. The benefits to me are that I work in an environment where I get to think about ideas, concepts and experiences for some of the time; that I find it rewarding to showcase artists' practices and see them develop.



P8 - My own practice overlaps all of the above.

P9 - Collaboration is important to my practice. I am interested in how art can have an economic, social and political, as well as creative value. My practice involves an interest in the idea of working within my local community/ neighbourhood, to see the artist, as a neighbour and a valuable member of a community, whose skills and experiences can be used as tools within his/her neighbourhood. I believe the role of art can be ameliorative and politicised but this needs to be critiqued as well as practiced. The value to me personally is that curatorial practice enables me to improve my knowledge and allows me to see different points of view and belief through a level of critique.

P10 - Value I find to be a very difficult word because of how it has been taken over by a process of neoliberalism that has reduced it to an idea of monetary value. I think the value of my practice might be in an attempt to destabilize this idea and to attempt to disentangle culture from this way of thinking.

P11 - I think art can make an impact on economic and social life, yes. But so can other things, like sport, etc. What one should be after is a holistic view towards life. I am also interested in politics and international working. I find that important; the international interaction between people.

P12 - As mentioned above, in the production of any 'new discourse' what is a problem to deal with is how to mediate this. How can a public become a stakeholder in the work? One-way is to conduct a performative curatorial practice, rather than illustrative. If a situation is produced (as situation may be an exhibition, screening, talk, CD recording, publication etc. etc.) which requires a 'viewer' to improvise a non-standard interaction with a work, then a relationship pertaining to the discourse would hopefully emerge. This is a way of distributing discourse, through practice.

Again, this is all quite experimental, and currently being tried out! As for a wider social or political value, I suppose my curatorial practice has very little bearing in reality - I am currently focused on expanding practices and asking questions, on a very small scale, and the distribution of these works may be very limited. These are areas in which I hope to create a bigger impact.

P13 - The value to me personally is of course huge - in all of the areas above. A city needs to have an actively engaged Curator who cares about artistic production in the region but just as importantly balances that with national and international positions so as to avoid being parochial. Curatorially, I believe I am being ambitious with the calibre of artists I am inviting. I

am also choosing to put an emphasis on production in the local area to provide skilled work and avoid shipping from a far, which assists all areas mentioned in the question.

P14 - The value of a curatorial approach that explores the creative, social, educational or political nature of contemporary practice is it can investigate the ways that art can cross into other spheres and have a relevancy. There is a tension that can be explored in these crossovers that is so important when working, as these gaps or tensions mirror the reality of the world.

P15/16 - We are able to tap into archives and private collections of factories and individuals to create a material, social and political context for our work, which we feel is important to present to a public audience. The legacy of a project, in touring shows etc provides a viable and sustainable proposition for us and our collaborators.

## **7. Sustainability of practice**

How do you continue to do your practice?

P1 - Currently I supplement my living whilst I carve out more projects and recognition as a curator hopefully in turn leading to a sustainable living in the arts.

P2 - I have teaching work and sometimes other bits and bobs such as cataloguing collections and editing and proofreading. I work from home and work flexibly to make use of time and opportunities that pop up. I have begun to save to finance future projects such as exhibitions as I am freelance and don't have regular access to a venue. I do find that I need on-going support such as catch-ups with fellow curators and artists for inspiration and feedback.

P3 - This is something, which keeps me awake at night, as I know we are reliant on Creative Scotland for this.

P4 - I have a full-time paid position and undertake freelance (generally unpaid) work at evenings and weekends. I received a Professional Development grant from the Scottish Arts Council and to undertake a series of research trips. Projects emerge through on-going conversation and discussion with others.

P5 - On a creative level, I sustain my practice by making room to think about encounters with people/news/readings, my reactions to them, and seeking the right timing or occasion to test out and speak to people about project ideas. If I look at your question from another perspective, I think my practice has, in fact, been an important way for me to sustain my interest

in life. On the level of morale, I usually need some demonstrated enthusiasm by friends to help me address any self-doubt, and to kick-off a project. My projects are very small in scale, and I generally work with collaborators and artists who self-fund projects. I have obtained funding from external sources for previous projects, though it only covers a portion of the production expenses.

P6 - Travel to fuel knowledge and ideas by seeing more art.

P7 - I am in a paid job so have an approx. average wage for Scotland. It is at times difficult for me to sustain the cerebral/ research part of my curatorial practice, as it's not usually possible to carry out the practical tasks demanded by my job within my contracted hours. I work on writing and independent curatorial projects in evenings / weekends and the majority of my reading and research is also done in non-office hours. I am constantly trying to develop more efficient working methods to allow for more thinking within my working week.

P8 - Continue to be paid by my arts organisation

P9 - I am currently studying a PhD. This is a continuation of my research from my MA Curating.

P10 - In a quite prosaic way. Earning enough to survive and giving me time and finances to research and travel. I find the biggest problem however to be that there is a lack of space to continue my practice in an embodied way.

P11 - I am paid by my organisation

P12 - I continue to do my practice in a wildly precarious and tentative manner – I do it without pay, and when I am not studying or working. I carry out my practice to the detriment of having any spare time or sleep.

P13 - I am employed by a Creative Scotland Foundation Arts organisation with a reasonable salary, a pension and a travel bursary. The organisation trusts me to deliver a programme that my Director and our Board approve. That feels like sustainability of practice at a time of economic uncertainty.

P14 - I have a full-time position. Working on the programme requires continuing engagement with the context, audience and possibilities. I also have enjoyed when the opportunity has arisen for other projects beyond where I have worked at the time.

P15/16 - We work very hard to get funding through projects and consultancy. Our practice relies on many hours of unpaid work and effort.

## **8. Effect**

When and how do you know when your curatorial projects are effective and rewarding?

P1 - I know when we receive positive feedback from events we have conducted. I also get a sense of feeling during the event if it is well received or not. I know internally if I think the project was successful or not. At the moment any project I do is rewarding.

P2 - When I get feedback from the artist I've worked with and the audiences I'm hoping to reach, but also when I self-evaluate. I usually set goals for each project, sometimes a project may not need to be seen or have to achieve anything except be a part of a longer goal – although the realization of this can sometimes come quite a while after the project is long finished.

P3 - Usually the feedback, which means most, comes from people involved or close to the project and peers. Also, feedback from audiences and participants. International respect is something I feel is also core. However seeing people's careers change after working with critical recognition or us is also something I would look for.

P4 - It helps when the aims of the project have been articulated in advance, but mostly it's to do with developing a discussion with the participants of a project and being able to share this progression with an audience.

P5 - When I realise that an assumption I had was wrong, when I undertake a change of course, and when the outcome is something I would never have anticipated.

P6 - When the artists is happy, and audience arrive, commentary starts, discussions ensue ... Personally they are always rewarding in one way or another, or sometimes many

P7 - When the artists have enjoyed the process and felt challenged and supported. When the audience are excited / are asking questions / have been moved by the project.

P8 - blank

P9 - Difficult question. As I have an interest in working with communities and the public, it would have to be the public response to the project. I feel this can sometimes be a problem with socially engaged projects if the audience is only other artists, or friends, as I don't think it reflects a true representation of the project.

P10 This is a very difficult question. For me a project starts to become effective when a sense of discourse starts to arise or is augmented in some way. This is a very abstract idea and not something that is easily quantified and something that I struggle with. I guess it is to be able to generate discussions around my interests to try and further understand my position in the world.

P11 - Well that is a hard one. One never should get complacent. One thing is if we get interesting press, it does not have to be positive one. Then of course if the artist is happy, and feels that the project was good and he/she got something out of it and feels like an ambassador for us. And then the community: if they like it, if they discuss things, etc. The balance between community and artistic innovation is vital. There is not one more important than the next.

P12 - Direct feedback has been very positive – but I prefer moments where conversations erupt around a project that point out either unasked or unanswered questions. I think I find the process most rewarding before completion. Another experiment I would like to carry out is also the production of systems of value, mechanisms of documentation and how to mediate these along with articulations of success and failure, which are relevant to a self-organised discourse.

P13 I do look at peer review, visitor comments, visitor numbers, press, blogs etc. If I initiate a project, then I am capable of self-review – I know where aspects could have been improved upon.

P14 - Feedback from those involved / Feedback from peers / Feedback from institution I work with / for the project to be a catalyst that sparks off other connections beyond itself – eg practitioners working again down the line / personal satisfaction in the work achieved / unexpected outcomes that work

P15/16 - So far we have received really positive peer feedback and now have the offer of future work/projects.

**And finally,**

Do you agree with the following statements?

**A Curator requires:**

---

**Summary**

**YES**

- **A creative ability to interweave knowledge, experience and risk**
- **A relentless work ethic (a way of life)**
- **A instinct and ability to change outputs for precision and success**

**EQUAL AGREEMENT**

- **A social and professional position in the field**
- **A proven track record of successfully curated exhibitions / projects**

**NO**

- **A historical and current knowledge and alliance with the field of power**
  - **A recognition in the field as one who curates**
  - **A position and location in the field where one curates**
- 

**Results**

**A historical and current knowledge and alliance with the field of power**

YES 4                      NO 10      (1 don't know)

Further comments:

P13 - someone who curates beyond one or two projects of course requires this.

P14 - The word 'alliance' is an intriguing one. Many curatorial projects in institutions are achieved in alliance or support by funders and other networks, so the curator requires to have a current knowledge of funding if we class 'power' as finance; it is part of the job for example to see the opportunities such as funding and identify gaps in provision in order to mine lines of

enquiry. However as a curator the important 'alliance' that holds the power is between the artists and curators. It is their work that is the capital.

---

## **Recognition in the field as one who curates**

YES 5                      NO 10

Further comments:

P7 - I think it should be recognised as a professional practice, project by project, eg just because an artist or writer has devised and curated 1 project it doesn't mean that they should always have to be considered as someone who curates per se or that they could / would want to curate other projects - they should be free to carry on their practice as they see fit.

P13 - Someone who curates beyond one or two projects of course requires this. Not required by a guest curator.

P14 - I find the emphasis on social standing in the next three questions multi-layered in meaning. Globally the visibility of the curator has become more prominent in the last ten years, often being a strap-line on marketing that is given as much prominence as the artists. There is often even within organisations, interesting gray areas where curators promote themselves above the organisation or even appear independent even though working for an institution. Do you define independent curators as those working outside of institutions? From a more pastoral point of view in any area of specialism there is accepted value in peer recognition.

---

## **A social and professional position in the field**

YES 7                      NO 8

Further comments:

P7 - I think it's important for the work and value of the work of contemporary visual art curators to be articulated and recognised better, this is because I think there is a chance that the already fragile and un-standardised position could become more undermined

P13 - After a certain point.

P14 - I work with organisations and have a f/t position with an organisation so this is where I predominantly practice. It is important for me to have a role in a community, I enjoy working with others, and so a professional role works for me.

---

## **A proven track record of successfully curated exhibitions / projects**

YES 7                      NO 8

Further comments:

P2 - How is it proven and what is “success” and by whose measure?

P7 - In practical terms it’s useful to show your thinking processes and interests, however broad, though a back catalogue of projects, but a successful curatorial project could also be build on a one off genuine interaction, understanding and engagement.

P13 - Not necessarily to begin with but after a certain point

P14 - It would obviously be disastrous to have a track record of bad exhibitions but how do we prove a good one? Footfall, press coverage, audience feedback, coming in on budget; mention on Hot 100; good in your region?

P15/16 - though experience working on exhibitions/projects/events, assisting their creation and production is vital

---

## **A position and location in the field where one curates**

YES 5                      NO 10

Further comments:

P7 - I think that in any successful project a level of knowledge and respect is needed. This doesn’t mean that years of knowledge need to be built up but there should be genuine, respectful, multi-level engagement with the subject.

