



ROLE OF CURATOR IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification thereof, or for any other university or institute of learning.

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are cited and included.

I also hereby acknowledge that my thesis will be made publicly available pursuant to Section 47b of Act No. 552/2005 Coll. and AAU's internal regulations.

Daria Stepanova

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ABSTRACT

Role of Curator in Contemporary Art

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Before joining art field as a curator I wanted to clarify for myself the terms of *curating* and *curator*. I also wanted to try and answer some questions like: is there a difference in the range of responsibilities between the different types of curators (e.g. museum, independent)? How do curators build relationships with artists? Is the term itself still relevant for the art field? What are the mostly discussed questions related to curating? Are curators really needed nowadays and why? That is why in the first part of this paper I will talk about the topics of my interest by studying opinions and thoughts of different critics, curators and artists and examine some questions and “hot” topics that are currently discussed in the artistic world. I will look at how the definition of the word *curator* changed over the history and why it seems like it is getting back to its initial meaning of someone who oversees, manages, and guards something. I will learn about the possible reasons that led to it. I will see how today the roles of artists and curators blend together and discuss the possible outcomes. The second part of the thesis will be based on the practical experience, more precisely - an independent curatorial project the goal of which will be to organize an art exhibition or some other kind of artistic event. In my case it will be a pop-up, site-specific performative artistic show by young Czech artist Ondrej Vicena. While working on this show, I will learn step-by-step how curators work on the project of such scale: find artists and topics, organize PR, distribute budget and negotiate with an artist, and so on. I will also see in practice how the relationships of artists and curators develop, how they work together and share responsibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

As David Balzer says in his book “Curatorism: how curating took over the art world and everything else”: “We can’t know who organized the first art exhibition. It is even more difficult to propose a teleology of curating, ...”¹ Indeed, this profession is surrounded by myths and misconception. More and more often we hear such questions as *What is curating? Who are curators and what do they actually do?* These questions are of the utmost interest not only for art students who are still deciding whether they want to work in this field or not, but also for the general public. Since these words spread from the artistic field to other areas, the world is so overwhelmed by them used here and there, that nobody really knows what the exact definitions of the words are. Even curators themselves can’t make up their mind and some of them start to reject the term, trying to find some appropriate substitutions.

This situation of confusion made me interested in this topic. Before joining art field as a curator I wanted to clarify for myself the terms of *curating* and *curator*. I also wanted to try and answer some questions like *Is there a difference in the range of responsibilities between the different types of curators (e.g. museum, independent)? How do curators build relationships with artists? Is the term itself still relevant for the art field? What are the mostly discussed questions related to curating? Are curators really needed nowadays and why?* Several established and well-known art historians and critics such as Hans Ulrich Obrist and Terry Smith made attempts to put together books about the history and the development of the profession, and tried to clarify some of the questions mentioned above for their readers. Both books consist of interviews collections. Only through the way of talking to concrete people about concrete experiences,

¹ Blazer, David. *How curating took over the art world and everything else*. Pluto Press, 2015: 23

exhibitions and art events one can learn how the curating profession was developing and how strikingly different it was and still is depending on time, place, and people involved.

That is why in the first part of this paper I will talk about the topics of my interest by studying opinions and thoughts of different critics, curators and artists, and examine some questions and “hot” topics that are currently discussed in the artistic world. I will look at how the definition of the word *curator* changed over the history and why it seems like it is getting back to its initially very broad and general meaning. I will learn about the possible reasons that led to it, such as the shift in roles that play curators today (especially independent and freelance curators), and their controversial occupation that on the one hand makes them probably the most influential people in the art sphere, but on the other hand, because of their too broad responsibilities, leads to overusage of the term *curator* and loss of its value. I will see how today the roles of artists and curators blend together and discuss the possible outcomes.

The second part of the thesis will be based on the practical experience, more precisely - an independent curatorial project the goal of which will be to organize an art exhibition or some other kind of artistic event. In my case it will be a pop-up, site-specific performative artistic show by young Czech artist Ondrej Vicena. The show will take place in an art space Berlinskej Model. While working on this show, I will learn step-by-step how curators work on the project of such scale: find artists and topics, organize PR, distribute budget and negotiate with an artist, and so on. I will also see in practice how the relationships of artists and curators develop, how they work together and share responsibilities.

Like art in general, curating cannot escape being simultaneously iconophile and iconoclast.

Terry Smith

1. THEORETICAL PART

1.1. INTRODUCING TERMS: CURATOR AND CURATING

Tom Morton, a curator of the British Art Show 7, the most influential exhibition of contemporary British art,² was once asked to define a term *curator*. In his definition Morton in a very generic way described three stages of development of this term.

1. In the most general sense, based on its etymology, the word *curator* can be defined as *someone who oversees, manages and guards something*.³ Consequently, in Ancient Rome, for example, *curatores* were people who supervised different departments of public works; and in Medieval times *curates* was a priest who “took care” of souls.⁴

The root of the word – *cura* – is Latin and means *care*.⁵ Therefore, curator essentially means *caretaker*.⁶ While discussing the origins of the word *curator* in his book, David Balzer quotes David Levi Strauss who said that early duties of curators were “a curious mixture of bureaucrat and priest”,⁷ meaning that they were split between *law* and *faith*. This, says Balzer, is “...not unlike the contemporary curator within major art institutions, who, we assume, wants to make the public believe in art and artists, and also to function successfully within the political

² British Art Show 7. Exhibition guide, Hayward touring, 2010: 3
<<http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/sites/default/files/2.%20British%20Art%20Show%20-%20Guide.pdf>>, 30 April 2017.

³ Etymology Dictionary. Curator. <<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=curator>>, 30 April 2017.

⁴ Morton, Tom. A brief history of the word Curator. Phaidon.
<<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/september/09/a-brief-history-of-the-word-curator/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵ Etymology Dictionary. Cure. <<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=cure>>, 30 April 2017.

