

CURATING THE STATUS

A report on the

CURATORIAL FUTURE TALKS 2017

Sharing curatorial practices in France and Belgium

By Kate Christina Mayne, writer and artist (UK-BE), based in Antwerp

The Curatorial Future Talks 2017 are an initiative by C-E-A, organized in partnership with Flanders Arts Institute, ISELP, the Direction des Arts plastiques contemporains of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and 50° nord réseau transfrontalier d'art contemporain, during the Brussels Gallery Weekend in September 2017.

How do people become curators? How to define what curators are, or do? How does one transmit the discipline to future generations? How do curators engage with other collaborators, and what are the formal terms of engagement?

To celebrate their tenth anniversary C-E-A, the French curators' association, teamed up with Flanders Arts Institute, ISELP and the Direction des Arts plastiques contemporains to compile a 3-day conference on 8th, 9th and 10th September 2017 in Brussels to discuss these matters. Five C-E-A members (Valentine Busquet, Alex Chevalier, Émeline Dufrennoy, Madeleine Filippi and Veronica Valentini) together with Marianne Derrien, C-E-A's vice president, Lucie Orbie, C-E-A's member and general secretary of 50° nord réseau transfrontalier d'art contemporain, and Juliette Courtillier, C-E-A's coordinator, participated in the conference, interacting with a number of their local counterparts in the Belgian art scene.

During 12 hours of discussions, some 20+ speakers, representing a variety of practices and geographic locations, and a 100+ member audience mulled over the bigger questions. As the program promised, they shared "experiences and thoughts on common projects, a variety of approaches to artistic and curatorial practices, and highlighted subtle nuances." They pondered the forms future curatorial

practices might take, and the kinds of networks that could facilitate such undertakings. In curatorial terms, the themes discussed were thoroughly existential. And, as befits a topic as formally diverse as contemporary art, the speakers were bound to voice a polyphonic range of – at times contradictory – approaches, desires and opinions.

The following is no word-by-word account. A tape-recording malfunction means it is also incomplete. It is no scholarly essay on curatorial studies either, but an approximate summary, with some added thoughts and a flurry of footnotes, to illustrate the examples cited. Those wishing to delve deeper with investigations of their own are invited to consult the links provided.

Day One began with the question of what a curator actually is, and highlighted the lack of any universally accepted definition of the role and practice. The program centered on first-hand accounts of a variety of curatorial practices, against the backdrop of C-E-A's ambition to develop a legal definition of curatorial practice as applicable in French law, and an accompanying model contract for curatorial projects. The question of curatorial authorship also arose.

Day Two focused on 3 educational programs for future curators in Belgium. Programs that alternately favor (predominantly) theoretical approaches, vs. hands-on, practice-based learning – and their respective benefits, were compared and contrasted. A number of other curatorial studies programs in France, The Netherlands and the US were also discussed.

Day Three aimed to broach economic realities and collaborative models in an overlap with artistic practices. Several existing collaborative models were presented, followed by input and questions from the floor. This session saw the curator's specific situation resonate with concerns for fair practices for artists, and beyond.



PREAMBLE

How can one define the role of a curator?

How do people become curators?

When done successfully, that thing curators do can feed into the way we engage with art. The shrewd placement of this work next to that one, in this or that sequence, or placing a chosen work with aplomb in a setting that deepens its resonance, can make the air between art works crackle with tension; thoughtful curating can, as Mieke Bal deftly demonstrated in her *Double Exposure*¹, ensure one painting can be placed so that it can “read another by hanging next to it”, and thereby unleash hitherto unrealized (or submerged) meanings. Curators’ efforts can have a profound impact on the way we experience and conceive of our culture(s). At present, however, there is no universally accepted definition of what curating is: precisely what it entails, and what curators do, remains open to debate. And yet, curators of so many different stripes curate.

The definition of the word curate, which, in practice, corresponds more or less to the French use of the term ‘commissaire d’exposition’, is elastic²: the term’s etymology, the Latin *curare*, means to take care of, and can be brought into relation with what curators do with and for art works, collections, artists, and in the process of making exhibitions. In recent years the verb to curate has also been popping up in all kinds of non-art contexts, with a slightly different connotation, meaning simply the process of making a selection, of practically anything; as Hans Ulrich Obrist points out in his book *Ways of Curating*³, it is useful to focus on the discipline of curating as it relates to the practice of making exhibitions. The phenomenon of the “star curator” has come in to cloud understanding of the term. The stereotype of the prima donna curator – who always gets invited to the best dinners and has an inordinate amount of power – tends to divert the attention from the fact that curators often go to extraordinary lengths to make a project happen. Does a curator use a hammer to hang a work, or is that the job of the installation crew?

1 “Bringing together an immense range of presentations - museum displays, stories, paintings, postcards, and philosophy - Mieke Bal offers fresh insights into showing and telling, analyzing the effects of display and of the different sorts of looking they encourage.” Jonathan Culler, Cornell University, writing about the book, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, by Mieke Bal with Edwin Janssen, *‘Das Gesicht an der Wand’*, New York: Routledge, 1996
mikebal.org/publications/books/double-exposures/

2 In 2012 C-E-A published a guide to making exhibitions, which opens with a definition of the curator’s profile (in French): c-e-a.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/CEA-brochure-Exposer.pdf

3 *Ways of Curating*, by Hans Ulrich Obrist with Asad Raza, Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2014. On p. 23 Obrist writes of ‘a shift in understanding from a person (curator) to an enterprise (curating) which is now understood as an activity unto itself. (...) The current vogue for the idea of curating stems from a feature of modern life that is impossible to ignore: the proliferation and reproduction of ideas, raw data, processed information (...)’. The word curation is now used to describe a process of selecting fine wines, or ice cream.

A curator's social status

The lack of a generally accepted definition of curating can have real-world, practical implications for those who practice it. In France, for example, the profession of curating is not formally recognized; there is still a lot of work to be done regarding collective labour agreements for the cultural sector. This lack of social status affects how curators can generate an income; those who find themselves outside of the relative shelter of an organized structure, such as a museum or other large institution with the means and infrastructure to employ them, work as freelancers. For want of a social status of their own, they are obliged to piggyback on the status of other disciplines, by identifying themselves as art critics, artists, categories of cultural workers that do enjoy this basic recognition. This sketchy situation does not recognize the value of the cultural work curators perform, and can cause complications for curators as they manage their careers.

Is curating a form of authorship?

The efforts to define curating and to have it formally recognized as an artistic discipline, as a profession, also raises the question of authorship. In Belgium and France, the legal definition of artistic authorship arises when a work fulfills two criteria: it is original, being the result of a creative process, and it takes on a concrete, embodied form (ideas alone are not protected).

In a legal sense, authorship traditionally applied to an individual artist's works, so the question is whether the process of selecting art works, bringing them together in a space in a certain way, for a particular duration in time, in the form of an exhibition – not to mention the processes involved in organizing how people interact with such works in the space, and managing the exhibition's residue after the show in writing and documentation, or in ongoing discussions – amounts to a creative act as well. Is it a (collectively) concrete form of expression (the medium not being something like paint on canvas, but rather the original assembly of an original selection of other people's works), and if so, could an exhibition and related activities amount to originality?⁴ The question is pertinent in countries like France and Belgium, since, if curating were to be recognized as an activity from which author's rights can arise, part of a curator's remuneration could come in the form of payment for their authors' rights. Most participants at the talks did not venture to offer conclusive answers, as they were there to talk about their projects, although both the questions of defining what curating is and of authorship could be felt throughout, simmering beneath the surface.

