

**UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE
Interdisciplinary Master Studies Department**



Cultural Management and Cultural Policy in The Balkans

master thesis:

**THE ARTIST – CURATOR PHENOMENON IN
THE EXPANDING ART WORLD**

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Belgrade, February, 2010

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ABSTRACT

The substance of the present research as the title of the thesis suggest means to investigate the relationship that artist have to the profession of the exhibition making or curating as a phenomenon. The research reflects on the worldwide phenomena of “artist-curator” and gives an inside picture of the new political and economic situation occurred after the dismantling of Eastern socialist block that maps the practices and manifestations of the artist curator phenomena in the East-European countries.

With a wide and diverse range of manifestations, the situation related to artist-curating practices in fact has become a worldwide phenomenon. It is not unusual for artists, working in contemporary art, to occupy a more evident role in the process of producing, as well as the aesthetics of an exhibition, that is, exhibition making, then they did some decade ago. The suggestions above in combination with my main concern (the appearances, origins and meaning of the phenomenon of artist-curators) have lead to the following central questions:

Is the appearance of artist-curators in the art system of contemporary art an answer to a certain situation? That is to say, is it an answer to a demand on the part of the institutions or is it an artist initiative?

This twofold question requires an explanation of both the position of the institution and of the artist, which is multiple and complex. Beside, I find it necessary to explore substantially the realm of artworks that resemble exhibitions, for these seams to be the key to the breakdown of borders between the traditional roles of artists and curators. It appears that theoretically, these artworks are still distinct from exhibitions. Therefore, the phenomenon of artist-curators cannot be explained by the proliferations of artworks that blow up the boundaries between artwork and exhibition. Yet, the production process of contemporary artworks has considerably come to resemble that of exhibitions. It is significant that the categories of artwork and exhibition expanded not only as the result of the development of the artwork in the twentieth century. Artist-curators have actually created their own “ free zone ”,

in which the definition of artwork and exhibitions are destabilized, and the curator excluded. Inside the “ free zone ”, artists obscure the individual definitions of artworks exhibition, artist and curator. This calculated construction enables artist to keep authority over the creation and placement of their artwork, as well as their activities – at the expense of the role of the contemporary art curator.

The research intends to touch upon these matters, however, with the working method, which enables to let individual voices, whether by institutions, artist or art works, speak. The research includes and presents many different situations and stories that contributed in one way or another to the development of the phenomenon of the artist-curator. With the aim to clarify complex matters, it is regarded as ongoing research and interest as complementary to that of few commentators of artist-curator practices and few others that have signaled the phenomenon as worthy to be reflected upon. Hence, the intentions of author are various, but all share the broad goal of making concrete the reasons behind the actual state of the system that is the art world.

As reflected in the main question of research: *does today's art world feature a need for artist-curators?* the thesis explores the potential demand for artist-curators in the expanding art world, emphasizing on the art practices in the East-European context.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of art curating has been having a strong appeal on me since my first experiences in dealing with art production, when I became involved in the development of an independent NGO-[KSAK] Center for Contemporary Art from Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. The KSAK-Center was initiated by a group of visual artists including myself, which took the responsibility not only to design and manage contemporary art projects and exhibitions but also to deal with fundraising strategies and long term sustainability of the institution. KSAK-Center was established on the basis of a former structure CSAC-SOROS Center for Contemporary Art that after the changes occurred in the policy and strategy of Soros Foundation on the larger scale; it lost not only its position and credibility in the society but also its managers. The former team was replaced by a group of artists that implemented its new curatorial and fundraising strategies following the real needs and demands of the art community. In the period from 1998-2009 I succeeded to develop a number of projects, like for instance INVASIA, 2001 and most recently Found Footage, 2007 and RO-MD/Moldova in Two Scenarios, where I had chance to practice and at the same time to analyze the relation between artist, curator, exhibition and the artwork.

The idea of writing about “artist-curator” phenomenon arose during this previous practices which combined the experiences of acting as artist and curator simultaneously and most recently it took shape during my internship in the frame of MA in Cultural Policy and Management in the Balkans, when I attended in 2005/06 the Curatorial Training Program at De Appel Foundation from Amsterdam.

Former CTP course director Saskia Bos stated later that the decision of De Appel’s selection commission to select me for the 2005/06 CTP session was motivated specifically by my “artist- curator” practice and this fact only proves that this model represents a new reality in the art world.¹ During the CTP research period the participants conducted an extended number of studio visits on the field, where we had chance to meet the artists and curators from UK, Belgium, USA, New Zealand, Indonesia, China, Holland, Korea, Spain, Israel, Germany

¹ Interview with Saskia Bos. De Appel, Amsterdam, 2005

and Lithuania. The research where expanded also after a series of study trips and meetings with art practitioners and curators at Istanbul Biennial, 2005, Baltic Biennial from Vilnius, 2005 and Transmediale-06, Festival for Art and Digital Culture from Berlin.

Also the curatorial program frame provided as an example of functioning art market the meetings with artists, gallery owners and collectors in the frame of Frieze Art Fair (London, UK) and Art Cologne Art Fair (Germany). I had chance to share the ideas and knowledge with an extended network of former CTP participants and practicing curators, that represented an important contribution in terms of not only exchanging the knowledge but also expanding my vision and notion of curating. Finally I have been fortunate to learn and expand my curatorial experience from a number of artists and curators invited to participate at the final project co-produced by Curatorial Training Program participants and developed in close collaboration with De Appel's curatorial team, which was - an exhibition and a series of public events under the title- "Mercury in Retrograde".

Especially for this exhibition I designed an installation room titled "Nova Zembla"- a collection of XVI century items loaned from the collection of Rijksmuseum from Amsterdam that functioned as a starting point for exploring "Mercury in Retrograde" exhibition. The displacement of items from the Nova Zembla collection from History Department of Rijksmuseum and their re-location into a contemporary art context through the CTP exhibition project at De Appel was guided by the principle of re-contextualization: a process of cultural value exchange between two major cultural institutions. In this sense, the aim of including the Nova Zembla collection in a contemporary art context was to offer a new reading on the collection, in which a reexamination of the story served as a metaphor for questioning the linearity and authorship of complexly layered historical "sites."²

The title of my thesis means to investigate the relationship that artist have to the profession of the exhibition making or curating as a phenomenon. With a wide and diverse range of manifestations, the situation related to artist-curating practices in fact has become a worldwide phenomenon. Certainly, exhibitions have been organized by artists long time before. One can think of many examples in the history of art, in which artists tended to gather in groups to have their work displayed for promotion and distribution, or as propaganda for an aesthetic or political idea.

What seems to be crucial departures from what was more or less usual with exhibition making artists, are the shift in the artist's focus on art works that are not their own, as well as

² Mercury in Retrograde, Editors: Laura Schleussner, Angela Serino, Defne Ayas, Stefan Rusu, Tessa Giblin and Diana Wiegersma. CTP Program 2005-2006, de Appel Amsterdam, 2007

the actual, far-reaching independence of the artist, even when his or her activity is related to an institution. This contemporary, financially and institutionally independent “artist-curator” is often employable in different settings in order to set up contemporary art exhibitions, thereby enjoying great organizational, intellectual, and artistic freedom. It is the palpable presence of artists in the field that was to be destined for the curator, that is, the phenomenon of artist-curators, not someone’s (dis-) approval of it, of which I find it crucial to explore and to generate in-depth knowledge. For much remains unclear about origins, meaning, and even appearances of the phenomenon.

After a quick investigation of these subjects one finds oneself intertwined with further questions around the development of the activities or the image of the artist, the notion of the artwork, the profession of the curator, and the exhibition making. These are many interrelated histories that compile the art world of both the last and this century. It might be reasonable, for instance, to assume that artists take up the role of the curator as a response to the enormous domination that the curator assumed, as announced by our first “modern” curator Harald Szeemann in 1972.³ The “revenge” could be communicated through artworks or artists’ activities. What we find, then, is a complete subversion of the subordinate position in the hierarchy of culture industry, which artists since the 1970s have been feeling.

It also plausible that new role of artists is caused by an increase of their activities in general, whether provoked by business mindedness, art institutions’ changing policies, or own artistic strategies. The suggestions above in combination with my main concern (the appearances, origins and meaning of the phenomenon of artist-curators) have lead to the following central question:

Is the appearance of artist-curators in the art system of contemporary art an answer to a certain situation? That is to say, is it an answer to a demand on the part of the institutions or is it an artist initiative?

This twofold question requires an explanation of both the position of the institution and of the artist, which is multiple and complex. Beside, I find it necessary to explore substantially the realm of artworks that resemble exhibitions, for these seams to be the key to the breakdown of borders between the traditional roles of artists and curators. For my

³ It was then that Harald Szeemann was assigned to be artistic director of the Documenta 5 and his approach would dramatically change this specific post, and that of the curator in general. Szeemann resigned the artistic commission of their duties, instead vying to take the entire programming, the selection of artist and their presentation into his own hands. Not only did this mean the beginning of a new player in the field of contemporary art, it had also set-off protests from the side of the artists as directed to the dominant and appropriate nature of this curator as “the author of an exhibition”.

research, I have relied on books and articles, and to bigger extend, on interviews with artist-curators. As a result a number of artists such as Anton Vidokle, Lia Perjovschi, Tadej Pogacear, Alexander Petrelli, Fred Wilson, Matei Bejenaru and Vladimir Us, will be recurring throughout the research material. The suppositions, concerning the institutions, the artists, and the artwork, will be arranged into and reflected upon in five chapters.

Hence, the chapter 1 focuses on the actual state of the art world and its institutes in particular. Here, the research aim is to find out whether institutes would favor artists acting as curators and if so why. In chapter 2, then, I have chosen to research artists' multiple activities as an explanation of the phenomenon of artist-curators. Artists might take up the role of the curator very willingly, but for what reasons? Chapter 3 will investigate the assumption that the origins and meaning of the phenomenon lay in the actual artwork itself. I intend to explore if the existence of artworks that closely resemble exhibitions, of whose production resemble that of exhibitions, could serve as the clarification of the phenomenon. Chapter 4 will present the artist-curator practitioners related to the East-European context. The chapter 5 will investigate the artist-curator as a model of institutional critique. Continuing this theme, but including findings from previous chapters, in this concluding chapter I will sketch the very acceptable model for artists acting as curators.

The specific areas of expertise needed for the contemporary art curator are broadly discussed in many recent publications as well as in specialized art magazines. The research will try to analyze how nowadays, both institutions and artists showing the desire to move away from the binary artist/curator relationship – a reconsideration of the principles that were set out by early contemporary art curators such as Harald Szeemann, Victor Misiano and more recently by Jens Hofmann. Today, collaboration is the key word. However, the interpretations of institutions and artists differ. To me, the entire research in essence acknowledges the presence of a lingering situation in the world of contemporary art. This situation is the following: today, it is unusual for artist, working in contemporary art, to occupy a more evident role in the process of producing, as well as the aesthetics of an exhibition, that is, exhibition making, than they did some decades ago.

The approach of the phenomenon, limited to the idea of reaction within the contemporary art world, undeniably entails the exclusion of other possibly valuable “breeding grounds”, such as political or economical reasons in a broader sense. The research intends to

touch upon these matters, however, with the working method, which enables to let individual voices, whether by institutions, artist or art works, speak.

Throughout the thesis, one will encounter many different situations and stories that contributed in one way or another to the development of the phenomenon of the artist-curator. With the aim to clarify complex matters, it is regarded as ongoing research and interest as complementary to that of few commentators of artist-curator practices and few others that have signaled the phenomenon as worthy to be reflected upon. Hence, the intentions of author are various, but all share the broad goal of making concrete the reasons behind the actual state of the system that is the art world.

With my research I intend to stress the fact that the emergence of the artist-curator is a phenomenon that signifies a growing tendency, which cannot be underestimated and suggests serious reflections on the economy and politics of the contemporary art world. The continuous proliferation of the artist acting as curators starting with some early examples from history of art and ending with the recent examples of artists acting as curators, managers and entrepreneurs that we could notice in the last two decades in the world of art and in the East European context in particularly, suggest that the model of artist-curators may well constitute the beginning of important changes of the art system itself. For this reason, I regard it of a fundamental importance to map out the phenomenon of artist-curators as a model of change that will contribute to establishment a new reality in the economy of contemporary art world.

CHAPTER 1

The phenomenon of artist-curator

So far, some terms that have been used still need to be clarified, such as the “art system” and the “artist-curator”. In order to look at actual manifestations of the artist-curator in the expanding art world, I will first define these terms. The notions of art system and art world are used interchangeably to indicate fairly the same organic structure. Although earlier applications of the terms exist,¹ it was sociologist Howard S. Becker who coined the term “art worlds” in his eponymous book of 1982. In his terms, the expression meant “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organised via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that are not noted for”.² Each kind of person who participates in the making of artworks is responsible for a specific bundle of tasks. In the case of contemporary visual arts, this art world would consist of a wide range of categories of “players”. Amongst them are the artists, gallery owners, art critics, museum directors, curators, collectors, and all other possible occupations applied to artistic work. Many interpretations of (the correct use of) the notion of the art world co-exist, though.

Artists, critics, and authors in contemporary art would probably agree with what was described by (Florian Waldwogel) some of them: Art is a system which is composed of a chain of different autonomous and productive subjects, each of which has its own competencies: artists, critics, gallery owners, collectors, recipients.³ Interestingly, the one could add hereto: But in particular, we wish to work with the artists themselves; they are the ones who first create the cultural space, and aim to transmit their contents, make the production and organization transparent, and flatten the hierarchies of elitist visitor structures’⁴.

Keeping the suggested core interest in mind, I will now concentrate on two or three types of participants in the art world that are relevant in my thesis.

¹ Alloway, Lawrence. “Network: the art world described as system”, *Artforum*, Sept, 1972, pp. 27-31

² Becker 1982: preface

³ Waldwogel 2001: p. 38

⁴ *Ibidem*

The curator of contemporary art, as the role is understood today, became established during the general social crisis at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Like one of their key protagonists (Harald Szeemann), curators came from groups that were critical of social structures, therefore radically questioned art and art institutions. Demanding profound and visible changes, contemporary art curators were strong supporters of contemporary art, were particularly sensitive to the innovative production of their time, and often acted as artists' producers. In representing the institutional and the artists' side, contemporary art curators kept art contained within an essentially traditional, thus institutional framework, maintaining also a hierarchy of prominent figures and values.⁵

Up until today, the scope of a contemporary art curator's activities is essentially different from that of a museum curator, who is the immediate predecessor. The museum curator, according to its etymological root in the Latin "curare" (meaning "to care"), is responsible for collecting, ordering, guarding and presenting the objects in the care of a given institution. The specific areas of expertise needed for the contemporary art curator are broadly discussed in two recent publications as well as in a specialized magazine⁶, and directly posed by Italian professor and author Angela Vittese: 'To choose, to negotiate, to organize [...]. The curator [of contemporary art], in fact not concerned with a body of work, but with the activity of living artists with whom he or she may, and indeed, must collaborate. In general, the exhibition is the moment in which a series of decisions and cultural approaches congeal so as to produce a result that demonstrates an ability to take care of artists, works and places.'⁷

Thus, it is significant that although both the museum curator and the contemporary art curator share a common task and medium—the presentation of art in institutional exhibitions—the latter one does more than just discreetly and precisely records a given situation. In the new context he or she has the opportunity to be much more actively involved in the production of such presentations, to be a curator or "co-creator" of a new trend in art, to promote ideas and select works of art according to personal choice, or to launch new "stars" in art. The curator has developed and established itself very rapidly in the world of contemporary art. Important

⁵ For a detailed study of Szeemann's influence on the conditions, strategies, dilemmas and contexts of curatorial work, see Gramael, Soren. *Ausstellungsautorenschaft: Die Konstruktion der Auktorialen Position des Kurator bei Harald Szeemann: Eine Mikroanalyse*. Frankfurt: Revolver, 2005

⁶ Regarding the analysis of curators with respect to their role, see in particular Kuoni, Carin (ed.). *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*. New York: Independent Curators International, 2001 and Tennert, Christoph and Tischler, Ute (eds.). *Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Frankfurt: Revolver, 2004.

⁷ Vittese 2004:p. 4.

features of this process have been the development of an educational system for curators⁸, the star status that curators have appropriated⁹, the protests this has generated¹⁰, and, as indicated above, the formation of a collaborative sphere with artists.

As the second player to be discussed in the field of contemporary art, the artist, subject to many (self-manipulated) appearances, is a general the creator of works of art by virtue of imagination and talent or skills. For the production of artworks, artists traditionally may also rely on collaborations; the creation or invention of art generally occurs individually¹¹. Since the activities of various creators of contemporary art, as well as contemporary artworks will be discussed into details (in chapters 2 and 3), here the intention is to solely expand on the position of the artist in the contemporary art world. Swiss professor Oskar Batschmann in an extensive study argues that the types of artist who had predominated until the second half of the eighteenth century—the court artist and the independent, entrepreneurial artist – have been replaced by the artist working toward exhibition¹². What he calls the “exhibition artist” has emerged as the heading type, addressing their art to the general public and critics. For the last decades, when it has typically been the task of the artist to create art works or design experiences that raise ideological, political, aesthetical or social questions, the boundaries of the position of the artist in the contemporary art world became loose. Artists nowadays may have an expanded and multi-operational field of practice.

At the point of which the operational fields of artists and curators have been becoming arbitrary the term artist-curator is often used. It is important not to confuse this indication of the new player in the field of contemporary art with “artistic curators” such as Harald Szeemann or the Belgian Jan Hoet, who are known (notorious) for the creative engagement in the design of their exhibitions¹³. This type of curators is often said to wish to work like artists.

⁸ There has been a growing number of curatorial scholls and courses, from short workshops to full programs or (post-) graduate studies all over the world.

⁹ It is widely thought that, in institutional as well as freelance settings, curators have the glamour jobs, and curators are often resented for that very reason.

¹⁰ Recent artworks, such as the project of a “curator lifting competition” by Therry Geoffrey/Colonel, or Navin Rawanchaikul's Super (m)art – How to be a Succesfull Curator: A Survival Game have publicly questioned the curator's position. At the Venice Biennale in 2003, the former artist proposed on tiny pieces of paper his project, in which artists must run with their curator partners on their shoulders. Al the third Liverpool Biennial in November 2004, Thai artist Navin Rawanchaikul created an installation in the form of a game with life-size dolls, which are turned toward a young curator, who is busy holding his cell phone as well as a suitcase, and an older South-American artist, who tries to leave his visiting card.

¹¹ For important exceptions on this, see Green, Charless. The third hand: colaboration in art from conceptualism to postmodernism.

¹² Batchmann, 1997: p. 9.

¹³ For realising own visions by means of an exhibition, some curators have climbed to be artist-curators, meta-artists, or exhibition authors.

In the world of contemporary art, we wish to work with the artists themselves, Waldvogel stated previously. This, he argues, is especially important “now that art has become an integral part of reality and has gone beyond the borders of self-reference by highlighting socially relevant questions”.¹⁴ The inherence of intensive collaborations between artists and curators to contemporary exhibition making was also stressed. Whether caused by present day tensions in the art world, or the actual art, it is presumably growing awareness for the need to re-orientate on artists that forms the core issue of this part of research. As reflected in the main question or research, I wish to explore the potential demand for artist-curators within the institutions. Does today’s art world feature a need for artist-curators?

Biennials

Artists Gabriel Orozco and Rirkrit Tiravanija were co-curators of the Venice Biennale in 2003. Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan co-curates the fourth Berlin Biennial of Contemporary Art that took place in 2006. Dutch theatre maker and conceptual artist Ritsaert ten Cate was invited to curate an exhibition from scratch at De Appel in Amsterdam in the winter of 2004; manifestations of the artist-curator around, and their institutional support is of all types. It is relevant to first explore the international biennial, being a dominant model for large-scale contemporary exhibitions, for the relatively high participation of artists in its curatorial processes. Museums’ “preferences for artists” involvement will be addressed following this.

“Biennials” and “triennials” are terms now often used generically, to refer to recurrent (every two or three years) large-scale art exhibitions. After the founding of the Venice Biennale in 1895, and those of Sao Paulo and Sydney respectively five and seven decades later, in the brief interlude of twenty years, from 1984 (the first year of the first Havana Bienal) to the present, more than fifteen international biennials have been established, including Istanbul (1987), Lyon (1992), Santa Fe (1995), Gwangju (1995), Johannesburg (1995), Shanghai (1996), Berlin (1996), Montreal (1998), and finally Moscow (2005).¹⁵ The specific circumstances under which these shows were established are extremely diverse; the

¹⁴ Waldvogel 2001: p. 38.

¹⁵ See Latos-Valier, Paula: «Biennales Big and Small». Info, the newsletter of the 25th Biennial of Graphic Art. Ljubljana: 2003.

same can be said of their resource and of the attraction they hold for both the specialized press and the general audience. Interestingly, the phenomenon of artist-curator has proved a consistent manifestation in this variety of art events, as recent editions of the biennials of Berlin, Venice, Tirana, Angola and Sharja.¹⁶

The growing number of biennials and other large-scale exhibitions has been subject to many discussions recently because of its obvious links to the processes of globalization, and the marginalization of artists by the biennial system. One author, in trying to define characteristic of contemporary biennials, stated that in their principal aim to provide certain facilities in response to certain needs and characteristics of what they support most biennials are based upon the first Havana Bienal, the very explicit goal of which was “to stimulate communication between artists and intellectuals of the Southern hemisphere, so as to keep the centers of economic power from monopolizing the distribution of contemporary art”. Havana’s success, then, was capitalized on by a number of subsequent biennials, which had the obvious function of “giving visibility to local production and promoting the cities and countries that hosted them”. It was a rather ideological project for and by artists and their benefactors who lay the fundamentals of biennials, but today’s interpretation of the genre seems to be prominently driven by the aim of city marketing.

For both its claimed self-reflective and critical nature and the curatorial role an artist is currently playing, it is interesting to have a look at Manifesta, the nomadic European Biennial of Contemporary Art. With a history of five biennials editions in respectively Rotterdam, Luxemburg, Ljubljana, Frankfurt, and San Sebastian, Manifesta has been the subject to reconsidering, accomodating, sometimes even re-inventing its structures.