⁶ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 24

⁷ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 24

machinery of the museum or gallery,..."⁸ Balzer also says that those early meanings of the word "suggest dependence and responsiveness rather than direct action and agency".⁹ This idea, in Balzer's opinion, shapes the future understanding of the profession (that will be described in the next point) in the context of museums and collections, where a collection, not curator, is a focus of attention.¹⁰

2. Only in the 20th century, said Morton, the term *curator* started to be used more or less in the way we understand it, describing a broad category of exhibition makers.¹¹ Curators were people who worked in museums conducting research, taking care of collections, and mounting exhibitions.¹²

In Balzer's opinion, thanks to revolutionaries like Duchamp "...the concepts of *exhibition* and *curation* were modernized."¹³, meaning changed to more contemporary understanding that Kate Fowle, the chief curator of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, describes in her article "Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today":

"With the charge of researching, acquiring, documenting, and publicly displaying art, the curator becomes the propagator of taste and knowledge for the public "good". The curator becomes a connoisseur as much as an administrator. His or her role is expanded beyond "overseeing" to encompass what Foucault calls "the cultivation of the self".¹⁴

⁸ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 25

⁹ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 27

¹⁰ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 27

¹¹ Morton, Tom. A brief history of the word Curator. Phaidon.

<<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/september/09/a-brief-history-of-the-word-curator/>> , 30 April 2017.

¹² Morton, Tom. A brief history of the word Curator. Phaidon.

<<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/september/09/a-brief-history-of-the-word-curator/>> , 30 April 2017.

¹³ Blazer, David. How curating took over the art world and everything else. Pluto Press, 2015: 30

¹⁴ Fowle, Kate. Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today. Independent Curators International.

<http://curatorsintl.org/images/assets/Fowle_Kate.pdf> , 30 April 2017.

Fowle mentions Harald Szeemann as the one who is today generally acknowledged as the first independent curator¹⁵ and who changed the way we see curatorial practice and curators. Together with Walter Hopps he “shared a desire to challenge the bureaucracy of institutions, earning reputations for actively questioning the form of exhibitions as well as for their sustained engagement with artists and their work”.¹⁶

Daniel Birnbaum, a director of Moderna Musset in Stockholm, says that Szeemann “...was the most influential curator of his generation--and, arguably, the most influential of all time, since he practically defined the curator's role as we understand it today.”¹⁷ Thanks to his work in Kunsthalle Bern, Szeemann got a chance not to work with a permanent collection, but to improvise and use his potential to the fullest. The show “Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form” that took place in Kunsthalle Bern in 1969 is considered his most famous one.¹⁸ He reevaluated the understanding of an art exhibition and allowed artists to exhibit not only their pieces, but also themselves and their attitudes. The artists were free to change the gallery space and even, as in the case of Richard Long, leave its premises. Now it is a common practice, but at that time it was something revolutionary. Therefore, though modestly calling himself “an exhibition maker”,¹⁹ Szeeman “...represent the romantic conception of the curator as inspired

¹⁵ Fowle, Kate. Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today. Independent Curators International. <http://curatorsintl.org/images/assets/Fowle_Kate.pdf>, 30 April 2017.

¹⁶ Fowle, Kate. Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today. Independent Curators International. <http://curatorsintl.org/images/assets/Fowle_Kate.pdf>, 30 April 2017.

¹⁷ Birnbaum, Daniel. When attitudes become form: works, concepts, processes, situations, information. Artforum, 2005:1. <<http://www.radicalmatters.com/metasound/pdf/Harald%20Szeemann%20-%20When%20attitude%20becomes%20form%20-%20Daniel%20Birnbaum%20on%20Harald%20Szeemann.pdf>>, 03 May 2017

¹⁸ The show that made Harold Szeemann a star. Phaidon. <<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/february/08/the-show-that-made-harald-szeemann-a-star/>>, 30 April 2017.

¹⁹ Birnbaum, Daniel. When attitudes become form: works, concepts, processes, situations, information. Artforum, 2005:1. <<http://www.radicalmatters.com/metasound/pdf/Harald%20Szeemann%20-%20When%20attitude%20becomes%20form%20-%20Daniel%20Birnbaum%20on%20Harald%20Szeemann.pdf>>, 03 May 2017

partner of the artist, a creative actor who generates original ideas and structures through which art enters public consciousness.”²⁰

For his interview to The Guardian, Hans Ulrich Obrist talks about the beginning of his curating career. He says curators had four main functions:

1. to preserve art;
2. to select new works;
3. to connect works to art history;
4. to arrange and display them.²¹

But he wanted to do more. Obrist says: “...When I became a curator, I wanted to be helpful to artists. I think of my work as that of a catalyst – and sparring partner.”²² He wanted to help artists realise their favourite projects that for some reasons were rejected by other curators. He also wanted to follow Szeemans ideas about exhibition forms: “I’m trying to expand the notion of curating. Exhibitions need not only take place in galleries, need not only involve displaying objects. Art can appear where we expect it least.”²³ But rather soon after the appearance of this new rendering of the term curator, one more shift in meaning took place.

²⁰ The show that made Harold Szeemann a star. Phaidon.
<<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/february/08/the-show-that-made-harald-szeemann-a-star/>>, 30 April 2017.

²¹ Jeffries, Stuart and Nancy Groves. Hans Ulrich Obrist: the art of curation. The Guardian, 23 March 2014.
<<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator>>, 4 May 2017.