P13 - Some very good peripatetic curators with only one of the above.

P14 - An understanding and interaction with the context – physical and demographic with which you are working with.

---

## **A relentless work ethic (a way of life)**

YES 11                      NO 4

Further comments:

P7 - compared to some other friends and family my life / work are more enmeshed; eg my socialising more likely to involved arts openings where I speak about current projects and ask others about theirs as well as how their kids are getting on at school, my holidays are more likely to involve visits to the city art gallery of that town / country, my bedtime reading more likely to be related to a piece of writing I’m working on. In practical terms, running a public programme is often relentless



P11 - but others have that too, often arts people think they are the only ones, and I think that is not the case)

P13 - I agree that I required this but equally I like the idea of an effortlessly talented curator.

P14 - this makes it sound not much fun to have a relentless work ethic but I would equate curatorial practice as an expanded creative practice, probably as I came from having an artistic practice. I therefore would say it is a way of life as it is tied in with identity.

---

### **A creative ability to interweave knowledge, experience and risk**

YES 12                      NO 3

---

### **A instinct and ability to change outputs for precision and success**

YES 10                      NO 4                      (1 don't know)

Further comments:

P7 - Instinct is one of the resources that some curators use. An understanding that the output of a contemporary visual art project is rarely fixed is an essential component feature that curators need to be able to deal with. It means making a strong critical framework, which doesn't rely on a specific physical outcome for its success.

P14 - More an ability to interact with the process. To change outputs sounds like only dealing with the end products and I view it as my role as a curator in an educational institution to uncover what occurs on the way.

---

### **Any others?**

P1 - conviction in their actions and decisions.

P11 - Love, passion and endurance.

P13 - Self-belief, genuine connection but with a small amount of detachment

P14 - A sociable and curious disposition, A questioning mind, The ability to be preoccupied with several subjects concurrently, Support, Organisational skills, An ability to communicate, Good ideas

## **Appendix 2**

### **Oak Trees and Fountains curated project, Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire**

#### **Show and Tell: The Making of Oak Trees and Fountains (2004)**

The central concept of the project was to place site-specific contemporary artwork within a heritage site in the North-East of Scotland. The artists who applied to take part were also asked to let their idea/making process transparent so that the audience could not only look at their artwork but also see how and why the artwork was researched, conceptualised, developed, implemented and presented.

It was hoped that the audience to the site would therefore experience a clearer understanding of the artwork by having the opportunity to access this process.

This project and concept came about for a number of reasons,

- To build on the rural, non-urban contemporary art projects which have been developed in the North-East over the past years.
- To continue to make use of the number of astounding heritage sites in the area through interaction with contemporary art, as they well out-number the usual contemporary art 'white space'.
- To enable and develop the existing and new audiences for contemporary art
- To enable contemporary artists to pursue an alternative context for their artwork and give them the opportunity to show the audience their creative process.
- To initiate and enable worthwhile and positive collaboration between the venue organisation, local authorities, local institutions, funders, artists, curators and organisers.

While these reasons endeavour to make a conscience development of the artist, audience and facilitator partnership, there was also an attempt to simply allow the participants to 'open up', to 'show and tell' and to 'hide nothing'. A couple of useful analogies which I tend to use to explain what I wanted this project to do for the audience is the 'Making of...' type documentaries of the latest Hollywood blockbuster. Generally shown on television days' prior to the opening of the movie. These programmes split the movie into pieces so that we all know how the visual effects are achieved, what the problems are with the restrictive costumes and whether the cast bonded in its making.

Also thinking about a general Design process might also give a good analogy to the project's intentions. While working with a client the designer opens up a continuous dialogue and so enables a client to 'buy into' the decisions made in the outcome of the product. If they see what is happening as it goes along the more likely that they can accept and understand the final output. The thing is making art doesn't usually, in my experience, work like that

*Perhaps the best way to understand this project, in the context of the research is to describe the organisational process in a narrative manner. It is a story of emotion, commitment and the unknown, as most projects tend to be for me, and I will comment from time to time with a reflection of the scenario.*

The project germinated as an idea that Lorraine Grant and myself developed in September 2002, We had the skills, the knowledge, the connections, the motivation; we just needed the money for the organising budget as well as the project site. The criterion was determined (heritage site, contemporary artists, site-specific work, transparent process, audience consideration). Calls and emails were made and a meeting was set up with The National Trust of Scotland, in the Aberdeenshire Council offices in Inverurie. At this meeting it was decided that we could access one of the NT properties in the North-East area to put on such a project. Some of the venues were better for this than others, and after a few site visits, Drum Castle was selected for its scale and variety of good external sites for artwork. Another meeting was set up with the Manager of Drum Castle and NTS Education Officer, to fine tune the possibilities. Everything seemed to be very acceptable, there wasn't anything, which might cause any problems, we just needed to check with the Castles existing timetable of weddings, vintage cars shows and seasonal activities so there wasn't some kind of cultural clash. It was also at this point that the decision was made to extend the whole project over the National Trust open season from May to October. Artwork would be rolled out over the year, in May, June, August and September so building the project into full bloom through September.

*This strategy was probably a good decision in respect that the artists had more time to consider, research, develop and make their work, and encouraging multiple visits by the audience to see the new work as the year went on. The artwork and the audience's visits would also be experienced in different seasonal contexts, which was another important development in the overall feel of the project.*

Meanwhile, the organisation of funding applications and selecting and contracting the appropriate artists continued. A major criterion for the project to go ahead with the four selected artists was the positive funding decision by the Scottish Arts Council. We planned that we could still put on a one-artist project for a short time, from the funding dedicated by

Aberdeenshire Council, but we wanted to do the whole thing and by January 2004 we finally knew that we had this funding. Therefore, artists could be paid, artworks could be designed and made, interpretation material could be designed and printed and this publication could be produced.

The publicly available interpretation for the project took the form of four free-to-take individual artists pamphlets that could be picked up in the main house and a specially constructed display of artists' research material housed in the Old Laundry. Each artist supplied material that was arranged by myself on four freestanding wooden notice boards. This material consisted of various research photographs, website print outs, sketches, artwork mock ups, previous catalogues, site visit photos, measured drawings, pamphlets, maps, books, photo collages and poems. Along with these artist boards were two boards that displayed the organisational and audience responses to the project. These included a timeline poster, files of emails, funding applications, installation of artwork photos, previous exhibition catalogues, full transcripts of artists interviews that were edited and used in the free pamphlets, world map which the audience could pin their home location on and audience question cards which were completed and pinned up.

With the money for the complete project more or less in place, the artists were then asked to develop their research into a formal proposal and output. David Blyth's project was moved back from April to open on May 1<sup>st</sup> to give us all enough time to prepare and complete the organisation, marketing and the production of the interpretation and artwork. Blyth's project required the production of 5 specially designed booths that had to be made onsite and then manhandled into the Old Oak woods of Drum and sited beside a specific tree. Once the booths were in place the glass sides were installed and listening box technology was linked up to a number of microphones that were fixed high up in the branches of the individual trees - holly, oak, birch, beech and cherry - by a very versatile artist who climbed into the trees to install them. On the opening few days, Blyth was then photographed for the local Deeside Piper newspaper and interviewed on Radio Scotland for a programme early on the Saturday morning about the great Scottish outdoors

*Blyth used every minute in refining the concept and manufacturing the artwork in the lead up time to the public. The first launch of the project went well but with limited press coverage, which never really manifested throughout the project, despite our persistence. The initial opening was an event; it was the acknowledgement of the existence of the project. It was a time to make a mark and get people interested. Although the project was open for 6 months we never gained any further press interest.*

*Since four works were being installed at different times during the year, we also had four openings for the artists and artworks, to welcome them onto the site and project. The Old Laundry was used as a location for the refreshments and general get-together of the people involved and invited friends. These were informal but much needed to launch the work.*

Once the Scottish Arts Council project grant money had been secured, Victoria Bernie, who was the last artist in the series, was an early site visitor in late January and was quickly clued up with minutiae research into the Drum site history, architectural detail and the horticultural and gardening history and culture of such sites in Scotland. Bernie had already been out in the field filming a number of various selected sites for her potential work. During this time she also had an exhibition at the Bonhoga Gallery in Shetland and while she was there was documenting the landscape and vegetation which might be used in her work.

Meanwhile, the two other artists Janice McNab and Jim Harold were individually proceeding with their own concepts for their work in their studios but site visits were needed to give them a full awareness of the context, potentials and restrictions for their ideas. McNab arrived in February where she spent a couple of days on site photographing the house, whose contents were still under covers as protection during the winter closure and talking to the staff and getting a general feel of the place. The house was always going to be the site to show her work but as time and ideas advanced she eventually had to revisit during May to enable a full understanding of the context. McNab initially decided on making paintings that would hang as a replacement for some of the paintings that were already in the house. As time went on discussions about the potential work required consideration of a number of issues relating to removing the house works, storage and insurance and fixtures into the surface of the walls. This produced too many logistical problems and the initial concept of McNab's work required some revision in light of the context that she wanted to show her work. After much consideration a suite of seven small-framed oil on paper works were made, and these would be positioned throughout the house on tables, mantelpieces, windowsills and sideboards.

*In reflection the scheme that was finally decided on used the context and conditions of the site extremely well and produced a very interesting work that required the Drum Castle volunteer guides to be directly familiar with the work, unlike the other artwork in the project, as they informed the public in their daily tours. So the artwork really did infiltrate the site, they weren't obvious and had to be looked for or pointed out.*

Jim Harold came for his initial site visit on the first opening in May. The Walled Garden site had been already chosen even before visiting. His interests in gardens and culture made the walled rose garden the perfect quiet reflective location. We discussed various schemes and

ambitions from glass walls and neon to text based installations. Production skills, available money and time became an important factor in these ambitions so Harold went off with reality in mind to consider what to do.

Harold's work was launched in August, after an intensive couple of weeks of decision-making and artwork production. His damask rose pink wall was built on site to fit the gardener's bothy while it rained and all the roses were gradually disappearing from the garden. Paint and lettering was applied for completion. The freestanding boards that had been constructed in Glasgow and driven up were positioned on the launch day. It all fitted and was sited perfectly, perfectly designed. The Harold launch was maybe a low-key affair but didn't matter, a local Indian restaurateur that Harold had been frequenting while working on site turned up with colleagues and made the day.

*At this time, there were 3 works on site and heading through summer and prime tourist-time in Scotland, the project was settling down and the artwork was coasting along, nothing was broken, or stolen, and the interpretation was working well. In the Old laundry the pin boards were being used and lots of the audience cards were being completed and posted. The world map was filling up with pins all over Britain and Europe but also a number of good folks from the US, Australia, and the Far East.*

In late September Victoria Bernie was on site again for a couple of days to install her projected digital film work. I had previously gone down to Edinburgh to interview her for the interpretation pamphlet material, at her WASPS studio beside Easter Road football stadium. The interview lasted over two hours, but a very illustrative, concise and humorous amount of information very produced, after the interview we went and had a great lunch in the Vittoria café on Leith Walk. Before the installation on site at Drum, Bernie had already produced and constructed her "Memoirs of a Beekeeper" film that was edited onto a continuously playing DVD. A mock-up of the screen and projection equipment was made and therefore calculations, measurements and light levels could be assessed to ensure a fully designed projected image of a particular size and intensity. So once the time came to install, it all fitted together perfectly and no need for last minute unforeseen alterations. The artwork was the projected image but the means to achieve this such as the screen, LED projector, beautifully designed and made security and ventilated plywood box for the projector was also a highly important detail in the success of the work.