Were previous editions conceptualized by a team of individuals (strictly curators), often arbitrary chosen to work together as a team, for Manifesta 6, the Foundation opted for a yet composed, interdisciplinary team. The brief for this curatorial selection was focused on the fusion of disciplines or backgrounds rather than inclusin of one or more artist-curators. It occurs that there has even atways been a hesitation to integrate artists into the team, because of the different orientation and not being able to focus on the works of others beside artists own work.¹⁷

¹⁶ In 2003, artist Gabriel Orozco and Rirkrit Tiravanija were co-curators of the Venice Biennale. At Tirana Biennale 2, in 2003, seven artist acted as curators. In 2004, Andreas Serrano was co-curator of the Berlin Biennial. In 2005, artist Ken Lum was associate curator at Sharjah International Biennial. Also in 2005, the forst Triennial of Luanda in Angola was directed by the conceptual artist Fernand Alvim. Of the four individuals of his curatorual team, three were practicing artists: Oladele Bamgboye, Kendel Geers, and Olu Oguibe. The Berlin Biennial (2006) was co-curated by Maurizio Cattelan.

¹⁷ ‘Manifesta 6’ 2005.

Selected artist Anton Widokle has proved the opposite, as he generally much more orientated to outsiders than regular curators. More reasons have appeared to be valuable arguments for his inclusion in the team. As an artist in general, he is better able to understand what might interest artists. Moreover, this sympathy would specifically contribute to the communication towards other artists, and even, in a later stage, to the communication to the rest of the world. However the entire Manifesta 6 strategy and concept of a biennial exhibition that suppose to be transformed an experiemntal art school (which supouse to become a permanent institution) has proven to be unseccesful and the invited curators including Anton Widokle was forced to develop theyr curatorial projects outside Cyprus cultural and political contexts.¹⁸

The other example to be discussed for its involvement of artist-curator is the “baby biennial” of Tirana.¹⁹ Tirana Biennale 2 (2003), entitled U-Topos in particular was the anticipation to the calls for hospitality and honesty in exhibition making as a core concept of the event. Typically, the institute of Tirana Biennale has been striving to create a structure for a new generation of young artists in Albania in unconventional ways. In order to improve the dialogue between artists, visitors and their surroundings, Tirana Biennale 3 (autumn 2005), for instance, would be “a place where art is not simply shown, but produced, where the artists, invited to work on their project in-site, shall become part of the next context and its compexities”.²⁰

In the previous biennial, artists where offered the chance to physically enter the art structure in development, thus becoming part of the ‘context’. Next to the acceptance of a number of free proposals and artist initiatives, directors Eduard Muka and Gozim Qendro invited curators as well as ‘artist as curators’, both internationally recruited.²¹ Thus, Muka argues, came out of their feeling the need to create a kind of ‘free zone’. Muka wrote: ‘This “free zone” should be understood as the opposite of what the term implies in today’s free market semiotics – it was to be a “free zone” that was not conditioned by the interests or rules of the art market. It was meant to be a sort of “free zone” where artists did not have to feel the pressure of galleries, collectors, or important “big” people scrutinizing their presentations, but

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Eduard Mukha, director of the second Tirana Biennial (2003), has titled his article «Tirana for Beginners: A Brief Guide to a Baby biennial» for the short history of the event (merely two editions by then), and its minor position in the larger field of such events.

²⁰ Tirana Biennale 3: Sweet Tabboos/(Episode 5)' 2005

²¹ In the exhibition catalogue the phenomenon is defined as 'artist as curators'.

should rather feel free to enjoy an adventure in a new undiscovered place, to interact with it and talk about it'.²²

Now a correction has certainly surfaced. Eduard Muka's contemporary aims go back to those of the first Havana Bienal, on which many biennial or triennial art events are based. That is to say, some of today's biennials, the structures that have aimed to provide international platforms for contemporary art, have put transparency and purity back on their map. Art and artists are to be secured from undemocratic power plays and hierarchy structures in the art world and beyond. With the conclusion of artists as curators, those biennials have found a way to step aside from the usual critique on biennials' display of power with the extra advantage of being original in curatorial practice. It is to wait for the fundamental establishment – the museums – to follow.

Museums

In fact, museums and other art institutes have already presented openness to the interference of active artists.²³ Although not the first museum to do so, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen gave artist Hans Haacke the free hand for the exhibition *Viewing Matters: Upstairs* in 1966 on the basis of the artist's critical and refreshing approach' to the installment of artworks, as curator and critic Patricia Bickers commented upon.²⁴ The art space Exit Art in New York has been organizing a series of exhibitions since the late 1990s, in which artists take on the role of the curator. The ongoing series of shows is called *The Choice*.²⁵ Further Saskia Bos, former-director of the De Appel Foundation in Amsterdam, has been selecting artists in order to let them design their exhibitions since the year 1991, the most recent example of which was an exhibition by Ritsaert ten Cate.²⁶ Also former-head of De Appel's

²² Muka2003: p. 75.

²³ This is also seen in managerial level

²⁴ Bickers 2001: p. 2.

²⁵ One premise of this curatorial initiative, however, is that artists are invited by Exit Art's Papo Colo and Janette Ingermann to select works by other artists that have influenced their practice. It is questionable, therefore, whether the exhibitions solely stand for the work of an artists-curator, or also represent the curators who selected the artists and their motives behind their selections.

²⁶ 'At years end, rethinking *The Family of man* (2004) consisted of collage-like sculptures and installations full of references to politics, history and existential issues regarding the good and evil in man, plus enlarged newspaper photographs winding through the exhibition rooms. Walls were covered from top to bottom with artworks selected by Ten Cate, many of which were from his own collection, together with newspaper cuttings.

curatorial training program, Saskia Bos has expressed to be open for applications by artists (but the first to be selected was only in the year 2005-2006).²⁷

Partly this eagerness to improve institutional curatorial work springs from a critique that is both internal (the exhibition as such) and external (the power-structures surrounding the exhibition) to curating. Ralf Rugoff, art critic and director of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary arts, San Francisco in his plea against the curatorial shortcomings in both international biennials and single-termed exhibitions, argues that curators can profit by following the lead of artists.²⁸ He writes: 'One of the very valuable gifts that artists offer us is their talent for making unexpected connections. They do so largely by asking questions, rather than taking things for granted'.²⁹ Presenting an artist-curated exhibition as the best ever experienced, Rugoff favors group shows that take some of the qualities of installation art; '[...] rather than a chance to contemplate isolated objects, they involve us in an implied yet elusive narrative that we end up putting together ourselves as we move through the exhibition'.³⁰

While literally demanding an artistic approach in exhibition making, Rugoff does not demand artists as curators. Perhaps similarly, key figures of prominent museums as Tate Modern in London and Muse d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in a discussion under the heading of 'Inventing New Models for the Museums and its Audiences', did not mention artists to be the new curators.³¹ Instead, both Nicholas Serota (London) and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Paris) refer to 'curator-curator' Willem Sandberg, who directed the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, for his brilliant management of the museum by always maintaining close links to artists. In a published lecture of 1996 that is a coherent historical account of the changing attitudes to the way art is presented in the modern museum, Serota presents the same viewpoint. Serota supports *artistic curators* in his praise for Jean-Christophe Ammann,³² but does not mention artists in his proposed models for the display of art in the twenty-first century: 'in my view we still need a curator to stimulate readings of the collection and to establish those "climatic zones"³³ which can enrich our appreciation and understanding of the art of this century'.³⁴

²⁷ According to her students, CTP De Appel 2004-2005. The acceptance of artist's participation in the class is established by the presence of Stefan Rusu in the class of 2005-2006.

²⁸ Rugoff 2003. p. 5.

²⁹ Ibidem: p. 5-6.

³⁰ Ibidem; p. 8.

³¹ Marincola 2001: p. 85.

³² Serota 1996. p. 51.

³³ Ibidem: p. 54-55.

Thus, although it is clear that some museums and other institutes for contemporary art tend to work with the artists themselves, like Waldvogel wrote, there are some holdbacks in practice. The hesitance might be explained by the accountability institutions have, as underlined by Nicholas Serota ('the most stimulating developments have occurred in smaller museums, where the sense of institutional responsibility towards conventional expectations is less pressing'³⁵), as well as exemplified by the title of the above-mentioned symposium *Curating Now: Imaginative practice/Public responsibility*.³⁶ Museums are of course dependent on the goodwill of governmental and now often corporate forces and need to consider the interests of their trustees, and are thus less likely to "experiment".

The more adventurous among them did invite artists as curators, though, typically to create interventions with museums collections. Artist Hans Haacke was invited not to show his own work, but to re-hang selections from permanent collection. More than 200 pieces were grouped into sections titled 'Artists', 'Reception', 'Power/Work', 'Alone', 'Together', 'Against Each Other' and 'Seeing'. The juxtaposition of old masters and modern and contemporary works was one of Haacke's tricks to get the viewer to look at these works in a fresh light.³⁷ In addition to the attempts of museums to "protect" themselves against institutional critique, it seems that there is another, more marketable argument for inviting artists for curatorial interventions with collections. Today, practicing artists could well be the very eligible candidates for improvement of museums' exhibitions, thus the image of the museum.

In the end, the most obvious examples of artists functioning as curators for the benefit of museum marketing are to be found outside the world of contemporary art. Though starting off from own initiative, Afro-American artist Fred Wilson for instance found the demand for his reorganizing and reinterpreting collections, creating site-specific works in historical and ethnographical museums.³⁸ Sarah Lucas, who has initially associated with the Young British Artists emanating from the Satchi Gallery in London in the 1990s, installed a number of site-specific works throughout the Freud Museum in London, a small historical museum with a conceptual alliance with contemporary artists, in an exhibition called *Beyond the Pleasure*

Since 'experience' has become a formula, Serota argues 'climatic zones' to be the future: 'The best museums of the future will, like Schaffhausen, Insel Hombriich and Frankfurt, seek to promote different modes and levels of "interpretations" by subtle juxtapositions of "experience".'

³⁴ Serota 1996. p. 55.

³⁵ Ibidem: p. 42.

³⁶ The symposium addressing the state of current curatorial practice was organised by the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative on 14 and 15 October, 2000.

³⁷ Bickers 2001: p. 1.

³⁸ For the fact that he initiated the curatorial activity, Fred Wilson will also be discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 5

Principle in 2000. The specially commissioned sculptures were inserted into the Freud Museum to make an effective contrast to their ultra civilized surroundings.³⁹ Typically evocating both humor and embarrassment, Lucas let the museum's visitors look Freud's collection in a totally different way.

An interesting case, after all, has been the interventions of Gerald McMaster, who, as a native Cree artist, was invited by Canada's principal anthropological museum to create an exhibition to re-appropriate consumer-based popular representations of "indians".⁴⁰ McMaster as the 'artist/co-curator' of the exhibition *Savage Graces* in 1992, which traveled nation-wide, believes that the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Columbia in Vancouver is changing its stereotype and 'wanting to pack new bags'.⁴¹ Mc Master: 'When MOA first asked me to do an exhibit, I knew how much of a force it was, as an institution, in presenting to the public the cultures of the West Coast Aboriginal peoples. Of course, I knew many more things about it, but more importantly, I knew how much they would be challenged by someone like me coming to question their practices'.⁴² It is clear that this particular museum, though being criticized for different reasons, felt a need to re-define its identity like some biennials did, both situations of which artists were called upon.

Conclusion

Examples with museums and biennials have shown that here is a certain need to include artists in exhibition making for the sake of "purity". Besides, biennial events such as Tirana Biennale and others, as well as museums have orientated on artists as curators recently in order to re-win a form of integrity of transparency towards the public. From an institutional point of view, then, the phenomenon of artist-curator is indeed a response.

It is not that exhibitions of contemporary art or museums' collections need to be purified in the sense of creating clarity. From the words of Angela Vittese, who argued it to be better for an artist to not have curatorial experience, as well as those of Ralf Rugoff, who wished contemporary exhibitions would take the form of installation art, we understand that generally, institutions do not desire to give way to a better or clearer reading of exhibitions.

³⁹ See Hall, James. 'Sarah Lucas'. *Artforum*, May 2000.

⁴⁰ McMaster 1993-4: p. 191.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*: p. 197.

⁴² *Ibidem*: p. 196.

What they require especially is bringing back the artist's voice -further than the display of a singular artwork can do-, including the possibility to mystify matters. Institutions from all sorts want collaborative efforts again.

Thus, the purification process in which the phenomenon of artist-curator, as the effort to re-orientate on artist and re-validate artistic vision, is clearly embedded has been applied to exhibitions, as well as to the structures that surrounds them, whether by large scale events or smaller institutions. Behind this need for purity and transparency lays an institutional desire to improve on both curatorial practice (so that it comes more closely connected to artists and their work): towards artists (who may or may not be selected), and towards the general public (whether disguised in forms of museums promotion, or to get away from criticism, or to make accessible museums' collections).

After this institutional point of view, in the next chapter I will look at the artist, who often also initiates the movement and wants to become a curator, possibly for the same reasons the institutions bring up.

CHAPTER 2

The artist multiple activities

The phenomenon of the artist-curator cannot be explained by institutional demand only. Its presence in the field of contemporary arts is much larger and more diverse than the examples of the previous chapter have suggested. Besides, seeing the institutional aims that underline their demand for artists as curators, there must be many artists, who, for professional and/or artistic reasons, may not be applicable for interventions in the curatorial processes of large, international exhibitions and other art institutions. Many artists, then, have been finding curatorial working methods that exist alongside the some more homogeneous institutional demand. I will argue that practicing visual artists also initiated the movement, taking the example of Lia Perjovschi, Tadej Pogacear's practice, amongst others.

In some cases it is even difficult to define where the demand for artists to curate has started. Fred Wilson strove to criticize the anthropological museum as an institution, and its Western view on the artefacts and art in particular. The artist perceived curating as a chance to work on self-identity as well as to change the common view post-colonial discourse as exercised by museums and alike.¹

Anton Vidokle and Maurizio Cattelan, co-curating Manifesta 6 and the fourth Berlin Biennial respectively, have also been willing to be part of a curatorial team. As assumed before, the phenomenon, therefore, is a complex one. This chapter seeks to find reasons for and meaning of artists' initiative to partake in curatorial practice. The phenomenon of artist-curators will be explored here from the idea of broadening field of activities of artists that has developed over a number of years, in which curating eventually originates. The question now is why and where artists started broadening their field outside of what is generally seen to be an artistic one. Have artists been expanding their practice as a means for critique? Are they forced by economic or even political conditions? Do institutions and galleries ignore them? are they attracted by a financial opportunity?

¹ Judith E. Stein. Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*. Published in *Art in America*, October 1993

The image of artist

When approaching the presence of the artist-curator from the intentions of artists to broaden their activities in the exemplary fields of writing, organization, and later curating, it is essential to outline the changing attitudes of artists toward art making, the art world, and the world in general. Seth Siegelaub, the prominent New York art dealer, who, in his core concern to promote conceptual art in the 1960s also often changed his role into that of the (artist) curator,² in an interview of 2004 stated that the nature of art making practice has changed dramatically over the past 35 years, both in terms of the more limited size of the territory an artist is forced to work within, and the time he or she has to ‘work the aesthetic backyard territory’, as Siegelaub put it.³ That is, it is almost impossible for an artist to develop gradually and slowly, and, once successful, the pressure to keep doing similar things is strong. Today, the world “career” to describe the life of an artist is commonly used. What Siegelaub has surfaced is the business side of contemporary art making. Art Practices have changed dramatically because the world of art itself has changed dramatically by taking on many of the characteristic values of the world of business, of capitalist life. As in the corporate world, developing an “image” in the art world and beyond has been becoming extremely important for artists in order to be successful. This image includes both artistic work (the “brand”) and the artist’s persona, thus his or her attitude and activities.

The altering images of artists during the last century are very well described by Batschman, as well as by art historian Caroline A. Jones, who concentrates on the art world of the 1960s, examining the artists Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, and Robert Smithson. Batschman gives an analysis of the image of the artist ‘in the modern world’, meaning going back as far as mid-eighteenth-century demonstrations of artists’ attitudes. With respect to the origins of artist-curators in the field of art, through this author we encounter an early representative in the guise of the French Realist painter Gustave Courbet. Both the primary idea of one-man-show I competition with the World Exhibition in Paris in 1855 and his hopes of earning 40.000 francs from it were decisive for Courbet’s position as an artist in confronting the

² As is obvious from an interview with Seth Siegelaub of April 17, 1969.

See Alberro, Alexander, and Norvell, Patricia (eds.). *Recordings Conceptual Art: Early interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Moris, Oppenheim, Siegelaub, Smithson, Weiner*. Berkeley/Los Angeles; University of California Press: pp. 31-55.

³ Malasauskas 2004.

political and artistic establishment, Batschman argues. Moreover, Courbet had openly declared his commercial interest by holding an “exposition payante”, and offering his work, photographs of it, and a brochure for sale. In plus, he showed himself to be a new entrepreneur in the art world: ‘[...] a self-made man, producer, advertiser and dealer all in one’.⁴ In the following years Courbet continued his efforts for international showing not only for commercial reasons, he also needed success and distinction abroad ‘to strengthen him in his lonely struggle with the hated Second Empire and its art institutions’.⁵

This artist’s stance as the result of both entrepreneurship and institutional critique is pursued by many later artists and, when it comes to curating, attentively reflected in the persona of *Marcel Duchamp*. *Duchamp* has been vital in the re-consideration of the image of the artist with his idea to end the myth of the artist as divine. He had in 1913 to demystify the creative act with his ready-mades (everyday objects exhibited unaltered), and his *Fountain* (1917) he undermined the institution of the exhibition. In a later stage, he challenged the structure of art galleries with the making of an own ‘portable museum’: the *Boite-En-Valise*, a miniature museum consisting of replicas and colour reproductions of his work collected in a box, completed in 1941. The execution of this museum project has set a whole tradition, including works of Claes Oldenburg and the contemporary Simon Barney, who both move toward the role of the curator that will be discussed later.

Duchamp took up the role of curator in the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1938, which was intended to differ as far as possible from a gallery exhibition, although it was held Georges Wildenstein’s *Galerie Beaux-Arts* in Paris.⁶ The negation of the gallery exhibition originated in Duchamp’s envisioning concern for museums’ dominance over artists, as well as the aesthetic concerns of the Surrealists.⁷ There is the traditional reading of Duchamp as the artist who continued the nineteenth-century tradition of the dandy, refusing participation in the collective production process, inverting his role as procreator into that of the flaneur who simply designates found objects as art, according to Benjamin Buchloh.⁸ Yet, it is the image of the artist as being very conscious of both the artist’s activities around the object and the (future) power structures of the art world, which become Duchamp’s legacy and is still valid today.

⁴ Batschman 1997: p. 126.

⁵ Ibidem: p. 127.

⁶ Ibidem: p. 185.

⁷ Ibidem: p. 189.

[The total installation by the Surrealists] induced the visitors to a comprehensive sensual perception by arousing and captivating desires, by seeming to involve danger, by smells, sounds and finally by its visual impact.’

⁸ Buchloh 2000: p. 7.

The romantic image of the artist as heroic and tragic in a hostile environment revived with the abstract painting and sculpture of the late 1930s and 1940s in North America and Europe. Abstract Expressionists and their popularisers emphasised the artist's roles as prophet, shaman, romantic isolate, and primitive, enacted and studious. In deed, the apparently consistent idea of the 'the romance of the studio' is the starting point of the book by Jones, who writes about the powerful American topos of the solitary individual artist in a semi-sacred studio space, and about how that image, idea and site changed during the two decades immediately following the Second World War.⁹ The system of beliefs and practices in 'the artist in the studio' was codified and conveyed in the growing literature of books, magazine articles and, most critically, their fairly new documentary films, and created the context for the art, rhetoric, and actions of the younger artists emerging in the 1960s.

Jones reveals the construction of an "industrial aesthetic" and a new, "post-studio" role for the artists in her research of the artistic production during the 1960s: 'In place of the saturnine recluse, the artist become an executive, an image manager, or director of bulldozers and discourse'.¹⁰ Frank Stella praised 'executive artists' and used assistants in producing his brand, while Andy Warhol converted his studio into Factory, used assembly-line silkscreen techniques on serial objects, claimed to delegate art production to "Brigid" and "Gerard" (his assistants and collaborators), and provocatively stated to be an "Art Businessman" or "Business Artist".¹¹

A seemingly final, "post-studio" stage was initiated by Robert Smithson, who moved art production to the industrially mediated peripheries of abandoned quarries and mining sites, and located its meaning in discourse rather than in the object. Herein, Stella (and his associates Judd, Flavin, and Andre), Warhol (and his colleagues Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist), and Smithson (linked with other Earthworks artists Heizer, Morris, Holt, de Maria) have all turned their artistic activities into these of the executive or manager, consequently favouring the 'machine' to the studio artist. Jones stated: 'Although Frank Stella and Andy Warhol exemplified the early phase of this transformation – and were influential models of the changing role of the artist – they marked only one stage of a diffuse, long-term

⁹ Jones 1996: Chapter 1.

The notion of the romance in the studio in America during the 1940s and 1950s as inexactly tied to nineteenth-century Romanticism was constructed by Harold Rosenberg with the article 'Introduction to Six American Artists', which appeared in *Possibilities 1* in 1947.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*: p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibidem*: p. 203.

expansion of the artist's domain, an eventual dispersal of centralised production that coincided with, and motivated, postmodernism [...]'.¹²

A substantial contribution in undermining the tradition of the exhibition making and changing the perception toward the work of art was the practice of Kosuth as one of the founders of Conceptual Art, and the one who tried to discuss the conditions and meaning of art with the help of its own aesthetic means. One of Kosuth's aims was to force the viewer to think about art in non-traditional settings and mediums.

In his practice Kosuth uses the related questions, "how meanings of signs are constituted" and "how signs refer to extra-lingual phenomena" as a fundament to discuss the relation between concept and presentation. Kosuth tries to identify or equate these philosophical problems with the theory of art. The philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, among others, influenced the development of his art from 1965 to 1974. During this period, he explored the idea that language possesses meaning only in relationship to itself, as in the series *One and Eight-A Description* (1965), in which eight words in neon signify only the elements that compose the work; for example, *Neon Electrical Light English Glass Letters Red Eight*.