²² Jeffries, Stuart and Nancy Groves. Hans Ulrich Obrist: the art of curation. The Guardian, 23 March 2014.
<<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator>>, 4 May

²³ Jeffries, Stuart and Nancy Groves. Hans Ulrich Obrist: the art of curation. The Guardian, 23 March 2014.
<<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator>>, 4 May

3. According to Morton, starting from the very end of the 20th century and in the third millennium, a curator started its way towards becoming a paid selector of things, from a programmer of a musical festival to a stylist putting together a capsule collection.²⁴

But regardless of the fact that the term *curator* recently underwent this shift in meaning mentioned above and spread to other areas, it still remained within the area of arts. A Code of Ethics for Curators, published by the American Association of Museums in 2009, defines curators as:

... highly knowledgeable, experienced, or educated in a discipline relevant to the museum's purpose or mission. Curatorial roles and responsibilities vary widely within the museum community and within the museum itself, and may also be fulfilled by staff members with other titles.²⁵

Curators' responsibilities include:

1. conducting research and keeping up with the new in the area;
2. working with museum's collection;
3. developing and organising exhibitions;
4. representing the institution.²⁶

These categories are very broad and can be fully applied only to museum curators that work with museum collections on a daily basis. It can be said that the roles that museums curators play

²⁴ Morton, Tom. A brief history of the word Curator. Phaidon. <<http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/september/09/a-brief-history-of-the-word-curator/>>, 30 April 2017.

²⁵ A Code of Ethics of Curators, American Association of Museums Curators Committee, 2009:4. <<http://www.aam-us.org/docs/continuum/curcomethics.pdf>>, 30 April 2017.

²⁶ A Code of Ethics of Curators, American Association of Museums Curators Committee, 2009:4. <<http://www.aam-us.org/docs/continuum/curcomethics.pdf>>, 30 April 2017.

nowadays do not differ much from those that they played in the 20th century; therefore they can be related to the second Morton's point about new, but at this point already traditional, type of curators like Harold Szeemann. Independent or freelance curators on the other hand seem to be that very kind of curators that caused the term *curator* to go back beyond the area of arts.

Being an independent art curator today often means not only choosing and putting works of art into the appropriate context, but also being able to develop an entire project from scratch and manage it from the beginning till the end. They have to:

1. deal with finances applying for funds and finding sponsors;
2. communicate with public and officials;
3. develop advertising plans;
4. administer exhibitions;
5. contextualise art pieces;
6. come up with the ideas on exhibition architecture;
7. analyse outcomes and so on.

Jens Hoffmann, a writer and curator currently based in New York, who previously curated in London, San Francisco, Dusseldorf, and was an assistant curator in Guggenheim Museum, points out one more function that contemporary curators have to perform and which he personally considers very important – a maker of exhibition catalogues.²⁷ Because, as Hoffmann says, “...unless you were there, that’s the only way you can get some hint of what I call

²⁷ Smith, Terry. Talking contemporary curating. Independent Curators International, 2015: 283.

“exhibitionary knowledge” (things you learn from actually walking around the show in real space).”²⁸

In the countries that are located on the periphery of the artistic world curators are “...involved in bringing art from one continent to the other while in the process functioning as cultural mediator, broker, translator.”²⁹ In times when they have to be their own graphic designers, consultants, project managers, PR agents, marketing specialists, and architects, the definition of the word *curator* became so blurry that it can be applied to practically everyone who oversees something. As Mari Carmen Ramirez, an art historian, critic and a curator specializing on Latin America Art says in her interview with Terry Smith:

Over the last fifteen-plus years, we have seen a significant transformation in the role and function of curatorial practices. In fact, the curator has not only emerged as a catalytic agent of artistic and social practice but the *métier* itself has become assimilated into mainstream culture. The term appears everywhere, from fashion to food to eyewear; it has been popularised.³⁰

This caused a current situation that is characterised by Justin Hammond, the curator of The Catlin Art Prize, as “...everyone is a curator now...”³¹ He claims that the term became ubiquitous, with its meaning hijacked and distorted.³² Indeed, a great example of it can be a new concept as *curated living*. Steven Rosenbaum writes about this phenomenon in his article for Forbes. He says that today people are so overwhelmed by the information that they get and

²⁸ Smith, Terry. Talking contemporary curating. Independent Curators International, 2015: 283.

²⁹ Smith, Terry. Talking contemporary curating. Independent Curators International, 2015: 230.

³⁰ Smith, Terry. Talking contemporary curating. Independent Curators International, 2015: 230.

³¹ Char, Jansen. Meet Justin Hammond: massive in the art game. Artslant, 20 October 2012.

<<https://www.artslant.com/lon/articles/show/32693-meet-justin-hammond-massive-in-the-art-game>>, 30 April 2017.

³² Char, Jansen. Meet Justin Hammond: massive in the art game. Artslant, 20 October 2012.

<<https://www.artslant.com/lon/articles/show/32693-meet-justin-hammond-massive-in-the-art-game>>, 30 April 2017.

connections that they build that they desperately need to order everything – to curate their lives.³³ This means to find structure, comfortable rhythm, filter all the unnecessary things, and so on.³⁴ It means to pay attention to every single detail and take everything under control. “Take life in your own hands” – this idea is supported by many bloggers, vloggers, youtubers; it went into the pop culture and became “fashionable” and “trendy”. People try to live consciously and “curate” every step from the way they wake up in the morning, to the amount of iPhone applications they purchase and the content of their fabric softener. Curated living websites are filled with topics on how to consciously choose you scented candle or keep you diary. Another example would be a scandalous online suicide game, or in other words challenge, which was leading teenagers in different countries to pass different challenges and at the end commit suicide.³⁵ This game spread in social networks and was supervised by so-called “curators of the game”³⁶. They contact the participants who by using special hashtags indicated their desire to be a part of a challenge, and curate them through the entire process till the last task. There are many articles regarding this new phenomenon, but what interests us is that the administrators of this deathly game were named curators.

Because of cases like this, opinions on the contemporary curating have now a touch of disillusion and frustration. They are caused by the current overusage of the word *curator* and commented on by Morton citing a stand-up comedian Stewart Lee. In his article for Financial

³³ Rosenbaum, Steven. A Framework For Living The Curated Life. Forbes, 10 May 2015. <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenrosenbaum/2015/05/10/living-the-curated-life-a-framework/#4a1619ce295d>>, 4 May 2017.