*In reflection, Bernie's attention to detail in the production of her work created a simple levitating luscious image in the Brew House basement of Drum Castle. Bernie not only made great use of her attention to detail skills but also created a friendly, helpful and*

*accommodating relationship with the head gardener and housekeeper at the Castle, which also led to achieving a complete project. It was important to develop these working relationships in the production of the project in this context.*

As the main National Trust season was starting to end during September, McNab's work was no longer on public view from October as the main house was closed to the public. The gardens started to wind down but the other 3 works and the interpretation material were still in place until the end of October. During this end period, I took a new group of MA students from Gray's on a visit to the project, although it rained heavily, it was a very useful experience and discussion about contemporary art in such a context.

The closure was a muted affair as nature was readily taking control and Blyth's wooden booths needed to be removed from the wood or it would become dangerous to physically remove them due to mud and slimy tree bark, we hired a van and removed the structures; McNab's works had already been dismantled and bubble packed up and stored by the Drum staff and returned to the artist; Harold's work, after being dismantled, found its way back to my garage for storage and Bernie came up from Edinburgh to remove her work and equipment for future use. So by early November it was all over apart from some of Blyth's microphones that had to remain in the trees all winter until it was safe in spring to climb the trees again.

*The project at this point was physically over and the public couldn't visit Drum and experience the artwork but I have continued discussing the whole project and experience in a vast number of recent teaching and learning opportunities. I have personally included it in my under and postgraduate teaching at Gray's. In UG contextual studies, stages 1, 2 and 3 were given lectures and seminars, which included reference to the project and its production. Lorraine and myself were also asked to present a talk about the project to the Engage Scotland conference in Glasgow, relating to public art and also in another workshop breakout session at an Engage conference at Duff House, Banff in relation to interpretation and access. These were highly beneficial to reflect and dismantle the project and debate what had actually happened.*

*Students who had visited the project on site were aware of the physical context and could appreciate the artwork and why it therefore existed but some others who had not seen the work were concerned by the compromises, which had to be taken into account in the siting and production of the work. Students who had experienced the project thought the works were successful in the context and that the reality of the situation had produced more interesting works.*

*There was a strong opinion from public, students and associated professionals that these projects are very good vehicles to encounter contemporary art. The general public had no problems with the background information being available, this display gave the project another additional layer, the audience responded positively about the effect and usefulness of this material. Interestingly as far as could be perceived from the audience information the majority thought that the display improved their understanding and interpretation of the artwork produced, they enjoyed being able to access the background information made available and they readily answered questions about themselves and their interests, desires and passions and also opening up to the other audience members.*

*The selected artists who took part were obviously already on-board, and in reflection stated that ...*

*“The facility of the laundry provided me with an interesting interface with which to engage the public further with regards to the development and progression of my work at Drum. I felt it was of use to me, as an artist, as it allowed my audience the opportunity to see my workings and decision making with greater immediacy and so enter into my thought process with ease.”*

*“This is good as it encourages interesting relevant discussion with the public audience. The laundry also served to give the audience an insight into the work that perhaps only a studio visit might achieve. Perhaps the laundry tried to do this only in reverse - it brought the studio (the working/ thinking done here) to the people.”*

In reflection the success (and its sustainability) of this type of contemporary art project could be due to its naturally multi-layered production structure. Perhaps it just seems enough to make it happen, to gather together some like minded organisers and practitioners with enough motivation and just enough life energy to bring their skills together. To try and control all the layers is a job that needs to be done but is maybe foolhardy. An interesting project also needs the unforeseen to happen and so create a successful and relevant project that isn't over-designed. During its production and evolution it encounters change, compromise and plate spinning, making the possibility of one falling off and making a serendipitous occurrence happen.





## Press Information

# Oak Trees and Fountains

## a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

May Day 2004 sees the launch of a year-long programme of contemporary artworks at Drum Castle in rural Aberdeenshire. The artists David Blyth, Janice McNab, Jim Harold and Victoria Clare Bernie have been commissioned to make new work in response to the location and context of this significant National Trust for Scotland property.

The project will present visitors with the opportunity not only to encounter contemporary work in an historic setting, but also to gain an insight into the creative process of each artist. An interpretive exhibition in the Laundry Building will house displays of the artists' design work, interviews and public comments, which will grow over the season as new works come on site.

By creating a season of works with something different to see at each time of the year, the public will be encouraged to make return visits to Drum.

Lorraine Grant, Aberdeenshire Council's Senior Arts Officer comments;

"Oak Trees and Fountains provides an exciting model for developing contemporary visual arts in our rural area, bring together three of the major cultural providers in the north east. The quality of the artists we are working with, and their willingness to reveal their working practice, will make this project appeal to a wide range of audiences. "

The artists' programme is

David Blyth	May – October
Janice McNab	June – September
Jim Harold	August – September
Victoria Clare Bernie	September- October

Oak Trees & Fountains will be accompanied by a series of educational workshops, artists' talks and events. A catalogue documenting the exhibition will be produced in September 2004.

Full details will be available as the project develops on  
[www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees](http://www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees)  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/iain.irving>

Curated by Iain Irving of Gray's School of Art and Lorraine Grant of Aberdeenshire Council in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland.

Supported by the Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Funds



**Press Information - 16 April 2004**

## **David Blyth - The Green Closet** Saturday May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 2-4pm, Old Wood of Drum

the opening project of  
**Oak Trees and Fountains**  
a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

The work of north-east based artist David Blyth has, as its basis, an inter-connection with nature, and its associated rituals and mythologies. It is fitting then that May Day brings the launch of David's installation, *The Green Closet*, situated in the Old Wood at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire. The wood is one of the few oak woods left in Scotland that is descended from the Caledonian Forest, which used to cover Deeside.

*The Green Closet* is Blyth's largest scale installation to date, and comprises 5 glazed booths that act as "listening posts", allowing visitors to connect with the life of the wood. Microphones in the trees connect to the booths, transmitting literal sounds of the wood – the wind, insects, birds – but perhaps other sounds less quantifiable – what Blyth refers to as Supernature.

"The cubicles create an interface to connect humans to the natural world - through the trees....I want to emphasise that for people who come to visit. To create that closer contact with the landscape around them." - David Blyth

David Blyth was one of the artists chosen to represent Scotland at the 2003 Venice Biennale. He will be available for interview on 1 May.

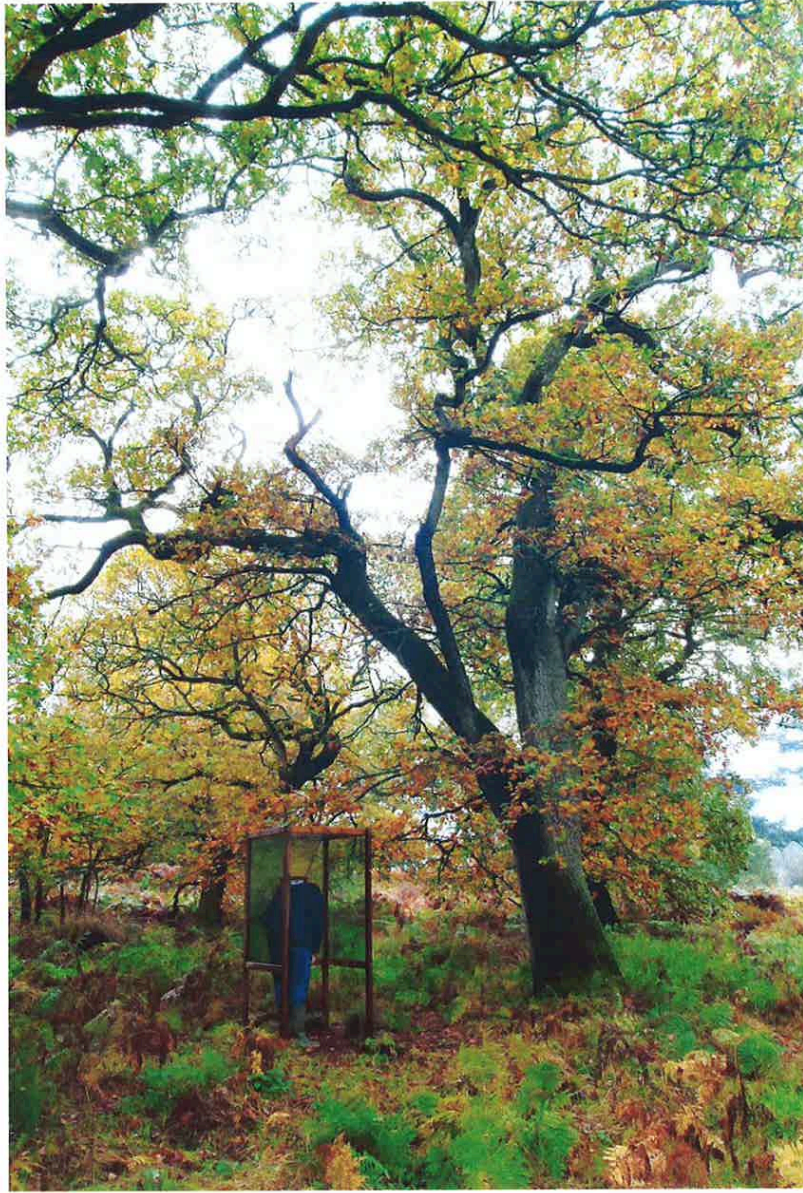
Oak Trees & Fountains will be accompanied by a series of educational workshops, artists' talks and events. A catalogue documenting the exhibition will be produced in September 2004.

Full details will be available as the project develops on  
[www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees](http://www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees)  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/iain.irving>

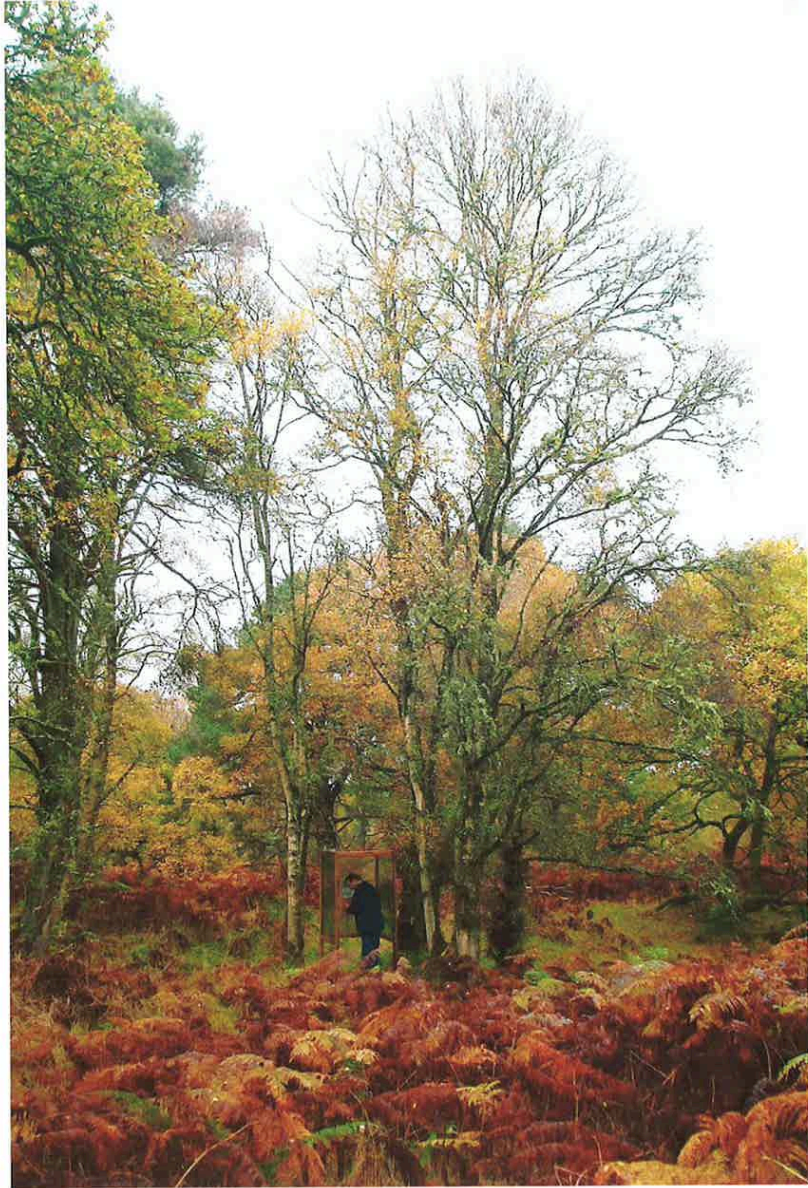
For information contact Lorraine Grant on 01224 664 873 or Iain Irving on 01224 263621

Curated by Iain Irving of Grays School of Art and Lorraine Grant of Aberdeenshire Council in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland.