4 It is useful to remember that cultural discourse regarding authorship, as for example defined here tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/authorship/ does not always coincide with how authorship is understood and the rights it conveys as defined by the letter of the law.

DAY ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON THE STATUS OF THE CURATOR

Speakers:

Marianne Derrien, independent curator and C-E-A vice president

Asad Raza, artistic director, Villa Empain – Fondation Boghossian, Brussels

Dirk Snauwaert, director, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels

Lilou Vidal, curator, Bureau des Réalités, Brussels-Turin

Maïté Vissault, director, ISELP, Brussels

Moderator: Septembre Tiberghien, independent curator

The speakers on the first day related their individual experiences of how they came to be a curator; some did so by design, but, by their own accounts, many of the speakers seemed to have stumbled into it.

Lilou Vidal is based in Brussels and Turin. She works as an independent curator for institutions, non-profit projects and galleries. She is the founder of the non-profit project Bureau des Réalités.⁵

“What we do is a day by day thing.”

Lilou Vidal trained as an art historian, after which she opened a gallery, which she ran for three years. Realizing that the demands of the art market left little room for experimentation and curatorial research, she decided to bring her activities as a gallerist to a close. At that point she was invited by Nicolaus Schafhausen to work as a curator in residence at Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna. Based on her experiences of working in a gallery and an institution, she then decided to found the non profit project Bureau des Réalités, with the intention of initiating an intimate and critical approach to contemporary practices by inviting artists, curators, critics and editors to participate in the specific environment of an office as a place of thought production.

“The pleasure of working with artists is priceless. It’s important to remember this.”

Experience taught Lilou to seek out means of ensuring payment for her curatorial projects, but she acknowledges she had to start from scratch to make many of her ideas and projects a reality at the

5 bureaudesrealites.org

start of her career. She is keen to point out that tiny budgets need not be an obstacle to the elaboration of ideas and the production of projects. Independent initiatives are creative niches in which precisely conceived projects that are rich in content and critically engaging, often generate new economic opportunities. Sometimes such projects enable encounters that naturally lead to other opportunities, and certainly, when starting out, any high-quality interaction among peers and new audiences is invaluable.

“Curators have been there all along: artists need someone who accompanies them, someone who compiles programs, and who serves as the first interface for the artwork. This is not some authoritarian figure, nor should he or she be submissive. Everyone balances each other out.”



Meggy Rustamova, She He She She He,
12 Sept - 19 Dec 2015
Bureau des Réalités, Brussels
photo credit: Isabelle Arthuis

Asad Raza is an artist and a curator and the artistic director of the Villa Empain for the Boghossian Foundation⁶. He doesn't experience being an artist and a curator as a duality:

"I experience projects that are interesting to do, and for which you try to perform the function that seems appropriate for the project, according to the roles as they are constructed at the time. (...) The statement to 'consent to not be a single being'⁷ gives a more accurate picture of curating. There is a strength in acknowledging one's multiple identities. When you speak you speak in a multiple way, and you are informed by more material than you can account for."

Asad Raza's first experiences as a curator came when he received a request to curate a show for the Manchester International Festival, with Tino Sehgal⁸. Unwilling to adopt the title of curators, they called themselves programmers, and thus programmed a show. It consisted of choreographic and live art projects disposed throughout the very large Mayfield Depot, a disused train station. The size of the space gave them a lot of freedom. The show was based on the idea of flanerier, whereby the visitor could wander from one work to the next. A lot of creative work was possible. The café where the dancers went to relax was placed by the entrance, so the visitors became part of this backstage dynamic as the exhibition was unfolding. Another important experience was assisting with the writing of Hans Ulrich Obrist's book *Ways of Curating*: "it was like doing a masters' degree in curating". This is also how he first found out about Jan Hoet's *Chambre d'amis*.

Blurred artistic or curatorial roles came to the fore in the Home Show in Asad's own NY apartment⁹. For this project he invited friends to submit an artwork, and included non-art objects such as a mammoth's tooth and a brutal looking artificial heart mechanism that his heart surgeon father had given him. With the work "HEX" the artist Sophia Al Maria cut a lock of her hair and put it in a box, asking Asad to soak it in soya milk. She sent him further instructions as the show progressed, which led to him cutting off lengths of her hair in his bathtub¹⁰. Camille Henrot instructed him to practice Ikebana, whereby he was required to go to the flower market for new floral supplies. Asad's own rule

6 villaempain.com/en/

7 dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ProductList.php?viewby=series&id=91

8 Asad Raza bio: frieze.com/fair-programme/asad-raza

9 The home show: wallpaper.com/art/artist-producer-asad-raza-stages-an-art-show-in-his-one-bedroom-new-york-apartment#139261; news.artnet.com/exhibitions/asad-raza-home-show-392498;

10 Re: Sophia Al Maria's piece: artnews.com/2017/09/20/bathroom-as-site-a-brief-incomplete-history-of-lavatorial-exhibition/

was that he had to give a tour to every visitor himself, which added a whole other layer to the experience: his own presence was a constant in the show.

For Asad, one powerful aspect of exhibitions is that one cannot replicate completely in time and space this co-presence with other things that occur during a given exhibition in a particular space and time, which brings curating into the temporal scale more akin to staging a choreography of sorts, or a performance. In a society where there is an overproduction of information, rather than a scarcity of things, it tends not to be about who creates new information, but who can somehow choose what to put into the attentional field of others. Curators are involved with this, and a person's name can become associated with a certain type of choice that coincides with your own taste. There are other forms too, and it will work itself out in conversations like these at ISELP.

“An exhibition is about being there with others, being with the stuff, and there is room for more people to get involved (...) and you can't boil it down to just exhibitions. It's about creating residencies, project spaces, things that till the culture (...) Curators are people who make things happen, like Diaghilev. He was a true curatorial figure of his time (...) and the point is, anyone can do an exhibition in his or her house. And if you don't have a house, you can do it in an alley.”

Dirk Snauwaert is an institutional curator and currently the artistic director and curator of WIELS¹¹. He considers his position and role to be relatively stable, compared to the conditions that independent curators work under. The term curator, or commissaire d'exposition, implies a finality, in the form of an exhibition, but that, he says, is just part of the work. Preparatory labour and training are not taken into account. At the same time, Snauwaert is keen to point out that curators of his generation were mostly trained as art historians. Whereas curating these days can also refer to the mere fact of organizing content, he wishes to reclaim the term from its instrumentalisation, which idealizes the trade. There are other outcomes to the practice of curating. In his generation, the author was absolutely absent from their text; no manifest personality was put forward. Then, during the nineteen eighties, the art world experienced its first eruption of the system of the star curator.

“A curator can appear to be like the omnipotent director of a puppet theatre, but in practice it is the absolute opposite. The job involves making public and

11 wiels.org/en/53/Artistic-direction

legitimizing artists and practices, and yet the artist is the one element of a partially shared 'authorship' who makes money if the works are eventually sold, not those armies of workers around them who produce the writing, the books, the exhibitions, all the people who help make sure the work is seen and talked about. They get the fixed salary or fee."

"Another aspect to remember is that some curators can at times be looking for a client who can reify their intellectual capacities; whether you put them in a public space, a lecture series, an exhibition or a guided tour, there are always clients and instruments that are possible options for the curator."