³⁴ Rosenbaum, Steven. A Framework For Living The Curated Life. Forbes, 10 May 2015. <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenrosenbaum/2015/05/10/living-the-curated-life-a-framework/#4a1619ce295d>>, 4 May 2017.

³⁵ Mullin, Gemma. Chilling Challenge. The Sun, 2 May 2017. <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tech/3003805/blue-whale-suicide-game-online-victims/>>, 4 May 2017.

³⁶ Khazov-Cassia, Sergei. Teen “Suicide Games” Send Shudders Through Russian-Speaking World. Radio Free Europe, 21 February 2017. <<http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-teen-suicide-blue-whale-internet-social-media-game/28322884.html>>, 4 May 2017

Times Lee harshly comments on how once he was appointed a curator of a Weekend of Comedy and Music in London: “I am a curator. What a dead word. It sounds like someone stirring turds in a toilet bowl with a stick. If something is being curated it already seems fixed and decayed...”³⁷ Therefore many contemporary art curators reject calling themselves *curators* and claiming the idea of *star-curator* to be ludicrous.³⁸ In 2013 the organisers of Royal Academy Summer exhibition, which mission is to promote art and artists through exhibition, education and debate³⁹, refused to be called curators and chose a term “co-ordinators”⁴⁰. But it can be said that the meaning of the term simply returned back to its roots. Because, as it was mentioned above, initially this term was not only used within an artistic context, but in many different areas, carrying its most general meaning of *supervisor* or *manager*.

But despite these widely spread negative sentiments regarding the current situation with curating and curators, independent art curators today are considered very influential people and seen as “...a contextualizing force for contemporary art, and one that develops infrastructure for contemporary artists and art discourse in different contexts throughout the world.”⁴¹ They do what the art critics did before – they set agenda for contemporary art - they are “precipitating and shaping the aesthetic revolution.”⁴² No one can deny their power and authority in the field of arts, because it seems that nowadays it is a curator who decides what can be considered art and what cannot. They discover new artists and very often play a role of their agents, choose works for the shows, write criticism and serve as a medium between an artist and the audience.

³⁷ Lee, Stewart. Joking apart. Financial Times, 22 April 2011. <<https://www.ft.com/content/a8066bc2-6b9e-11e0-93f8-00144feab49a>>, 30 April 2017.

³⁸ Char, Jansen. Meet Justin Hammond: massive in the art game. Artslant, 20 October 2012.

<<https://www.artslant.com/lon/articles/show/32693-meet-justin-hammond-massive-in-the-art-game>>, 30 April 2017.

³⁹ Royal Academy of Arts. Who we are. <<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/about-the-ra>>, 30 April 2017.

⁴⁰ Gardner, Anthony. All Curators Now. The Economist, December 2013.

<<https://www.1843magazine.com/content/ideas/anthony-gardner/all-curators-now>>, 30 April 2017.

⁴¹ Independent Curators International. About. <<http://curatorsintl.org/about>>, 30 April 2017.

⁴² Smith, Terry. Talking contemporary curating. Independent Curators International, 2015: 321.

According to an Italian curator Francesco Bonami, “...in today’s market-driven contemporary art environment, curators retain the important task of highlighting art’s non-commercial dimension.”⁴³ But to what extent are art curators involved into the affairs of art market? It can be said, that they serve as a mediator between public (in this case I mean buyers, i.e. private collectors, museum’s representatives, etc.) and art market. By presenting an artist, curators and galleries endorse his or her works and, before they are even completed, promote them as a potential investment.⁴⁴ Being noticed by a powerful curator or gallery can mean that one gets into the world of high-end art and never has as to think about money again. Commercial galleries choose very carefully with whom to work, whom to sell, and never make prices public in order be able to manipulate them even after the deal is closed (by manipulating secondary market – auctions and private collectors).

However, this creates a problem for those artists who work with galleries that are not on the periphery of the art market and do not filter buyers and manipulate prices. Such artists probably can’t support themselves by selling their work.⁴⁵ While discussing on what ground do curators who work with commercial galleries and art collectors choose which work to acquire, many gave a very personal and subjective reason like: presence of the red colour or polka-dots (apparently such art sells more often); communicating a strong message (how to measure this “strength?”); proper scale (again, who measures what is a proper size and what is not?).⁴⁶ The idea that artists’ success depends on the luck of being discovered by the right curator or gallery

⁴³ Neuendorf, Henri. Art Dimystified: What Do Curators Actually Do? ArtnetNews, 10 November 2016. <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-demystified-curators-741806>>, 4 May 2017.

⁴⁴ Schrager, Allison. High-end art is one of the most manipulated markets in the world. Quartz, 11 July 2013. <<https://qz.com/103091/high-end-art-is-one-of-the-most-manipulated-markets-in-the-world/>>, 05 May 2015.

⁴⁵ Schrager, Allison. High-end art is one of the most manipulated markets in the world. Quartz, 11 July 2013. <<https://qz.com/103091/high-end-art-is-one-of-the-most-manipulated-markets-in-the-world/>>, 05 May 2015.

⁴⁶ Schrager, Allison. High-end art is one of the most manipulated markets in the world. Quartz, 11 July 2013. <<https://qz.com/103091/high-end-art-is-one-of-the-most-manipulated-markets-in-the-world/>>, 05 May 2015.

at the right time can be scary. Everything seems eerily subjective. Such concentration of power in hands of contemporary curators causes a row of widely discussed problems, not only connected with an art market, but mostly with the amount of power and influence in general that contemporary curators have today.