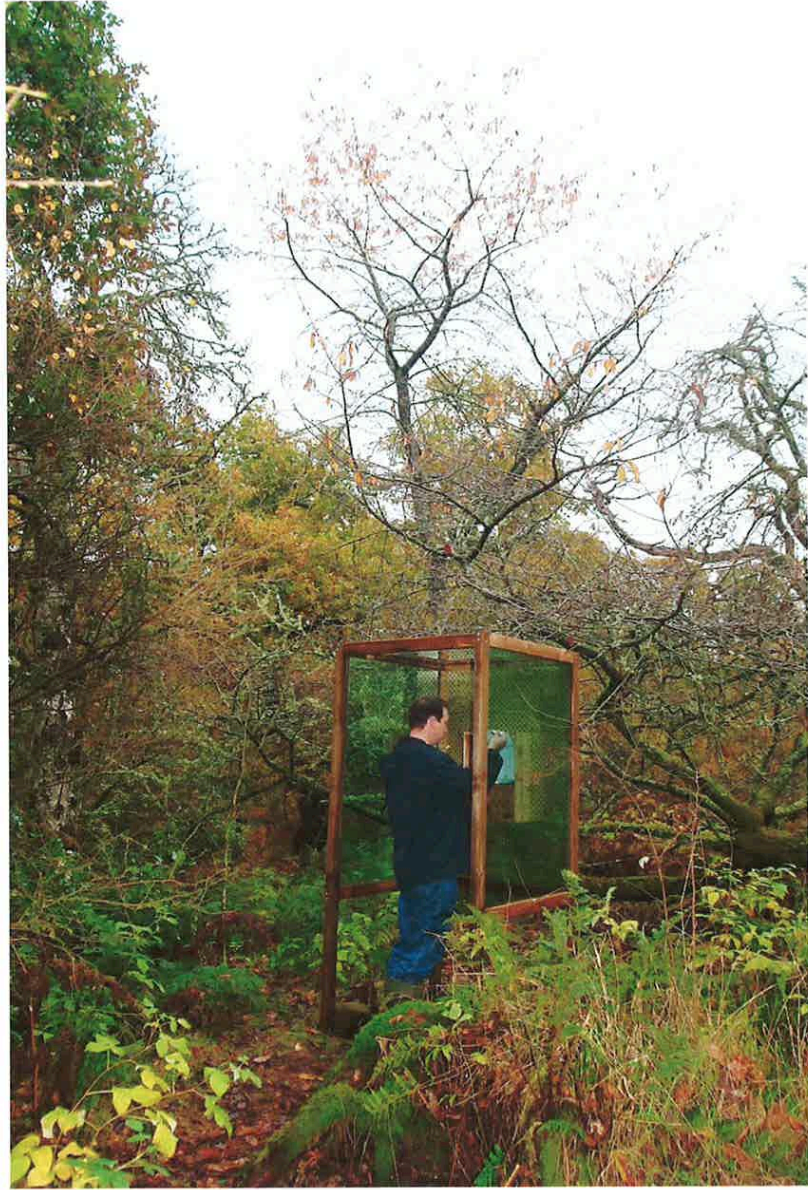
Supported by the Scottish Arts Council National Lottery  
Aberdeenshire Council, Grays School of Art, National Trust for Scotland



**David Blyth**, *The Green Closet* - timber, glass, brass, amplifiers and microphones.



**David Blyth**, *The Green Closet* - timber, glass, brass, amplifiers and microphones.



**David Blyth**, *The Green Closet* - timber, glass, brass, amplifiers and microphones.



David Blyth, *The Green Closet* - timber, glass, brass, amplifiers and microphones.



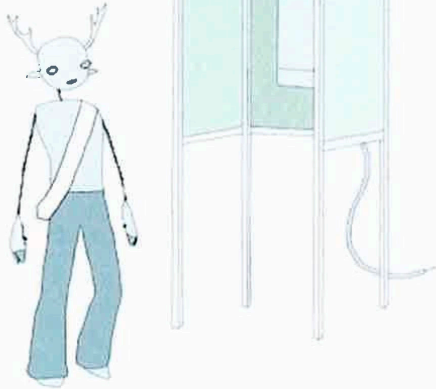
**David Blyth**, *The Green Closet* - timber, glass, brass, amplifiers and microphones.

# Oak Trees and Fountains

a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

## David Blyth - The Green Closet

David Blyth in conversation with Iain Irving (extract)  
Children's Outdoor Play Park, Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire  
1.30pm Tuesday 23rd March 2004.



*II - What about conceptual thinking, what do you do? How do you generate thoughts and ideas for your work?*

DB - I kind of said earlier that I keep myself open for the first few visits to become familiar with the place, and as I'm a local artist I've got that indulgence that the other artists possibly haven't. I've been lucky to come up every couple of weeks to just get a feel for the place. I always knew I was going to be up here in the woods so I did sort of base myself up here, and one of the first things that struck me when we came here was the fact that no deer were allowed in the woods. As a big fan of deer I was a bit gutted to find that they were banned, so I thought what on earth I'm I going to do? I'm just going to have to think of something else and look at somewhere else, which is not a bad thing - in fact it's a good thing. When we arrived, the gate looked as though it was locked so we walked up the farm road and climbed up over the fence and through the back, and we thought we were breaking and entering - behaving and acting like the deer would basically, making their way in - so we kind of had this first experience of Drum Wood as this sort of secret stalking and being aware of our surroundings. But standing under the tree, hearing the woodpecker on that Yew tree, that's really good. Also the fact that it's an oak grove and the druids would make sacrifices in oak groves, and they would worship in the oak groves, and that started to tie in with a lot of my research. You don't want this thing to completely stick out like a sore thumb from your own practice, but at the same time I felt I did have to do something slightly different because of the size and the scale of the place with things so spread out

*II - So the ideas that you generated to start with are more to do with your continuing practice and your interests, but once you started to get more into the project towards the deadline I suppose you had to start to make decisions?*

DB - Yeah, I like to give myself as much time to develop the work as possible, and not to have to make decisions early on. I wasn't doing too many other projects, so it allowed me the time and just a singular thought about this project, and get to grips with it. After that I'd do site visits and look around the house, read about the history of Drum. I did a lot of research on the internet as well, looking up Drum and the Irvine family and the clan Irvine and what they are about. But I started to draw some blanks and things that weren't really interesting, things that were not really tying in with my own practice. But then I found that chap Edward Irving and he wasn't in the family tree, in the booklet or on the websites or anything, but he was an Irving so I daresay he was part of the family somewhere. He was a strange sort of exuberant catholic chap who wasn't well liked up in these areas, so he had to go down to London to set up his church. The reason I got into him was the idea of glossolalia, speaking in tongues, or receiving messages that you don't necessarily understand and you don't have the capability to understand. I thought that was kind of interesting, and that was kind of historical, and so I started to look at what is actually happening here and now, and how the National Trust look after the place. I thought for a while that, back long ago, perhaps the woods were to protect the castle, providing a safe haven for the castle. But it's very much the other way round now. If that was the case it's certainly the converse now, with this seven-foot high fence around and, as a site of scientific interest, being keen to conserve the place. Making sure we're not bringing in any seeds or bugs that shouldn't be there. I was quite keen to see that they were monitoring, inspecting and surveying the area in some way. So, in a way they are taking care of the nature round the house as much as the house itself. But through this protection they are tuning people into it.

*II - Maybe that's what you have to do with nature generally now anyway, to protect things?*

DB - Yeah. It's a dying thing, it's a receding thing, in today's concrete age. So maybe there is that sense of emergency. There is a definite need and necessity for them to look after it, or it will diminish. We'll come back to that sense of emergency, that's kind of interesting. I almost envisage people from the city needing to come out to the woods and going out to these phone boxes to be able to rebalance themselves. So creating this opportunity for people as a matter of survival - it's a spiritual thing to be able to get in touch with the trees, in touch with nature. That's funny because I came across this idea of the cubicles partly because it was for a hide. I was thinking about hides and I was thinking about little weather stations, and then I started thinking about hides - bird hides - and as that's developed, it's turned into a sort of telephone box.



II - Why did your concepts develop into these objects? Why did they turn into the objects they have turned into, from the concept of the hide?

DB - The concept of the hide was generated from the idea that the National Trust was somehow spying or something, or drawing secret information from the woods - almost something very surreptitious. It's about eyes hidden in these cubicles made for the purpose. There is something quite sinister about that, and at the time I think I was of the feeling maybe they should let the woods be. Why aren't they letting the deer in the woods? So I think that's why it's this sort of hide, a sort of listening-in device. I was also considering FM transmitters and bugs at that time as well, so the technology was starting to play a part in the idea. I had the microphones and the bugs, and as I recall, the concepts of both are entirely different. You put the bugs up in the tree and you're being a 'dodger' - tuning into something you shouldn't be. But if you put microphones up the tree you're creating a platform for the thing to talk to you - it's totally different. So then this hide turned into this phone box.

II - They are quite confessional like also, as an obvious link to make.

DB - With the material I was quite adamant that it had some spiritual content to the piece of work - partly because of the lovely chapel down there and everything - but more so because of the druid lore and the groves and being so majestic and the trees having something to say as well.

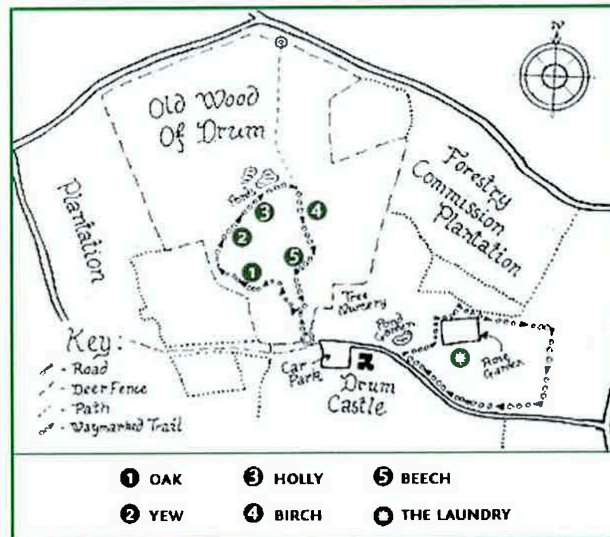
II - Is the work about a new experience for the audience?