"We obviously wish to escape materiality, and the idea of products. What are the new forms for organizing content? What, then, are we organizing as curators? If we go back in time, we realize that the dualism 'curators versus artists' is not the question. The profession has manifested itself in confusion. The professional practice of making exhibitions offers countless niches for specialization: curator, registrar, transporter, art handler, tour guide,... myriad roles that each have their specific dimensions. A curator organizes contents, based on materialities, documents, gestures; it's a dance that is played out in multiple forms."

Maïté Vissault works in Belgium as the director of ISELP, the Institut Supérieur pour L'Étude du Langage Plastique¹², the hosting institution of the present event, supported by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Like Dirk Snauwaert, Maïté Vissault was educated as an art historian. She studied political sciences and developed her practice as a curator by working for institutions, after she completed her PhD. She points out that, in addition to the French term commissaire d'exposition (commissioner of exhibition) and the English word curator, there is the German ausstellungsmacher (which translates as 'maker of exhibitions') although 'curator' is also widely used in Germany. The term conservateur in French, or Kustos in German, both evoke a kind of custodian, and were also used at one point to refer to people working exclusively in museums. Pondering what curators share across the various communities, and what type of model can be applied, she adds:

"A curator has a number of public responsibilities to respect, whereas the artist has the liberty of not having to deal with these issues."

12 iselp.be/fr/1-iselp

The C-E-A members, of a younger generation, spoke of being either totally independent, in search of a structure or an institution to be a part of, or attempting to leave a structure in order to initiate their own.

Marianne Derrien is an independent curator and the vice-president of C-E-A¹³, who initiated the conference.

“We needed a document that says: ‘we are going to work together. Here is what everyone is going to do.’”

The idea of a contract first arose with the beginnings of the association ten years ago, in conversation with CIPAC¹⁴, the French Federation of Arts Professionals. It seemed like the natural move, to create such a tool between curators and the parties they work with. Many curators work without a contract. Another goal was to get away from the idea of the star curator and to provide a way to recognize the curator’s moral rights, stating that they curated the project, thought of the title, wrote the text, etc. and that no one can alter their work without their permission. This also leads to more complex issues, and certain administrative and fiscal benefits, too: if a curator’s authorship is recognized, in France anyway, they could receive payment in the form of author’s rights payments.

C-E-A also likes to set up meetings with colleagues across borders, which is intended to lead to the creation of a network of curators on European scale. There is a desire and a need to federate, to unify curators of certain territories, also anticipating the post-Brexit situation. The contract however will be specific to the legal system of the country in question, which can become rather complex.

“There is an individual aspect, and then there is almost a collective intelligence, that we can use to question our actions and activities. (...) C-E-A is a mental space for exchange about our practices. We are focused on social and judicial matters. We also aspire to have an international dimension, and we are concerned with research, training and prospection.”

13 c-e-a.asso.fr

14 cipac.net/

Preliminary conclusions, day one:

People grow into being curators in different ways, just as their projects are creatively diverse. The speakers' experiences illustrate there is no standard route into the discipline. A former gallerist, a practicing artist, and several people who trained as art historians all spoke about how they became curators: by initiating their own projects, via collaborative processes, or by working in an institution under the wing of more experienced professionals.

And, while authorship is not being formally defined here, the projects cited suggest a lot of creative invention and originality goes into them. It is also worth noting that, even if fair pay for all in the exhibition-making process – artists and curators alike – is a very meaningful ambition, there is a general acceptance that, in order to develop one's skills, it may also be necessary for aspiring artists and curators to work without financial reward now and then.

People learn through being given opportunities, and sometimes, when opportunities are absent, it is worth remembering that individual generosity, of labour, expertise and vision – or simply an institution inviting a potential curator for a residency – that help to make artistic exchange at the highest level possible.



DAY TWO

FROM LEARNING TO DOING. ABOUT INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL FORMATS AND LEARNING-BY-DOING OPPORTUNITIES.

How do we transmit the discipline to future curators?

Is it important to have curatorial studies?

In its first part Day Two focused on three educational programs for future curators in Belgium. Programs that alternately favor (predominantly) theoretical approaches, vs. hands-on, practice-based learning – and their respective benefits, were compared and contrasted. In the second part of the session, a number of other curatorial studies programs in France, The Netherlands and the US were also discussed.

Speakers:

First part:

Aurélie Gravelat, artist, ArBA-EsA – Master CARE, Brussels

Antony Hudek, curator and researcher, Curatorial Studies, KASK School of Arts, Ghent

Emilie Lecouturier, scenographer, MASDEX – Masters in Exhibition Design, ARTS2, Mons

Second part:

Sonia Dermience, curator, Komplot & The SCHOOL OF CURATING, Brussels

Josine De Roover, coordinator, NICC & Cas-Co, Leuven

Laura Herman, curator, La Loge, Brussels

Septembre Tiberghien and Wouter Huis, curator and artist, Greylight Project, Brussels

Charlotte Van Buylaere, curator, Netwerk Aalst and De Appel, Amsterdam

Moderator: Lissa Kinnaer, Flanders Arts Institute

DAY TWO, PART ONE

Antony Hudek is a curator and researcher, trained as an art historian, and now directs the Curatorial Studies program at KASK in Ghent¹⁵. His first internship was with Paolo Colombo, who did the Istanbul Biennial. He said it was “all in the eye.” Hudek started by giving a brief overview of the history of Curatorial Studies programs:

15 schoolofartsgent.be/en/education/courses/curatorial-studies

“The term curator first appeared in the late sixties, and along with it emerged the question of how to teach curators. The Whitney Independent Study program started in 1967. In Europe, the Ecole du Magasin was founded in 1987 in Grenoble. These programs emerged outside of formal academic institutions. In 1992 the Royal College of Art in London set up a Masters in Curatorial Studies, which had a link to the museum world. Goldsmiths also in London, and Bard College in the US followed, and then there was an acceleration in new programs being set up.”

“TEBEAC was the first name of the post-graduate curatorial studies program I am now running at KASK in Ghent. It is a postgraduate program awarding a postgraduate certificate that can be converted into a post-masters’ degree. It consists of 48 credits and does not play into certain academic models, nor is it a museum model. There is a tension between time spent on research and that which is devoted to output. The gap between theory and practice is however yet to be addressed.”

“It really is a craft; not necessarily a manual craft, but there are standards. It’s not just about the care of objects, but also of people. There is a place for our programs. I say it if only to suggest: can you convey the gift of curatorial ability, if it is not innate? I would argue very much so. This emergence of exhibition histories is interesting: for some it starts in ‘72 with Documenta 5, for others it starts in the late 19th century. From art history to the question of conservation there is a field of knowledge that is only, I would say, 5-10 years old. So if only for that reason, curators have a right to understand the history of the practice that they are engaged in. Curatorial Studies make sense. It is important for us to be able to refer to examples (...) if only to be against them”

Emilie Lecouturier is an artist, scenographer and designer. She runs MASDEX¹⁶, a Masters’ training in exhibition design at the Ecole supérieure des Arts in Mons. She does not consider herself to be a curator. A team of colleagues from a variety of disciplines, they help students to reflect upon their practice and to make exhibitions.

“The central question is how to combine two complementary disciplines from exhibition design: curating and scenography. Other questions are: how do we

16 masdex.be

put narrative content into a space? How do we transmit it to an external audience?”