Kosuth's concern with the difference between a concept and its mode of presentation was prefigured in the "event cards" of Fluxus-artists like George Brecht, Dick Higgins and Yoko Ono. These artists also tackled the problem of presenting "concepts", in fact the art works, to an art audience. *One and Three Chairs* realised by Joseph Kosuth in 1965, is perhaps, a step towards a resolution of this problem. An example of conceptual art, the piece consists of a chair, a photograph of this chair, and an enlarged dictionary definition of the word "chair". The photograph depicts the chair as it is actually installed in the room, and thus the work changes each time it is installed in a new venue. Rather than present the viewer with the bare written instructions for the work, or make a live event of the realization of the concept (in the manner of the Fluxus artists), Kosuth instead unifies concept and realization.

One and Three Chairs demonstrates how an artwork can embody an idea that remains constant despite changes to its elements. Kosuth stresses the difference between concept and presentation in his writings (e.g., "Art after Philosophy", 1969). He tries to intimately bind the conceptual nature of his work with the nature of art itself, thus raising his instructions for the presentation of an artwork to the level of a discourse on art. In 1967 Kosuth founded the *Museum of Normal Art* in New York and his first solo show took place there that year.

¹² Ibidem: p. 357.

Kosuth fundamental contribution in respect of Duchamp legacy is that he changed the art practice from hand-made originals to notations with substitutable realizations, and tries to exemplify the relevance of this change for the theory of art. In his book "Art after Philosophy", which summarises ideas on this topic since 1969, Kosuth refers to analytical philosophy and draws a distinction between the exterior object relation and the interior relation of meaning present in the work of art.

A step forward in the developing his concepts in between 1970 to 1974 he created classroom environments in the frame of his solo shows in which participants were accommodated at desks, given documents to read, and presented with texts or diagrams on the walls. The walls of the room were covered in additional text and diagrams. The idea that art can be more than an object in an environment and actually be the environment exemplifies Kosuth's desire to force the viewer to approach the idea of art from a new perspective.

Later in 1989 Kosuth was invited to devise the exhibition "Ludwig Wittgenstein Das Spiel des Unsagbaren" at the Secession to commemorate the 100th birthday of the philosopher, in which Kosuth functioned as a curator, where he appropriated works by more than 100 artists, all of whom had at some point been influenced by Wittgenstein. In this impressive selection he included some familiar avant-gardists such as Malevich, Picabia and Man and other contemporary neo-avant-gardists as Daniel Buren, Robert Gober, Imi Knoebel and Sherrie Levine, including Duchamp. Kosuth used sentences from Wittgenstein's writing, locating them at ground level, while the works were grouped together on the wall above, as though the sentences were the pedestal that elevated them to the dignity and status of art -- the works became empty examples of Wittgensteinian thought. With this exhibition Kosuth operated as artist-curator-philosopher-art historian in one.

Today's artist, seen as the historical sum of the relatively recently developed images of the entrepreneur (or businessman or worker), the artist conscious (and critical) of the structures of the art world, and the post-studio artist that started with Smithson, is comfortable in an expanded activity. As exhibition artists in general, present-day artists work with ideological, political, aesthetical or social issues, and partake extensively in the discourse of contemporary art.¹³ Artists lately have been becoming increasingly emancipated by practicing art criticism and attending curatorial schools. Building upon Jones' observations, professor

¹³ The now dominant 'exhibition artist' or 'artist on show', who addresses his or her art to the general public and critics, was introduced in Chapter 1. For his inventions of exhibitions, environments or installations. German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) was the most gifted exhibition artist, says Batschmann (Batschmann 1997: pp. 215-216.).

Miwon Kwon has posed that in today's generation, the artist is 'no longer a studio-bound object maker, [...] primarily working on call.'¹⁴ Because these A 'itinerant artists' are often invited by an art institution to produce a work specifically configured for the framework provided by an institution, Miwon Kwon goes as far in saying that the role of today's artist is that of 'a cultural-artistic service provider rather than a producer of objects'.¹⁵

Hypothetically, the position of the contemporary artist is analogous to the role and profile of the collaborative, creatively independent contemporary art curator that was introduced in the first chapter. However, the completion of the image of today's versatile artist brings to the fore a crucial dilemma. It seems impossible to unite this current image of the artist with the capitalist structure of the contemporary art world and its impact on art practice that Siegelau had pointed out: career pressure in that art world caused the restriction for artists to follow the same trademark style, which does not congregate with the artists' general move towards an expanded activity and interest.

Many artists of the last forty years have broadened their working field, often along with statements that still place the work inside the domain of art practice. Siegelau's generation was the one involved in changing the expectations about the relatively narrowly defined domain of activity. Siegelau said: 'You were a painter or sculptor or something like that whose activity was clearly defined, whether you were good or bad, or rich or poor. [...] Earlier, what was changed was the content within the accepted genre of painting or sculpture [...]. In the period of the 1960's people were thinking of changing the whole sphere of art; the limits, boundaries and the nature of the genre itself'.¹⁶

Now the borders of these limited ideas are stretched, the artist-curator has proved to be a frequent figure in the art field. The image of the artist, working within an expended activity, is a structural and universal one; yet, the individual motivations for artists to become involved in curating are much more diverse. Investigation of the motivations of both the aforementioned artists and more contemporary artist-curators reveals that there are three meanings for artists to act as curators. These three principal, though often intersected backgrounds are entrepreneurship, artistic practice and economic circumstances. All three manifestations have their precedents in earlier times. All display a close relation to the art practice. Moreover, all feature a certain desire by the artists to comment on art, art making, the art world, and the world in general.

¹⁴ Kwon 2002: p. 46.

¹⁵ Ibidem: p. 4.

¹⁶ Malasauskas 2004

Entrepreneurism

The term entrepreneurism has its connotations with commercial interests. In the context of the art field it is one's individual curiosity and challenge, more than a business effect in strict economic terms that success is accounted for. The entrepreneur, the person who organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a "business venture", as embodied by Courbet, often explores different working fields in order to fill a void. Hence, the artist as curator (or at least exhibition organiser) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century wanted to bring forward work not being shown in conventional venues. European and North American artists protested against the conservative salons and institutions of their day and formed themselves into avant-garde groups to show their works outside the bounds of establishments. The *Societe des artists Independants* for example, comprising of French Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist painters, organised the recurring exhibition *Societe des artists Independants* from 1884 to 1916. Similarly, thirty years ago, the artist-run-space movement took off around the world, aging inspired by artist's desire to by pass existing museums and galleries and present innovative and experimental art directly to the public. Artists began to write, sometimes in direct response to curators. Curator and art critic Patricia Bickers signals a development from art practice to writing or writing or art criticism to organization to, eventually, curating with artists, originating in the need to fill in a gap. In *Art Monthly* she wrote: 'It was Joseph Kosuth who argued that artists should cut out the middleman and take responsibility for discourse concerning their own practice, and it was largely discussed in the pages of *Artforum* and the now defunct *Arts Magazine* that artists as diverse as Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Donald Judd staked out their territory. [...] The artist-curated exhibition was the logical next step'.¹⁷

The end of the 1960s witnessed an eruption of language in the context of art practice. Bickers principally referred to a generation of artists that found in the presentation of the text not solely an alternative to imaginary inside neither the visual art field, nor a means a means to merely deal with art critics' shortage, but also as a tool for their own critique, or protest. Statements by Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Sol Le Witt, Claes Oldenburg and Daniel Buren

¹⁷ Bickers 2000: p. 1.

are essential in this respect.¹⁸ Bickers' suggestion is particularly exemplified by artist Donald Judd, who had developed a concrete action - organisation - from his writing or art criticism.

Having created an art that was primarily about spatial relationship and interacted with the architecture into which it was set, for Judd the spaces in which his work was shown became a matter of great concern and fear.¹⁹ The artist opened his keynote text 'On Installation' of 1977 as follows: 'The installation and context for the art being done now is poor and unsuitable. The correction is a permanent installation of a good portion of the work of each of the best artists'.²⁰ In this standpoint he was not alone, save for he also put his thinking into practice, first in New York at 101 Spring Street in Soho (1969), and, on a truly monumental scale, in Marfa, Texas. In Marfa he realised, from 1971 until his death in 1994, permanent installations of his own as well as other artists' work. The Chinati Foundation, as Judd's contemporary art museum is called, opened to the public in 1986 as an independent, non-profit, publicly funded institution, and has become, especially since Judd's death, 'an often-quoted example of absolute artistic autonomy, a place where the intentions of the artist are respected above everything else', according to one author.²¹

By expanding his artistic activities into the fields of writing, organisation, and even curating, Judd created a perfect demonstration of his thinking. Well aware of the niche that was the lack of understanding for his generation's complex attitude towards architecture and its relationship with art, he showed to be a successful entrepreneur with the realisation of a unique art museum, while at the same time setting up a strategy for escaping the power of selection, categorisation and installation of the surrounding museum structure.

Present-day artist, like for example the Dutch Rene Van Engelenburg, have been manifesting a similar concern for both the spatial justice regarding the artwork, and the conflict between institutional power and artistic freedom. With his successful alternative museum (*Pleinmuseum*, 2005), Van Engelenburg has offered a new concept to various Dutch and Belgium cities: an open, flexible museum that is most accessible to everyone, and naturally adapts to its urban environment. *Pleinmuseum* is an impressive architectural object, measuring 15 meters in length and 6 in height, and constituted of steel frames and white film canvas. During the day the pavilion is closed, symbolizing the classical museum

¹⁸ Some of these are direct or indirect reactions to Szeeman's "declaration of independence". In the June issue of *Artforum* in 1972, prominent artists-Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Don Judd, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra and Robert Smithson - had taken out an advertisement which posed as a manifest that protested against the role of the curator as the author of an exhibition.

¹⁹ Exemplary are Judd's letters to *artforums* (1967) and his expressions of injustice that he confronted prominent curator and art critic Rudi Fuchs with. Rudi Fuchs, 'Ideal Museum'.

²⁰ Judd 1983: p. 195.

²¹ Schubert 2000: pp. 83-84.

model of the “white cube”, after the sun fall the object unfolds hydraulically, so that the seven selected artists are offered a splendid space for their works’ display on the dynamic, architectonical installation. Having challenged the institutional art structure before,²² “museum director” Van Engelenburg manifests an entrepreneurial attitude similar to Gustave Courbet and Donald Judd. This particular alternative to the traditional exhibition space could furthermore be compared with Duchamp’s aforementioned suitcase for its nomadic, democratic and critical nature.²³

Also in the 1970s, Tom Marioni, an American sculptor who created a large body of work in drawing and printmaking, consciously stepped into the role of curator by establishing his own Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA). Marioni’s entrepreneurship was less driven by criticism, as it was by (artistic) curiosity. In an interview of 1976 he stated that he did not necessarily desire to create an alternative art space: ‘I wanted to be part of the establishment right from the beginning because I had come from working with museums [...]. I am a museum person [...].’²⁴ He explained the expansion of his activities as follows: [...] after I had been an artist for ten years or so, I happened to get a job at Richmond art Center as curator and that changed my whole outlook. It gave me a kind of social position, more so than a private one, like being concerned with getting things to the public. So it changed my whole attitude’.²⁵ After two years in Richmond, Marioni felt ‘canned’, and unable to experiment ‘as for out’ as he wanted to. Thus, in 1970, he founded the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) in San Francisco, which is today referred to as ‘a large-scale social work of art’,²⁶ because of the social situation it provided for artists. Until it closed in 1984, Maroni directed MOCA and at the same time continued to pursue his individual work as an artist. For Maroni pioneering using social situations as art, his entrepreneurial steps towards a curatorial role have remained close to his artistic ideas and personal interest, while at the same time presenting an innovative concept that suited the zeitgeist, and was much welcomed in the art world.

Artist Anton Vidokle, invited to co-curate Manifesta 6, has proved to be a contemporary entrepreneur by his engagement in curatorial practice, his role of moderator in related projects, and the set-up of *e-flux, electronic flux corporation*, which is an artist-initiated, artist-owned and artist-run information bureau for the worldwide distribution of

²² Van Engelenburg’s graduation project for Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 2002 consisted of a transportable, inflatable extension of the original Rietveld building, titled ‘blaas de rietveld op!’ (Literally meaning: “give the Rietveld a blow!”).

²³ A relation between the work of Marcel Duchamp and Renee Van Engelenburg was also suggested by journalist Ianthe Sahadat. See Sahadat, Ianthe: ‘Dit is een alternatief voor klassiek museum’. In: *De Volkskrant*, 25-06-2005

²⁴ ‘Museum of Conceptual Art’ 1983: p. 253.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ ‘Tom Maroni’ 2005

information between art institution and professionals. As the founding director of *e-flux*, Vidokle had also put together *e-flux video rental*, which started in New York in 2004 and has travelled to many international venues, and produced and published online projects and print publications. E-flux operates as a professional business. Nonetheless, Vidokle sees all of his activities as being related to his art.²⁷

‘I never think of myself as a curator’, Vidokle needs to underscore.²⁸ He has argued that historically, artists have always worked as organisers, publishers, editors, writers: ‘Some of the most interesting exhibitions, magazines, and institutions of the past one hundred years or more have been initiated and produced by artists. I feel very comfortable in this sort of expanded activity as well’.²⁹

Curating, just as planning and further developing the strategy of the *e-flux project*, as he prefers to call it, gives him the opportunity to create new structures, which is central to his art. Also e-flux and his other, less collaborative artistic projects belong to the twentieth-century Tradition of a ‘reoccurring desire for a social experience of art and a range of practices that result in things or situations which are not static but are fluid and shared’.³⁰

Thus, it is not for the selecting and composing process (or ‘excluding artists’, in Vidokle’s words) of curatorial work, but for the eventual outcome, the exhibition, that he has chosen to be eligible as the organiser of a major exhibition. On the next Manifesta 8 (unrealised) he said: in all the different forms of social life of a specific place, or something more productive and engaging than an exhibition’. Besides, Vidokle believes that the format of biennials needs to be questioned, for their homogenizing factor by replication all over the world has become a concern.³¹

Anton Vidokle and Rene van Engelenburg, as well as the earlier artist-curators Gustave Courbet, Donald Judd and Tom Marioni, have become engaged in curatorial practice through an entrepreneurship of which the artists cleverly maintain that it is artistically driven. As in the actual business world, all have manifested and materialized a desire to set up alternative structure/model. These structures models, though different in their outcomes, could well survive besides the existing ones. It is not that these undertakings were all financially successful – with the probable exceptions of Judd’s *Chinati Foundation* and

²⁷ ‘Anton Vidokle.’On artistic practice – A conversation with Anton Vidokle, member of Manifesta 6 team’. 2005. p. 186.

²⁸ Ibidem: p. 186

²⁹ ‘On artistic practice’, 2005: p. 187.

³⁰ Ibidem: p. 188.

The artist refers to early twentieth century avant-garde that worked with books, posters, films, and various other forms of ephemera and mass produced objects. Besides, he recalls the Conceptualists and Situationists after the WWII.

³¹ Ibidem: p. 186.

Vidokles's *e-flux*. Unlike the “real” entrepreneur, who starts a new business or arranges business deals for the primary goal to making money, the artist-curator might profit from something else, that is, fame. In the end, our self-acclaimed ‘Business Artist’ Andy Warhol proved himself successful by being renowned.

As I mentioned earlier, Siegelau had pointed out the capitalist structure of the contemporary art world, and its specialising and professionalizing impact on art practice. These entrepreneurial artists, whether driven by critique or (artistic) curiosity, have done the opposite by broadening their working fields. Paradoxically, as I have argued, the artists’ multiple activities exist out of a similar will to gain reputation or to build a career. Meanwhile, in the guise of the curator the entrepreneurial artists play with power structures inside the “capitalist” art world. Anton Vidokle underlined this by saying: ‘I suppose one has to continually avoid becoming a product, to keep challenging institutions and the market to accept a much broader range of activities without hierarchical valuation’.³²

Artist practice

Artist often become engaged in curating by means of their artistic ideas or production, as divergently exemplified with Marcel Duchamp, as well as with Anton Widokle. The second field of motivations for artists to partake in curating to be analysed, the stimulus that is here named “artistic practice”, actually does affects almost all contemporary artist-curators. Some artists, however, have encountered curatorial work specifically in the course of their artistic projects, such as the artist-curators Lia Perjovschi, Simon Barney, Alexander Petrelli, Tadej Pogacear and Fred Wilson, whose drivers for artistic-curatorial activities are described below.

Romanian artist Lia Perjovschi started his career with performance related practice that later was extended to the more complex and community based projects. Her artistic practice encompasses drawing, performance, installation, video, photography and exhibitions, and focuses on the process of making, in which collaboration is essential to her. Her artist based practice evolved naturally in 1997 into a space for critical debate The Archive of Contemporary Art in Bucharest that later evolved into the Centre of Art Analysis (CAA).

³² Ibidem: p. 188.

Recovering, collecting, and disseminating information are Lia Perjovschi's main activities. Over the last 15 years she has developed a highly personal archive from recent art history, filled with objects, diagrams, texts, images and films. The Archive is a living and evolving structure that is at the same time an installation and a complex work of art. Her subjective chronologies, mind maps or displays of information should be seen as materials with which to build up relations and dialogues, to encourage individual research or collective debates. Perjovschi is always very much aware of the art's environment, therefore the creation of the environment of the artwork becomes a major concern.

Lia Perjovschi argues that curating thus evolved naturally, in the course of his artistic development. Nowadays she is being invited by galleries to curate shows in their space, and the results are unconventional, or in Perjovschi's words: 'alternative ways of displaying work, where conceptually and visually my own work was influencing the works around me, and creating a sort of overall environment'.³³ In 2008 she has been part of a team that has set up "Pavilion Unicredit", a permanent alternative art space in a former bank in the city, where she curated a group exhibition entitled 'Knowledge Museum'.

For Perjovschi, the creation of 'one installation, one environment with a group effort' brings together all things that are central in his work: collaboration, opening up possibilities, the construction of a dialogue between both artists and works of art, and extension of the artistic process.³⁴ Curating for Perjovschi is a continuation of the creative act or process. More artists seem to work this way. Swiss artist Ursula Biemann, who considers art as 'an agent of knowledge, a discursive factor and a space of action', considers curating to be an extended form of her own practice: 'It does not involve touring Europe to scan the major art shows for exciting discoveries. I have personally entered the network of several of these projects. In that sense, the exhibitions address systems both of representation and of navigation, in which the activities defined as curatorial, scholarly, artistic and activist become permeable'.³⁵ Borders between traditional classifications are deliberately kept porous, for Australian 'visual artist and organiser',³⁶ Simon Barney stated "I do not find difference between what I do as an artist and what a curator do."³⁷ Barney has a long association with artist-run and independents spaces. Having staged a series of exhibitions in glove boxes, he has since 2000 been taking on

³³ Heana, Pintilie. [The States of Mind of Romanian Visual Arts: The Personal Exhibition of Lia & Dan Perjovschi.](#)

³⁴ Lia Perjovschi. Interview with the author. 2007.

'Central is the idea of curating being a continuation of the artistic process.'

³⁵ Tannert 2004: p. 157.

³⁶ As he is introduced in the interview by *Artspective*.

³⁷ 'Simon Barney: The art Scene' 2003.

the gallery context by compressing in into his *Briefcase Gallery*, for which he lifts the lid on a new exhibition every couple of months.

A metaphor for an alternative space, his suitcase clearly relates to the Duchamp tradition, save for the fact that Barney's case is not a compendium of own work. Apart from the artist's curatorial interventions of selecting and assisting artists, the *Briefcase Gallery* has an existence of its own. Barney leaves it open to artists, so that his work offers an endless and often surprising range of alternative display of art.³⁸

A certain similarity resides in the other model of alternative space that of Russian artist Alexander Petrelli who hides an art gallery under his overcoat. The collection of artworks curated/selected by him for every single occasion, he presents in a coreographed scenario in the spaces and exhibitions that he visits occasionally, sometimes at the openings of other shows. His portable collection represent a mobile Gallery (Palt'o Gallery), where he mostly invite emerging and younger artists.³⁹ His project evolved over extended period since mid 90's until now, when he was traveled between his home town Odessa, near the Black sea border to Moscow. The Overcoat Gallery is a space free of institutional control and function as alternative space to overmediated art spaces. Both artists-curators Barney and Petrelli like the idea of creating new content or context for the entity that is their artwork. Thus, curating has become an essential continuation of their artistic practice.

For Slovenian artist Tadej Pogacar, curating has become an important dimension of his artistic practice. In fifteen years of operation, Pogacar organised and coordinated numerous events, actions, public interventions, performances, exhibitions, projections, roundtables, etc. It has been a "guest" of museum collections, galleries, schools, universities, personal homes, public spaces, streets. Their work takes the form of installations, photography, video, image-text collages, performances and public intervention.

Ideally, his collaborative efforts would establish an alternative, democratic structure, where not only individual people, but also the social and underrepresented groups of individuals in order to find their own space for representation. His large scale museum intervention entitled *The Art of History-Throughout the Body* consisted from several room size installations in the five rooms told non-linear stories, which dealt with the vulnerability and fragility of the body, its disappearance through ideology and similar, i.e. the other part of

³⁸ Ibidem.

'Leaving it open to artists has thrown up things that I wouldn't have suggested to anyone.'

³⁹ Alexander Petrelli. Interview with the author. 2006

the linear, heroic history. The exhibition at Museum of Modern History (former Museum of the People's Revolution) in Tivoli from 1993 was put together by the artist-curator.

Pogacear, like Marioni and Wilson, has found in curating a social way of working that is routed in much more elaborate projects such as the project "Kings of The Streets". The project is a result of Tadej's systemic investigation in self-organization and his continuous participation in collaborative projects worldwide. His sensibility for social relations comes from personal observation of marginalized groups.⁴⁰ It is aspects of teamwork such as collaborative (aesthetical) decision-making and negotiation with various parties that he finds attractive in curating.