In his article for The Guardian, a British art critic Waldemar Januszczak quotes Grayson Perry who called art marked a “formidable cartel”⁴⁷ and blames no other than a curator. He says:

When I started writing about art, there were no curators. Now they are everywhere. They go to the same biennales; speak the same meaningless art language; and control the art world from within by privileging their creativity ahead of the artist's. For 5,000 years art survived perfectly well without curators. Now they are its gate keepers.⁴⁸

1.2 INTRODUCING PROBLEMS: CURATOR AS ARTIST, ARTIST AS CURATOR

First of all, as we've already mentioned above, one problem is connected with the fact that curators now are the people who choose what can be exhibited and “brought to light” and what should stay in the shade; who is talented enough to be represented and presented, become widely known and promoted, and who is doomed for remaining a part of a “dark matter”⁴⁹; what can be considered art and what cannot. With this problem rises the question of what really art is. An interesting point was made by Anton Vidokle, an e-flux co-founder, who in his article described the situation that took place at the Documenta 12. Back in 2007 the Documenta's curator Roger Buegel included in the programme of the festival a Spanish celebrity chef Ferran

⁴⁷Orr, Deborah. Grayson Perry shows us how the art the world works – as a formidable cartel. The Guardian, 20 September 2013. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/20/grayson-perry-how-art-world-works>>, 6 May 2017.

⁴⁸ Januszczak, Waldemar. Why the art world needs to rise up against curators. The Guardian, 23 September 2013. <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/sep/23/art-world-rise-up-curators>>, 6 May 2017

⁴⁹ Sholette, Gregory. Dark Matter. Pluto Press, 2011: 1.

Adria⁵⁰. Buergel explained his choice by pointing out that Adria developed his own aesthetics and his own language⁵¹ which had become very influential in the international context. The artistic crowd did not support that decision and in his article Vidokle notices that even the influence of such an experienced curator as Buergel could not transform coking into an art form.⁵²

But it is important to mention that in 2014 Ferran Adria had his own exhibition in Cleveland called “Notes on Creativity”, which was only the beginning of the world tour. In the description of the exhibition we can see such phrases as “one of the most important avant-garde chefs”, “the use of drawing to articulate cuisine”, and “curated by...”⁵³ This demonstrates us that one precedent can change the understanding of what art is, and even though at the moment of his first appearance as an artist Adria caused a strong disapproval from the side of an artistic crowd, as a result his sketches, collages, plasticine models, cutlery and cooking utensils are exhibited in museums as rightful art pieces⁵⁴ and curated by Brett Littman, a former deputy director of MoMA and the executive director of The Drawing Center who put together many successful exhibitions⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵¹ Documenting Documenta. David Pujol, Visual 113, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdo_p4t5dIs&t=526s>, 30 April 2017.

⁵² Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵³ Andria, Ferran. Notes on Creativity. The Drawing Center, 2014. <https://issuu.com/drawingcenter/docs/drawingpapers110_adria>, 30 April 2017.

⁵⁴ Smith, Roberta. A Culinary Dali, Delving into Palettes. The New York Times, 13 February 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/14/arts/design/ferran-adria-opens-at-the-drawing-center.html?ref=design&_r=1>, 30 April 2017.

⁵⁵ Parsons Fine Arts. Bertt Littman. <<http://amt.parsons.edu/finearts/visitingcritics/brett-littman/>>, 30 April 2017.

At the same time an Argentinean artist Rirkrit Tiravanija works on artistic projects that take form of cooking and sharing meals⁵⁶. His exhibition *Untitled (Free)*, where he transformed a gallery into a kitchen and gave out rice and curry to visitors, was even recreated by MoMA in 2012⁵⁷. This interactive work of his is described as conceptual as it makes people interact with each other while eating food, therefore becoming a part of art process⁵⁸. Vidokle distinguishes two cases where an artist makes a decision to include cooking into the list of his activities, and a curatorial power to designate some activity or object as art⁵⁹. But doesn't Adria's example show us quite the opposite? Many respectable media channels like *The Guardian*⁶⁰ and *Esquire*⁶¹ discussed this issue in their articles. In his article "Is Cooking Ever an Art?" John Mariani dwells upon the topic enumerating all characteristics of cooking such as imagination and creativity, skill and practice.⁶² It involves great effort in making food visually pleasing. It can be characterised as inventive, provocative, and conceptual. This topic can be developed further, but for now we can say that a single president like the one that took place at Documenta 12 can change the history and the definition of art itself. It can change the way people and society as a whole view what is art and what is not, and today the power of deciding what is "worth" a chance and what is not is in hands of curators.

⁵⁶ Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵⁷ Rirkrit, Tiravanija. Cooking and Drawing Event at Art Basel 2011. Vernissage TV, 2011. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CQsZ0AAheY>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵⁸ Rirkrit, Tiravanija. *Untitled*, The Museum of Modern Art, 2012. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xRx2s3FpSg>>, 30 April 2017.

⁵⁹ Stokes, Rebekka. Rirkrit Tiravanija: Cooking up an Art Experience. *The Museum of Modern Art*, 3 February 2012. <https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/02/03/rirkrit-tiravanija-cooking-up-an-art-experience/>, 30 April 2017.

⁶⁰ Mariani, John. Is Cooking ever an Art? *Esquire*, 17 January 2012. <<http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/food/a12401/cooking-as-art-6640412/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁶¹ Jones, Jonathan. Why cooking was an original artform – and is still the most universal. *The Guardian*, 3 January 2014. <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/jan/03/cooking-original-artform-heston-blumenthal-rirkrit-tiravanija>>, 30 April 2017.

⁶² Mariani, John. Is Cooking ever an Art? *Esquire*, 17 January 2012. <<http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/food/a12401/cooking-as-art-6640412/>>, 30 April 2017.