“At MASDEX, students come with different background, so it is interesting to find everyone’s strengths. Through concrete projects, we try to combine practical issues and theoretical reflection. It’s important, for instance, that students can also learn how to use a drill. There are different courses: graphic design for mediation, 3d, object design..., to manage the whole aspects of design exhibition. One collaborative project lasts the whole year, usually in collaboration with an institution. For instance, last year we worked with the Museum of Mariemont¹⁷.”

“Curating is focused on discursive content. Scenography on sensory perception.”

“Collaboration is a key value and we think it is important to respect everyone who is part of the chain. It leads to far better projects.”

“We like to experiment with pedagogy based on our own experience. It’s a work in progress. Exhibiting has always existed, but you should be in a position that you continually question what you are doing.”

Aurélië Gravelat teaches drawing at ArBA-EsA, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, and runs a two-year masters’ there in exhibition practices¹⁸. The plurality of practices recognizes the multiple roles, of director, artist, mediator, that can be part of a curating practice. The course collaborates with the Brussels arts centre La Centrale¹⁹. In higher education in the arts in Belgium, the artistic subjects tend to be split by medium; in France that is very different, where they work horizontally. At ARBA-EsA they like to be very open, too. She thinks it is important to keep the aspect of conservation in the training of curators. This focus on the understanding of the medium and the material and so on, is important. It is also significant in a very concrete, work-related way, due to the increase in private museums and artists’ estates. The focus there is increasingly on one artist.

17 musee-mariemont.be/index.php?id=home-en

18 arba-esa.be/fr/site.php?cid=18&pid=270

19 centrale.brussels/en/about/

“Regarding the legacy of a dead artist in the context of a gallery, a private museum or just an artist’s estate, I think it is important that people with knowledge of the material, but also with the wider context and art history, are involved in these kinds of questions.”

Preliminary conclusions, day two, part one:

As Antony Hudek pointed out, there is already quite a history in curatorial studies, internationally and in Europe. The Belgian examples of courses discussed show a diversity of approaches, even in a relatively small geographic territory such as Belgium, which is perhaps something to celebrate about the country’s inherent cultural diversity. It was remarked that the KASK Curatorial Studies program’s focus on theory and history, and the more hands-on, scenographic and team-oriented projects at MASDEX would complement each other very well. History and conservation techniques were additionally cited as key elements to include in curatorial training, especially since the increased call for curators who have the skills involved in managing and conserving private collections or a single artist’s estate.

DAY TWO, PART TWO

Sonia Dermience is a curator, founder of Komplot²⁰. She explains how, like many collectives, Komplot was founded in 2002 by a group of friends who had all been working as gallery assistants at the time and who decided: “now we do it”.

“You have to fight for your rights. But when you have achieved something, you have to share it. (...) Today I am the coordinator of this project, which started like a joke: ‘let’s do a school of curating’. We have a lot of interns too, so we wanted to try to let them do a project at the end of the year. Transmission is very important when you have experience. And young practitioners come up with new ideas. It is not a process of reading books and then going out in the field; you create teams for every project, every idea. (...) It is a very intimate practice of putting art with a public. First of all you have to be against something; to want to change something.”

20 Founded in 2002 in Brussels, Komplot is a curatorial collective of variable composition and condition. Concerned with nomadic creative practices and trends of specialisation, it operates as a platform for experimental art. (...) Komplot starts from a core of openness and flexibility regarding the programming, therefore its projects can take different forms: exhibitions, publications, films, discussions, workshops, symposium, events... kmpit.be/about.php

“A lot of people say I am ‘punk’. I take it as a compliment. It is good to reinvent. No rules; a surprise. You get a new perspective. Curating is creating a context for the artists and the audience. I am punk, but very structured. You build it and then you can create chaos. (...) People in society are isolated. So the idea is to put people together, in the making and the pleasure or contestation in the exhibition. It is very important to be frustrated. Desire for change will create a debate. And the desire for an aesthetic. (...) You have to make the objects speak; it’s like theatre. All these metaphors are important to remember. And you are writing a history.”

“Normally the curator engages himself to first find money for a project, and to then invite artists. It’s the job of the curator to have something concrete to propose to the artist. The schools are there to professionalize people. It is not a hobby. We are not there to claim the notion of authorship, that already exists.”

Lucie Orbie, general secretary of 50° nord, C-E-A member and co-initiator of this event, points out that the curator’s role is not exclusively limited to finding money. The creation of content, through research, writing, programming of events, sometimes not involving artists, but involving people active in other disciplines, such as the sciences, also amounts to the practice of curating.

Josine De Roover is the coordinator of the NICC²¹, an artists’ association, and she is also running Cas-co²² in Leuven, a studio program for young artists. Integrated into this is a young curators’ program.

“Cas-co is a studio organization founded in 2015 within the context of the city of Leuven, which has the STUK and Museum M, to help build an artist community, which as yet isn’t very present in the city. There is no art school in Leuven. So how do you build up an artistic community? We manage a building of artist studios. There are producers of theatre and performance artists in the building too. We thought about how to support the practices of individual artists. I got quite frustrated with this ‘nothing’: there was a lack of artists, of community, of any grass roots movement... the relationship of art to the public is very traditional, museum based. We thought about how to render the context more dynamic: why not combine the need of young curators for more practice, with the needs of young artists?”

“I got an intern from the university of Leuven, who did research on starting up a

21 nicc.be/

22 cas-co.be/over-cas-co/

program. It is still in the planning stages. It is not a residency, but a program. It is great to give a curator 9 months to work in the context of Leuven, and to really do a program with different phases. It is a long-term project space. Each time it can be a publication, a talk, a screening, which all give the opportunity to get practice in the field. It's called a young curators' program, but an artist could also fulfill the role. I don't make any distinctions; we can accept both approaches."

Wouter Huis is an artist and founder Greylight Projects²³, a residency for artists which recently also began to accommodate curators.

"It's good to put up a title, and then you can go into dialogue and collaborate with other people. The nice thing about the Greylight structure is that it can change. We have program for curation, but it's also different. Now there is an artist who is also curating, like myself. We accept applications, but most of the time we meet people, and there is a dialogue, a question."



Mélanie Berger, Work in progress, 2017, colorpencil on Schoellershammer paper 180 gr, 21 x 29,7 cm. Exhibition *In/Out*, Greylight Projects, Brussels. Curator: Septembre Tiberghien. Photo: Gilles Ribero.

Septembre Tiberghien was Greylight's first guest curator:

"It is strange for me to be teaching, since I didn't go to a school of curating myself. But the idea of « do it yourself » is very important, you need to do the doing. The thing that is most important in any curating practice is the proximity with artists. Artists are residents at Greylight, and I thought it would be good for me to be there. I put a desk in the exhibition space and had office hours, to provoke encounters with artists, which didn't work that well at first. Sometimes artists don't want to meet a curator, they just want to get on in their studios. The idea was to shift these boundaries, which led to an exhibition « IN OUT », which referenced the porosity of public space, and Greylight, a lieu de travail, a workspace. I really implicated the artists in the notion of the exhibition. Everything was on

²³ Greylight Projects is an independent artist run organization based in Brussels (BE) and in Hoensbroek (NL). It has been created in 2009 in Hoensbroek, and a space was opened in Brussels in 2013. Greylight Projects focuses on supporting artists in their researches and practices by facilitating, producing, or organizing events. greylightprojects.org/about/

wheels. There were these plank-trolleys. I asked the artists to move their works in the exhibition space each time they entered the building. The idea was to leave a trace of the performance in the form of an exhibition and a publication. (...) We learn by doing. I am a baby curator. My background is actually in art criticism.”