DB - It needs the context of the woods to make it happen, it is specifically for here. If you showed it somewhere else it would be the same but it wouldn't mean the same. It has become quite tailored to the oak woods, to an oak grove and also to a National Trust site. But the thing I wanted to say was that it is creating an interface for the audience - that's what I see it as. The cubicles are an interface to connect humans and the natural world through the trees. When you go into the woods, you get that lovely sense of something natural, but then, for my work, I was looking at activities or things that might bring that closer - more direct. I wanted to emphasize that for the people who came to visit, to create that closer contact with the landscape around them. The trees are so grand I started feeling that anything I was putting in would be some how belittled by the surroundings and the grandness of the place and its 6000 year history.

II - Although surely by doing this you become part of its history? - in 2004 you placed this work in the woods and that is part of the history of this place now. When I do these projects it's not just reflecting and making an event for people to come and see; you end up being part of the history of it as well. This is a first for Drum to do a project like this, so in the future that will be something that was part of what happened here - you interacting with the woods and you enabling people to experience and sense those 6000 year old woods. It's taken 6000 years for someone to do it.

DB - And the phone boxes, the booths, are to allow the woods to tell their story.

**The full version of this interview is available at The Laundry, Drum Castle**



[click here to return to the index page](#)





**Press Information - 28 May 2004**

**Launch Event - Saturday June 5 2004 2-4pm, Drum Castle**

## **Janice McNab – Lyrical Scotland**

the second project of

### **Oak Trees and Fountains**

a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

Janice McNab is one of Scotland's foremost contemporary painters, her work being exhibited widely across Europe. Janice's paintings, whilst representational in nature, have a powerful, often unsettling quality to them. This is in part due to her imagery that encompasses people, objects and interiors which have uncomfortable relationships with their surroundings, and also to the way in which the artist paints from photographs.

For "Oak Trees and Fountains", Janice has extended this interest in authenticity and provenance with a suite of new works, collectively entitled "Lyrical Scotland", which respond to the location and fine art collections of Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire. Seven small oil paintings will be placed throughout the Castle interior, creating a dialogue with specific areas or objects. The images will act as historical documents of events which themselves lack authenticity.

**"The idea is to question what makes something real, what is history, what is shiny surface. In relation to my own regular practice I have an ongoing interest in the relationship between photography and painting, truth and fiction – the narrative vacuum, at the end of the day, of all objects. Janice McNab**

Janice McNab will be available for interview on 5 June.  
The artist is represented by doggerfisher, Edinburgh.

Oak Trees & Fountains will be accompanied by a series of educational workshops, artists' talks and events. A catalogue documenting the exhibition will be produced in September 2004.

Full details will be available as the project develops on  
[www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees](http://www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees)  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/iain.irving>

For information contact Lorraine Grant on 01224 664 873 or Iain Irving on 01224 263621

Curated by Iain Irving of Grays School of Art and Lorraine Grant of Aberdeenshire Council in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland.  
Supported by Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Funds  
Aberdeenshire Council, Grays School of Art, National Trust for Scotland



Janice McNab, *Lyrical Scotland, Heritage* – Oil on paper.



Janice McNab, *Lyrical Scotland, Nation* – Oil on paper.



Janice McNab, *Lyrical Scotland, Chocolate Box* – oil on paper.



**Janice McNab**, *Lyrical Scotland, Souvenir* - oil on paper.



Janice McNab, *Lyrical Scotland, Spiritualist, Edinburgh 1938* – oil on paper.



Janice McNab, *Lyrical Scotland, William Wallace 1270-1305 r* - oil on paper.





**Press Information - 28 May 2004**

**Launch Event - Saturday August 21 2004 2-4pm, Drum Castle**

**Jim Harold**

the third project of

**Oak Trees and Fountains**

**a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire**

Glasgow-based artist Jim Harold has created an evocative intervention in the Old Rose Garden at Drum. A series of text-based panels construct a suite of narratives describing small encounters between two individuals and their relationship to the world that surrounds them.

Connections are drawn between the enclosed constructed garden of Drum and those of the Near East – through the origins of the roses themselves to their symbolic link to politics, nationalism and religion.

The artist states;

“I have chosen to draw connections between the two worlds; the small but beautiful enclosed garden of Roses at Drum Castle and the sprawling, culturally complex worlds of the Near East. One the one hand to re-orientate the garden (which lies almost exactly on an east-west axis) towards its point of origin, and on the other hand to touch on the history of interaction, both good and bad, that has sustained between the West and East since the crusades.”

Jim Harold has shown extensively throughout Europe. Recent projects at the CCA in Glasgow, and his Residency at Durham Cathedral in 2003, have highlighted the artist's interest in the cultural connections between our society in the West and those of Near East countries.

Jim Harold will be available for interview on August 21.

Oak Trees & Fountains will be accompanied by a series of educational workshops, artists' talks and events. A catalogue documenting the exhibition will be produced in September 2004.

Full details will be available as the project develops on

[www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees](http://www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees)

<http://freespace.virgin.net/iain.irving>

For information contact Lorraine Grant on 01224 664 873 or Iain Irving on 01224 263621

Curated by Iain Irving of Grays School of Art and Lorraine Grant of Aberdeenshire Council in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland.

Supported by Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Funds  
Aberdeenshire Council, Grays School of Art, National Trust for Scotland



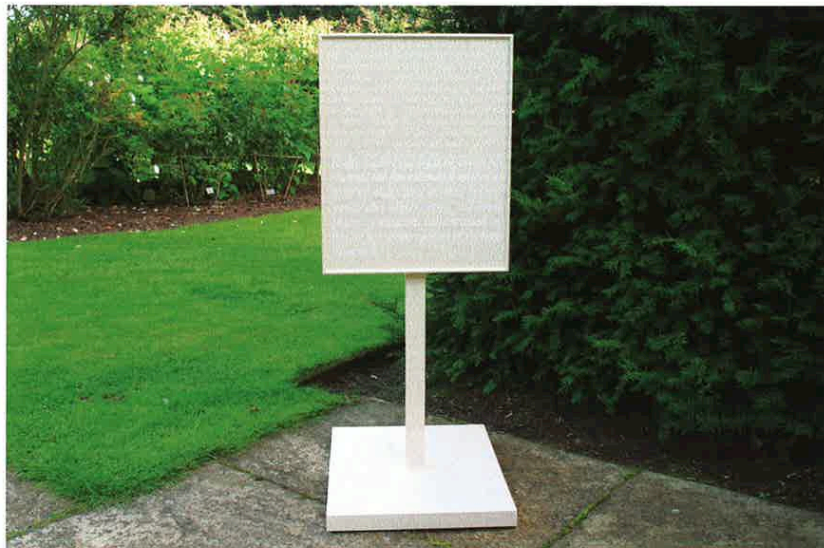
*Each night he would try to draw from memory the ground plan and elevations for a model of the mosque. In his mind he would circumnavigate the exterior - as they had done together - pass through the cool low-arched stone porch and then step in.*

*But at every attempt his pen would only trace the outline of a single damask rose.*

**Jim Harold**, *A Damask Rose*, mixed media.



**Jim Harold**, *A Damask Rose*, mixed media.



**Jim Harold, *A Damask Rose*, mixed media.**



**Jim Harold**, *A Damask Rose*, mixed media.



POSTCARD



printed at www.goodprint.co.uk

Four horizontal lines for an address, with a vertical line on the left side.

**Rosn Omar Khayyam**  
Jim Harold  
Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire (July 2004)

*This card has been designed to complement Jim Harold's project "A Single Damask Rose" for the Garden of Historic Roses, Drum Castle and is part of a series of site-specific artists' commissions for Oak Trees and Fountains, curated by Lorraine Grant and Iain Irving, May-October 2004.*

school of art



**Jim Harold, A Damask Rose, postcard.**

"Omar, you crazy, crazy drunk! Oh, Khayyam, you really have gone too far this time. Wailing at the moon all night like the drunken fool you are and falling down amongst the roses!"

"God loves a drunk", you sing - but do get up off the floor!"

POSTCARD



printed at www.godsonline.co.uk

Four horizontal lines for an address.

"Omar, you crazy drunk...!"  
Jim Harold, August 2004

This card has been designed to complement Jim Harold's project "A Single Damask Rose" for the Garden of Historic Roses, Drum Castle and is part of a series of site-specific artists' commissions for Oak Trees and Fountains, curated by Lorraine Grant and Jim Irving, May-September 2003.



Jim Harold, *A Damask Rose*, postcard.

## Oak Trees and Fountains

a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire



### Jim Harold - A Damask Rose

**Jim Harold in conversation with Iain Irving** (extract)  
**Gardeners Bothy, Walled Garden, Drum Castle, August 2004.**

*Iain Irving: Why be involved in the Oak Trees and Fountains project?*

Jim Harold: I guess I wanted to be involved because of what the project was about. The fact that it is about taking a difficult site, a site that is charged with its own history. It was clear from the way the project was presented that it was about not criticising those things for the sake of it, but bringing an expanded critique to that space, and by using the word critique I don't mean criticise - more explore, argue with, test, question and affirm if necessary what's happening. So it was about that, and my ongoing notion of landscape in general.

*II: I suppose there is this sense of "possibility", and that's why I've curated projects in these spaces. I never try to be critical of where we show things, it's about enjoying all things.*

JH: In a sense there has been a mythologizing of art as being in this continuous state of being the outsider, and therefore always commenting in on something - but at a removed and detached position, which has become thought of by some people as being a pejorative act, a negative act. From my point of view I don't see any value at throwing stones at easily broken windows.

This is a garden that requires quietness, because that's the nature of the garden, and a sensitivity to the beauty that already exists here and how one might use that. People do come here, and they do sit, and they go into a sort of moment of contemplation. That contemplation doesn't have to be passive, and doesn't have to be benign or anodyne. It can be meditational and reflective, and complex and difficult as well, but there is that point of stillness - that active stillness - of being in the garden but allowing one's mind to move into another space, another place, another world. That's what I feel is important, and that's what I've tried to think about when I've done this project.

*II: How do you develop your ideas for your artwork?*

JH: It starts in part from reading, but the first visit here sort of threw most of that into the wastebasket but opened up other avenues, as has every visit since. How the one thing influenced the other is kind of interesting as it ebbs and flows backwards and forwards. Yes, I wanted to use the rose garden - and I was aware that it was a dangerous thing to say yes to some extent before I had even visited - but I just looked at some photographs and said yes. I guess also, and this is what makes it interesting as a journey, that I have gone a sort of full circle. Because when you first mentioned the rose garden, one thing that went through my mind was how incredibly important the rose is symbolically to so many cultures and how one might use that symbolism. That's where it started from. The interesting thing is that it was almost the first thing I had to jettison because the symbolism of the rose is so potent, that it could almost become a trap in itself. So the journey went from the symbolism of the rose and how one might use that, to how do you deal with the history of the garden, and rejecting that as well, to looking at what was left.

In the times I have visited Drum it's that odd mix of the physical presence of being in the garden, and how that being in the garden makes one strangely slip into that moment of memory and reflection outwith the garden to somewhere else. It's the way in which this garden works, fixed here at Drum, yet its edges bleeding out in all directions. And again they bleed out in terms of landscape, garden history, symbolism of the rose but they also bleed out in terms of the politics, the military history of Drum - which has to be seen as a kind of metaphor for current times.