Another widely discussed problem is what in Terry Smith's works called "artist as curator, curator as artist. In his book "On the Curatorship" Boris Groys says:

When it comes down to it, the contemporary curator does everything the contemporary artist does. The independent curator travels the world and organizes exhibitions that are comparable to artistic installations – comparable because they are the results of individual curatorial projects, discussions, actions. The artworks presented in the exhibitions take on the role of documentation of a curatorial project.⁶³

Indeed, today we can say that curators' artworks are their installed exhibitions. And there is even further step towards curators becoming artists. A great example for it is a "Curating Degree Zero Archive" exhibition presenting documentation of more than 100 curators as "a representative cross-section of the critical curatorial discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century".⁶⁴ The exhibition travels displaying these archives as works of art. It has a big educational potential and can be a part of a rather new trend in curating called "Educational Turn" which distinguishes contemporary curating from its precedents "by an emphasis on the framing and mediation of art and the circulation of ideas around art, rather than on its production and display".⁶⁵ Curators now concentrate a lot on "paracuratorial"⁶⁶ – "...lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art"⁶⁷, anything that does not require an actual production of something that can be exhibited. More and more curators take on the role of so-called quasi artists, museum and other kinds of spaces where they work can be viewed as their studios, and make the curatorial idea an inseparable if not the

⁶³ Groys, Boris. *On the Curatorship*. *Art Power*, 2008:50.

⁶⁴ Richter, Dorothee and Barnaby Drabble. *Curating Degree Zero Archive*. *Oncurating*. <<http://www.on-curating.org/issue-26-reader/curating-degree-zero-archive-20032008.html#.WQYvhhPyvIV>>, 30 April 2017.

⁶⁵ O'Neill, Paul and Mick Willson. *Curating and the educational turn*. *Open editions*, 2010:13.

⁶⁶ Smith, Terry. *Thinking contemporary curating*. *Independent curators international*, 2012: 144.

⁶⁷ Smith, Terry. *Thinking contemporary curating*. *Independent curators international*, 2012: 144.

most important part of visitor's experience.⁶⁸ And since the exhibition shows now include not only static objects but also performances, happenings and different types of educational events, exhibition can be seen as a work-in-progress, constantly changing.

This situation is of a big concern for artists. Anton Vidokle, comparing curator-artist's relationship with the relationship management-workforce, says that such paradigm is unfortunate for artists.⁶⁹ On the one hand, being curated means being supported by institutional power and security. On the other, how to work freely when your curator expects to be the co-author of your work? Moreover, if one rejects the offer, he or she risks not to be invited again. However, there are cases when the bond between curators and artists is so strong that no one else can experience the project. In this case there is little interest in the outside world and the public. This tendency is highlighted by Maria Lind, a curator, writer and educator who is currently a director of Stockholm Tensta Kunsthall, and called "over-collaboration"⁷⁰, because instead of having a strong self-standing project, as a result one might get something with no author at all.

The chief curator of the Mori Art Museum in Tokio Mami Kataoka suggests that today there are so many artists all around the world that even for big artistic events such as, for example, biennials the participants are chosen from the curator's personal connections and his or her subjective knowledge.⁷¹ That is why when we say that some exhibition is a curator's artwork, we simply imply that it is too subjective.⁷² Plus, curators have to be very critical and creative, which results into very artistic outcomes. At the same time we should not forget that there is also a tendency of "over-collaboration", as we've already mentioned above, when an artist and a

⁶⁸ Smith, Terry. *Talking contemporary curating*. Independent curators international, 2012: 144.

⁶⁹ Vidokle, Anton. *Art Without Artists?* E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁷⁰ Smith, Terry. *Talking contemporary curating*. Independent Curators International, 2015: 325.

⁷¹ Smith, Terry. *Talking contemporary curating*. Independent Curators International, 2015: 209.

⁷² Smith, Terry. *Talking contemporary curating*. Independent Curators International, 2015: 209.

curator work as one. There can be different reasons: inexperience of one of them that is dominated by a vision of more experienced artist or curator; or just willingness to do something together. Whatever the reasons are, such situations cause quite disturbing tendencies that contribute to the already serious confusion in the artistic field mixing terms and making definitions blurry. Nobody is sure about the division of responsibilities.

I'll talk more about curators-artists' relationships in the practical part. Here I just want to also note that even though we know that art already left the premises of exhibition halls, according to Vidokle, the concept of exhibition itself remains strong.⁷³ Together with galleries and curators' reputation they become "...the singular context through which art can be made visible as art."⁷⁴ Therefore it might seem that the production of art now is in power of curators and exhibitions, not artists. The role of producing art should stay "in hands" of artists, but can't it be said that artists themselves often cross borders and become curators? We can trace such cases back to 1855, when Gustave Courbet organised his own show that was an act of rebellion against the system and the French Exposition *Universelle* in Paris.⁷⁵ In the 20th century Damien Hirst curated the show of his own works making sure all the necessary people visited.⁷⁶ In most cases it was a reaction to inadequacy and lack of support from existing institutions.⁷⁷

Today it is a common phenomenon. For example, every year MoMA invites one artist to participate in Artist's choice – a program where a contemporary artist is asked to make an

⁷³ Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁷⁴ Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

⁷⁵ Are Artists the Better Curators? BMW Art Guide by Independent Collectors. <<https://www.bmw-art-guide.com/idx/collections/are-artists-the-better-curators>>, 6 May 2017.

⁷⁶ Are Artists the Better Curators? BMW Art Guide by Independent Collectors. <<https://www.bmw-art-guide.com/idx/collections/are-artists-the-better-curators>>, 6 May 2017.

⁷⁷ Vidokle, Anton. Art Without Artists? E-flux, May 2010. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/>>, 30 April 2017.

exhibition from the museum's collection.⁷⁸ Laura Hoptman, a curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, shares her comments on this project:

Curators like me, who have been trained as art historians and have been at this over a period of time, come to have systems of exhibition-making. We group objects according to certain criteria, which vary depending upon the kind of exhibition we are making, the kind of material we are displaying, and the kind of audience we are trying to reach....