Veronica Valentini is a C-E-A member. She attended the now legendary Ecole du Magasin in Grenoble²⁴. After working as the editor of Flash Art art magazine in Milan and New York she moved to Barcelona and asked herself what could be done in a new city, in an autonomous way. Central to this was how to finance any initiative. The original idea was to set up a hotel and finance an art project through part of the income it generated: in other words, the economic considerations influenced the form of the program.

“Art projects need to be associated with a business. Since tourism in Barcelona is quite a present factor, the initial idea arose to set up a hotel as a foundation to feed the program (...) Quickly it turned into something else: we were given the use of an apartment that was lent to us by a patron, a friend in the art world who recognized our line of questioning. (...) Another factor is that our own work would only be feasible if we were paid as well in addition to all of the participants involved being paid. It is important to take care of the financial aspect first, so that people are able to work under good conditions.”

Veronica Valentini is now the mediator of the Nouveaux Commanditaires-Citizen Art Spain Program²⁵, she runs EMMA²⁶ and, together with two colleagues, she is in charge of running BAR

24 “In 1987 the École du MAGASIN was founded as one of the activities of the art center, MAGASIN in Grenoble. Being the first international curatorial studies program in Europe, it was set up to provide a professional environment for a rigorous combination of research and practice. By providing the participants with a nine months hands-on experience in organizing a curatorial project, the École du MAGASIN gives a direct approach to curatorial practices. The program presents a wide variety of insights into what curating can be and become in the future through a series of tutorials, workshops, seminars and visits with professionals from different backgrounds.” This description of l’Ecole du Magasin is from transartists.org/air/ecole_du_magasin.7963.html consulted 19 October 2017. The program has been reinvented and now goes by the name of Magasin des Horizons; its current program is described here: magasin-cnac.org/ecole/

25 Les “Nouveaux commanditaires” (The New Patrons) is a project that the Fondation de France has been delivering since the 1990s. People wrestling with issues of society and land development are given the chance to share their concerns with contemporary artists by commissioning works. The originality of the scheme lies in the intersection of three groups of participants who are supported by the public and private partners: artists, ordinary people who commission works, and cultural mediators approved by the Fondation de France. nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/

26 “Emma is a collaborative and curatorial organization for artistic and cultural practices conceived as a place for experimentation, social exchange and collective experience. It develops a roaming program of artistic research that encourages

project²⁷ (2013). BAR project is a curatorial organization that develops a residency program for international artists and curators, and BAR TOOL (2016) is a practice-based training-program for visual art and non art-related practices. It is an independent project that is managed by three curators that is supported by sponsors, public and private financing, etc.

*“We work on budget that allows us to pay ourselves and paying our guests.
We are aiming at active citizenship, and moving things beyond the art world.
Rather than having an exhibition space to curate shows, we decided to curate
a program of residencies and time-based performative and discursive events.
We consider the whole city as a public project space for display, by using what
already exists, or by requesting space from others and thereby collaborate.
The idea is to reach other audiences, not just art people.”*

Laura Herman, curator at La Loge, studied at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard in Annandale-on-Hudson in New York²⁸. This graduate program provides excellent training, but – like all education in the US – it comes at a price that is prohibitive to most. It should be noted here for readers that the school, alongside other funding bodies, does provide financial aid²⁹ through scholarships, and fellowships do exist that are available to international students.

“CCS trains its students through two years of the intensive study of critical theory and exhibition histories, along with a critical and experimental approach to curating. This extremely rich, in-depth, and at times exhausting experience, gave me many new insights, alongside a valuable and diverse network of peers with whom I keep in touch.”

“The question my peers are often asked – generally by curators who emerged in the days before curatorial studies programs existed – is whether we actually need two years of study to be able to curate or understand what art can do. But the question shouldn't so much be: ‘do we or don't

dialogue and exploration in the arts through diverse forms of presence. Emma is founded and directed by Veronica Valentini and developed in partnership with a multiplicity of associates coming from various areas of society.” e-m-m-a.org/

27 “BAR project is a curator-run organization supporting local and international artists and curators and promoting trans-disciplinary dialogue, hospitality, collaboration and exchange. Through a public program of diverse activities, BAR's curatorial practice aims to highlight relevant subjects in the current political, social and economic paradigm.” barproject.net/

28 bard.edu/ccs/

29 fulbright.be/
baef.be/documents/home.xml?lang=en
bard.edu/financialaid/international/programs/

we need to approach curating as a discipline in its own right or “learn how to curate”?, but rather: ‘how can we create discourse and visions around what we want to achieve as curators and with what strategies?’ We need contexts for this.”

“The course extended the conversation about the curatorial over two years, by, for example, paying great attention to contemporary critical theory and social justice issues. This was done through collaborations with the human arts department and local social justice organizations, and the ‘Bard Prison Program’ to name one of the many initiatives. But the conversation also played itself out by incorporating self-criticism into the curatorial process and by forming a testing ground in a community of people from very diverse backgrounds who were living together. In that sense, CCS wasn’t just about making curating a discipline, but also about stirring thought and reflection on what constitutes ethical or political behavior both in work and life, and how to put that into practice.”

“An additional comment I would like to make at this conference is that, in Belgium, there are no structural funding opportunities for curators in place on the part of the government. Independent curators cannot get funding for projects because they are not artists, unless they work through an organization. The Mondriaan Fund for example sends Dutch curators to study at Bard CCS³⁰ and there are also plenty of other interesting curatorial residencies out there that curators could benefit from. It would be a tremendous benefit to the artistic community at large if there were funding in place to enable aspiring curators to gain greater access to such opportunities.”

Charlotte Van Buylaere, curator, Netwerk Aalst and De Appel in Amsterdam, tells of her research for De Appel.³¹

“A six-month research at De Appel was dedicated to evaluate its own curatorial program according to the contemporary landscape of curatorial education. This permanent evaluation is crucial in curatorial training, whereas curating as such is always subject to actual changes in theory, society and science. It is nevertheless important that we have a variety of programs with different focuses, that can coexist. It’s the same with artists; there are also various models of for example residency programs. In addition, it would also be very interesting if museums in Belgium would be more open to working with independent curators, for instance.”

30 bard.edu/ccs/study/program-overview/

31 deappel.nl/en/about, netwerkaalst.be, charlottevanbuylaere.com

Preliminary conclusions, day two, part two:

There are many non-academic routes to curating. Komplot thanks its interns by giving them a chance to curate an exhibition, and values their fresh input. Bar Projects in Barcelona has developed a business model that gives aspiring curators the chance to learn by doing – without having to pay massive tuition fees – using the city as a template for broadening art audiences, whilst ensuring the founding curators themselves can be paid for their input. Cas-co in Leuven aims to feed the development of the city's fledgling art scene, whilst offering professional development opportunities to curators and artists at the start of their careers.

International academic programs such as CCS Bard or postgraduate non-grant awarding programs such as De Appel in Amsterdam, can be instrumental in training curators. The fees are restrictive to most, and it is agreed in the conference that government funding, in addition to incidental awards to the most brilliant³², should be provided to allow that expertise to feed the art scenes here.

32 fulbright.be
baef.be/documents/home.xml?lang=en
bard.edu/financialaid/international/programs/

DAY THREE

HOW TO WORK AND TO SHARE?