Artist-curator Tadej Pogacear arrived at the curatorial position in a natural way. It comes with the establishment of its artist initiative as a virtual structure that is precisely directed toward social commentary, messages or the description of the actual state of things, rather it is an example of using artistic means to override the dominant strategies and discourses of power. The early museum interventions raised questions about knowledge: How is it produced, structured, and ordered? How is it possessed, transmitted, and used? Another, closely related issue was that of social visibility: Pogacear posed questions about what we see and what we fail to see, what we consider 'natural' and what we find disturbing.

According to Pogacear, the production process or research, which can take the form of a performance a discussion or public presentation, can be considered a work of art, which is later transited into another work: the exhibition.⁴¹ It is obvious now that here artistic and curatorial practices are fundamentally entangled.

Afro-American artist Fred Wilson has encountered the role of the curator through his artistic interest in certain museum collections, in which he was offered physical space to intervene. Driven by the variety and richness of these particular in historical, crafts and antropological museum collections, as well as by his artistic interest in the possibilities of the process of representation, this artist has been personally and artistically motivated to create exhibitions or artworks.⁴² A political activist and installation artist, Wilson takes social justice as his subject and museology as his medium. Moreover, his interventions (or interpretations) in for instance the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) from Baltimore imply a critique on various levels.⁴³ In the guise of the artist-curator Wilson is able to comment on the collection, as well on the chosen museum and its surrounding space. On the implification of his

⁴⁰ Pamura Umetessi, *Kings of the Streets*, *Journal for Antropology and New Parasitism*, 1.3/No 1, 1996.

⁴¹ Tadej Pogacear. This is what you want...this is what you get. Article in *Strategies of presentation* 2&3. 2004.

⁴² Ibidem

⁴³ Judith E. Stein. Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*. *Art in America*, October, 1993

interventions the artist said: I wouldn't say what I do with museums is a collaborative venture. But it isn't an antagonistic one either. Everyone who opens up to me becomes part of the project and feels it."⁴⁴

When doing research for his artworks, Fred Wilson found many sleeping depots: large collections of objects that were not touched or displayed for years. His interventions, therefore, are also commenting the history museum itself. The artist attempts to re-question the narrative that is in display, and to interfere in the way of reading it.⁴⁵ One level further, the interventions in Maryland Historical Society (MHS) also comment on museums in general: their display systems, selection systems, hierarchical systems (of the individual pieces), and their histories. Wilson's strategy is to mimic the conventions employed by history museums, where objects and artifacts are displayed alongside expository wall texts in order to illustrate how other cultures and peoples lived. So in addition to its aesthetic quality, his work amounts to a critique of that system.

Curating, that is, the negotiation, the selection and the installation that precedes the actual artwork/exhibition, has become a component of Wilson's artistic practice that is at least equally important as the purely artistic process. Like Pogacear and other aforementioned artist-curators, Wilson finds the negotiation stage the most vital, necessary, and interesting. Collaboration and negotiation stage the most vital, necessary, and interesting. Collaboration and negotiation opens up 'other areas of society with which artists do not engage normally'.⁴⁶

Curatorship with artists, whether they are driven by entrepreneurship or artistic practice, is si artists' initiative to explore alternative structure. Wilson strongly believes that artists should take the initiative, instead of waiting for the art structure to invite you: 'Curating is also a way to self-generate the space that you need for your work, instead of taking what is already there and not necessarily suits you'.⁴⁷

Wilson: 'In this, we are trying to escape the given structure, and create one in which we believe and we could generate work'.⁴⁸ Here, entrepreneurship and artistic practice as motivations for curatorship with artists meet. As with aforementioned artist-curators, often the different motivations congregate. In her efforts to find her own space to create work, Wilson is also bridging the first two categories of motivations into the third.

⁴⁴ Donald Garfield, Making the Museum mine: An interview with Fred Wislon, Museum News: Mav/June, 1993.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Jody, Zellen. Fred Wilson at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2004

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Donald Garfield, Making the Museum mine: An interview with Fred Wislon, Museum News: Mav/June, 1993.

Economic or political need

Tadej Pogacear sees the role of the artist as transforming, putting himself into different roles of society: “Playful activity makes evident what systems don’t function properly, which are based on the now, the local, and society. Pogacar’s practice is in the reconfiguration of his role as expanding, pro-social curator.”⁴⁹ Unlike Beurriaud who is constraint to the gallery-museum-apparatus, Pogacar investigates the margins of human co-existence more often outside than inside the gallery in direct context to the individuals and locations involved.

Similarly, a transformation in the role of the role of the artist could also be the result of his or her environment. When in society the art structure is insufficient to offer material and mental space for the work of contemporary artists, artists could feel the need to adapt to these circumstances, to their space by expanding their activities. Curatorship with artists then originates in an economic or political need for artists to create alternative ways for the exposure of contemporary art.

For instance, Romanian artist and university lecturer Matei Bejenaru, whose recent art projects are focusing on social problems of minorities in his country, was also the artistic director of the sixth Periferic Biennial of 2003. The biennial exist since 1997 and is initiated and organised by Matei Bejenaru as chairman of the VECTOR Foundation in order to develop an independent artistic context in Iasi,⁵⁰ which, like all of Romania, suffered physically and psychologically from Ceausescu regime. He explains his motivations as follow: ‘I consider myself living in the periphery of a peripheral city (Iasi), of a peripheral country (Romania) from a peripheral region (South-Eastern Europe). [...] I wanted to organise, together with my collaborators, a center for contemporary culture’.⁵¹

Professor Reinaldo Laddaga and museum director Charles Esche argued that today, the ‘artist’ initiative’ phenomenon (or artist’ platform, artist’ project or artists’ organisation) is gaining strength.⁵² Aside from their individual careers, artists are focusing more and more on forms of joint organisation in order to change something in the local, national or regional

⁴⁹ Pamura Umetessi, *Kings of the Streets, Journal for Antropology and New Parasitism*, 1.3/ No 1, 1996.

⁵⁰ According to the biennial's website. 24.10.2005 «www.periferic.org»

⁵¹ Interview with Matei Bejenaru. June, 2008.

⁵² This is also seen in the recent flow of newspapers or magazines by artist groups. see for example Commander, Ingrid. 'Ik publiceer dus ik besta. Metropolis M3 (2005): pp. 108-144.

environment, 'to create conditions that are close to the artists' practice to make joint work'.⁵³ According to Laddaga, the initiatives are seeking greater democracy and breaking through existing power relations, not by toppling institutions, as was the case for the avant-garde movements in the first half of the twentieth century, but rather through the development of alternative forms of institutionalisation.⁵⁴ This also implies the emergence of new and different ways of conceiving the roles of organiser and public, of artist and curator.

The tendency to concentrate on designing alternative institutions rather than developing practices of cultural decontamination is illustrated by the activities of Vladimir Us from Republic of Moldova, who is one of the first artist to take part in the Curatorial Programme curatorial training course at Le Magasin Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble (France).

In a country without a market system or even local market ('or any idea' according to Vladimir Us), not to mention an art world, this visual artist has been 'producing' projects that were by their very existence forced to step outside of the institutional, organisational, technical and ethical frameworks, if present at all.⁵⁵ Vladimir Us started to become involved in organisation and coordinating art projects when the Moldovan SOROS Center was dismantled.⁵⁶ Between 1998 and 2001, when the professional staff left the institution, Vladimir Us and other artists have felt responsible to manage the institution themselves including the organisation of exhibitions. From 2001 on he created a new initiative – Young Artist Association titled Oberliht.

In terms of Vladimir Us's personal but still political engagement for curating, it is exactly the reflection on the methods of transformation that he finds in the process, For him, artistic and curatorial work shares the same creative device or ideology.⁵⁷ It is the tools and impact that are different. Vladimir Us considers curating to be an elaborate process: 'My vision of curating is collaborating, together creating a production process. Curating touches upon all levels of transformation: psychologically, emotionally, and conceptually...'⁵⁸

⁵³ Flentge 2004: p. 10.

⁵⁴ Flentge 2004: p. 15-21.

The author argues that the emergence of these initiatives does not occur solely in response to events in the field of arts. Laddaga: 'It is necessary to situate them in the context of processes that take place in other areas of social existences: in the field of politics, for instance [...] I am thinking of actions that originate at the point when a political demand emerges relating to phenomena of exclusion'.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Us interviewed by the author, October, 2008.

Vladimir Us separates his activities in that of the artist, and of the producer, indicating with the latter on: 'Projects/ events that I create'.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

A second, well-known example of Laddaga and Eshe's characteristic 'artist' initiative' phenomenon is to be found in the young British Artists,⁵⁹ prominent in the 1990s, particularly in the expanded activity of Damien Hirst. Hirst's activities comprise artistic and curatorial work (between which there is no distinction, according to him), making videos and films, a restaurant, a music singles, and a book, which was devoted to the Hirst image.⁶⁰ Most important, he was the main organiser of the now legendary exhibition entitled *Freeze*, which showed the work of art students from Goldsmiths College and took place in an empty administrative block in London's Docklands in 1988.

A year later, the economic recession took place, and the British art market suffered a catastrophic collapse. Due to the absence of support from private galleries and the public sector, artists put together their own exhibitions in former factory buildings. Those shows were alternative in their concept, their locations, the interaction between the various pieces shown, and the manner in which the art was displayed. That is, to refer to artist-curator Fred Wilson, the art as well as the artists were responding to their environment.

Author Julian Stallabrass stated that *Freeze*, in particular, came to be seen as a prescient and successful tactic for survival in the hard economic, circumstances of the 1990s: 'a way to complete for the attention of the few galleries still dealing in cutting-edge art, or at least to maintain one's visibility until things improved.'⁶¹ Yet, young British Artists like Damien Hirst did not solely intend to side-step both the temporarily defunct apparatus also implicitly criticised the slowness of the public institutions in recognising the latest art.⁶² Furthermore, they often contained work that attacked artists and conventions favoured by the established art world.⁶³ The artists rejected specialised knowledge of cultural theory, art history and even curating. All in all, the alternative, artist-curated shows were a way of cutting out the public sector intermediary, and with that, the role of the curator.

⁵⁹ The group of artists has gone under a number of names: 'new British Art', the 'new art', the 'Brit Art', or the 'New Boomers', but the 'young British Artists' (abbreviated yBa's) is the term that stuck. Author Julian Stallabrass however, has used the term 'high art lite', because they were not all young, neither British. They did not have in common program, nor style. The artists were a group in the way that they shared art education, participation in "do-it-yourself exhibitions", residence in London, dealers, tactics and temperament, and the moment of coming to the public's attention.

⁶⁰ Stallabrass 1999: p. 30.

⁶¹ Ibidem: p. 54.

⁶² Stallabrass rightly asks: 'If the Tate or the Serpentine or the Hayward were reliant on private money to put on shows, why shouldn't artists go directly to private sources to get money for an exhibition, rather than wait for one of those institutions to recognise their worth?' (Stallabrass 1999: p. 53)

⁶³ Ibidem: p. 55.

Conclusion

In this chapter, dealing particularly with the contemporary artist and his or her motivations to partake in curating, I have first outlined the image of the contemporary artist, who is comfortable in an expanded activity and generally as responsive to art historical, ideological, political, aesthetical or social issues as any other art professional, including of course curators. Artists of today are expanding their activities as far as the domain of the curator of contemporary art. However, the contemporary art world keeps up the boundaries between its various players, perhaps as the result of the permeated 'capitalist structure'.

Thus, artist-curators usually argue that their curatorial work is an integral part of their artistic practice. In artistic-curatorial projects artists respond to situations in which it is possible or necessary for them to initiate curatorship. This dare on the part of the artists originates in various individual motivations that I have categorized into three principal, though very much related motivations. Curating is even historically initiated by artists out of personal entrepreneurship, as part of their artistic practice, or for economic or political reasons.

Beyond the institutional desire for the purity of and collaboration with the artist, I have used these three categories of artist' motivations to try to deconstruct the phenomenon of artist-curators from the side of the artists. The three categories are interconnected, but different in their outcomes in terms of institutional framework, format, collaboration, impact and success. It is most significant that with all motivations institutional critique has surfaced. Artists have been feeling a need to question the institutional structure of the contemporary art world that some institutions are recently trying to stimulate themselves. Further, artists have made manifest a desire to work collectively.

The preference for collaboration or "a social way of working" has led to curatorial projects by artists that, following my earlier findings; recurring art events or museums would encourage. Most of the aforementioned artist-curators however, share the aim to create alternatives to the institutional structure and their methods of display. Curating has appeared a means to explore these unconventional structures under the heading of artistic practice. It is not desirable that artists' multiple activities all share this status. Sometimes it is questionable whether we are still experiencing art or merely lead into a path of concealed opportunism or even self-promotion by the artists-this in the format of the exhibition. In their eliminating strict divisions of artist and curator (most artist-curators prefer not to be referred to as

curators), artist-curators have actually created their own “autonomous zone”, in which also the definitions of artwork and exhibition have become permeable that I will deconstruct the phenomenon of the artist-curator even further.

CHAPTER 3

An artwork or exhibition?

I do not see a difference between what is an artwork and an exhibition. It depends on how you contextualize it', artist-curator Fred Wilson observed.¹ To him and others like Tadej Pogacear and Lia Perjovschi, the definitions of artwork and exhibition have become interchangeable, especially so in the context of their own practice.

How did the notions of artwork and exhibition become blurred? Conventionally, the term exhibition refers to an occasion on which paintings, photographs, and/or other objects are shown publicly. Typically implying the creation of a space for an aesthetical or educational experience, the exhibition differs from the individual artwork (a painting, sculpture, and/or other object produced by artist) in its spatial dimensions, compositions and function that are to serve the public's pleasure and knowledge. Since the 1920s, when artists as Piet Mondrian, El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp began creating room-size works of art, it has been increasingly common to artists' artistic practice to design experiences.² In terms of the impact on museum practice the most decisive steps were taken by a generation of artists working in the 1960s, particularly with the rise of installation art.

It is essential to look at some developments of the actual work of art in the course of twentieth century in relation to this clouding of formerly exact notions of art and exhibition. I will explore whether this present-day fusion of artwork and exhibition is the reason for artists to appear in the role of the curator, and if so, a valid one. That is to say, do the origins and meaning of the phenomenon of artist-curators lay in the artwork itself?

The nineteenth-century quest for a synaesthetic "Gesamtkunstwerk" demonstrates an artist-initiated transformation of visual art into an experience. German for "total work of art", the term is attributed to the German opera composer Richard Wagner and refers to an operatic performance that encompasses music, theater, and visual arts. This Wagnerian importance integrating multiple art forms and "mood setting" elements such as light and sound effects

¹ Judith E. Stein. Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*. *Art in America*, October 1993.

² Batshmann 1997: p. 229.

'Designing experience means providing facilities, arrangements or objects that surprise the visitors to an exhibition by confronting them with an unexpected situation or involving them in a process and so giving rise to an experience'.

was re-invented in Marcel Duchamp's *International Surrealist Exhibition* of 1938. The various artworks were to be experienced together as a whole so that the audience would be completely immersed into an imaginary world. Whereas Wagner's ideology of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* has undergone adjustments, his definition is now commonly, almost randomly used in the visual arts to indicate a multidisciplinary approach. Contemporary artist-curator Lia Perjovschi, for instance, presented her exhibition at Learn to Read Project at Kunstraum Innsbruck Lia Perjovschi's CAA Contemporary Art Archive/Centre for Art Analysis present 'Timeline' (25.02.06 - 08.04.06) as a chronological installation.³

Piet Mondrian, El Lussitzky and Kurt Schwitters also manifested a clear aim for visual arts to invoke an experience. Their desire to create three-dimensional, independent spaces were, according to Tate director Nicholas Serota, "indicative both of a certain frustration at the limitations of painting as the sole means of controlling space and a wish to develop a new kind of relationship between the object and the viewer".⁴ The re-orientation on the control of space by these artists led to filling or partly filling whole rooms, such as Schwitters' successive versions of the *Merzbau* (1923-1948), where each surface of his different homes was submerged by mixed-media collages. The generation of Mondrian, Lussitzky, Schwitters and Duchamp established new boundaries in the manipulation of space, as well as new parameters for the relationship between art and audience, In terms of terminology; however, the distinction between artwork and exhibition was not yet affected.

Merzbau and other artworks of the same period are regularly cited as precursors of installation art – *the present-* day experience in a prominent way – Art historian Julie H. Reiss in her book *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* signals the importance of the Italian Futurists, Russian Constructivists (e.g. Lissitzky) and Dutch De Stijl artists (e.g. Mondrian) for the status of installation art in New York in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. She argues that the European precedents provided "permission" to artist Allan Kaprow and his contemporaries to create room-size works of art, to allow spectator participation, and to move out from conventional art space.⁵

³ Ileana, Pintilie. [The States of Mind of Romanian Visual Arts: The Personal Exhibition of Lia & Dan Perjovschi, 2008](#)

⁴ Serota 1996: p. 27-28.

⁵ Reiss 201: Introduction pp. xxii-xxiii.

Environments

Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Whitman created room-size multimedia works that were defined in 1958 by Kaprow as 'Environments' or 'Happenings'.⁶ In California in the 1960s, Ed Kienholz began making 'full-scale, walk-in tableaux', which became known as 'Assemblage art' in 1962.⁷ Through his knowledge of Schwitters, Allan Kaprow became intrigued by the idea of the creation of a total work of art, and active spectator participation became of paramount importance to him, says Reiss.⁸ In this drive he created *Words* in New York gallery in 1962. Visitors to the exhibition could write words on provided papers and add them to the words that were already covering the walls of the rooms. Words on rollers, chalk, crayon, and pencil allowed the participant to change the words that were visible at any time.

Kaprow's works of the 1950s and early 1960s share a feature which has come to characterize the work of many artists of his and later generations: the artworks were realised in the place of exhibition itself, under the direction of the artist. Furthermore, the artwork's completion became dependent on the audience. The work or art thus became a moment, a place, a unity of space and time – just like an exhibition. Environments in that sense were foreseeing Minimalism, Land Art, and installation art, where according to Reiss, 'the art did not exist in a space and time that was separate for theirs'.⁹

None of Kaprow's environments were originally presented in a museum. Neither traditional exhibition methods, nor their spokespersons were affected by the expanded art, in spite of Kaprow's clearly articulated anti-museum stance.¹⁰ The space of environments were informal, often self-generated places that were not part of the commercial art world: 'arenas in which to experience'.¹¹ Claes Oldenburg's *The Store*, which ran from 1 December 1961

⁶ Ibidem: Introduction p. xi.

⁷ Fineberg 2000: p. 283.

⁸ Reiss 2001: p. 283.

⁹ Ibidem: p. 111.

¹⁰ Ibidem: p. 29.

According to the author, Allan Kaprow was against museums in principle, for he saw them as responsible for isolating and separating art from life.

¹¹ Ibidem: p. 23.

trough 31 January 1962, providing the setting of an actual 9 store of a gallery, for art was the merchandise), can be seen as a self-contained, alternative exhibition space.

In the wake of Minimalism some artists presented environmental work with a direct engagement with the space inside the museum. For instance, Donald Judd's sculpture and Dan Flavin's lights¹² were not strictly autonomous art objects. When exhibited, they become part of a situation that also includes the space and the viewer. This 'situational aspect' of Minimalist sculpture, as Reiss calls it, was to challenge the conventional relationship between the artist, the work of art and the institution, including its curator.¹³ In the floor pieces of Carl Andre, Reiss argues, both traditional notions of display and the spectator's expectations in relation to the artwork are challenged. Certainly, even today viewers are puzzled whether to treat his objects as a work of art or as a "context", a continuation of the floor or wall, thus museum architecture. It is in the museum context that it has become ambiguous whether the work is done by an artist or a curator.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the involvement by artists in the physical space of the museum increased rapidly. This is part of a much larger, anti-Modernist tension for art to attach to the actuality of a site, Art historian Miwon Kwon in her study of this phenomenon argues that site-specificity in these years 'focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion'. Furthermore, she recognizes an 'aesthetic aspiration to exceed the limitations of traditional media, like painting and sculpture, as well as their institutional setting; the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context' the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience; and the self-conscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy, which circulates artworks as transportable and exchangeable goods'.¹⁴

On the surface, the above does not exactly explain the blurring of the definitions of artworks and exhibition. In Kwon's analysis, the artwork seems to drift even further apart from the established art structure, thus abandoning the art exhibition. Yet, Kwon has touched upon elemental aspects of the exhibition: site-orientation, ephemerality, the need for visitors' presence, the constitution of an experience. as exemplified by the works of Carl Andre, in their 'epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the

¹² Dan Flavin used light to create environments that the spectator could enter.

¹³ Reiss 2001: p. 56.

¹⁴ Kwon 2002: p. 12.

cotincencies of its context' artists have also manifested a heightened inclination to reflect on the conventions of the museum. In the late 1960s, a number of artists began to examine what Marcel Broodthaers called 'the function of the museum': its taxonomies and history.¹⁵ Site-specificity, driven by the critique of the confinements of art and its institutional structure, teoretically enabled the artwork to become the exhibition.

Installation Art

Coming of age between 1965 and 1975, installation art is still a dominant art form, and turns out to be the catalyst of the apparent break-down of the boundaries between what constitutes an artwork or an exhibition. The term "installation" itself has been ambiguous since it first came into use in the 1960s, For both installation and exhibition were used to describe work produced at the exhibition site, artist Daniel Buren in his well-respected essay 'The function of the Studio' of 1971 asked: 'Hasn't the term installation come to replace exhibition?'¹⁶ Claire Bishop, author of *Installation art: A critical History*, explains: 'The word "installation" was employed by art magazines to describe the way in which an exhibition was arranged. The photographic documentation of this arrangement was termed as "installation shot", and this gave rise to the use of the word for works that used the whole space as "installation art".¹⁷

Characteristic for both an installation of works of art, i.e. the exhibition, and installation art proper is the emphasis on the public's experience. There is a desire by the two sorts of creators (curators and artists) of installations to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and to evoke a mentally or bodily response to it.