Gallery displays are highly planned; scale models of galleries and artworks are created and works are arranged well in advance of actually stepping into galleries and commencing to hang. Objects are chosen for their beauty and historical significance, but also for their role in what can be seen as a kind of visual symphony of objects that exist on their own but also in concert with one another.⁷⁹

Artists, she says, work in a different way. They are not restricted by any rules and do not have to choose objects that relate to each other chronologically or stylistically. "Instead of being subsumed in some sort of greater narrative, the works of art in this *Artist's Choice* exhibition shine through as unique and beautiful objects unto themselves. They relate to one another ... in a very intuitive way."⁸⁰

On the one hand such projects give artists some amount of freedom and independency, allowing them to really make their project *theirs* without sharing authorship. But on the other

⁷⁸ Hoptman, Laura. A Curator Observing an Artist Being a Curator. MoMA, 8 November 2012. <https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/08/a-curator-observing-an-artist-being-a-curator/>, 6 May 2017.

⁷⁹ Hoptman, Laura. A Curator Observing an Artist Being a Curator. MoMA, 8 November 2012. <https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/08/a-curator-observing-an-artist-being-a-curator/>, 6 May 2017.

⁸⁰ Hoptman, Laura. A Curator Observing an Artist Being a Curator. MoMA, 8 November 2012. <https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/08/a-curator-observing-an-artist-being-a-curator/>, 6 May 2017.

hand, keeping in mind how much work contemporary curators have to do and how many responsibilities they have, playing their role shortens artists' time on working strictly on his or her art pieces and devoting all attention to creative activities. The artist-as-curator situation can be considered a separate phenomenon that happens and develops in parallel with and independently from the curator-as-artist one. But it also can be its direct consequence. *What to do and how to deal with this situation* are the questions that can be handled only by those who are directly involved in the situation, meaning – curators and /or artists.

In my opinion, the responsibility of dealing with it lies on the shoulders of curators. Being directors and conductors, they are very often in an authoritative position. It is important for curators to build with artists trust-based relationships, and while working in collaboration, never outshine or suppress them. In contemporary world, when an artist's exhibition can be organised without his or her consent⁸¹ and not experience any legal consequences, the attention should be drawn not to the commercial problems, but to the problems of the amount of control and respect.⁸² However, as expressed by a curator Beti Zerovic, when great money is involved, the amount of pressure from dealers, collectors, galleries and art market in general can be very high; artists at the same time feel like shows where artist's view is fully expressed and artistic concerns voiced, become a rare thing.⁸³

⁸¹ Charney, Noah. Artist v. Curator: Who should control a living artist's legacy? Observer, 21 February 2017. <<http://observer.com/2017/02/artist-v-curator-who-should-control-a-living-artists-legacy/>>, 6 May 2017.

⁸² Charney, Noah. Artist v. Curator: Who should control a living artist's legacy? Observer, 21 February 2017. <<http://observer.com/2017/02/artist-v-curator-who-should-control-a-living-artists-legacy/>>, 6 May 2017.

⁸³ Charney, Noah. Artist v. Curator: Who should control a living artist's legacy? Observer, 21 February 2017. <<http://observer.com/2017/02/artist-v-curator-who-should-control-a-living-artists-legacy/>>, 6 May 2017.

JAZAMA PAJAMA, PAJAMA KAZAMA!

SHIMERA KAZAM,

KIMERA KAZAM,

IMERATAZAM.

PAJA-PAJAD SHAZAMA!

SHAZAMA PAJAMA PAJAMA!

*Little Nemo*⁸⁴

2. PRACTICAL PART

The task for my final curatorial project, assigned by my university, was to organize an artistic event, more precisely - an art exhibition or show. To begin with, I needed to choose an artist. Since it was a student project with a rather limited budget, it was decided to start by searching among young artists that were still studying at the universities. For my research I chose two Prague schools – The Academy of Fine arts in Prague⁸⁵ and Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague⁸⁶. Both schools have a long history, great reputation and many well-known Czech artists studied there at some point in their lives.

The best idea was to visit the open studios events that usually take place at those schools twice a year. All studios open their doors to visitors in order to present their students' semester works. It is not only a good chance for art lovers to have a look at what happens behind the usually closed doors of art schools, but also for those who are in search for new talents to discover them. Therefore it is a good platform for curators to find “rising stars” and start working

⁸⁴ Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland. Directed by Masami Hata and William T. Hurtz, 1989. Official trailer, Youtube, 15 March 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JTk4OC7COo>>, 7 May 2017.

⁸⁵ The Academy of Fine arts in Prague. Official website. <<https://www.avu.cz/eng>>, 01 May 2017.

⁸⁶ Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. Official website. <<https://www.umprum.cz/web/en/>>, 01 May 2017.

with them before someone else does. One can meet students, talk to them in person about their styles, to build a network. Most of the students already have their works exhibited and portfolios ready for demonstration. Moreover, very often there is a possibility to have a look at several student's works, which gives an opportunity to understand his or her style, the way it developed and also to think whether you can collaborate with this person or not, and if yes – how.

At one of such open studios' events at UMPRUM a young artist Ondrej Vicena presented his eye-catching piece *Jazama Pajama* – an installation inspired by the concept of virtual reality, dreams and sublime.⁸⁷ It consisted of a mattress with a whole cut in the middle of it, illuminated and with a mirror inside that created an illusion of an endless space. On the pillow and the cover there were portraits of the artist wearing virtual reality glasses and holding a controller. The images were covered with the writing of a “magical charm” from a cartoon *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland*. This detail caught my eye. I liked the way the artist made a parallel between the latest high-tech devices and the concept of virtual reality, and the 80's children's cartoon that tells a story of a little boy's adventures in the land of dreams and nightmares. I also enjoyed the weird, jibber-jabber-like form of the charm. Personally for me it associated with the most of the contemporary art, which from the first sight might make no sense at all, but after a closer look and some research reveals hidden topics, meanings, and references. The piece was accompanied by a poem written by the artist himself:

Maybe sometime in the future I become a permanent user of virtual reality. I will be watching with one eye to reality, and the second into a dream. One day appears in my bed

⁸⁷ See Appendix A

an abyss, I will do a selfie nearby and sooner or later I will fall into sleep. Maybe it will help me a movie spell that I wrote down on the blanket before.⁸⁸

This piece inspired me to contact the artist and meet him in person. On this stage of the project I acted intuitively, choosing the artist on the basis of “like-dislike” and without any ideas regarding the topic or installation prepared in advance. Here, of course, since it is a student project, I relied on project advisor’s advice as well. Usually curators choose artists themselves or even in groups, when picking participants for the group exhibition, competition, award, etc.