About individual and collective responsibility, new forms of collaborative work and the impact on organizational and funding models.

The talks of Day 3 focused on economic realities, and collaborative models in the arts, and where these overlap with artistic practices in general. Contemporary discourses on fair practices were a key topic: “how do we deal with each other in the arts? How do we take responsibility for each other? How do we organize our practices in ways that contribute to transparency and solidarity?”

Speakers:

Steyn Berghs, art historian, and Ronny Heiremans, artist, CAVEAT!!!, Jubilee

Jean-Baptiste Carobolante, theoretician, and Dieudonné Cartier, artist, Neptune

Dirk De Wit, head international relations, Flanders Art Institute

Ann Goossens, business director, Auguste Orts

Einat Tuchman, artist, SOTA State of the arts, InCompany Workers’ Club, Espace Tous

Moderator: Philippine Hoegen, artist

Ronny Heiremans and Steyn Berghs collaborate in the artist collective JUBILEE on the project CAVEAT!!!, which the JUBILEE website³³ describes as follows:

“CAVEAT!!! is a three-year program on the legal and economic position of artists and cultural workers in contemporary society. Taking its name from the law principle ‘caveat emptor’ – warning against “unfair practices” – the project acts on the relationships between art, artists and cultural producers, and the legal frameworks in which they operate. CAVEAT!!! takes as points of departure and arrival the contracts used in the art world as a tool for reconfiguring relations of authorship, labour, price, among others. Contracts are not, however, considered as possible instruments for artists and producers to become ‘better’, savvy entrepreneurial subjects. Rather, they can be seen as a phenomenon with great emancipatory potential. How can contracts, the neoliberal instrument par excellence, be developed towards more inclusive goals?”

33 jubilee-art.org/?rd_project=1501&lang=en

Steyn Bergs explained how the research is an investigation into the contract as a privileged site for the examination of the interface between labour, value and authorship in the field of contemporary art. The project was instigated by the field of art. But in light of neoliberal deregulation and the flexibilization of labour, the research is a thorough examination of cultural production, in the broadest sense. Given that a contract is seen as a supreme example of bureaucracy, i.e. exactly the kind of thing artists do not like to be preoccupied with, JUBILEE thought it interesting to investigate how a bureaucratic tool might be implemented as a tool against the insecurities of existence.

Ronny Heiremans

“We try to mix theoretical and practice-based research. We imagine it as a kind of toolbox, not merely a collection of applicable models. We consider it to be more of learning process. This is about two parties trying to figure out the proper nature of their relationship: instead of coming up with a contract that cover your interests and risks, why not look at mutual interests and shared risks? There is also a concern for language: judicial language can scare people, so we try to work on sympathizing the language. We thought we were being progressive, but we came across relational contracts, and contexts in industry in which these aspects are practiced.”³⁴

JUBILEE is looking at ways for the research to become truly practical, e.g. by assembling teams of lawyers, artists and other experts, and by programming a number of workshops or symposia on the subject. The concern is to work with experience-based knowledge. Some artists already work with law as their source material. The idea would be to make the findings accessible online and to grant open access. Another goal would be that the research could contribute to the current debate on how to commit all agents in the arts to certain standards of fair practice. The contract they would like to elaborate is a model to be used by art workers of many kinds.

Marianne Derrien reiterates that the founding idea of C-E-A was to have 4-5 curators get together and reflect on their status, and these economic, social and judicial questions. There is a great social insecurity in the profession in France as well. They understood that if they didn't undertake to create a standard contract, they could end up in very complicated professional circumstances. C-E-A's draft contract, elaborated with a lawyer, is seen as a working tool. It serves to aid reflection, since it does not yet have any validity in legal terms. There is however a dialogue with public authorities, notably the ministry of culture, and with the CIPAC federation of professionals in art and culture in France, which itself unites some 20 associations.

³⁴ “Macneil (1929-2010) was the John Henry Wigmore Professor Emeritus of Law at Northwestern University School of Law and is credited with coining the term *relational contract*, referring to the social contract of moral obligations to guide behavior in business. Simply put, he felt contracts should not simply be about the legal terms and conditions, but also promote moral and ethical behaviors in business.” (...) “the charter creates overarching guidelines for how the parties operate, and creates a safe environment to collaborate.” forbes.com/sites/katevitasek/2016/11/30/relational-contracting-on-the-rise-with-the-success-of-the-australian-navy/#49ea911303a3

C-E-A does not make exhibitions: it exists as a means for curators, whether they work in institutions or are independent, who are based in France or who have a connection with France, to defend their rights, and authors' rights in particular. This aspect makes the contract C-E-A is elaborating quite exceptional, in that it considers an exhibition to be the result of a creative act. A curator's contract can certainly also be used by artists: by focusing on author's rights the duality of artist / curator is no longer an issue.

Lucie Orbie, who also worked on C-E-A's model contract, adds that this document incorporates the idea of solidarity and the curator's responsibility to help improve working conditions for all artists-authors involved in a given project. The bipartite contract between curator and hosting institution (be it a museum, a gallery or even a city) in fact contains a clause whereby the institution agrees – and is therefore obliged – draw up contracts with all other artist-authors involved in the project. In this way the model-contract not only raises awareness in the arts sector but genuinely contributes to raising its professional standards.

Dirk De Wit, head of international relations at Flanders Arts Institute, spoke of the traditional value chain: an artist makes a work, a curator is invited to make a show, the curator invites the artist, the exhibition is present to the public. When someone invites a curator, it is important to know about the shared working conditions in which the artists will find themselves. When someone invites you to make a show, it is crucial to know the elements that are involved, regarding the overall budget, the production budget, the artist's fee, etc. There is a responsibility to be aware of these things.

And if a contract is introduced, many things will change: everything is subject to discussion. A curator can also involve the artist in the conversation. What happens to artists is often a black hole. And in practice, various issues can arise: if nothing has been agreed, together, in advance, that can cause problems, also for the audience. As a curator you work as a medium between the artist and the audience: when is that relationship open? And how can a curator contribute to audience mediation? Sometimes these aspects are all discussed separately, but it is in fact all one thing.

Philippine Hoegen mentions that in the Netherlands, the artist-interest group Kunsten 92 is in quite advanced stages of working out a code of fair practice³⁵ that it aims to improve working

35 kunst92.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Fair-Practice-Code-versie-1.0.pdf

In the US, Working Artists and the General Economy has initiated recommended fees for artists. It offers W.A.G.E. certification to non-profit organisations that adhere to them. So far 48 organisations have qualified. [wageforwork.com/home](https://www.wageforwork.com/home)

A-N, the Artists' Information Company – whose staff is incidentally composed of 58% of practicing artists - advocates for artists' rights in the UK. They have also produced a code of practice and guidance on fees and day rates for artists (members only): a-n.co.uk/resource/pdf-version-the-code-of-practice-for-the-visual-arts-1 a-n.co.uk/resource/guidance-on-fees-and-day-rates-for-visual-artists

conditions for artists: it encourage institutions, but also artists, and curators, to adhere to these guidelines. This introduces the idea of fair practices: if we wish to involve all parties concerned, and making matters extremely concrete in the form of a contract for exhibitions, who do we consider to be part of the playing field? Who are the partners that should be included in the contract? Beyond artist and curator, there is also the audience. Should this be part of the conversation regarding contracts?