As for installation art, the design of the experience often opts for a redefinition of the roles of the artist and viewer, and the function of the objects or installation. This is not a new idea: Gustave Courbet, Marcel Duchamp, Allan Kaprow, and other artists have demonstrated the same desires. These attempts resulted in the creation of alternative spaces. It is only with installation art (and some minimalist art like that of Carl Andre) that artists were able to

¹⁵ See for example Crimp, Douglas. 'This is Not a Museum of Art'. *On the Museum's Ruins*. 1993: pp. 204-206.

¹⁶ Buren 1971: p. 206.

¹⁷ Bishop 2005: p. 6.

question the art structure from inside out. In the late 1960s the general political upheavals extended to the politics of the museum structure. Reiss highlights that installation art is highly applicable for protest against museums: 'By virtue of the physical involvement it often demanded of the viewer. Installation art could also change the atmosphere of the museum, [...] and could break the rules of proper museum decorum'.¹⁸

Created at the spot, installation art by its very nature is a gesture of protest. Reiss discusses the difficulty or even impossibility for installation art to collect and to commodify: 'By virtue of their ephemeral nature, these forms challenged the market system of the art world and their ephemeral nature, these forms challenged the market system of the art world and by extension become a protest against the politics of the institutions'.¹⁹

Curators become part of these politics. Their traditional working methods were directly affected, for installation works usually could not be seen by curators before they were installed. Installations are in act created by the artist, in situ, shortly before the exhibitions open to the public. In the words of Nicholas Serota, the curator transforms from 'a dispassionate judge of quality, who visits the studio or private collection to select works and to assemble a body of material that will be presented to the public in the museum' to a mere collaborator, 'often engaging with the artist to accomplish the work'.²⁰ It is plausible that artists deliberately create experiences inside the museum walls to seduce the viewer, to directly grab the attention of the audience by negating 'the atmosphere of the museum', encompassing its politics, hierarchy and exhibition practices. Instead of the curator, the artist working with installations is the one to be 'dispassionate', for he or she seems to have gained full authority over a museum's space.

Thomas Hirschhorn

The Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, for instance, controlled one entire museum wing (100 m²) for the work *Anschool* at the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht in 2005. Known for his enormous, labor-intensive, room-size "collages"²¹ made from the "anti-market" cheap

¹⁸ Reiss 1999: p. 78.

¹⁹ Ibidem: p. 77.

²⁰ Serota 1996: p. 36.

²¹ Hirschhorn 1998: p. 5.

Hirschhorn refrains from employing the word installation: 'I hate the word "installation". I use the term "display" to describe my work.'

and disposable material, the artist usually creates individually, in-situ, and by means of existing products and own artworks. Anschool proved an anarchistic cacophony artistically and institutionally: aluminum foil, cardboard, multiplex, plastic, tape and other packing materials were combined with many earlier composite collages, texts written by himself and others, pictures from newspaper and magazines, home-made airplanes, watches, gold bars, streamers and moving toy trains. This was all situated in a transformed museum space, taking the form of a school divided into several classrooms furnished with the usual chairs, benches, desks, globes, maps, and added TV and slide screens.

Purely according to Hirschhorn's logic, everything was displayed mixed up together, and presented with "pedagogical" material (printed material, journalistic photo reportages, hand-written texts). Visitors to Hirschhorn's exhibition indisputably have to give in to the quantity, elaborateness and suggestions of the work on display.

The experience evoked by Hirschhorn's work could be that of both an artwork and an exhibition, because aspects of the exhibition have become integral to his works of art. Here the artwork and the exhibition intertwine. Where installations feature fundamental aspects of the exhibition (site-specificity, temporality, the creator's physical presence, numerous objects, various rooms, and even "pedagogical" aims), the corrosion of the notion of artwork and exhibition flourishes.

However, the phenomenon of artist-curators cannot be clarified solely on these grounds. Both Julie Reiss and Claire Bishop correctly defined as a characteristic of installation art that the artist creates a single "situation", rather than a gallery for displaying separate works – the latter being an exhibition.²² Installation often take the form of independent spaces to be entered by the viewer in the context of the museum or biennial, and are in that sense still parts of an exhibition. The division between the two can still be made.

The curator affected

How then can the "free zone", in which artists consider the artwork to be no different than exhibition, still exist? And how does it relate to the phenomenon of artist-curators? Obviously, the division between artwork and exhibition is practically preserved at the side of

²² Reiss 2001: Introduction p. xiii.
Bishop 2005: p. 6.

the institutions. Since Schwitters, artists have been deliberately creating works that blow up those boundaries, often in the form of institutional critique. This “free zone” by artist serves to challenge museums’ aesthetics and politics.

Daniel Buren crucially conveyed in 1970: “Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whatever the work itself is directly – consciously or not – produced for the Museum, any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency – or idealism’.²³ According to Buren, there is a need for art to engage with its surrounding space if it does not want to become incredible. Hence, installation art proposes a heightened control of the museum space by the artist. Installation art, consisting in elements that are inherent to the exhibition, thus offers the possibility for artists to ‘examine’, replace or otherwise attack institutional exhibition practice.

I will argue that there are two more “methods” that are used by artists to blur the boundaries of artwork and exhibition. These methods resort to subject and the production process of the artworks and have proved to be more successful in sustaining artists’ “autonomous zone” of interchangeable notions of artwork and exhibition.

Firstly, the division between artwork and exhibition, thus between artist and curator, has become highly imbalanced when the museum functions as the artist’s medium. Many artists such as Gerald AcMaster and Fred Wilson have become interested in investigating methods used by museums in presenting an “official” cultural and historical overview. Earlier, from 1968 to 1972, Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers undertook critique of the categorizing function of museums in his own “museums”. Different “departments” (installations) came into existence, as he was commissioned to do different exhibitions. James Putnam in his book *Art and Artefact: The Museum as Medium* presents an overview of works of installation art of the last forty years, in which traditional methods of taxonomy, archiving, storage, and other aspects of curatorship have been variously appropriated, mimicked or reinterpreted – often at the expense of the curator’s presence.

Related to this is the other tactics, in which the working method of the artist resembles that of the curator. Already in the 1960s, collecting appeared to be an important technique for artists to imitate curatorial work. Walter Grasskamp in his essay ‘artists and other collectors’ of 1982 argues that although collecting was cultivated in the arts as early as the Renaissance (‘painters’ studios must have looked like miniature curiously cabinets’), it was not until the

²³ Buren 1973.

twentieth century, after the establishment of collage and assemblage, that collecting as a direct activity became an independent artistic genre.²⁴ Grasskamp: ‘What had begun in such small way on individual-canvas scale, was now being taken up and pursued on the museum level. The collection as the manifest outcome of artistic activity thus came to lay claim to the institutional setting, which hitherto had been reserved for artists’ *products*.’²⁵

The exhibition Documenta V in Kassel in 1972 marked an acknowledgement of this significant tendency. It proved the opportunity for Marcel Broorthaers to present the final manifestation of his *Musee d’Art Moderne*, for Herbert Distel to show his *Museum of Drawers*, an entire museum of modern art in a multi-drawer cabinet with artists’ contributions of work in miniature scale, and for Claes Oldenburg to show his *Mouse Museum* (fig. 3. 11). Comprising of 385 miniature consumer objects and toys, which Oldenburg collected in his studios during the mid 1960s, this collection of found and fabricated material was displayed in a linear form in a continuous vitrine. The plan of the building within a building has the shape of a Mickey Mouse. As clearly articulated by Putnam, this installation’s form affected the notions of the artwork and exhibition: ‘Although this shape may be unreadable from the ground, the museum structure is used as a logo and thus integrated with the collection, so becoming, in effect, another exhibit.’²⁶ On the whole, Oldenburg’s work showed that the practice of selection and classification are not operational procedures reserved for the curator alone. Both the *Museum of Drawers* and *Mouse Museum*, though by no means portable, refer inevitably back to Marcel Duchamp’s *Boite-en-valise* – a long term-resident of the “free zone”.²⁷

The development is significant: as a producer of objects the artist recedes into the background, whilst as a “collector” he or she lays claim to the largest possible setting for the presentation of collections: the museum. Less than a decade later, Group Material formed a comprehensive artists’ curatorial initiative. Founded in New York in 1979 with initial members Julie Ault, Doug Ashford and Felix Gonzales-Torres. Group Material created installations such as *The Inaugural Exhibition* (1980), including works of art by Group Material members alongside those of artists from a variety of backgrounds, and *The People’s choice* (1981), where neighbors were invited to donate things. Their work eventually found its way to institutional commissions such as *Americana* (1985), shown at the Whitney Biennial,

²⁴ Grasskamp 1982: pp. 130-132.

²⁵ Ibidem: p. 133.

²⁶ Putnam 2001: p. 20.

²⁷ Coosje van Bruuggen explicitly refers to Duchamp’s *Boite-en-valise* – in relation to the constitution of *mouse Museum*.. See Brugen 1983: pp. 260-261.

taking the form of an alternative exhibition within an exhibition, and *The Castle* (1987) for Documenta VII, similarly taking the form of a curated exhibition in which artworks were hung alongside mass-produced objects and works by unknown artists.

Engaging in (the work of) living artists, Group Material's curatorial approach unquestionably indicates the blurring of installation art and exhibition making. As in curatorial work, debate and dialogue become an important aspect of Group Material's practice. According to Claire Bishop, the group considered the collaborative process of their exhibition making as important as the outcome,²⁸ something we have already encountered in the previous chapter with contemporary artist-curators Lia Perjovschi, Tadej Pogacear, Fred Wilson, Matei Bejenaru and Vladimir Us. Working according to curatorial methods, though at the same time creating artistically, Group Material as well as those contemporary artists-curators truly found a way to get around strict notions of artwork and exhibition, while additionally diminishing the role of the curator.

Thus, the key notion that brings together the activities of curating and art making is not that of the artwork, but that of "production". Recently, curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud has explored the shift in artistic practice from creation to "postproduction". In the art of postproduction that he proposes, the artist figures as the DJ. He argues that since the early nineties, an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of communicative processes and pre-existing works.

In 2005, Bourriaud spoke of 'the emergence of a super-labor which is art'.²⁹ Herein, he refers to his earlier conception of art being both the process and the result of communication between people: 'The work of any art may [...] consist of a formal arrangement that generates relationship between people, or be born of social process; I have described this phenomenon as "relational aesthetics", whose main feature is to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself'.³⁰

It is significant that contemporary artists practices, which, according to Bourriaud, 'all have in common the resource to already produced forms', are created on the basis of such communicative processes and "pre-existing works", because this closely approaches, the principle of contemporary exhibition making.³¹ Truly, contemporary artists communicate, select and compose, just as they started designing experiences and collecting forty years ago – not in the least to productively complete with the curator.

²⁸ Bishop 2005: p. 112.

²⁹ Bourriaud Nicolas. 'Interactivity'. *Right About Now* lecture series. 30 November 2005, Amsterdam.

³⁰ Bourriaud 2002: pp. 26-27.

³¹ Ibidem

Conclusion

Following the previous chapter, the field of activities of the artist, as well as the notion of art practice has stretched to an extent in which curating is easily included. Consequently, the notion of the artwork has often become identical to that of the exhibition. This chapter has shown that in the course of the twentieth century, the categories of artwork and exhibition expanded. Ambiguity around both the creator (as with the work of Carl Andre) and the status (as with Thomas Hirschhorn) of the work began in the 1960s, when site-specific “installations” redefined the roles of the artist, the recipient, and the museum, its curators in particular.

The “free zone”, in which the meanings of artworks and exhibition are obscured, appears then to be calculated construction by artists. For the sake of institutional critique, artist actually explored ways to reach a level of *carte blanche* within the museum structure. This they established not by the form of their actual art works (that become to resemble exhibitions), but by their working methods. By imitating the works of curators, artists kept the authority over the creation and placement of their work, as well as eliminated the role of the traditional curator. Essentially, art practice from the 1990s onwards has come to resemble the work of the curator in some respect.

In conclusion, I would argue that the phenomenon of artist-curator couldn't be explained by the proliferation of artworks that blow up the boundaries between artwork and exhibition. It is rather these artworks of which the production or subject resembles those of exhibitions that prove a valid donor to the contemporary phenomenon of artist-curators. In the last chapter I will concentrate on some initiations by artists to combine institutional critique with curatorial processes specifically, before coming to a final conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

The artist – curator practices in the East-European context

In this chapter dedicated the broader aspects of artist-curator phenomena I will emphasize on its manifestations in the East European context analyzed in parallel with the development of contemporary art practices that took shape with the democratization of the post-socialist societies in transition period.

Indeed as it was stated by the several researchers earlier, there are many affinities between the development of art process in East European context, between the artists and colleagues working in Moscow, Ljubljana, Kiev, Bucharest or Chisinau. A brisk comparative analysis might convince us that uniformity of post-totalitarian conditions equates with uniformity of artistic response. For one thing, conditions were not uniform throughout the East European countries. This is exemplified in the practices of Andrei Monastyrsky, Dmitrii Gutov, Dmitrii Vilenski and Alexander Petrelli from Russia, Tadej Pogacear and IRWIN artist group from Slovenia, Nikita Kadan and Alevtina Kakhidze from Ukraine, Calin Dan, Lia Perjovschi, Matei Bejenaru and Vlad Nanca from Romania and Vladimir Us from Republic of Moldova.

Each country's artists adopted different strategies to cope with the lack of financial support and the conservatism of the state institutions or with influence and dominance of the institutions and structures funded by private sector. It is obvious though that the constant explosion of this historical, social and economical amalgam that one may find in the Eastern context should not be ignored, especially from those who deal with Contemporary art practices. But there is also another very important issue for the definition of the artistic production at the end of the 90's beginning of 2000. It has got to do with the fact that the entire above mentioned situation takes place in a time when there is a range of new phenomena showing in the artistic scene. This new phenomena is mostly conditioned by the the same change of systems. This change of the aesthetic paradigm is present in different forms in almost every country in the Former Eastern countries. In those countries with a relative ideological freedom, this change brought the legitimisation and the institutionalisation of certain artistic practices which before considered as “politically non correct art” even though such tendencies had up ealready in the mid eighties. In other countries with a harder cultural

and ideological repression, such as Russia, Romania or other Eastern countries even, the appearance of such phenomena and their respective artistic practices happened in a relatively later time and found space and legitimacy only in a more recent years.

Artist - curator practice (Russia)

The tendency of the end of the 90s in the context of East European and post-soviet countries was the total institutional crisis. Artists were not just leaving for reality from museum and gallery spaces: reality encircled them as they were standing on the museum's ruins. They were captivated into the world of media industry by something more than creative curiosity: because of the lack of art market, media was the only existing industry, producing images. Art autonomy becomes the center of art discussions. That was Anatoly Osmolovsky, an artist of the early 90s, who initiated this discussion with his texts starting the self-reflexion of a new epoch. Referring to Theodore Adorno, he actualized the problem of a form and a method. Being the first who plunged into the formlessness of life and euphoria of the media world, Osmolovsky sensed the danger: without clarifying its own basis, art is able to forget its substantial nature. To enforce art autonomy means to remind that art has formal base and temporality.

Capitalism was triumphant in the 1990s in the sense that it proved capable of de-ideologizing society, enfeebling it with the media spectacle. In this spectacle, the aesthetic and the political dissolved into one another, while the ethical was simply deprived of any substance. This is why forms of neo-ideological protest – including those that Osmolovsky was involved in – turned out to be media spectacles, which is, by the way, exactly what made him develop his program of non-spectacular art in his search for a non-conformist position.¹

However, the program of art autonomy does not come to the production of art market artefacts. One of the earliest and program manifestations were the practices of Andrei Monastyrsky and later by Dmitrii Gutov, Dmitrii Vilenski and Alexander Petrelli that proves with their works substantial reconsideration of the role of artist in designing and producing art projects an exhibition making in particular.

¹ Anatoly Osmolovsky "90-s – Art Is Simple As Mooing", 1999

The practice of Andrei Monastyrsky is important in understanding the role of an independent artist that coagulated the large group of artists during the 70', 80's and later 90' in order to perform and later to exhibit their multifaceted activities of the 'Collective Action' group using alternative spaces, mostly apartments and improvised spaces, when the official spaces were inaccessible due to the official censorship policy. The group Collective Actions came into being in 1976, founded by a group of artists lead by Andrei Monastyrsky.² At the same time within the group of artists organised without the leading role of a curator or organiser artist actions, performances and underground exhibitions settled in private apartments stimulated exchange between those who were active in various media—between fine artists, musicians, writers, theorists, and critics. However, it was not simply a matter of intensifying social contact; rather, the communicative processes within the scene were stylized into an aesthetic event.

Organized under complex scenarios the "actions" conceived by Monastyrsky unfolded in the most neutral space possible in the former Soviet Union—on the outskirts of town, often in a snowy field. This was original compared with Western performance art, which usually took place in an urban environment; in that period of time, artists needed nature as a space outside the law, free from social and ideological determination. These performances were painstakingly documented and the resulting commentary comprised several volumes entitled "Trips Out of Town."³

Taking a step back in history of the eastern art it becomes clear that for instance in the 1970's, underground practice played a decisive part in the development of an alternative sphere of communication in Russian-Soviet culture. Unofficial shows and exhibitions, performances and actions became important meeting places for an unofficial cultural scene that realized its activities outside the practice of state culture—access to which was regulated by strict censorship—primarily in the countryside around Moscow, in studios and private apartments. Here, forms of artistic self-organization developed parallel to the initiatives of so-called "samizdat," the movement of "self-publishing" in the fields of literature, philosophy, or science.

Here we have to mention that Russian artists who emerged from the unofficial Soviet culture set their work in relation to such practices of contemporary Western art⁴. After the

² The group name "Kollektivnye Deystviya" derives from the title of the section "azioni collettive," in which performances were categorized in the catalogue of the Venice Biennale in 1977. This name was taken up by Boris Groys in his article "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism," *A-Ya [Unofficial Russian Art Review]* 1 (1979), pp. 3–11, and ultimately also used by the group itself.

³ *Kollektivnye Deistvia. Poezdki za Gorod* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998).

⁴ *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo* 5 (1991).

tight closure of the borders and the demonizing of foreign “cosmopolitan” influences during the Stalin era, noticeable efforts were made to redefine one’s own culture in dialogue with other cultures. From today’s art-historical perspective, it is especially interesting to examine the use of Western concepts in Russian culture more closely. Labels from Western culture were often applied to developments that were actually caused by the Russians’ own cultural dynamics.⁵

This development coming about in Soviet culture corresponded to an international trend in post-war art, which was characterized by a questioning of the traditional work concept and a shift in interest from the art object to the aesthetic event.⁶ From the 1960s onwards, performances—in connection with concept art, land art, or Fluxus—shaped the spectrum of art in North America and Europe. In the West, performances were one of the most prominent forms of the artistic protest movements, which proclaimed an abandonment of the established art sphere. At the same time, this move to leave the traditional spheres of art, like museums and galleries, was connected to criticism of the traditional genre of the panel picture, which was consequently regarded as a consumer fetish of the art market.

Victor Misiano argues that soviet society was hardly monolithic or faceless, but was woven from a multitude of closed yet mutually intersecting communities. [...] In this sense, one can actually apply the definitions that post-modern sociologists have offered in appraising Western society, the “tribal society” of Michel Maffesoli, for an example.⁷ Without taking this social context in account, the practices of Andrei Monastyrsky and “Collective Actions” cannot be understood in full, since the essence of their work consisted in problematising this polysynthetic society, broken up into circles and communities, in relation to which (including the community of the Moscow underground) “Collective Actions” took a meta-position, to use their terminology.

This also distinguishes Monastyrsky's individual projects created in the 1980s — texts and installations in which he discovers curious correspondences between the Agricultural Exhibition pavilions, biographical details about ‘Collective Action’ members, hexagrams of the I Ching, and various other aspects of his personal mythology. These works demonstrate his immersion in “interpretational ecstasy” as a shamanistic practice, which does not allow the possibility of regretting the absence of anything.⁸

⁵ Ilya Kabakov, “Konzeptualismus in Russland,” in *Das Leben der Fliegen*, exh. cat. Kölnischer Kunstverein (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1992), p. 123.

⁶ Paul Schimmel and Peter Noever, eds., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979*, exh. cat. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998)

⁷ Victor Misiano. Interview with David Riff, 2006

⁸ Kollektivnye Deistvia. Poezdki za Gorod (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998). \

With the emerging new generation of artists at the end of the 90s not only come back to “the white cube” but also transformed it and scenographically changed its parameters. This period signalize the appearance of Alexander Petrelli is initiator and the only manager of Overcoat Gallery that functions spontaneously in the various Galleries from Moscow and others art institutions outside Russia. Wearing a long overcoat, which he opens conspiratorially he shows small paintings and photographs pinned to the lining, complete with price tags, catalogue texts. The works exhibited in the Overcoat Gallery is changed everyday and features works by many emerging and younger artists and some others known already such as Dubossarsky&Vinogradov, Oleg Kulik, etc. His activity is well known and he has exhibited widely presenting his collections internationally, including in the Stedlijk Museum (Amsterdam).⁹

The other notorious example of artist-curator practice is the activity of Dmitrii Gutov from Moscow who together with Bohorov in 199 created an initiative “Lifshitz Institute”. [...] The "Institute" was founded on the initiative of Kostya Bokhorov and myself. But we didn't found any kind of formal organization.¹⁰ By the early 1990s, public disinterest in and mockery of Marxism had reached its apogee and Gutov and Bohorov decided later to turn their efforts into an organization, to search for allies.

The name "Lifshitz-Institute" appeared in early 1994. At this point, [...] our meetings attracted an extremely broad and colorful group of people: students, political activists, doctors of art history, professors of philosophy, Duma representatives, radical artists After 2000-2001, when the situation changed yet again, there was a new upwind of interest in Marxism, and we continued our vigil with the next post-Perestroika generation. [...] If someone calls our public discussions performances, no problem, if a film about Lifshitz is called video art and if exhibitions dedicated to Lifshitz are called installations, very good. We are researching and spreading our precious intellectual heritage in forms accessible to us as artists.¹¹

In fact this initiative of organizing an artist initiative was a strong statement against the mainstream art movement and establishment and institutionalization of contemporary art in Russia after the 89. One of the distinct activities of the Institute besides organizing public talks and debates consists in the organization of exhibitions. [...] we held an exhibition dedicated to the 20-year anniversary of Lifshitz's death at the ArtKlyazma festival in 2003.¹²

⁹ Alexandr Petrelli. Interview with the author, Moscow, 2008.