Here we are living in a high level of military unease, and Bush's war on terrorism, and suddenly we are in a different kind of fortified world here in the West. So it's not just the garden. It's interesting in a way that all these potential narratives



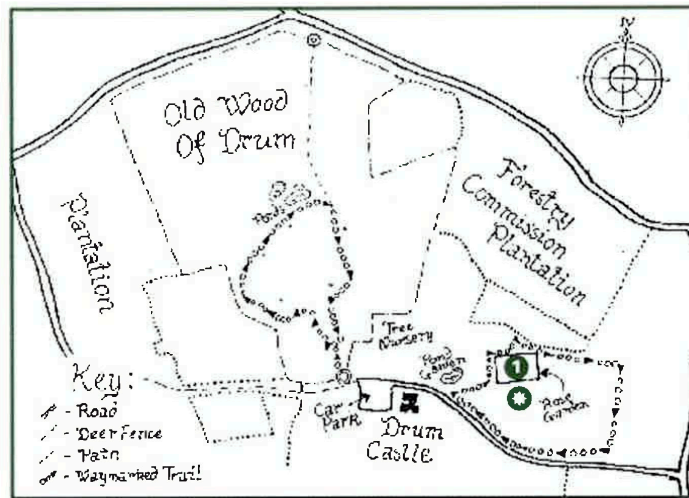
bleed out of this one site into the world. So that's when I began to think about how I might reflect my here and now in the garden with that kind of wilderness - political, moral, historical wilderness - that resides outside the garden. Early Persian gardens were about that reflection, providing a kind of Eden, a protective space where that person might be able to experience the world outside, or consider the world outside. So it became about that in my mind. The work has developed in a way that wants to reflect those things here and now - with a reflectiveness and potential edginess because of the current political climate, and then perhaps with an unashamed beauty, as with the rose.

Taking the contemplative qualities of the site I've tried to construct a group of related text-based works, which move the viewer/visitor between their experiences of the garden, and the reminiscences of other journeys and experiences. The short text vignettes highlight five times of the day, (dawn, midday, afternoon, evening and the dead of night) and describe various small encounters between two individuals and the world around them. A world that moves between the garden and the Near East.

Four of the texts are set onto freestanding signage boards located in the 19th century garden, placed beside the four existing garden benches. The fifth text is located in is located on a specially built wall in the bothy. The colour of the wall is intended to be a reflection of the dominant colour of the damask roses in the garden: a rose pink. However, by the time the work is installed most of the damask varieties will have ceased flowering. The wall and its attendant text, will therefore act as a melancholic reminder of the absence of their blooms.

**The full version of this interview is available at [The Laundry, Drum Castle](#)**

**JIM HAROLD'S ARTWORK IS WITHIN THE ROSE GARDEN**



**1 ROSE GARDEN   \* THE LAUNDRY**

[click here to return to the index page](#)





**Press Information - 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004**

**Launch Event** - Saturday 18th Sept 2-4pm, Drum Castle

## **Victoria Clare Bernie - Memoirs of a Beekeeper**

the fourth project of

### **Oak Trees and Fountains**

a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire

You are cordially invited to join us on Saturday 18th September 2-4pm at the launch of "Memoirs of a Beekeeper", a new video installation by Victoria Clare Bernie, within the courtyard at Drum Castle. Refreshments will be served in the courtyard outside the Gardner's Store.

Edinburgh-based artist Victoria Clare Bernie has created an atmospheric video installation, evoking the end of summer through a series of shifting images and specially commissioned soundtrack. The work charts the seasonal changes within a garden, creating a dream-like contemporary still life -linking directly with its intimate location and evoking the memory of the formal garden which once existed on the South Lawn at Drum.

Victoria Clare Bernie has exhibited across the UK and internationally, and is a part-time lecturer in architectural design at Edinburgh University.

Oak Trees & Fountains will be accompanied by a series of educational workshops, artists' talks and events. A catalogue documenting the exhibition will be produced in September 2004.

Full details will be available as the project develops on

[www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees](http://www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/oaktrees)

<http://freespace.virgin.net/iain.irving>

For information contact Lorraine Grant on 01224 664 873 or Iain Irving on 01224 263621

Curated by Iain Irving of Grays School of Art and Lorraine Grant of Aberdeenshire Council in collaboration with the National Trust for Scotland. Supported by Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Funds Aberdeenshire Council, Grays School of Art, National Trust for Scotland



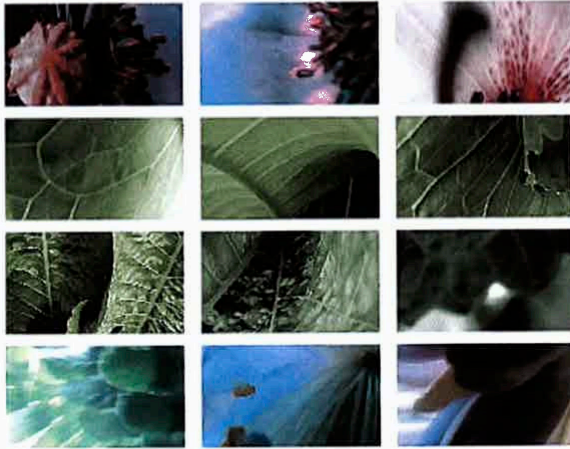
**Victoria Clare Bernie**, *Memoirs of a Beekeeper*, digital projection with sound.



**Victoria Clare Bernie**, *Memoirs of a Beekeeper*, digital projection with sound.

# Oak Trees and Fountains

a season of site specific work at Drum Castle, Aberdeenshire



## Victoria Clare Bernie - Memoirs of a Beekeeper

Victoria Clare Bernie in conversation with Iain Irving (extract)  
WASPS, Albion Road, Edinburgh, 11.00am  
Wednesday 8th September 2004

*Iain Irving: Why were you initially interested in taking part in the Oak Trees and Fountains Project?*

Victoria Clare Bernie: What seduced me first of all was the mention of the National Trust for Scotland. I've had my eye on them for a long time! You spend your childhood being taken to all these places and I just like all the little corners. I also slightly developed a deep-seated love of landscape and garden history, and knowing that this whole area has a number of amazing gardens I was instantly attracted.

The sequence of events was that I saw from your call for artists in the Scottish Arts Council newsletter and collaboration with the NTS, but it seemed that the deadline was over but checked out your website anyway just to see what it was all about. For a long time now I have been thinking about and studying the way people look at art, what the audience is and the different models of showing art. So there was some word or other that you used - I think it was "understanding art", and how the project would engender or encourage a greater understanding or a different kind of understanding on the part of the audience - and I seem to recall discussing a while ago whether you need to understand art at all.

"Understanding" is like a generalised education, like a National Curriculum. I know I didn't say that when I was writing to you, but I'm interested in the notion that understanding the heritage of art is meant to make you a better person - you are meant to learn from it and if you can't, or you don't, then there is something lacking in your sensitivity level as a human being - which is basically incorrect.

*II: So what is it that you are trying show with your work?*

VCB: What I try and do is get somewhere near to the experience you have when you are dreaming - basically that slight detachment from the pragmatic, such as you remember when you are sitting halfway down the classroom on a sunny day in your geography class and you're meant to be learning about the spur in a river or something, and you get that warm buttery feeling of light on your face and your eyes go slightly out of focus. That is the time that interests me most, the most impractical and not the most didactic moment, but it is common to everybody.

*II: Is that what you want the audience to experience when they look at your film projection?*

VCB: I want to make that kind of place possible. I don't want to give the audience their daydream. I've never thought about it really analytically and defined what sort of sound I like or what sort of colour makes my eyes shimmer or blur, but it is probably about making "places" or spaces where this moment can happen.

*II: What are your concerns about new audiences engaging with your work?*

VCB: My politics are socialist, inclusive, all those sort of words. I don't want to exclude people from whatever it is I do. I hope it gives everyone something on some level. But I have concerns about how I don't exclude the audience. I ask myself how do I still make things the way I want to make them? I used to make things which were extremely abstracted and probably not that immediately accessible. I'm not changing the things I want to make, but that contact with somebody, that thoughtfulness, is there, and I may push it even further.

The small ink drawings on the wall here are the storyboard for the Drum Castle film and they work on various levels, such as to remind me not to make a bad Hollywood film. They are many other things as well, like the break up of a flow of wash across a piece of paper is about the way light might fall across a leaf, or how you might fade or dissolve into them. But that's all going on in that world, and the other part of it is "well, so how would people look at this?". I remember when we were working and we projected the film image on the wall of the Brew House space and it just reminded me so much of galleries that I had been to in Berlin, old warehouses - you've got a big wall so you put the projector there to have a huge great projection. Technically those sorts of images are not very delicate as the image breaks down the pixels, and it requires you to move in a particular way with regard to it, so I didn't want to do that here. Those issues I find quite

fascinating to think about, and I believe that I have a real responsibility for what I offer as work.

II: So there are concerns about making what looks like art?

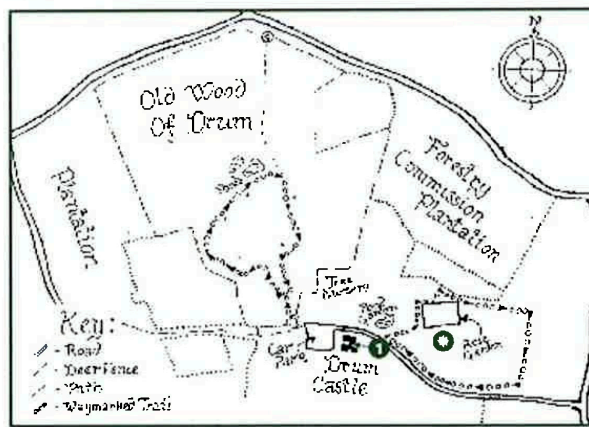
VCB: Yes - that technique of display gives work importance when perhaps it doesn't need it. Perhaps its like Islamic miniatures for example. It should be very small, but communicates as strongly.

II: Do you think that the non- experienced art audience need that bit of framework that says, "Well this must be the bit of art being put on"

VCB: I think if they glimpse my film from the first room, the wood store – a flickering image of film in the Brew House - there's a good chance it hasn't got a practical function. But then my hope is that the audience come into the room and see the box on the work surface, and it gives the scale of the work more intimacy. I've realised now that when I first thought about this work, I'd planned to make all the technology disappear and nobody would know where it was coming from, the images would just emerge, ghostlike in front of you. But technically that was a nightmare, and in terms of what I was trying to do I wanted the workbench and all the glitches to be there. All the way through the project has been about talking to people and trying to understand the history of how the gardens came about, people buying and selling different kinds of seeds and cabbages - whether it was in the Second world war or the Victorian era or 18th Century - and that it has a day to day manual existence. My hope is that when you see the projection and the box you might think that you have interrupted someone looking at their memories in a way. I remember being shown Super-8 family films by my Dad. He'd stand at the back, swearing at the projector, and you just get that little cone of light and you know that its not a big scale, and its not hiding much. This work is meant to be small scale. So yes I'm fairly sure that the audience will know that it's the art.