“Do we give space to, or make transparent, what exactly the financial relationships are between all these parties, and what their responsibilities to each other are? This might be very complicated to ask in one go.”

A curator in the audience adds:

“I do tri-partite contracts. I also cover my own protection; if something falls on me during the hang, I want to be covered by the institution’s insurance.”

Einat Tuchman, artist active in SOTA, describes the work done by State of the Arts, a gathering of predominantly performance artists in Brussels, who tried to organize a voice for artists. They formed in the wake of the austerity cuts to the budgets for culture and have also been working on fair practices. The platform started to give a voice to artists, mostly those active in the performance sector, who work in the Flemish system but it also became very international. They began by defending the diversity of the sphere. They came up with a whole proposition on policy for the minister of culture; later the focus shifted to the art scene itself: what are the inequalities between art processes, art production and outcomes? Who decides the criteria of a model fair practices document? Should a group of artists that works on these issues be a kind of union? Is it concerning a very specific production?

Dirk De Wit

“How can we ensure a more sustainable career for curators, and artists? In the visual arts the roles are probably more linked than in other disciplines. While it is too soon to draw initial conclusions of the study into the socio-economic position of artists that Kunstenpunt carried out, one aspect that did come to the fore was that the socio-economic positions of filmmakers, writers, and dancers, artists seems to be very tough. There is a lack of networking, a lack of coming together. The performing arts have a long tradition of doing things together and talking things through. In Belgium the self-organization of artists is difficult. Besides artists, there are also curators, private galleries, and institutions who all have an impact on the field. That is a lot of individuals. And yet it is vitally important to improve the position of artists. They are often invited to participate in shows whilst only receiving a reimbursement of costs.

If we are going to fight for the remuneration of artists with fair pay, we should also do the same for curators.”

Melanie Rainville, a Brussels-based Canadian art critic who published a report on the symposium in L’art même, remarked that there are various guidelines regarding the payment of artists in Canada. They are not set in law, but these codes are generally respected.³⁶ Further research also shows that the Canadian Association for Preservation of Cultural Property published a code of ethics regarding the payment of artists.³⁷

Alex Chevalier, independent curator and C-E-A member:

“The question of remunerating artists, but also of curators, hasn’t always been clear in France either. It’s an issue of ethics, first and foremost. You should be paid for any work you do, but, even though that may sound logical to most, this is not always so obvious to institutions.

Regarding analogous questions in France, a group named Économie Solidaire de l’Art (ESA)³⁸ has drawn up a contract of sorts, that galleries, museums, art centers, associations, etc, and others who are linked to the arts are invited to read, and then apply to their own policy. ESA also objects to any open calls that request artists to work for free. And, even if there is still much to achieve regarding those questions, this document is now being accepted, signed and applied by an increasing number of arts institutions.

Also, we shouldn’t forget that, in the late 1960’s, in New York City, but also in other major cities throughout the US, many active members of the art scene (critics, exhibition organizers, art dealers, artists, museum staff...) united in the Art Workers Coalition (AWC). They were already fighting for questions linked to the ethics of the art institutions by going on strike, and by organizing demonstrations in the streets. In museums they protested by taking down some of the artworks on show. They would close the institutions, or threaten such institutions, and demand better conditions for the artists they exhibited. They also fought for an equal status regarding the ratio of artists shown: African American artists, Hispanic American artists, female artists... were not given opportunities to show their work as often as white, male artists

36 carcc.ca/en/Copyright-Fees-Schedules
carcc.ca/en/fee_schedule_2017_1_exhibition
carcc.ca/en/fee_schedule_2018_0_introduction%20FR

37 in English, for conservators of cultural goods: cac-accr.ca/files/pdf/ecode.pdf; in French regarding curators: curateur.gouv.qc.ca/cura/.../code_ethiq_cura.pdf; carfac.ca/initiatives/best-practices/

38 economiesolidairedelart.net
facebook.com/groups/economiesolidairedelart

at that time. Thanks to the Art Workers Coalition, they gained more opportunities to show their art and to be recognized in a way that is moving a bit closer to the exposure that their male, white counterparts enjoy.”

Dieudonné Cartier, artist, Neptune:

“In 2014 I founded THE OFFICE OF GRAVITATIONAL DOCUMENTS³⁹ which is a platform that aims at gathering elements as an archive of creation processes and protocols and Jean-Baptiste joined me as research director on a specific project we developed together named Neptune⁴⁰.”

“In this project we play that we are working. It is a staging of work; starting from the notion that the artist working in his studio is a bit passé, we show the artist at work in the white cube like someone would usually work in an office.”

Jean-Baptiste Carobolante, theoretician, Neptune:

“It originates from Walter Benjamin’s statement that artists are children of the planet Neptune (they are melancholic), and we don’t have time for that: we are too busy drawing up invoices.”

“It’s good to protect yourself with a contract, but it also interferes with what an artist is. It means that the bureaucratic powers that be have won. We want to focus on how art can be sustained in a world in which bureaucracy has won. But it worries me that if we start to define things we risk losing what makes artists artists. And along with it, their subversion.”

Artist in the audience:

“The administrative form is important in society in which we take part, but I am not sure if that defines what an artist is. The administrative form does not define who I am as an artist. My administrative status allows me to survive, but it does not affect my personality. Making a contract does not define what an author is, it is to clarify interrelationships.⁴¹”

Laurent Courtens, curator, ISELP:

39 dieudocartier.blogspot.be/2015/05/the-office-of-gravitational-documents.html

40 deborahbowmann.com/?neptune
dieudocartier.blogspot.be/2015/05/the-office-of-gravitational-documents.html

41 This is in fact true: in Belgium, the nature of original works protected by authors’ rights are described in an open fashion: Belgian law does not restrictively define what an art work is, nor does it circumscribe the creative processes that lead to the creation of original works, with a closed list of qualities. Cfr advice sofam.be

“You can also have self-organization of the artistic work connected to the world of work. I am surprised that for 3 days we have only been talking about ourselves. But there is the larger world, that is also in a very bad position by measures directed by EU. When we organize ourselves, we can also go into the world. We are talking about social rights being destroyed all over the world. It’s everywhere.”

Lucie Orbie mentions her own ongoing research into the multiplicity of networks and roles that make the art world tick. She highlights the fact that, within the art world, there is an increasing porosity regarding the functions people fulfill: since individuals at work in the art world frequently shift roles – from being, for example, an author, a trainer, a researcher, an inspirer, a producer, a publisher, a developer, a collector, a reflector, a facilitator, etc. and back again – people tend to be defined far less according to their function, which is no longer fixed, but according to their state of activity. Such pluralities of practice, to a certain extent, mirror the present loosening of relationships in labour markets as a whole. In that regard, developments in the art world could provide a fascinating testing ground for the status of individuals whose working lives span a multitude of roles.

DAY THREE, PART TWO

focused on concrete examples of collaborative forms.

Ann Goossens is the business director of Auguste Orts⁴² which was created in 2007 by four artists, Sven Augustijnen, Manon de Boer, Herman Asselberghs and Anouk De Clercq, who each of them work with the moving image, between the worlds of visual arts and of film.

“They felt that producing a moving image work involves a lot of bureaucratic and administrative matters, so they founded the structure to group their resources and knowledge. Film requires working with a crew. There is technical equipment, insurances to think of; for distribution, it is necessary to have the right technical knowledge, of all forms in which your films are to be shown.”