¹⁰ Dmitrii Gutov. Interview with the author, 2006

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem.

This exhibition was prepared in an intensive email correspondence, fragments of which have been published. This correspondence included all of the institute's participants and is a free exchange of ideas, suggestions and analyses of the artistic situation in Moscow at the time. Their second mode of working consisted in organizing social events in public space, to which they invited anyone who is interested. For an example, they organized a public discussion of Lifshitz's article "The Phenomenology of the Tin Can" featuring the emblematic image of the Campbell's soup can at the Andy Warhol exhibition in the Stella Gallery. [...] There was also organized a presentation of the Russian edition of Lukacs' book "History and Class Consciousness" especially seen in Gutov's documentary when Russian artists discuss the snobbery of pop art – e.g., that art movement that is completely based on commerce and its affections.¹³

Thus, in 1996 Gutov's work at 'Manifesta 1' in Rotterdam was done as an excursion through Boymans van Boymingem Museum¹⁴. His work presented as a museum itinerary composed by Gutov himself. Any visitor coming to the museum could get at the entrance an audiocassette with the exhibition guide on it. However, Gutov's art is not a "Musée Imaginaire". He appropriated one phrase from his spiritual teacher, a Marxist, Michail Lifshitz: "It's time to say good buy to the petty intrigues of reflexion". That phrase has become Gutov's slogan not only in his polemics with self-sufficient intellectualism of conceptualism (the most alien trend in the Moscow art of previous decade), but also in his polemics with the idea of art autonomy. The artist is obsessed with reality and he represents still actual figure of a social artist with an active position toward institutional critique.

Gutov's poetical criticism is valuable part of the nova day reality of Russia, which is willing to map an island of critical engagement toward the new way of art market development and its philosophy. The basis of his critical approach is recalling the Marxist-Leninist esthetics trough re-reading of Michael Livshitz theoretical legacy. Gutovs engagement is directed also toward critic of Modernism and it is important and valuable for the reason that it is not limited on the critic of certain movements inside the history of art but is related to broad analysis of the evolution and critic of the entire Modern society values system and the imported art market rules and principles in contemporary Russia.

Post-communist reality of the 90-s was the time of forced conformism: political chaos and social decay left not space for critical discourse. Reality has nothing stable and defined that could be the subject of critical analyses and confrontation. Thinking class accepted

¹³ Dmitrii Gutov. Interview with the author, 2006.

¹⁴ Dmitrii Gutov. Excursion, Manifesta I, (<http://www.gutov.ru/exc.htm>)

gangster capitalism as an addition to the chance for private success, new poverty – as an addition to the freedom to create and to travel, the glory of cynicism as the liberation of ideological moralism. Any critical position ignored by attributing it to communist nostalgia.

Art of the new decade puts forward new understanding of art language and art practices. In case of Osmolovsky's new formalism gives life to classical Russian vanguard, he turned to the search of the new art language, artist driven tactics and strategies, able to possess implicitly critics of its own roots. [...] When we founded the "Extraordinary Control Commission" in 1998, we had already made this experience, which is why we felt ourselves to be a political group agitating "against all parties" rather than an artistic community.¹⁵ . Consequently, Anatoly Osmolovsky understands art autonomy in the tradition of the left critical theory by Theodore Adorno.

Osmolovsky's recent art works are built upon semantic equivocation: they fall out of the system of stable visual codes and definitions of an art object. These works are politically aesthetic reprove to the artists, who are mostly his colleagues of the past epoch, whose work in the market perspective comes to creation of something semantically obvious and visually comfortable. [...] In the end, I think that a collaborative project can only work if it really resists the capitalist machine of representation by refusing to show its work in museums and showing its work in its own museums. However, any critical position does not only motivate deconstruction of the language; in some artists' activity it is obvious both in topics of their work and a subject they depict.¹⁶

Perhaps it makes sense to analyze both Anatoly's recent (after 2000) turn away from building and working within the framework of communities and institutional critique the efforts of the Dmitry Vilensky and his role in the development of the platform "What is to be done?", which are directed toward developing new forms of curatorial practice rooted in the emergent structures of alternative forms of social composition, not only in Russia, but all over the world. The name of the group derives from a novel by the Russian 19th century author Nikolai Chernyshevsky, and immediately brings reminiscences of the first socialist worker's self-organizations in Russia, which Lenin actualized in his "What is to be done?" (1902). 'Chto delati' sees itself as a self-organizing platform for cultural workers intent on politicizing their "knowledge production" through reflections and redefinitions of an engaged autonomy for cultural practice today.¹⁷

¹⁵ Anatoly Osmolovsky "90-s – Art Is Simple As Mooing", 1999

¹⁶ Viktor Misiano "Passions pour l'histoire. L'art russe, 1980-1995", in: *Face à l'histoire. 1933-1996 (Catalogue)*. Centre G. Pompidou. Flammarion. Paris, 1997

¹⁷ See the "What is to be done?" web site: <http://www.chtodelat.org>

In Dmitry Vilensky projects as part of artist the platform "What is to be done?", developed at the beginning of a new decade, "Ein mark", "Lenin", "Power of Music", "Contact", etc. shows the scrupulous reconstruction of post-communist sociality: new social tissue appears on the remnants of the Soviet disciplinary society, multiplicity, a product of spontaneous democracy, at the same time, Dmitry Vilensky's latest works, titled "Negation of Negation" is dedicated to another bright non-conformist, violent critics of globalized capitalism, Toni Negri. The epoch of political carnivals has finished and post-communist individual is starting to recognize his interests. According to another idol of radical intelligentsia, Slavoj Zizek, "revolution is at the gates".

In September 2006, Dmitry Vilensky organized a project called "Self-Educations", an international exhibition and seminars-program at the NCCA in Moscow, dedicated to alternative, community-based forms of self-learning as emancipatory practices. His most recent work is "Partisan Songspiel/Belgrade Story" was realized in collaboration with Belgrade based organization Biro for Culture and Communication conducted by Vladan Jeremic and Rena Raedle.

Actual situation, having overcome intellectual confusion of the 90-s, is looking at the past from the point of new post-ideological perspective. Moscow critic and curator Ekaterina Degoti argues that while [...] the capitalist system of art institutions is oriented toward the [singular] product, the communist system of art institutions was oriented toward [collective] creativity.¹⁸ This is why the communist system did not consist of galleries and collections, but of communities and groups, ranging from the artist's union to the narrow "circles" of nonconformist art. All of these groups were organized according to the principle of the autodidactic circle. This circles were lead by the enlightened individuals such as Andrei Monastyrsky, Dmitrii Gutov or Anatoly Osmolovsky.

Following the same logic Victor Misiano states that [...] in this sense, the Soviet system of art – including both the official Artist's Union and the underground – recognize themselves rather magnificently in the analyses of Pierre Bourdieu, who was able to uncover the presence of different types of markets in culture, one of material, the other symbolic.¹⁹ From this perspective, there is much in the experience of the Russian underground corresponds to the practices of Fluxus and many other phenomena in Western art. Consequently the artist curator a practice finds its correspondent in the both east and west,

¹⁸ Ekaterina Degoti. Interview with David Riff, 2006

¹⁹ See: Viktor Misiano "Passions pour l'histoire. L'art russe, 1980-1995", in: *Face a l'histoire. 1933-1996 (Catalogue)*. Centre G. Pompidou. Flammarion. Paris, 1997

that become obvious with the open market realities, transparent policies with the democratization of the Eastern Europe.

Artist –curator practice (Slovenia)

The artists in some cases seems to function successfully as a collective mind and a corporate producer, a discussion club and public opinion, a cultural context, intellectual refuge, ethical formula. An example of such multifaceted practice is the Slovenian group IRWIN and its members - artists. IRWIN's used (deriving use value from) both East and West by being a borderline model between curatorial and artist practice which is relevant precisely now, rather than being a politically, ideologically and historically transient phenomenon.

According to Moran Mohar and in respect to the artist position in the society he argues that [...] the artists became aware of the fact that if they didn't organize themselves someone else would (un) organize them according to his wishes and needs.²⁰ Following this idea they created the conditions for the operation of the art system in their own space and to this, in addition to other projects, they have devoted more than 15 years of their activity.

The first project the group realized at the beginning of 1984 and still under the name R Irwin S was called 'Back to the USA' and consisted of a complete reconstruction (some would say a copy) of a group show of American artists by the same title that was touring through Western Europe at the time. Although this project didn't yet possess the formal language that would become typical for Irwin only a short time later, it anticipated – and this is what makes this project so incredibly important – the radical copying strategy so central for the group, practically in a single coup. The group's name – an obvious reference to Marcel Duchamp²¹ and whose typical written form stemmed, according to Irwin, from a Cincinnati clockmaker of the same name – was soon shortened to R Irwin S and finally, in 1984, following the founding of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), to Irwin.

The largest project IRWIN produced lately based on the principle of archival collection that resembles scientific approach is East Art Map (EAM). According to Borut Vogelnik East Art Map (EAM), is a project that started in 2000, as a synthesis of the experiences and realizations accumulated over the course of previous projects. [...] EAM

²⁰ Borut Vogelnik and Miran Mohar interviewed by the author, Ljubljana, 2005.

²¹ Marcel Duchamp used "Rose Sélavy" ("Rose – c'est la vie") from 1920 on as one of his feminine pseudonyms.

deals with the most basic level of organizing information, the drafting of a simple chart of the most important artworks and artists from the area of Europe's East in the period from 1945 to 2000.²²

In Eastern Europe there are, as a rule, no transparent structures in which those events, artworks, and artists that are significant to the history of art might be organized into a referential system that is accepted and respected outside the borders of a single given country. Instead, as Miran Mohar put it [...] encounter systems that are closed within national boundaries, most often based on a rationale adapted to local needs, and sometimes even doubled, so that alongside official art histories there are a whole series of stories and legends about art and artists who opposed the official art world. But written records about such artists are few and fragmented. Comparisons with contemporary Western art and artists are also extremely rare.

In fact the artist operated as a curatorial team in conceiving, structuring and producing the EAM project, which consists of several phases: In the first phase (until 2002), according to Miran Mohar [...] IRWIN, in collaboration with *New Moment* (Ljubljana), invited a group of art critics, curators, and artists from different ex-socialist Eastern European countries to select and present up to ten crucial artifacts, events, and projects from their countries created over the last 50 years.²³ In this way, basic information on approximately 220 artifacts and projects was collected and presented on a CD-ROM (2002) and in a special issue of the *New Moment* magazine in the same year.

Since the exhibition *Irwin/Neue Slowenische Kunst*, curated by Jürgen Harten for the *Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf13* in early 1989, the group Irwin – not least driven by the political changes and upheavals following 1989 – has redefined its concepts from the 1980s (“retro-garde,” “over-identification”) and developed important new projects and concepts for the 1990s and 2000s. In this context, the most important have been *NSK Država v času* (*NSK State in Time*) with its temporary embassies (i.e. in Moscow in 1992), founded in 1991; the *Transnacionala* project, carried out in 1996; the initiation of *East Art Map* (2002); as well as Irwin's year-long commitment towards establishing collections of Eastern European art in the territories of the former Yugoslavia (currently: *ArtEast 2000+ Collection*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana).²⁴

²² Borut Vogeljik and Miran Mohar interviewed by the author, 2005.

²³ IRWIN artist group. Interview with the author, 2005.

²⁴ Inke Arns (ed.) *Irwin: Retroprincip 1983-2003*, September, 2003

The artists (IRWIN members - Borut Vogeltnik, Moran Mohar, Andrej Savski) are convinced that without developing one's own art system (organized publication of theory, education system, art collections, galleries, museums), one is left to the free play of interests of more developed systems, and thus amnesia is inevitable in the long run. For instance Borut Vogeltnik argues in this sense that [...] our projects do differ in themselves between a more curatorial approach and a purely artist-driven one. In the end, they find their proper place and function and are unified within the framework of the contextual scheme. We have been practicing this mode of production from the very beginning. Actually, we started off with selecting.²⁵

IRWIN's first important presentation from 1984, titled *Back to the USA*, was, in fact, a "remake" of a contemporary American art exhibition with the same name that was at the time making the rounds in major European cities. For us, the two approaches were intrinsically connected from the beginning, being two sides of the same coin so to speak.²⁶

The other argument in this sense is that the project Retro-avantgarde from second half of the 1990s functioned as if it were a work of art. This double inscription—as an act of mapping and artifact as well as, in this particular case, the shift in perception it produces—is precisely what interests the artists. EAM project was conceived differently, although one can draw substantial parallels. On several occasions, different people have asked the artist in relation to EAM: "This is an art project, isn't it?" As if it were necessary to exclude the possibility that it is not an art project, that it is for real.

Following the same logic Andrej Savski argues that [...] it was not our intention to enter into this field, and we don't want this project to be viewed as some marketing strategy. We of course expect that at some point there will be some resonance also within the market reality, it will certainly not happen immediately.²⁷ One can presume this will go hand in hand with the economic growth of the Eastern European countries. Local spaces will define the value of their art.

Two other examples of IRWIN practice that resembles and is a sort of shows the creative potential of curatorial practice by opening up the discussions regarding the role of art I the contemporary society is the installation *Was ist Kunst Slowenien* (2001), where the group switched to exhibiting pictures that were no longer painted collectively or quoted images from European art history, but were originals by various artists from private and

²⁵ Miran Mohar, Borut Vogeltnik and Andrej Savski interviewed by the author, 2006.

²⁶ Miran Mohar and Borut Vogeltnik interviewed by the author, 2005.

²⁷ Ibidem.

museum collections, framed in typical Irwin frames.

The other argument of above mentioned idea is the installation *Was ist Kunst Deutschland* (2003) were realized for the first time with loans that represent German art history of the 20th century that was presented in the frame of exhibition *Irwin: Retroprincip 1983–2003*.²⁸ In these two installations, Irwin creates a panorama of the cultural influences and references that have been crucial to the group and clearly articulate their artist curatorial practice.

The artist curator practice of other Slovenian artist Tadej Pogacear that we intridced already in the 2nd chapter is contextualised here in the reginal context. Throughout the time he expended an artist approach working with the various fields; muzeology and curatorship, the relation between artist and the history of art, within the structures of power and the representation. Right from the very beginning of his career he was interested in the problem of display: how to exhibit certain cultural artifacts? Finding the answer to this question was the establishment of an institution - P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art. At the end of 1993, the institution Museum of Contemporary Arts – which had been founded by him in 1990 – officially adopted the resolution to change its name to P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Arts (PMCA). PMCA functions as a virtual institution which "exists without its own space and employees, but rather merely settles into territories, locations and networks and feeds off the juices of institutions".²⁹

This was an institution which does not have its own premises or art collection, but which acts according to parasitic and parallel principles. In the early 90's its meaning was to discuss the artistic context, the meaning of curatorship, the positions of power, representation, later in the mid 90's it started to focus on broader cultural issues, media and the active cultural operation.

When we discuss the role of P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, we cannot overlook the radical changes that took place in the social context during the 90's. This was a period of numerous commotions- from the 'fall of communism' to the transition to the forms of early capitalism on the local level, from 'utopia' to 'consumption as a substitute for democracy' on a global scale. At the projects that were carried out by the *P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art* in various institutions of power, the mid 90's were denoted by the demand for a more active involvement in the public sphere, both within and outside of the art system. It is significant that Tadej Pogacar and PMCA has intervned in a number of

²⁸ Inke Arns (ed.) *Irwin: Retroprincip 1983-2003*, September 2003.

²⁹ Tadej Pogacar. *P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art and new parasitism*. Article in *Theories of Display*. 1998

museum collections and museum: collection of Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana; Tretjak's African Collection at Gallery of Fine Arts, Slovenj Gradec; the collection of the National Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Naturmeuseum, Rotterdam; Mucsarnok, Budapest; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Max Liebermann Haus, Berlin.

Apart from the early anonymous projects, the *Kings of the Streets* represent the first project which take the role of a curator and organizer where he explicitly exposes the co-operation with a marginal social group and makes an issue of the public space – its occupation, crossing acceptable forms and contents, monitoring, etc.³⁰ The central idea is that of co-operation, establishing connections, new models of production, etc.

In the practice of developing his hybrid practice in combining artist and curatorial approach there are two other complex examples organized by him in 2001 and 2002 in the form of “congress” and “conferences”. The *I. World Congress of Sex Workers and New Parasitism* was the first public manifestation of the CODE:RED project. Due to the excellent organization the action achieved great attention and extensive media coverage from the official media. *I. World Congress of Sex Workers and New Parasitism* took place within the frame of the 49th Venice Biennial, between 6th and 8th of June 2001, on a public space at Giardini in a tent, or the so-called Prostitute Pavilion (Padiglione delle Prostitute).³¹ CODE:RED project encompasses various forms of joint operation with experts, scientists and activists groups, from research, activation, self-help to public manifestations, actions, exhibitions, etc. The project takes the place within and outside the art context, actively intervened in the existing conditions of things and searches for new ways and forms to change them. It also opened the artistic space for dealing with the issue and changing social, economic and political issues. P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art co-operated at these actions according to the principles of teamwork and established equal partner relations with groups and individuals.

Tadej Pogacar and PMCA has exhibited widely on a number of international manifestations and events including the Venice Biennale (2001), the Tirana Biennale (2005), the International Biennale of Contemporary Art Prague (2005), the São Paulo Art Biennial (2006), the International Istanbul Biennial (2007), and the Biennial of the Canary Islands (forthcoming in 2009). That proves the fact that Pogacar is demanded by the art contexts and his practice is recognised and largely accepted.

³⁰ Pamura Umetessi. *Kings of the Streets*, *Journal for Anthropology and New Parasitism*, 1.3/ No 1, 1996.

³¹ Tadej Pogacar. This is what you want...this is what you get. Article in *Strategies of presentation* 2&3. 2004.

In regard of his complex and multifaceted activities Pogacar states that [...] I do not divide the roles of the artist and curator, for the principle of work is fairly similar. Even when I work as a curator I operate on the basis of a relation artist-artist.³² In his opinion the curator is part of the process of creation, but not by decisively intruding into it, nor by summarizing the work of the artist in his curatorial work.³³

Artist - curator practice (Ukraine)

In search for relevant examples of artist-curator practice I looked into the recently established art context of Ukraine, where beside some older structures like for instance The Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), some new institutions and structures supported by the private capital emerged, such as the PinchukArtCentre (PAC), EIDOS Contemporary Art Centre and some others.

Because of the small scale of the Ukrainian contemporary art community, there is often a fine line between the institutions who support the creation of contemporary art and those who take a critical position toward them. By controlling the selection process through which artists and projects get grants, exhibition space, resources and support, Ukraine's few contemporary art institutions can exude great influence over the development of Ukrainian contemporary art, steering it in the direction of their particular interests. Following Soviet and post-Soviet tradition, this system is still not fully transparent, sometimes favouring personal connections over objective merit. This is the reason behind the artist-curator driven tendencies that becomes evident in the practices of Nikita Kadan or Alevtina Kakhidze.

In an essay called "Abandoned Agent," artist Nikita Kadan noticed that the contemporary art scene in Ukraine since the 1990s has been dominated by a series of businessmen, like Soros and Pinchuk, with their own personal, peripheral interests. Further one most of the artists is forced to gravitate toward whichever institution was dominant at the time, and the art shown by that institution – often reflecting a particular aesthetic or political bias – would define "contemporary art in Ukraine" at that given moment.

³² Tanja Mastnak. Conversation with Tadej Pogacar. August 2004.

³³ See the artist's web site: <http://www.zavod-parasite.si>

From the other side recently opened (2006) PinchukArtCentre (PAC)³⁴ that is independently supported by billionaire collector Viktor Pinchuk, has dominated the public perception of contemporary art with its large gallery space in Kyiv. Through unparalleled financial resources for exhibiting art in Ukraine, the institution has succeeded in making contemporary art accessible to a wide Ukrainian and international public. The other private structure EIDOS Arts Development Foundation and Ludmila Bereznitsky and Partner Gallery opened a new, sleek space for contemporary art in Kyiv – the EIDOS Contemporary Art Centre. The CAC plans to showcase both experimental work by young Ukrainian artists and international curatorial projects.

On the contrary the new generation of socially engaged artist promoted new tendencies in the process of conceiving an art project and exhibition making, Nikita Kadan a founding member and active member of the R.E.P., Alevtina Kakhidze proved that in some cases they are able to produce the art work without institutional support establishing the status quo and expending the temporary limits of artist autonomy.

Alevtina Kakhidze is unique among her fellow Ukrainian artists because most of her projects are realized independently of a collective group structure. Kakhidze was educated in Ukraine and the Netherlands. Like Bazak, in her artistic practice she examines local issues (like Ukrainian notions of public and private through the architecture of balconies and fences) from a perspective that reflects her international experience. Her contribution to the development of Ukrainian contemporary art scene is the establishment of an artist's residency program with her husband on their property outside of Kyiv. While many young Ukrainian artists strive to establish themselves abroad, Kakhidze is inviting artists from other countries to explore Ukraine.

Here would be right to mention that The Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), was once the first institution to introduce contemporary art practice to Ukraine. Originally funded by George Soros between 1993 and 1999 (as part of his program of Soros Centers for Contemporary Art in many Eastern European and post-Soviet countries), the CCA was a hub of exchange, bringing exhibitions of works of major contemporary art figures - such as Joseph Kosuth and Ilya Kabakov in 1999, or Andy Warhol in 2000 - to Ukraine, as well as supporting the development of local artists through grants and exhibitions. After 1999, the CCA became an independent institution and gradually lost the financial support of Soros.

³⁴ According to the PinchukArtCentre's website [www.pinchukartcentre.org]

However, it still functions as an archive and continues to support education and outreach programs, often in partnership with other organizations.