**The full version of this interview is available at The Laundry, Drum Castle**

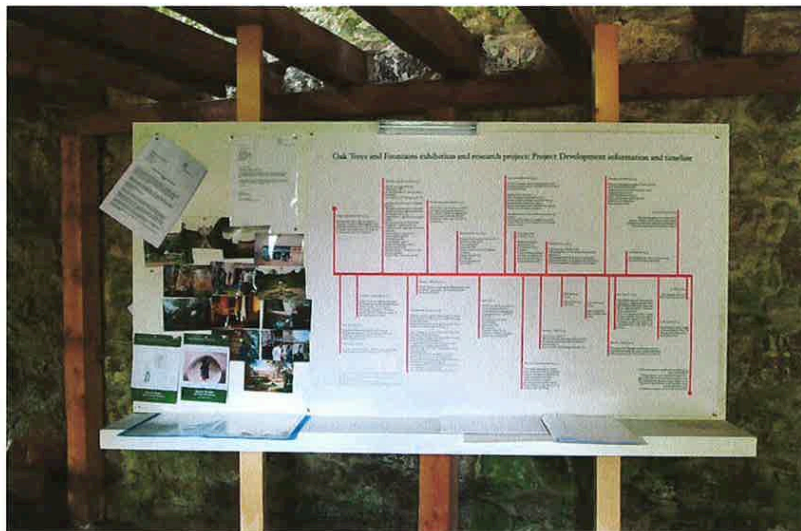
VICTORIA CLARE BERNIE'S ARTWORK IS WITHIN THE COURTYARD OF DRUM CASTLE



1 COURTYARD 2 THE LAUNRY

[click here to return to the index page](#)





Iain Irving, project research and process information.



**Iain Irving**, artist's (Jim Harold/Victoria Clare Bernie) research and process information.





**Iain Irving**, artist's (David Blyth/Janice McNab) research and process information.

**Oak Trees and Fountains archive image/design credits**

Stuart Johnstone p. 90 - 94, 98 - 103, 105, 114, 115, 118 - 120

Sunil Vishin p. 95/96, 111/112, 116/117

David Blyth p. 95

Jim Harold p. 106 - 111

Victoria Clare Bernie p. 116

Texts and images by kind permission of the authors, artists, photographers and The National Trust for Scotland.

## **Appendix 3**

### **“Where is curating if it is not in the Institution? DART Seminar, Grays School of Art, Aberdeen**

#### **Research paper and DVD**

**2%: “Where is curating if it’s not in the Institution?”**

Iain Irving, May 2012

---

#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the definition of the essence of curating by analysing the ideas of the curatorial. It is an attempt to determine what and where this occurs in the process of curating, perhaps even before curating. It is illustrated by examples of curatorial practice outwith the institution and also considers the curatorial metaphors and concepts discussed and employed by others that might shape our understanding of this idea.

---

The 2%, is the essence of curating. We can describe and assess the 98% as being the things that make it all happen; the accidental properties, the pragmatics, but the intension here is to consider and maybe capture this 2%.

The 2%, as stated by exhibition organiser Paul Nesbitt (Nesbitt 2009) is the essence of curating. We can describe and assess the 98% as being the things that make it all happen; the

accidental properties, the pragmatics, but the intension here is to consider and maybe capture this 2%.

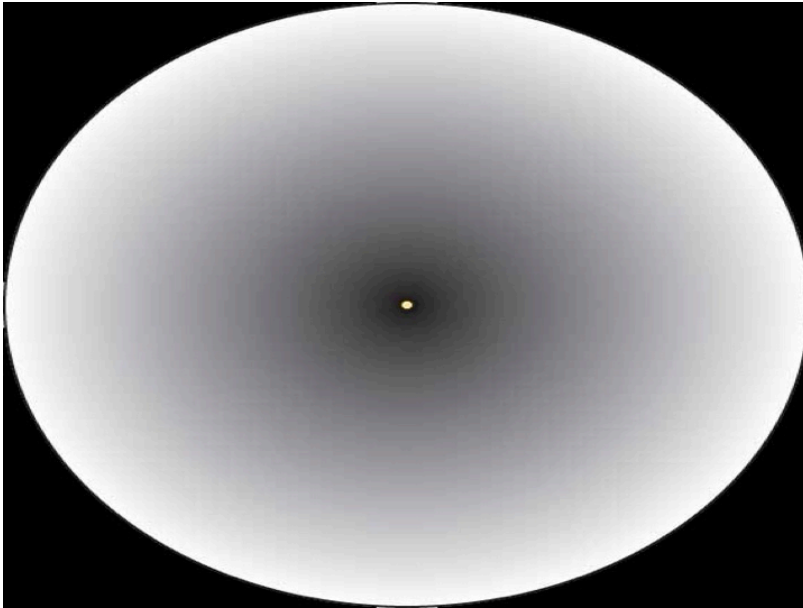


image ref. author 2012

Maybe to start to understand this essence we need to retreat from the sharp end, from the most obvious and standard definition of curating. This being within the institution and the construction of a theme, genre or scenario, which is illustrated with images and objects placed within an institution. By retreating, backing out of the doors, we enter a public everyday world, and therefore the context is different, values are different, what people see and experience is very different. Here we can identify existing scenarios where things are connected – intentionally or unintentionally. Also, within our own mind there is a virtual or imaginative spatial place where the practice of curating can also exist. Here there are no physical restrictions therefore the imagination can be just that - no barriers and no restrictions apart from your own personal limitations. Curating has sometimes been called ‘managing knowledge’ or ‘taking care of things’ but still this comes to the ‘doing’ of the activity which leaves the ‘being’ as something where the essence of curating could exist.

Within the safe context of the museum and art institution the traditional curator is at home. Working with a collection and a knowledgeable amount of information with the consecrated items, they can weave and knit, enhancing each piece in conjunction with others that they care to connect with. But this is where the habitual image of the curator comes from, and in recent history certain curators (and people who curate) have questioned and challenged these traditions.

Following on from his apparent brutal curating experience of the 1972 Documenta 5, exhibition in Kassel, Germany, Harold Szeemann withdrew for a short time and invented the 'Museum of Obsessions'.

Following on from his apparent brutal curating experience of the 1972 Documenta 5, exhibition in Kassel, Germany, Harold Szeemann withdrew for a short time and invented the 'Museum of Obsessions', which he said only existed in his head. He determined it to be a kind of speculative place to release our primal and positive unit of energy that is the source of our creative individuality and the catalyst of intensive intentions, those individual energies of obsession that create our own intellectual and sensorial worlds.



A view of the exhibition *Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us*

image ref. SZEEMANN ARCHIVE/BALTHASAR, B., 2006. *Grandfather, A Pioneers Like Us* In: MÜLLER H-J., 2006. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz. p. 54.

Although at this time he continued curating by producing the actual exhibition, "*Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us*" (exhibited only in his apartment in Bern, 1974) it is important to note that the curator is seen to identify new approaches in curatorial practice for it to be a meaningful experience for all those involved. This necessity (after the stress and management of a major art event, perhaps) for a new approach to curating, as a space of imagination, is also important to acknowledge. Szeemann's experience of Documenta was mixed, "after the excessively public, only the opposite seemed possible: the exhibition as a representation of intimate matters, thereby regaining a dimension" (Obrist 2008). This scenario could be accused of creating a proto-institution, just constructing the problem somewhere else, but in Szeemann's practice this was a crucial moment where the curator looked for a more individual process and consciously avoided the traditional expectations and methodologies of curating.

Another example to consider of the curatorial extending the distance from conventional exhibition is Seth Siegelaub's catalogue exhibitions. There were a number of self-published 'exhibitions' produced by Siegelaub who is credited as the editor.

Another example to consider of the curatorial extending the distance from conventional exhibition is Seth Siegelaub's catalogue exhibitions. These were a number of self-published 'exhibitions' produced by Siegelaub who is credited as the editor.

The first, being a solo exhibition by Douglas Huebler in a private New York apartment in November 1968. Following this there was a Lawrence Weiner book as an exhibition and a group show in December 1968. This project, called the *Xerox book*, although Siegelaub did not encourage the title, entailed the curator requesting each of the selected artists to propose an artwork for the 'exhibition'. Knowing that there would be no physical production or showing of

the artwork, the proposals were mainly textual, which were either statements or instructions for the hypothetical artwork. Again the purpose of this project and subsequent 'exhibitions' can be seen as an extension and loosening of the boundaries of the institutional rules for curated creative and imaginary possibilities. Perhaps a consequence of the questioning anti-establishment nature of the times, but subsequently was an important model to support a continuing challenge of the institutional power field.

As a curator of an institution,  
you have your space, it's the  
vessel, the four walls that  
you know intimately, and this  
is your canvas. Therefore  
your imagination is already  
restricted, it has parameters,  
and there is a field of activity,  
but this still needs to be filled  
in whatever way for the  
curation to exist.

Hans Ulrich Obrist in his recent keynote presentations continues to venture back to his curatorial beginnings with the much-covered story of the exhibition in his kitchen in St Gallen, Switzerland 1992.

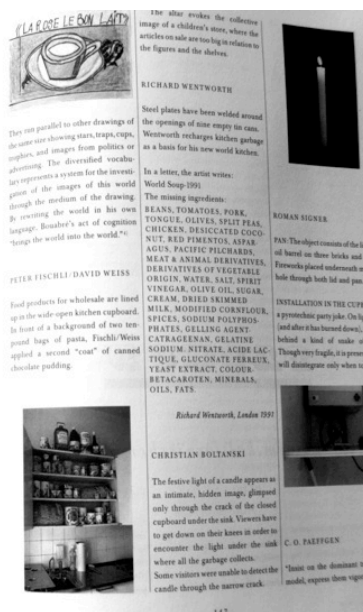


image ref. PARKETT 1992. Pages from Parkett: *A Kitchen Exhibition in St. Gallen*. Parkett, Zurich, Vol.31. p. 146-147

Here he started to curate outwith the institution, was this a challenge to the institution or a portfolio example of his creativity and innovation of where the curatorial could also exist? This humble beginning (as many others have had using their domestic spaces for exhibitions has led to many other curatorial ideas and real exhibitions, but its important here to acknowledge the need for this experimentation of ideas, which don't manifest themselves in a traditional public exhibition. Obrist's work also includes a book of compiled proposals of art projects which 'didn't physically happen', although in fact they have, in the imaginations of the artists and in the pages of the *Unbuilt Roads: 107 Unrealised Projects* book and in a recent open call through e-flux.com to gather artistic unrealised projects (of which there were many) and which gathered together these ideas so that the viewer can 'see' them.

Identifying and analysing curated exhibitions that didn't 'exist' may help, where the non-physical is another way into the essence of curating. Construction of a hypothetical scene, going against what is the familiar model and format of the curated item takes us out of the physical institutional space, into another 'space', which is the space of human imagination. Here the curator can construct any format, nothing is wrong. All things are possible, as much as your imagination can take it. This is the moment of joy for the curator; there are no restrictions or any need to problem solve.

As a curator of an institution, you have your space, it's the vessel, the four walls that you know intimately, and this is your canvas. Therefore your imagination is already restricted, it has parameters, and there is a field of activity, but this still needs to be filled in whatever way for the curation to exist.

Hypothetical curating requires some discussion and identification. As a curator of an institution, you have your space, it's the vessel, the four walls that you know intimately, and this is your canvas. Therefore your imagination is already restricted, it has parameters, and there is a field of activity, but this still needs to be filled in whatever way for the curation to exist.

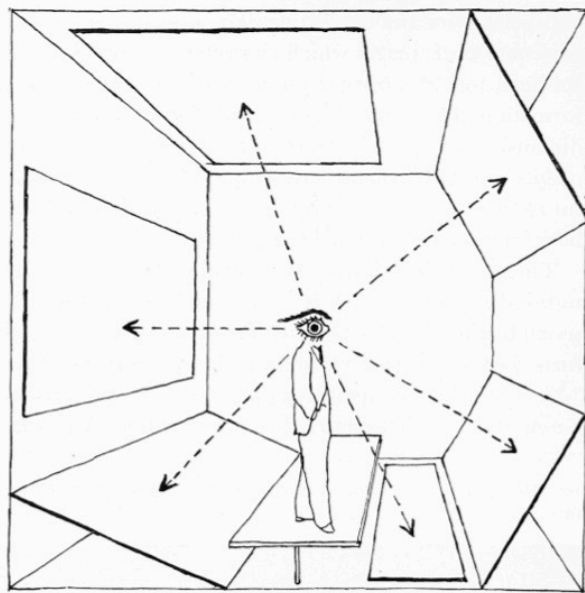


image ref. BAYER, H., 1930. *Diagram of extended vision in exhibition presentation*. In: DORNER, A., 1947. *The Way Beyond 'Art'*, New York, Wittenborn, Schultz Inc , p199.