“We support them with a team of two employees Marie Logie, my colleague, and myself. We are there to help them with writing applications, to deal with the whole crew, to manage the budgets... We take the risks in their place. Luckily we received structural funding from the Flemish Community from the beginning, but it is still an artist-led association. The structure helps them: it is a legal instrument. In film production you need a producer to apply for film

42 augusteorts.be

funding. So Auguste Orts acted as their producer who applied for the project funding. It also means that they can keep full authorship over their works, which is very important. In film production the producer also obtains some of the rights. So Auguste Orts is an instrument behind which they can hide. The artists are at the core of the relationship with institutions and curators, but they can also refer to Auguste Orts who is dealing with the contract and the fee. As it's a person's name, it is also handy. It's a big investment on their part. The artists decided to create this structure to deal with the pragmatic side of things. At the same time they do need to invest their time: they do not get paid for meetings, etc. This is not a problem for them as it is their own choice. And from the start the aim was there to open up the platform: from the start they have worked with other artists. But this is maybe not a solution that works for everyone. It may be a solution for the world of the moving image, since collaboration is integral to filmmaking and so very natural. In the visual arts people work individually. When Auguste Orts distributes, it gets 50% of the distribution fee. 7,5% of the production budget also goes to the structure.

Jean-Baptiste Carobolante mentions the collective Deborah Bowmann⁴³, an artist-led structure that permits artists to market their work in a variety of ways. It also riffs off the role of the gallerist. An amusing video of their promotional efforts can be found in the “about” section on their website.

Einat Tuchman also elaborated a project called ESPACE TOUS. In the basement of a community space in the Brussels commune of Molenbeek – which became international headline news in the wake of the Paris and Brussels attacks of 2015 and 2016 – the artists moved in with initiatives to promote sharing of resources, ideas and experiences. It continues to this day.

Preliminary conclusions, day three:

Artists and curators, along with other organizations in the field, are actively exploring how to instate fair practices, regarding the way cultural workers get paid. Some artists integrate the legal status and societal perception of artists into their artistic practice, while others aspire to have a tangible influence on the formal status of art and its actors.

The thinking is that if a code of fair practices could be established, organizations, curators, artists, could all be encouraged to adhere to them.

The further question of extending such reflections to encompass fair practices in society as a whole is an admirable one, but perhaps beyond the scope of the present exercise, and food for thought for a

43 deborahbowmann.com/about-us

future conference. Small-scale initiatives such as Espace Tous in any case already give a concrete example of how artists and curators can have a literal impact on social cohesion in their immediate surroundings.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

No one will be able to fully quantify the impact of the phenomenon of the star curator on the general understanding of what curators do, just as the romantic notion of the suffering, individual artist is a myth that has left its traces, and in some cases, scars, in the psyches of generations of artists all over the world. These phenomena are part and parcel of larger dynamics at play in individuality-oriented societies as a whole.

How artistic merit is recognized and rewarded, and how authorship is dealt with in a society sits somewhere on an anthropological scale that maps out how extraordinary human endeavors of all kinds receive recognition and financial reward. It is a topic that merits in-depth study and attention, that surpasses the scope of this exercise.

As the numerous case-stories cited during the conference have shown, the fact that curators perform valuable cultural work is not being questioned: curators clearly do have a defining impact on the way art, artists and ideas circulate. Curators not only manage the complex human relationships that arise at the interface between artist, artwork, audience, and between artist and institution, they are often at the basis of initiating the very occasions, and conditions in which art is seen. There can be no doubt that these occasions are, in most cases, the result of an enduring, personal commitment to a creative curatorial practice.

With this creative privilege comes professional responsibility. Training in formal, academic settings can help some budding curators gain the skills they need, but others simply learn by doing, often thanks to the guidance or generosity of others who give them the opportunity to learn and experiment. There is a recognized wish to train curators who have a thorough understanding of the history of their discipline and are capable of engaging with, or affecting, the artistic discourses of their times. Having an understanding of the realities of spatial organization and collaborative processes is also desirable, but all speakers seemed to agree that a keen sense of the ethical dimensions of what one is doing is essential too.

A lack of opportunities often compels curators to be inventive, and to collaborate, and the conference acknowledges that new collaborative forms have the potential to provide valuable (albeit, at times, unpaid) experiences to artists and curators at the beginning of their careers. Some initiatives are designed in such a way that payment for all participants is integrated from the start. Some approach their projects by devising business models. Other artist groups pool their resources in order to share funding, production-based support and expertise, which they in turn pass on to younger artists. Yet others turn their creative attentions to some of the pressing social needs in the society in which they

work, with positive effects: Einat Tuchman's project Espace Tous brought much-needed exchange and cohesion to the Brussels commune of Molenbeek. The work with artists initiated by science teacher Rudi Audience at the Royal Athenaeum of Antwerp, with the school's principal Karin Heremans and the school's Islam teacher, Mohamed Filali, is another example that has also contributed greatly to students' sense of belonging and well-being⁴⁴. This case is now being shared with schools throughout Europe. The value of art can be activated in multiple contexts and curators are often, but not always, the people who make the necessary connections to instigate such innovative projects.

All present acknowledge that no single practice precludes the validity of any other, and it is in combination that their value resonates, to the art-world and society at large.

Payment for artists and curators is a crucial point, and establishing guidelines for fair practices are an essential part of recognizing the contribution that artists and curators make to society. It would however make sense for such changes in awareness to first and foremost occur from within the art sector itself. Visual artists lag behind when it comes to claiming fair and adequate payment for showing or producing their work; institutions on the other hand do not always help them with this about-turn in professional awareness. If, by extension, curators, but also artists, could help define and negotiate the various roles, it would benefit all parties concerned, since it would clarify roles and expectations, as well as giving an outline, on paper, of the individual participant's role (and its attendant remuneration).

A code of fair practices can only work if it is subscribed to by all involved. These good practices in institutions can in turn be publicly rewarded and recognized through prizes, or as a required condition in applications for funding. To put it in tangible, concrete terms, why should an artist or a curator not have the possibility of affording a mortgage? The conference attests that there are already many artists, and curators, who are pursuing these questions in very tangible ways.

But there is more at stake. What if artists and curators were brought in to advise governments on how to fund them? Or to help them develop innovative forms of support that both strengthen the economic resilience of cultural producers, and put them in a position to further stimulate the cultural life of the communities they inhabit? Is there a larger role for cultural workers in society than the one they have so far claimed for themselves? Curators tend to be experts at handling complexity; like artists, necessity as much as creative enquiry demands them to think outside of the box on a daily basis. Aren't these skills just as applicable in a world that is as complicated as our own? Why can't curators, with their excellent networking abilities, and their flair for creating value and meaning, contribute to a

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greater sense of belonging in society, and help make sense of the challenges of identity that have come to a head in the 21st century?

The pronounced wish to establish clear agreements regarding the cultural work curators perform is part of all of these larger issues. With formal agreements come the definition of tasks, and a recognition for that work, which can be in the form of a protection of authors' rights, and especially in the adequate payment for artists and curators involved. Just as the legislation of authors' rights (in continental, European law) consists of guide-lines, rather than a closed list of activities, the balancing act will be to come up with a set of definitions that allow curatorial practices the space to flourish and develop, rather than for it to be a conclusive definition which the arts are bound to outgrow. In the meantime, however, it is unlikely that practitioners of curating are going to let any lack of formal status hold them back any time soon.

[Curatorial Future Talks complete program outline](#)