In 2007, R.E.P. drew attention to the trend among Ukraine's emerging artists to work collaboratively through an exhibition called "Communities Project" in Kyiv. Artist *Nikita Kadan*, one of R.E.P.'s founding members and the leader of the group, explains that one reason that young Ukrainian artists – often called "Generation 2004" – are drawn to the structure of the collective comes from the experience of the Orange Revolution, where autonomous, self-organized groups assembled to stand up for common principles against established authority. According to Kadan, artistic cooperation is also a critical reaction to the earlier 1990s generation, who took advantage of the chaos and fragmentation of wild capitalism to build their artistic careers.

The activity of *Nikita Kadan*, is an example of resisting to the context of over institutionalised space in contemporary art production in the new economic and political circumstances also seen through the practices of *R.E.P. group* established in 2004 amidst the events of Ukraine's Orange Revolution when social-political activism remains central to their practice. R.E.P. (Revolutionary Experimental Space) is group of young Ukrainian artists that has achieved local and international acclaim for their active role in shaping and critiquing the Ukrainian contemporary art scene. In addition to working collaboratively, they often feature communication as a central theme in their projects. In "Patriotism," begun in 2006, the artists conceived an "artificial visual language" to express concepts in an internationally accessible way. In each installation, they composed their graphic symbols into new images, whose meaning could be deciphered with the help of an accompanying "dictionary." The project, which was shown in Ukraine and in various European venues, makes an attempt at creating a universal language that could transcend national, cultural and institutional boundaries. R.A.P. projects according to Nikita Kadan 'have pluryfaceted character that takes multiple forms, including organizing critical discussions and curating exhibitions'.³⁵

In a country where official art institutions (museums and art academies) are stubbornly focused on maintaining the status quo without any interest in exploring new ways of experiencing and thinking about art, the self-organized artistic community acts as an alternative, parallel structure of support. Yet there is ambivalence in the roles that many individuals play in this small, close-knit community. Members of R.E.P. and other artistic

³⁵ Larissa Babij. *A Short Guide to Contemporary Art in Ukraine*. 2009

groups often work simultaneously as artists, curators and critics, so the threshold between the makers, supporters and evaluators blurs into a collective of mutual support and discussion.

Artist - curator practice (Romania&Moldova)

What is particular in the case of Romanian art context is that there are different generations of artists who took the position after the dismantling of socialist system such as Calin Dan, Lia Perjovschi, Matei Bejenaru and later some younger artists like Vlad Nanca. In the new circumstances they developed a number of artist initiatives and exhibitions dealing with post-communist reality and the post-socialist condition of the society in transition and where they acted simultaneously as artist and curators. The same values and approach shares with Nanca the other Romanian artist from Republic of Moldova Vladimir Us, who emerged in the beginning of 2000 and developed his artist and curatorial initiatives in Chisinau that obviously because of the ideological pressure and state control over artistic production couldn't take place before 89 and even in the course of the 90's.

Calin Dan embodied his artist practice in the post-89 circumstance in the context of Eastern Europe, being born in 1955 in the Transylvanian town Arad (next to the border with Hungary) in a middle class family and was trained as art critic. Calin Dan had a mixed career under the Ceausescu regime, managing to achieve a reputation in the art circles while keeping a low political profile, and he survived the dark eighties as an art historian and journalist.

Calin was therefore quite well trained to enter the chaotic period after the bloody 'television revolution' of December 1989. That was the time when he shifted his practice of art historian to that of visual artist and so that later he bridged his artistic career with that of curator when he organised a number of group exhibitions titled: 'Ex_orientale Lux' and '010101...'. In 1992 he was appointed director of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) Bucharest. In that position he initiated the first media art event in Romania, 'Ex Oriente Lux', which opened in November 1993.

In those times using his managerial capacities and skills of organised together with the artists Dan Mihaltianu and Iosif Kiraly in 1990 the art group subREAL and started to produce conceptual installations. Their style was dirty and minimal, full of ironical references to Romanian history and to the political moment--the dubious post-communist leadership of post-communist leaders (Iliescu, Roman, etc.).

The government withdrew all funding for Arta in 1994, where Calin Dan, Dan Mihaltianu and Iosif Kyrally worked as the last editor-in-chief, designer, and respectively photographer until the publication died in the process of economic liberalization. The same year, acting as curator and organiser Calin Dan produced another mega-event, the exhibition '010101...', using for the first time in the Romanian context features like community oriented projects, interactive displays of content, on-line communication. The event generated an important body of work produced in collaboration with 14 artists, a documentary film and an impressive catalog.

In 1995, Calin Dan and Iosif Kiraly (by and since then the only members of subREAL since Mihaltiany left the group) were invited for a one year residency in Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin where they produced the project *Serving Art*. They traveled there with the photo archive of Arta, practically saving it from destruction by neglect from the part of the authorities. "Serving Art" was a collection of about 2,000 b/w negatives coming from the archive of "Arta" - a Romanian art magazine who controlled the public image of the local art world between 1953 and 1989. Those collection of negatives, meant to provide reproductive material for printing, were produced in an approximate working context and relayed completely on the final cropping in order to adjust the framing and concentrate on the art reproduction aspect of the content.³⁶

As a result of the works produced there, subREAL became almost synonymous with 'artists & archives'. Unlike in other cases originating in the Former East, subREAL did not intend to reveal any scandals about compromised artists or alleged secret agents, working for the powerful (at the time) Securitate. The 600 kg heavy archive was primarily material illustrating Art History as a concept. Nevertheless, this was the archive of a communist, state-controlled art magazine, closely tied to the rich and influential Union of Artists, an organization embodying the official ideology as far as the art scene was concerned.

'Serving Art' produced in Kunsterhaus Bethanien, Berlin ('95-'96), regrouped the prints in various formats and around different media (installations, performances, slides & video projections, lectures, theater plays) addressing different types of public - from international academics to the Kreuzberg lower middle class, and various environments - from the streets of small Transylvanian towns till art spaces in Rotterdam and Santa Fe. In the A.H.A. projects the artists always started by looking first at the historical data. From there on they extrapolated to a symbolic level. And then they looked for similarities in the art

³⁶ Lovink, Geert. Interview with Calin Dan, 2000.

of today. After the fall of 1999 Calin Dan and Isif Kiraly went further and started a new archival project by taking photos of people from the cultural world. The new project was called 'Interviewing the Cities' and started in Vienna. The ongoing process of sharing the information extracted from the existing archive is therefore doubled by the process of building simultaneously a potential equivalent for the 90s. Artists they met in various working contexts and in places like Bucharest, Stockholm, Berlin, Amsterdam, Stuttgart, Santa Fe supported their efforts to build a dynamic database reflecting the art/art mentalities of this decade. By accepting to be photographed as remote figures gravitating in the aura of their own work, many artists and curators, art critics joined them in an effort of exploring private domains, analyzing public discourses, and - last but not least - establishing human contacts.

Commenting on his interest in working with the local context he argues that [...]While in Eastern Europe the impact of the so called globalization, new economy and so on is much more drastic and more on the surface, precisely because of the specific conditions, which leave those countries more vulnerable to changes.³⁷ What makes the situation there more challenging for the researcher and the activist is the relative innocence of the local populations, which is usually misinterpreting the painful collapse of the local economies as a transition towards the vanishing welfare state order. Concerning his preoccupation in combining an artist and curatorial practice he added that [...] One has to admit that this is a most interesting dynamics.³⁸

The activity of Romanian artists Lia Perjovschi and Matei Bejenaru is analyzed in conjunction with the establishment of The Centre for Art Analysis in Bucharest; Vector Association and Gallery along with the Periferic Biennial of Contemporary Art in Iasi that become one of the most active self-organized initiatives in Romania that tries to bridge the gap between the obsolete institutional discourse and the audience.

Lia Perjovschi's practice was already introduced in the 2nd chapter and the intention here is to contextualise her practise in the regional context. She belongs to a talented generation of artists that began their studies during the Communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu and have subsequently been active in the recent tumultuous and conflictive years. 'The last years of Ceausescu were terrible!' as Lia stated herself. You couldn't really deal with that by painting a still life.' Perjovschi himself has been in the vanguard of those

³⁷ Lovink, Geert. *Navigating the Normalcy. A social history of art reproduction*, 1998.

³⁸ Lovink, Geert. *Interview with Calin Dan*, 2000.

searching for new idioms in the post- Communist era, in a country still constricted by its historical experience.

Lia Perjovschi practiced mainly performance art and who originally comes from Sibiu (the Western part of Romania). Her hybrid artist-curator approach is focused on making “diagrams” that presented cultural sites in connection with representative personalities (*Mind Maps*). Her research moved towards a much larger context, exploring a wide range of historical periods and civilizations (*Research Files. General Timeline: from Dinosaurs to Google Going China, 1997-2006*).³⁹ Perjovschi would probably prefer to be considered simply as an artist, but given the particular recent history of his country and his own involvement in the hard struggle to create a new cultural environment there, it is perhaps inevitable that she should be perceived as a promoter of Romanian art on the international art scene and the promoter of the performance based practice in Romania through the non-institutionalised discursive platform Centre of Art Analysis (CAA), in her works and artist position can be seen the tensions of the new post-Communist society created over the past two decades. Initially CAA was set up as the Archive of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, which later became the Centre of Art Analysis (CAA), a space for critical debate that was also supported and promoted by her husband Dan Perjovschi. The CAA (Contemporary Art Archive) is a “context in motion”, a “museum in files”.⁴⁰ Based on 15 years of meticulous documentation of the international art scene, CAA has the mission to enlarge the contemporary art scene (in Romania), to preserve independent positions and empower promising institutions and individuals.

Art practice can portray the region, but the region, in its varying states of political, economic and cultural development, portrays also the facets of this practice. Whatever tensions or polemical conflicts there are between them, they all operate on the same vivid stage – undergoing transition towards the Western paradigm, yet striving to preserve its identity. This is because the Romanian art scene cannot be detached from the political context at large: it is a hybrid space reflecting its particular condition as result of the geographical, historical and cultural specifics, allowing contingent intersections, but demanding pertinent participation. Working over two decades in such circumstances as artist and curator, art manager Matei Bejenaru created a operational model in actively surviving in harsh economic and political circumstances.

³⁹ Ileana, Pintilie. [The States of Mind of Romanian Visual Arts: The Personal Exhibition of Lia & Dan Perjovschi, 2008](#)

⁴⁰ Simona Nastac. Contemporary Visual Arts in Romania (part II). 2007

Together with a group of artists and philosophers from Iasi (located in the North-East of Romania), Matei Bejenaru founded in 2001 the Vector Association, a contemporary art institution that supported the local emerging art scene to become locally and internationally visible.⁴¹ He is also member of the editorial staff of Vector – art and culture in context magazine, a publication that mainly analyses the regional artistic and cultural situation of the South East European countries, in the process of transition, and the Middle East region, subdued to the pressures of conflicts. On his initiative and Periferic project started in 1997 and since then it has passed 8 editions. In the beginning it was a performance event, which grew up in the first 3 editions (1997, 1998 and 1999) to a level of an international regional contemporary art event. Periferic is organized and managed by Vector Association that operates as non-profit cultural NGO, an artistic association that has its mission to promote contemporary art on the local level.⁴² As an artist, he is socially engaged in analyzing the way globalization affects post communist countries labor force and rapidly changes mentalities and lifestyles. In 2003, for the second edition of Tirana Biennial he installed a water post in the center of the city offering a free water distribution for Albanian inhabitants. In 2004, he initiated the cARTier project, a socio-cultural project aiming to regenerate a workers district from Iasi. In 2005, he published in the Idea Magazine and later exhibited at Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art in Vienna, a Traveling Guide for Romanian illegal workers.

An artist of the generation of change who represent the current tendencies in the contemporary art development and establishment of a local artist network is Vlad Nancă. Born in 1979 in Bucharest, Rumania, he lives and works in Bucharest. He studied photography and video at the University of Arts in Bucharest. Drawing on the environment and influence of Bucharest life Nancă documents urbanity through his photography and is active as artist and curator.

His most significant projects related to the progression of the city art scene is related to establishment of a 'Bükreş' blog (<http://bukresh.blogspot.com>) and the development of an independent artist initiative under the title 'home galleries' (2020 homegallery, Apartamentul 17) and curating exhibitions (Wait... 2006, Back to the future/Cu Spatele la Viitor 2007, at Galeria Noua, Bucharest) his main goal is to encourage and support local artists of younger generation by offering a platform to show their work.

For his 2005 Errorism exhibition he produced the satirical Terrorist Balloon, a black balloon resembling a person wearing a balaclava, which reflected his impression of the recent

⁴¹ Interview with Matei Bejenaru. June, 2008.

⁴² Ibidem.

terrorism situation in the “War against terror”, but was also a reference to the terrorists that were active during the hectic days of the Romanian Revolution in 1989 and were afterwards never found. In 2006 Nancă was commissioned to do a work celebrating the 50th anniversary of National Television in Bucharest. He hung a 27metre long banner on the television building, bearing the words *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, thus using Gil Scott Heron’s famous title as a comment on the authenticity of the Romanian Revolution of 1989, supposedly the first Revolution ever to be transmitted live on television.

As opposed to his earlier works on the subject, Vlad Nancă’s latest works about the Revolution have shifted from being somewhat impassive, provocative and ironic to a more sensitive, insightful and commemorative approach, but they still continue to question the events. As the artist puts it: “The events that took place 20 years ago in Bucharest still need to be clarified; judicial investigations are underway, but no sign of an elucidation is to be expected any time soon. The only thing that one can do is to remember and honor the people who gave their lives for freedom.”

A more recent work, which was recently shown at Kultur Kontakt in Vienna, is the *Revolution Book*, an artist book in which a series of details of images from the 1989 events present a different reading of the dynamics of the time. From a photo album entitled *The bloody chronicle of Bucharest during the Revolution*, the artist selected very small details cropped from the original photographs to create a distinct visual interpretation of the Revolution, focusing on less usual aspects of the violent events. It is a more aloof interpretation, rather serene and disconnected from the emotional chaos that such an upheaval can provoke. Utilizing different mediums his varying personal projects employ political and cultural symbols, often using wordplay to evoke nostalgia and referencing Romania’s recent past and challenging current social and political climate (*I do not know what union I want to belong to anymore*, *Original Adidas*, *Terrorist Balloon*, *Proposal for the National Redemption Cathedral*, etc).

The very recent development after the year 2000 of the art scene in Republic of Moldova and its orientation toward contemporary art practices among young artists showed an increasing potential of the local art community and its ability to reflect critically on social and political issues which were impossible before 1989 and even before 1995. This situation couldn’t happen without the encouragement and support from Contemporary Art Center as an independent institution (established in 2000) and some other minor art initiatives despite the fact that the real functional art market remains a projection. Within transitional processes, art

and culture come last, sinking down the inter-space of an inexistent market and extinct institutions. The actual situation is that a number of non-profit institutions lead by the individuals like for instance KSAK Center lead by artist - curator Stefan Rusu and the Oberliht Artist Association by Vladimir Us develops its activity without any support from the state bodies. The projects generated by two institutions over the past years were directed to the consolidation of the art context and education of a new generation of critically engaged artists in constant confrontation with the power structures.

The activity of the artist Vladimir Us from Moldova is analysed in conjunction with his multifaceted practice directed toward consolidating the young artist community through managing of a mailing list (Oberlist) launched in 2005 and managing the Young artist association OBERLIHT established in 2002.⁴³ The association is a legal structure that helps him to develop his curatorial projects and artist driven initiatives. His activity and role resembles with those of entrepreneur by his engagement in curatorial practice (curatorial practice), his role of moderator (manager of mailing list) in related projects (contemporary art magazine State of Urgency).

His recent projects INTERVENTION/2008 and CHIOSC/2009 is an example of the managerial and organisational activity that he is doing starting with his independent activity that he acquired in the KSAK Center for Contemporary art where he was active as intern and coordinator of various small projects and initiatives.⁴⁴ The project CHIOSC (kiosk) that he initiated in 2008 aims to create the premises for collaboration in Europe and worldwide, taking the social, cultural and historical but also political and economic character of Republic of Moldova as a starting point. It aims to document by artistic means the changes that are taking place on daily bases in the city's cultural tissue. Subjects like the legacy of the communist past and its reminiscent, the migration of the population from rural areas to big cities, multiple and fragmented identities as a result of a sudden change from one political and economic system to another, local life styles "surviving" in the global world etc. In fact the CHIOSC project as an "art bureau" (interdisciplinary public platform for manifestation, meeting, sharing, exchange) his intention is to promote contemporary art and youth culture in public space, to state its importance in the process of transition by strengthening the local and developing the regional and international network of cultural operators and professionals. His

⁴³ Vladimir Us interviewed by the author, October, 2008.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

role in the developing the young artist in the context of unstable cultural market becomes crucial and vitally important.⁴⁵

Conceptually, the project CHIOȘC operates as a “ free zone” and a place free of institutional control aiming to provide a platform to a wide range of renown but also marginalized initiatives from the local level and from the region, searching to interact with different publics and to offer visibility to artists, curators and cultural workers operating within the public domain.⁴⁶ On the occasion of the next G8 summit that took place near Rostock in Heiligendamm in 2007, the On the basis of Oberliht Association Vladimir Us organized an exhibition accompanied by a projection of videos representing the anti-globalist movement in Europe and worldwide that was followed up a public discussion open to the wide public in Chisinau. In terms of Vladimir Us’s personal and political engagement for curating, it is exactly the reflection on the methods of transformation that he finds in the process. For him, artistic and curatorial work shares the same creative device or ideology. It is the tools and impact that are different.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The so called parallel institutions developed by the artists within the art system that have emerged over recent decades have their antecedents in Duchamp’ Societe Anonyme, Warhol’s Factory, Broodthaer’s museum of Modern Art or Beuys’s open international university. In response to the question of whatever culture would continue to bear any real significance for the society, Broodthaers replied that it could only survive by “embodying itself”, within its own reference sources and theory with which to counter the images and texts circulating in the press and the other mass media – the ones that currently determine the rules and patterns of our behavior and ideology. Parallel, fictive institutions represent a response to this situation. But characteristic of many of them is a fascination with planning, organization, production and distribution – elements normally associated with economic sphere. In the late

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ According to the Oberliht’s website: <http://www.oberliht.org.md>

⁴⁷ Vladimir Us interviewed by the author, October 16, 2008.

capitalist period, economics have become the main, dominant social value and the overriding discourse. The economy has taken over the position traditionally held by religion. Parallel to this, it has brought about a diversion from the concept of author/artist, by its very essence it undermines and breaks down the logic of the art system that rests on the notion of originality and the autonomy of the subject.

As a conclusion I would like to point out the fact that when artist and curator Edi Mukha recall his experience in working in the 90's while being confronted with the state apparatus, he reminds about the problems of art and culture in the frame of Balkan region, which were defined by him as permanent instability. That symptom of time becomes the title of a group exhibition he organised in Tirana with the support of Ministry of Culture and presented at the National Gallery by bringing a selection of artists from Balkan countries. While preparing the project he was aware of the fact that one of the motives of organising this project was certainly connected with the growing interest of the international public for regional projects, which tries to establish a reflection on marginal cultures. Mukha deliberately restricted the project to artists from the Balkan countries and invited some guests from the West as observers. One of the conclusions of his interest in working with local context is that [...] the Balkan countries are truly connected because of a long history of political and cultural changes and instability. One could say they are an explicit multi-cultural area.⁴⁸

The post 90's era is considered, or better said labeled as the Post Communist era, and the territories that constitute it as a Former Eastern Europe. [...] The first part of this label is a remnant of the Cold War terminology, while the second one is a fresh and new nomination that is trying to "level" the differences. Therefore it is interesting to consider that the actual developments in the region with their insecure stability or with what could be defined as [...] "Permanent Instability" puts a question mark to the above ideological definitions. In a relatively wide geographical area, where the condition of existence seems to be Instability, the transition through an intermediate phase that never comes to crystallise a status of Stability, has become a routine.⁴⁹

This statement made at the end of the 90's by Eduard Muka a representative of a country perceived as peripheral from the Balkan region draws a precise picture of internal processes and the dynamic of how the entire Former East and actual East European countries are developing in terms of economy, politics and cultural identity. Certainly in such

⁴⁸ Eda Cufer. An interview with Eduard Muka. Geopolitics and art. 1999.

⁴⁹ Eduard Muka. Permanent Instability. Geopolitics and art. 1999.

circumstances the role and functions of contemporary art practices and the development of the art market is a long and difficult process that needs to be closely analysed and documented.

CHAPTER 5

The artist-curator as a model of institutional critique

The phenomenon of the artist-curator has hitherto been analyzed through the institutions, the artists, and the “object”: artworks that resemble exhibitions as well in the regional context as it is the case of artists-curators from Eastern Europe. The (institutional) exhibition has been, and still is, the preferred context for artist-curators, seeing from the point of the institutions, as well as that of the artist. In the previous chapters, we have encountered the modification or even re-placement of the contemporary art curator as the result of the phenomenon of the artist-curator. Vidokle’s involvement in institutional exhibition making, Hirst’s individual demands for curatorship, Hirschhorn’s transformations in the actual artwork and its creative process: contemporary artists have been suggesting that there is no more use of the curator. This is a problem, a gesture. The Curator is eliminated, which is an indirect critique on his or her function.

Institutional critique, surfacing throughout the thesis, appears to hand in hand with the phenomenon. Recalling the work of three-artist curators, I will argue that institutional critique may be envisaged as the perfect model for artists acting as curators. Marcel Broodthaers, Lia Perjovschi and Fred Wilson deliberately attempted to combine institutional critique with curatorial working methods.

In the discussion below, the rather heterogeneous “free zone” in which artworks apparently play the exhibitions, thus artists the curators, will also be simplified. By far, the work of most artist-curators belongs to the professional field of either artistic practice (as in the chapter 3), or of curating (discussed in chapter 1 and 2). The descriptions of work by Broodthauers, Wilson and Perjovschi (presented in the chapter 4) will shed light on a valuable criterion for the admission to, therefore the existence of this “free zone”. The work of the genuine artist-curator could not be done by any contemporary art curator, for reasons that will become evident below.