This is also a place that the artist can see, to be creative and construct their ideas and their format. The audience also have a place to go, a location to travel to, to enter and physically interact with. There is also the time of the physical exhibition, in contemporary spaces a matter of weeks or even in museums there is a time frame. Even after a number of years there is the need to 'refresh the display' fundamentally to remarket the collection and gain new visitors and attendance. Therefore the physical space is important for the institution and its curator, it's a powerful container, like any other space of experience or commerce, it has its location which the audience get to know and will visit if the artist/marketing interests them.

To not have a physical space can cause problems. What we are doing here is all agreeing that the spaces, which display exhibitions, are the places and spaces were they exist, and therefore not anywhere else. We have created this chain of consecrated spaces that are the places to see Art. If this is the case, then where does curating exist outwith these institutions and spaces?

Is curating for no space actually 'curating'? Curating for a space is the 98% of the activity, it is the "everything else that needs to be done". Therefore by taking away the reasons for the 98% we should be left with the 2%. Get rid of the physical space, but still consider a location; get rid of the dictated scales (weight, size, time, costs) but still consider the ultimate dimensions; get rid of the authorship and ownership, everything is free, you can have anything, any artwork, commodity, experience, there is no containment. Like the universe, your mind and imagination has no barriers. It can go wherever you want it to, and noticing things as you go. Making connections and links, maybe only for a moment some being more exciting or significant than others but to do this perhaps is to begin the practice of curating.

The context of the contemporary artworld comes with its limits and gatekeepers, therefore to only curate in this way would be interesting but naïve. There is a taking care of business required, so perhaps we need to venture outside of this context to try to get closer to a definition of the 2% by way of analysis of the curatorial.

Before moving on there is something to be said about the use of metaphors in discussing curating and the curator. As we know the metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance. This use of metaphor helps in not only describing things but also encourages us to believe that the practice can become the other. Schön discusses the notion of the generative metaphor, which is an interpretive tool for the critical analysis of a practice (Schön 1993 p. 138). Conceptual metaphors as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1990) are from our everyday

language. These metaphors influence the way we communicate, but they also affect and form the way we see and do things. They help us in the journey to understand the practice.

De Certau also usefully states, “In Modern Athens the vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai. To go to work or come home one takes a ‘metaphor’ – they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them” (De Certau 1994 p. 115).

The curator as a trickster,  
middleman, flâneur, activist  
or indeed as politician, talker,  
publicist, conversationist,  
speaker, translator etc, or  
curating as smuggling or the  
curatorial as a gift.

Metaphors are then spacial trajectories. To use the metaphor to explain curating seems natural, it is appropriate to the practice and its methods. Therefore when referring to the curator as a “trickster” (Czegledy 2002), “middleman” (Andreasen and Bang Larsen 2007), “flâneur/activist” (Kowalski 2010) or indeed as politician, talker, publicist, conversationist, speaker, translator etc, or curating as smuggling or the curatorial as a gift, it conjures up and determines a chosen interpretation, which implies that we need to consider this ‘other’ as the way not only to understand what curating is but how it is done. The metaphors chosen are then not just useful, colourful adjectives. With their use they can create a thinking method of and for the practice, they have the power and persuasion to alter our understanding as well as produce new interpretations of the practice.



image ref. ANONYMOUS. 1900 *Schichtl's Marionetten, Variété = Theater* postcard. Available from:

<http://www.galerie123.com/original-vintage-poster/117/schichtl-s-marionetten-variete-theater>

The use of the particular metaphors mentioned to identify curating, has in fact made it more mysterious and related to subversion therefore shaping the way that the practice might be carried out.

Lewis Hyde writes about the creation of a work of art as a “gift” (Hyde 2006 p. xiv). The gift is the creativity, the talent, the ability of us in its production, but could the item that is produced also be a gift whether it is a virtual or physical output or is this making the item, as a material thing more important than it actually is. The gift is contained within the item, so if it is given to you it is identified and felt, but the external receiver would need to be willing and able to identify the gift if they are offered it.

Jean-Paul Martinon proposes the curatorial as a gift; by stating “the curatorial is [therefore] this first gift, a gift before the subject/object or curator/viewer relation, prior to any contractual determination. In this way, and before any proper curating has taken place, the curatorial first establishes itself as gift structured by a radical law without which no opening of thought and therefore no gift as parcel would be possible” (Martinon 2012 p. 1). Therefore the fact of producing this ‘ordinary’ or everyday gift is free-spirited and wonderful, it has all the logic of a fantasy, it can be anything it wants to be, but ultimately it still needs a presence to be experienced. How can we then *see* this presence if it is so private and so ordinary?

In astronomy a new planet is identified by the effect it has on other things, the gravitational forces that wobble neighbouring stars, it cannot be seen in itself. The knock on effect of its presence makes it exist so then the scientist may identify it.

In astronomy a new planet is identified by the effect it has on other things, the gravitational forces that wobble neighbouring stars, it cannot be seen in itself. The knock on effect of its presence makes it exist so then the scientist may identify it.



image ref. Artist's rendering of Kepler 22b © NASA/Ames/JPL-Caltech.

Perhaps in curating this is one way to *see* the presence. An essence of curating is not managing but being disruptive, wobbling what is around it. It is a dull and dead thing if it has logic and is too calculated and careful, it needs to be “a disruptive embodiment against received

knowledge” (Martinon 2012 p. 1). But this disruptive nature is required to sustain any creative practice, as an expected anti-dote to the current creativity, thinking and outcomes. So this returns us to consider that the curatorial’s element is that of a creative destructor.

So maybe the curating is doing and the curatorial is being. At this stage it helps to identify and discuss other recent proposals on the essence of curating.

Irit Rogoff invokes the notion of 'smuggling' in relation to the curatorial (Rogoff 2006) For her, she states that 'smuggling' is an extremely potent model through which to track the flights of knowledge, of materials, of visibility and of partiality and so making dynamic movements essential for the conceptualisation of new cultural practices. In envisioning 'the unbounded' Rogoff is enabling a situation that is limitless, even anarchic. The mapping of an activity must have a boundary, but maps are a political contrivance, which have been negotiated as well as claimed, whether you have the rights or not, so to be unbounded needs an agent who works and is creative with these conditions, perhaps the curator. Smuggling is proposed as “an operational device which allows us to bring our speculations concerning global circulations, cultural difference, translations, legitimacies, secure inhabitation, visibility and the queering of identity into play as they circle and hopefully produce 'smuggling' as a new subject in the world” (Rogoff 2006) The activity is clandestine in nature and could be seen as a passage of contraband (knowledge, experience, ideas, creativity even items) working out with the normal routes of trade. This term makes sense with the activity of independence, as it has an attitude of knowing and skill in survival but looks for the gaps in the system to take advantage of in making new meanings.

This concept can be clearly seen in the creation of a curated idea, where in the very initial stages, before any pragmatics or management occurs, there are no limits, no boundaries, Although smuggling also has the connotation of the illegal, breaking laws for profit as well as also for good, as in removing knowledge, items or people from conflict to a secure place. But primarily this concept of smuggling helps to consider how the curatorial has no boundaries of the imagination and creativity.

The smuggler also sees the surplus to take advantage of and hence cause further disruption. If the curatorial lives best in the unbounded then what happens when a horizon of some sort is reached, the fullness is complete. Jean Paul Martinon proposes, “The curatorial disrupts by heightening the limits, the lines or the horizons. In other words it plays at making the fullness (or surplus) unbearably fuller” (Martinon 2012 p. 3). This fullness can only be combated by the imaginary “because the imaginary is the only thing that can never be drawn with any certainty or confined by a discipline or practice” (Martinon 2012 p. 4). Here Martinon is

declaring that this is where the curatorial fights for the creative practice/person to see no limits, as the imaginary is like the cosmos where there are only extremes and no compass.

So the essence of curating is  
a cryptid, we know it is there  
but we can't see it.

In conclusion then, perhaps the essence of curating is a cryptid, we know it is there but we can't see it. We can identify it, like the new planet from the things that we can see and experience - it is there or the 98% that is 'the everything else that needs to be done' wouldn't exist. It is also clear that we will continue to identify and have influence on the practice through metaphors to discuss and articulate what we mean and what it means to us - a curated metaphor identifies curating.



image ref. author 2012

## References to paper

- Andreasen, S and Bang Larsen, L. (2007). *The Middleman: Beginning to talk about mediation*, in O'Neill, P. ed. *Curating Subjects*, London: Open Editions.
- Czegledy, N, *The Myth and Mischief Maker*, in Thomas, Catherine, ed. (2002) *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*. Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press.
- De Certau M, trans Rendall S.F, (1984) *The Practice of everyday life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- Hyde L. (2006) *The Gift*, Edinburgh: Cannongate Ltd.
- Kowalski, MJ. (2010). *The Curatorial Muse*, London: Contemporary Aesthetics. Available from: <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=585>
- Lakoff, G. & M. Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Martinon J P. (2012) *Theses in the Philosophy of Curating*, London: I.B.Tauris. Available from: <http://www.jeanpaulmartinon.net/Site/Books.html>
- Nesbitt P. Exhibition Organiser at Inverleith House, Edinburgh. Personal communication. 2009. April 7. Note: Paul Nesbitt stated in our conversation that he does not see himself as a “curator”; he assists the artists to make the projects and exhibitions for the gallery. His job is 98% organising (fundraising, lending work, negotiating the works, preparing the gallery, marketing and designing and writing interpretation and publications) and 2% curating (idea of project in relation to space, context, location).
- Obrist, H.U., (2008). *A Brief History of Curating*. Dijon, Les Presses du Reel.
- Rogoff, I., (2006). *Smuggling - An Embodied Criticality*. Available from: <http://transform.eipcp.net>
- Schön D. A., In: Ortony A, editor. (1993). *Metaphor and thought*. revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The inserted photographs and short texts were used in the presentation as contextual - metaphorical images to the text.

FREE  
CURATING



The village curator sat down and reflected on the day.

He thought about the discussion at the office drop in session in the morning which had seemed to help a few of the locals with their networking issues of connecting up their craft group to new members. He had given them advice about sharing resources and demonstrators with other similar groups through their micro sites and posters. He also thought about the weekly ecology group coming in energised at lunchtime after their walking trip down to the Harbour and beach. Earlier they had made their way along the bay picking up any materials or items they found polystyrene, wood, plastic panels, shoes, rope. The group had then continued to climb across the rocks towards the island. But getting there was always difficult but luckily they were able to get to it by a path, which appeared when the tide was out. Once there they had organised a spontaneous exhibition of the items found. Things were categorized in form, material and colour, arranged on the rocks and photographs were taken. Once back in the cabin one of the group downloaded and processed the exhibition images on to the curators online exhibition space.

Later in the afternoon he had held a seminar online for his course in 'Sociocultural Positioning in Curating: Exploring Culture, Discourse, Narrative & Power.' This six-week course had students from down the road and the other side of the world making a creative global interaction from a simple wooden office.

At the end of the day, the village curator then tidied up the teacups and milk, stacked the magazines, journals and books back on their shelves, closed down the word processing and internet social networking applications and switched off the computer.

(Irving I 2011 p. 14/19)

Continues...