

Editorial

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This issue of *ONCURATING.org* brings together a range of interviews and essays, inspired by the symposium, “Why Artists Curate”, held by the Kunstbüro der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg in cooperation with Columbus Art Foundation in July 2011. The feedback from this conference prompted a discussion on authorship in contemporary art, from artists, curators and artist-curators.

Walter Benjamin’s well known essay, *The Author as Producer* outlines that artists became producers when they shifted their labour from an independent creator reliant on conventional artistic apparatus, to an operative, in which the skills and accomplishments of the artists are transformed by the advanced technical content of new reproductive technologies’ place in art¹. This represents the very re-functioning of the relations of artistic production in the interest of the new definition of the artist. Therefore the artist is not bound by a closed relationship with material, or their own encounters with the world in the conventions of artistic tradition.

The role of the curator as a scholar and keeper of a collection has all but faded away. The contemporary art curator is no longer an expert on a particular period, instead the curator is an anthropologist, a reporter, a sociologist, an epistemologist, an author, an NGO representative or an observer of the internet². The figure of the globe-trotting independent curator appears to be most associated with contemporary art; this transitory figure is always searching for an opportunity for an exhibition or publication. The curator shares his or her labour with that of the contemporary artist. Both practitioners are reliant on the art market, engage in precarious work, maintain a connection with the international scene and their income is dependant on their intellectual and networking ability. These positions are questioned in this issue; how do they relate to new working paradigms and existing power relations in contemporary art.

Since the 1990s the rise of the curator has sparked debates on the level of authorship curators can attribute to a work of art. As John Roberts writes, “the artist becomes a curator and the curator becomes an artist not in order to advance to democratization of the social form of art, but as a democratization of the circumscribed professional relations between artists and those who seek to professionally represent it.”³ Not only is this about a “democratisation” of professional relations but also a merging of roles, artists may take on some of the roles and functions of the curator in order to produce artworks. In turn, curators may exercise their curatorial or authorial voice by assembling a set of practices and ideas together to formulate an exhibition or project.

This collection of interviews formulates a discussion on authorship in contemporary arts production and curation. **Artur Żmijewski** discusses his curation of the 7th Berlin Biennial, *Forget Fear* (2012), which set out to investigate the role of art

and its effectiveness within contemporary politics. Zmijewski reflects on the controversy associated with the biennial, as well as deciding to including his own work in the exhibition, *Berek* (1999). **Raqs Media Collective**, discuss joint-authorship and working across disciplines as both artists and curators. With particular emphasis on their latest project, *Sarai*: a program initiated in 2000, as part of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, India. They present a range of models for successful collaboration with participants and how authorship can be shared.

Marion von Osten reflects on her practice as both an artist and as a curator, and what can be learned from both practices; defining herself as an “initiator-curator”. After working with several influential German curators, such as Kathrin Rhomberg and Beatrice von Bismarck; von Osten reflects on the process of collaboration and the question of “equal” authorship. Artist-curator **Gavin Wade** discusses his approach to curating and art making and how the two disciplines can intersect with one another. Wade discusses his *5 Acts of Art*⁴ where he proposes that art is exhibition, that art is not exhibited but that art exhibits, that exhibition is a fundamental function of being human, and the fundamental process of art. The collective **Fucking Good Art** discuss their collaborative approach to art making and how their practice intersects with curating and research. Their recent publication, *Italian Conversations: Art in the age of Berlusconi* (2011) offers a glimpse into Italy’s contemporary art scene and pays tribute to a tradition of artists publications that emerged during the 1970s.

Curator, **Valerie Smith** discusses her approach to curating *Sonsbeek 93* (1993), and how her process of engagement was influenced by other models at the time. Smith discusses her role as a producer – in constant dialogue with artists – to create an entire concept with complete authorial control. The curator **Mary Jane Jacob** engages in a discussion about authorship, curatorial practice and the history and future of public art. Jacob considers her role in the site-specific exhibition *Culture in Action* (1995) and her development of community-based projects. Both Jacob and Smith paved the way for socially engaged art work, their exhibitions in the 1990s framed the discussion of art’s renewed interest in the social during this period⁵. **Kristina Lee Podesva** reflects on authorships’ possible disappearance in the art-pedagogical field, by looking specifically at her *colourschool* (2006/7) project within her artistic and curatorial practice; in relation to historical, societal, political, economical and cultural contexts.

Long-standing collaborators, **Ute Meta Bauer** & **Yvonne P. Doderer** engage in a dialogue about audience – specifically how the public sees the outcome before the curator or artist – and what it means to work as a women in the global, (often) male dominated art world. The artist and initiator of the Immigrant Movement International, **Tania Bruguera**, reflects on her work with immigrants and how her work is viewed in the contemporary art world. As an advocate of political work, Bruguera talks frankly about some of her early work and contribution to Cuba’s art education, by founding *Arte de Conducta* (2002-2009) and her responsible approach to art making.

Finally, **Marc James Léger’s** essay, ‘*Homo Academicus Curatorius: Millet Matrix’ as Intercultural Paradigm*, considers the curator-as-analyst by examining the collaborative exchanges between two Montreal-based artists: Rosika Desnoyers and David Tomas. **Dorothee Richter’s** essay, *Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team workers?* discusses artistic and curatorial authorship, from a historical position, in the context of Harald Szeemann’s curatorship of Documenta 5; as well as using the case studies of Fluxus and the Curating Degree Zero Archive.

Notes

1 Benjamin, W. (1934) ‘The Author As Producer’, *New Left Review* 1, no. 82, 1970.

2 Bude, H. “The curator as meta-artist: the case of HUO” in *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2012, pg. 114.

3 Roberts, J. *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, pg. 184

4 To be published in the forthcoming, Gavin Wade, *UPCYCLE THIS BOOK*, 2013, Sternberg.

5 Bishop, C. *Artificial Hells*, pg. 217