Institutional critique

Institutional critique in the art world was initiated by artists, such as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Michael Asher in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the same time that the position of the contemporary art curator became prominent. Artists made the art institution the site for critical intervention. As explained by Miwon Kwon, these artists' variously conceived the site not only in physical and spatial terms but as a cultural framework defined by the institution of art'.¹ The techniques and effects of the art institution were frequently questioned, particularly by artist Daniel Buren ('Hasn't the term installation come to replace exhibition?'), who expressed his concerns about the loss of relationship between the work and its place of production in his essay 'The Function of the Studio' in 1971. As exposed in the slightly later articles 'The Functions of an exhibition' and 'The Function of the museum', the artist fears the 'mark' the museum make: '[...] the Museum imposes its "frame" (physical and moral) on everything that is exhibited in it, in a deep and indelible way'.²

For artists' critique on art's material, social, and discursive contexts, the term "institutional critique" emerged in the early 1980s, and was given a definitive turn in an essay by Benjamin Buchloh titled "Conceptual art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", published in the journal *October* in 1990. Institutional critique as a phenomenon has thus been named retrospectively: an attempt to historicize a movement. However, I will argue that it defines also something that was going on in the 1990s, and is this decennium. Today, it is applied in criticism, museum activities, and art practice. I do not consider institutional critique as a "historical" movement, but something that continues today, especially in relation to the phenomenon of artist-curators.

Among the most prominent figures identified with the movement's early manifestations is Marcel Broodthaers. Broodthaers is also an early conciliator of the two different operational fields of artists and curators. Influenced by French cultural theorist Michael Foucault,³ Broodthaers undertook his museum critique in the form of his own

¹ Kwon 2002: p. 13.

² Buren 1973.

³ Michael Foucault's writings of the late 1960s stimulated a critical examination of existing curatorial institutions and recognised art as being interwoven with a system of socio-economic exchange.

(fictional) museum, the *Musee d'art Moderne, Departement des Aigles*, from 1968 to 1972.

The artist assumed directorship over his museum, naturally obtaining curatorial control.

Broodthaers's installation has had numerous sections, each of which demanded different positions of the artist. In Septemebr 1968, five years after he had complemented his earlier work as a poet by working as a visual artist, Broodthaers publicly opened his newly founded museum in his own apartment in Brussels by introducing himself as its director. The exhibition of his irst section (*Section XIXeme Siecle*) consisted of empty packing crates, lamps used for illumination, postcards of French nineteenth-century paintings fixed on the wall, a slide projection of prints by J.J Grandville, and signs used to give information about the gallery's entrance policy.⁴ On the opening and closing days of the nineteenth-century section, exactly one year apart, an empty transport container was packed outside the building, suggesting the recent arrival or imminent removal of the collection on display.

All of the objects on display evoke the museum as their source. Combined with their 'resounding emptiness', the objects strip that source of their meaning, art theorist Benjamin Buchloh argues.⁵ What is also stripped of its meaning is the role of the curator. For the artis's duties were ranging from the installment of lights, "artworks" (that also ostensibly backtracked the curatorial procedure) and labels to welcoming the audience, Broodthaers no longer functions of defines himself as a creator, but rather as an irganizer or art administrator.

Broodthaers further positioned himself within the framework of institutional control through the historical and exhibiting function of the later *Section XVIIIeme Siecle* and *Section XIXeme Siecle*, and the administrativem financial and press concerns of the *Section Publicite*, *Section Documentare* and *Section Financiere*. The largest section, the *Musee d'art Moderne, Departement des Aigles, Section des Figures (or: The Eagle form the Oligocene to the Present)* was commissioned by the Kunsthalle in Dusseldorf and involved the actual loan of over 300 objects, all representing eagles, from forty-three private and museum collections such as the Imperial War Museum and British Museum. The objects were displayed in vitrines, each with an engraved label declaring in French, German and English 'This is not a work of art'.⁶ Broodthaers also indirectly informed the viewer on what was dispised by Daniel Buren: that it is not the individual object alone, but the relationship between the objects, in fact their context that constituted the work of art.

⁴ Such as *Museum: Enfants nod admis* of 1968.

⁵ Foster 2005: p. 551.

⁶ Broodthaers explicitly referenced Rene Magritte's distribution of language and image ('This is not a pipe')

An obvious expression of institutional critique, Broodthaers's labes are significant as an artistic contribution to what was foremost curatorial work: the official inaugurations, the correspondence with stamped letterheads, the mailing list of art world notables, the donations, the contracted art shippers, and the installment of the objects. Marcel Broodthaers deserves the legitimate status of artist-curator, because a curator could not have done all of this.

Moraly or socially, it would have been offensive to other artists to be the only soul in control of the exhibition, especially at a time when artists publicly protested against Szeeman's dominance as contemporary art curator. Broodthaers, as an *artist-curator*, questioning the contemporary art structure, was not condemned for his actions. On the contrary, still today, artists are not offended by the inclusion in or the exclusion of the work of another artist that conveys an institutional critique. Broodthaers showed that all sense of hierarchy could be negated, both in terms of exhibition practice and museum organisation, for the museum organisation, for the museum director is also a press officer, a curator *and* an artist.

Practically, a curator could also not have matched Broodthaers's work as an artist-curator. Broodthaers gave himself permission to put together all kinds of objects in a wide variety of media and statuses. This he did without any explanations on the objects' origins or on the development of the exhibition's theme. While suggesting a didactic exhibition in the title, Broodthaers remains far from educational. Instructions are an explicit curatorial responsibility. All in all, Broodthaers cleverly demonstrated that in the model of institutional critique, artists are able to become artist-curators effectively, for it also provides them with a re-balancing of "the function of the exhibition/museum".

Lia Perjovschi places herself in the domains of art making and curating simultaneously. The role of the artist had essentially become assimilated with that of the curator in the exhibition 'CCA Timeline'. In 2006 she presented her CAA Contemporary Art Archive/Centre for Art Analysis as chronological installation titled 'CCATimeline' at Kunstraum Innsbruck. CAA functioned as a voice activated installation, a place for debate and criticism; it served as a point for local and international artists and curators to meet and exchange opinions and transformed itself and its mission according to the changes in the political and cultural context. For this exhibition Perjovschi has created a series of new works, which explore the exhibition itself and its selected artists. As a result, Lia Perjovschi created a total work of art that he left function as an 'living archive',⁷

⁷ Ileana, Pintilie. [The States of Mind of Romanian Visual Arts: The Personal Exhibition of Lia & Dan Perjovschi. 2008](#)

Her curatorial approach is combined with his aspirations to collaborate with other artists and artistic explorations and enable the artist to comment upon institutional exhibition practice. A series of other presentations and exhibitions organised by Perjovschi such as 'States of Mind' - the first big collective exhibition at Art Museum of Timisoara, 'States of Mind', Nasher Museum, 'Endless Collection', Kunsthalle, Göppingen, 'Detective (in art history from modernism till today)', The Station, Žilina, 'Knowledge Museum. Body Mind Map', Dorottya Gallery, Budapest and 'Chronology', Gallery Yujiro, London provided the artist with ways to open up the gallery spaces for possibilities in alternative display.

"Chronology" concentrates on Lia's "Subjective Art History", an extensive series of reproduced images and text dating from Modernism to the present day. The piece is made up of three interconnected stems: "Time line general", "Time line on Romanian culture" and "My time line", edited and re-edited over the last fifteen years; an investigative practice, its purpose to examine what, how, and ultimately who, enters into the archive of history. Ideas and notes take on the form of snowflake-like crystalline diagrams, comprising of fifty drawings in different languages, mapping the connections in history, history of art, theory, politics and language.

As a result of Lia's research, a collection of information from galleries and institutions is accumulated and presented as 'Detective' (in art history from modernism till today) at The Station from Žilina, Slovakia. The "postcard collection" and "plastic bags collection", dating from 1990 to the present are exhibiting in conjunction with the "detective table", which consists of models, replicas of artworks bagged and tagged, as if a form of criminal investigation which is in progress. For roughly twenty years Lia has embarked on a project-as-an-institution, employing the recent history of art as material for building up relations, and dialogue. "Her works are neither installations nor performances; they look like offices for individual research, reading rooms or places for debates; the focus is the body of art. She cares less if one calls it art or not."

Lia Perjovschi explains her working methods as follows: 'It is the idea of possibilities, or this idea that you can go away from the conventions of how you are supposed to display artworks. [...] I am exploring new ways to create a space together. I have always been very interested in this idea of how things can work together, and also there is the idea of re-contextualising. [...] It is about creating new possibilities, new context. This is the way I

work in my individual works, but it is very much the reason why I think I am interested in creating this by doing group exhibitions'.⁸

With the explicit desire to open up possibilities for alternative display, Perjovschi suggested that the work of art can be shown and be perceived in many different ways. Art can and should constantly be re-contextualized. For instance here other exhibition project The Museum of Knowledge presented in Dorottya Gallery, Budapest is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, the positioning of art within a changing system of relations. "The belief in ideals, in the realization of dreams, as well as in the function of art in increasing knowledge, is one of the most important characteristics of Perjovschi's artistic practice. In the 'Plan for a Museum of Knowledge', she proposes an imaginary museum, which is based on the metaphors of the Body, the Earth and the Universe."⁹ This educational element works out to be undemocratic and unnecessarily controlling to the individual artworks, the artist-curator argues. Perjovschi brings forward what was already suggested in the first chapter: institutions could be much braver in embracing artist-curated activities.

It is questionable how "potentially patronizing" Perjovschi's own curatorial methods are. In the role of the curator, Perjovschi attempts to fully orchestrate her space, including the audience's perception. With this artist-curator, however, the control of the museum atmosphere is undeniably creative and undetermined.

This is the result of what Perjovschi's says to be 'the collaborative effect': It is the same way that I work always, whether I draw a mind map or if I make a group exhibition. There is always this idea of collaboration, and also there is always this idea of keeping an open window to something that will happen, that will be brought in by somebody else: by somebody else's work or by the actual process of making something. [...] There is an element of chance'.¹⁰

Obviously, Perjovschi's work could not be done by a contemporary art curator. Artistically and morally, only an artist can be allowed to work with reduced public responsibilities, and to "use" other artists and they're so broad-mindedly. Perjovschi is a distinctive, contemporary artist-curator, though very different to Broodthaers. Marcel Broodthaers distinguished himself as such by excluding the curator, in fact all museum staff. Perjovschi also exclude the curator, but shares its re-placement with other participants of her

⁸ Lia Perjovschi. Interview with the author. 2007

⁹ Ileana, Pintilie. [The States of Mind of Romanian Visual Arts: The Personal Exhibition of Lia & Dan Perjovschi, 2008.](#)

¹⁰ Ibidem.

projects. Her artistic aim for the 'collaborative effect' in exhibition making reveals a desire for social democracy in the art structure that art institutions increasingly will (have to) meet.

Fred Wilson's work is interesting in relation to both institutional demand that he is meeting, and his own artistic initiative to curatorial intervene in museum collections. The institutions, which are in most of the cases non-art museums, are apparently welcoming this artist-curator, though for other reasons than the artist's intentions. Wilson's exhibitions in non-art museum imply a critique on their collections, the museum system as a whole, and the art field and the academic world. The museum, which is the Maryland Historical Society from Baltimore, was just forthrightly enthusiastic to make collection more accessible and attractive to visitors.

Similar to Perjovschi, Wilson seeks a "collaborative effort", though less open to chance. Fred Wilson desires collaboration not only among artists, but also between artists and academics or institutions, such as museums, libraries and archives. Ideally, his collaborative efforts would establish an alternative, democratic structure, where not only individual people, but also the individual objects of the collections find their own space.

The 38-year-old artist has suddenly become a leading force in a new movement by museums to re-examine themselves, their past roles, and their present places in society. "I'm just a person in the middle, outside the various systems museums have set up to run their institutions . . . [...] I wouldn't say what I do with museums is a collaborative venture. But it isn't an antagonistic one either. Everyone who opens up to me becomes part of the project and feels it." " Wilson's breakthrough exhibition was "Mining the Museum," which took place at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992 and featured "Cabinet Making." In 1999 Wilson completed projects for the de Young Museum with the commissioning participation of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. For the latter, Wilson created the exhibit "The Greeting Gallery," in which he built an official-looking glass room that contained indigenous objects – baskets, pipes, instruments, and so on – which maintain a function in existing communities.¹¹

Rather concealed, Wilson in the role of the artist-curator he infiltrate in the museum, up to the level where he meets full authority over the display of (his) work. He is in complete control of he collection and its display, thus an authentic curator. He proves to be a genuine artist-curator also by adding artistic element (the installation setting) that could not have been done by a curator. Paradoxically, these artistic interventions also contribute to a curatorial responsibility, which is education.

¹¹ Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979-2000. Berkeley Art Museum, 2626 Bancroft, Berk.

By emphasising on the institutional critique that underlies his work, Fred Wilson actually proves to be a very advanced artist-curator. Wilson succeeds in bringing his artistic-curatorial practice inside an institution, where both the institution and the artist fulfil their own aims. Both parties seem to be respecting each other's possibilities and capabilities. It is almost a pity Wilson moves away from the given art structure, for he might be well have presented the best balance between institutional demand and artists' dare for artist-curator. The next step is to do similar things inside the *art* institutions.

Conclusions

Institutional critique seems to be a functional model for artist-curators, but it might create some hesitation at the side of the institutions to embrace the phenomenon. Marcel Broodthaers did not mince matters. He very clearly articulated his museum critique into the formation of an own museum, where the artist retained full authority over the treatment and display of individual artworks. Institutional demand for his Departments had only arisen around 1972, when art institutions such as Documenta were made very well aware of the omnipresence of artists' institutional critique, thus the necessity to be open to it. Lia Perjovschi, I would argue, proposes a contemporary variant. Her version of common exhibition practice is also a revision on Minimalist concerns around the installation of art, where each artwork is given its own space. She also critically responds to the sort of non-hierarchical or non-museum-marked display of work, advocated by Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers. Perjovschi's practice is an obvious reaction of a younger generation to an older one, which precisely explains institutions' contemporary hesitations. By contrast, Fred Wilson keeps institutional critique out of sight, which might be the best format to structurally link the phenomenon of artist-curators with the institutional art structure. This we have already seen in chapter 1, where artists such as Anton Vidokle figure as co-curator, in close collaboration with others.

Marcel Broodthaers, Lia Perjovschi and Fred Wilson in their daring fusions of artistic and curatorial practices has found a way to become part of the institutional structure, though sometimes marginally. In their work, these artists are responsible for the exclusion of the curator. Combining institutional critique with curatorial working methods in their practice, Marcel Broodthaers, Lia Perjovschi and Fred Wilson are key figures in the "free zone" of

artist-curators. For aesthetic, moral, social or practical reasons, their curatorial work cannot be executed by a contemporary art curator. With a flashback on all chapters; I come to the following conclusion.

CONCLUSION

In my research I have relied on literature, as well as on personal interviews and other encounters with artists and art professionals, thus bringing together “historical“ and contemporary viewpoints relating to the artist-curator in the contemporary art world and in the East-European context in particular. Both sources have proved to be very meaningful for a better understanding of the manifestations and motivations for the phenomenon, and are continuously reflected in each chapter. The results of research makes it evident that nowadays, both institutions and artists show a desire to move away from the binary artist/curator relationship – a reconsideration of the principles that were set out by early contemporary art curators such as Harald Szeemann. Today, collaboration is the key word, however, the interpretations of institutions and artists differ.

Institutions such as biennials, and, to lesser extent, museums seek renewal in their exhibition practices through experimentation and exchange with artists. Those collaborative efforts will bring in purity and transparency in exhibition making, which institutions believe to be beneficial for both institutions’ hospitality (towards both artists and the general public) and their curatorial practices.

Artists have also been taking up the role of the curator from their own initiative. It seems the even historically – think of Gustave Goubet in 1855 – curating was initiated by artists out of personal entrepreneurship, as part of their artistic practice, or for economic or political reasons. With all reasons, artists appear to prefer collaboration, and to express a “contemporary” institutional critique. Both the desire by artists to collaborate and to question institutional structures is apparently welcomed by the institutions. The result is a modification of the role of the (institutional) contemporary art curator.

Thus, the appearance of the artist-curator in the field of contemporary art is both a response to institutional structure and it stems from a desire on the part of the artists. In principal, the two seems to work together. In practice, however, museums are hesitant to embrace the phenomenon due to the public responsibility they hold. Besides, artist-curators often choose to start curating outside the conventional structures.

Institutional critique, often excluding the contemporary art curator, provides a model for artist-curators. It is institutional critique in combination with curatorial work, as practiced by Marcel Broodthaers in the 1960s and 1970s and today by artists like Lia Perjovschi, Tadej

Pogacear, Matei Bejenaru and Vladimir Us, that function as a model for the convergence of artists' intentions and the request from the side of art institutions.

Aside from the institutions and the artists, I have also analyzed an object: artworks that resemble exhibitions. It appears that theoretically, these artworks are still distinct from exhibitions. Therefore, the phenomenon of artists-curators cannot be explained by the proliferation of artworks that blow up the boundaries between artwork and exhibition. Yet, the production process of contemporary artworks has considerably come to resemble that of exhibitions.

It is significant that the categories of artwork and exhibition expanded not only as the result of the development of the artwork in the twentieth century. Artist –curators have actually created their own “free zone”, in which the definitions of artwork and exhibitions are destabilized, and the curator excluded. Inside the “free zone”, artists obscure the individual definitions of artwork, exhibition, artist and curator. This calculated construction enables artists to keep authority over the creation and placement of their artwork, as well as their activities – at the expenses of the role of the contemporary art curator.

I also would like to stress the fact that my research is based on a significant number of artists acting as curators from Eastern Europe that show their capacities and motivations in changing the actual state of things that they proved with an extend number of exhibitions and project that become important not only in the regional context but also internationally.

To conclude, it is important to point out that the phenomenon of artist-curator in the contemporary art world represents the extension of many boundaries: artist, curator, exhibition, and artwork. This is precisely what makes it meaningful in the broader context. With the thesis results I proved once more that the emergence of the artist-curator is a complex phenomenon that signifies a growing tendency, which cannot be underestimated and suggests serious reflections on the economy and politics of the contemporary art world. The continuous proliferation of the recent examples of artists acting as curators, managers and entrepreneurs in the context of East European countries suggest that the model of artist-curators is the beginning of important changes of the art system itself. For this reason, I regard it of a fundamental importance to perceive the phenomenon of artist-curators as a model of change that will contribute to establishment a new reality in the economy of contemporary art world.

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VITA

Stefan Rusu is visual artist, art manager and freelance curator, was born in 1964, Kâietu, Moldova, based in Chisinau and Bucharest. Stefan's artist and curatorial agenda is closely connected to undergoing processes and changes occurred in the post-socialist societies after 1989, currently works as projects and programs manager at [KSA:K]- Center for Contemporary Art from Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. Among his preoccupations are the aspects of mass-manipulation techniques, political engineering strategies (political engineering), forms of colonization and culturalization that culminated in some cases with the construction of artificial entities, as it is the case of Republic of Moldova. Rusu was trained as visual artist and later extended his practice to curating, managing and fundraising projects, editing TV programs, producing experimental films, TV reports and documentaries.

Starting from the year 2000 he is involved in the evolution of KSAK Center from Chisinau in the frame of which he develops curatorial projects, screenings, presentations and art programs. Recently he initiated in collaboration with ROTOR Contemporary Art Association from Graz an exchange program between Austrian and Moldovan artists, the program started in 2009 and will continue through 2011. The other exchange program was initiated between KSAK Center and DCR from Hague where 3-6 artists from Moldova and Holland will visit and research in Chisinau and Den Hague. The final result of this exchange programs will be two exhibitions in the public space organized and curated in Chisinau and Den Hague.

Between 2005 and 2007 he was involved in the production of AlteArteTV project where he was appointed as editor-in-chief. Alte Arte TV project was a collaboration between [KSA:K] Center (Chisinau) and Relations (Berlin) founded by Culturshiftung, Germany. The main purpose of this project being the production of a 30 minutes TV program, dedicated to the promotion of Contemporary Art practices and artists positions in the society, broadcasted twice a month. During the production period that last until January 2007 a total number of 31 TV programs (30 minutes length) has been produced and broadcasted on the National TV channel- "Moldova 1". □As editor-in-chief of AATV Project he was responsible for the production and content of a number programs (11th, 13th produced in 2005 and also the programs from 25th - 31st produced in 2006-2007). The editorial strategy of the TV program

he developed dealt with decontamination of cultural environment and promotion of contemporary art practices and artists positions in the society.

In 2005/2006 he attended the Curatorial Training Program at Stichting De Appel from Amsterdam where he co-curated Mercury in Retrograde (www.mercuryinretrograde.org) His managerial and curatorial experience at KSAK-Center for Contemporary Art includes: Found Footage Workshop (2007) - in-depth exploration of digital filmmaking techniques and aesthetics combined with the reuse of archival media, Cultural Campaign (2006-09)- a long term project dealing with the post conflict resolution situation and decontamination of cultural environment in Moldovan regions: Transnistria (a territory controlled since 1991 by Russian army and security service FSB) and UTA Gagauzia (territorial-administrative unite populated by Turkish Christian Orthodox community). His internationally known projects include MOLD-GOLIA- video art from Moldova in the frame of Czechpoint - Exhibition of Political Art at NOD Gallery from Prague and Museum of Art Zilina/Slovakia and New Old Routes – Central Asian Video Art presented at Arsenal Gallery, Bialystok, Poland and at BizArt Center, Shanghai, China.

In 2008 he designed and managed the project RO-MD/Moldova in Two Scenarios that deals with the investigation by juxtaposing of the current cultural, social and political situation in two Moldova regions (Moldova region from Romania and Republic of Moldova) this interdisciplinary research platform was an attempt to create a rapprochement and to understand the nature of the relationship between Romanian and Moldovan societies at the present stage, to analyze the causes and effects of a shared historical and identity trajectory in the context of divided regions and societies.

Changing Climate is a curatorial project realized in 2009, which was presented at Kunsthalle Exnergasse from Vienna and deals with New Media and Video Art from Central Asia. Currently he is in residence at Centre International les Recollets from Paris where he is preparing a research based project Drifting Identity Station documenting multiple aspects of identity syndrome that took place in former political construction- RSSM (Soviet Socialist Moldavian Republic) and some decades after the dissolution of Soviet Union in the new era of a neo-liberal system.