For Vicena’s show, for example, that recently took place in the Galerie Mladych in Brno, Ondrej was chosen by a group of curators and gallery employees led by Zuzana Janeckova. His project HEADSET along with 7 others (by other artists) was chosen among 74 proposals.⁸⁹ This piece is also connected to the topic of internet, virtual reality and 3D. These motives somehow define all Vicena’s latest works. This concrete piece was an installation in a “bipolar interactive open space”⁹⁰ where data travelled through cables and passed an illusional membrane.⁹¹ The idea that thanks to this connection you can get anywhere and learn whatever you want, gives the artist, and also the visitors, an almost spiritual experience.⁹²

The topic of virtual reality in art is very “hot” right now. Art galleries and museums develop 3D tours for their websites and sometimes even special smartphone applications that include, like in Smithsonian American Art Museum, “detailed 360° 3D panoramic views of each

⁸⁸ Ondrej Vicena, personal website. <<http://ondrejvicena.com/>>, 01 May 2017.

⁸⁹ Janeckova, Zuzana. Personal interview. 24 April 2017.

⁹⁰ Janeckova, Zuzana. Headset. Curatorial text. <<http://galerie-tic.cz/2017/04/headseat/>>, 27 April 2017.

⁹¹ See Appendix B

⁹² Janeckova, Zuzana. Headset. Curatorial text. <<http://galerie-tic.cz/2017/04/headseat/>>, 27 April 2017.

gallery, enhanced by video interviews with many of the artists and the curator.”⁹³ New Museum opened an exhibition *First Look: Artists’ VR* that exists only in virtual reality and can be attended any time from IOS or Android device.⁹⁴ It presents six newly commissioned digital artworks and explores possibilities for experimental animation.⁹⁵

Artists of the new generation actively work with virtual reality tools, which let people escape from the real world and redefine their entire identity. In 2015 Daniel Steegman transported the visitors of his show “Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name)” the Brazilian rainforests “...whose leaves rustled and grass waved as you acted like a fool in the white cube.”⁹⁶ The artist first scanned the real Brazilian Mata Atlántica rainforest, one of the fastest disappearing environments of the world⁹⁷ and then allowed the visitors to “...move through this environment, experiencing how one's invisible body interacts with the scanned forest, rendering a physical experience of dissolution into the world.”⁹⁸ One more interesting project connected to virtual reality is called “Virtual Reality is for artists”. The project demonstrates “what happens when seven artists paint in three dimensions”.⁹⁹ TIME invited seven people of creative professions (painters, designers, illustrators, sculptors) to try out Google Tilt Brush which allows drawing in 3D.

⁹³ Wonder 360°. Smithsonian American Art Museum Renwick Gallery. <<http://americanart.si.edu/multimedia/wonder360/>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁴ Farago, Jason. Virtual Reality Has Arrived in the Art World. Now What? The New York Times, 3 February 2017. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/03/arts/design/virtual-reality-has-arrived-in-the-art-world-now-what.html>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁵ First Look: Artists’ VR. New Museum. <<http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/artists-vr>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁶ Farago, Jason. Virtual Reality Has Arrived in the Art World. Now What? The New York Times, 3 February 2017. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/03/arts/design/virtual-reality-has-arrived-in-the-art-world-now-what.html>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁷ Steegman, Daniel. Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name). Artist’s website. <<http://www.danielsteegmann.info/works/41/index.html>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁸ Steegman, Daniel. Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name). Artist’s website. <<http://www.danielsteegmann.info/works/41/index.html>>, 6 May 2017.

⁹⁹ Virtual Reality is For Artists. TIME. <<http://time.com/vr-is-for-artists/>>, 6 May 2017.

But what is interesting about Vicena's works, and what caught my eye, is the way he sees virtual reality, internet and technology in general. For him all processes that happen there are almost sacred and are seen as some spiritual experiences. The idea of spirituality is rather often appears in Vicena's works. A lot of his installations include religious motives and references. For example, his first show REW/FFWD that took place in SPZ gallery and was curated by a young curator Christina Gigliotti, touched upon such topics as resurrection, decay, worshipping, and religious symbolism.¹⁰⁰ This piece juxtaposed a found artefact – a Walkman, created by humanity long time ago but still functioning, with a rose, which is a living object and therefore is a subject to decay.¹⁰¹

The idea that obsolete technology can carry a religious meaning and can “live” like people do, spread to other Vicena's projects as well. In his work HEADCLEANER the artists presents an installation in the centre of which is a cassette that was used for erasing data from a head of a playback device, a part that allowed to record data.¹⁰² The artist gives the process of cleaning a head a religious status. Vicena draws parallels between a data-clogged head of the taperecorder and our data-clogged society.¹⁰³ Another show where religious motives were combined with the images of old electronic devices is the one that was displayed at AM 180 Gallery. The show was called New Made Religion¹⁰⁴ and was devoted to the idea of the fear of the unknown. According to the curatorial text prepared by the AM 180 collective, people have always been scared of the unknown.¹⁰⁵ That's why they try to construct the reality to affirm their presence. Similar to the way prehistoric people confirmed their presence by leaving their hand

¹⁰⁰ Gigliotti, Christina. REW/FFWD. Curatorial text. <<http://ondrejvicena.com/>>, 27 April 2017.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix C

¹⁰² See Appendix D

¹⁰³ Hruskova, Tereza. Headcleaner. Curatorial text. <<http://ondrejvicena.com/>>, 27 April 2017.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix E

¹⁰⁵ AM 180 collective. AM 180 Gallery. Curatorial text. <<http://ondrejvicena.com/>>, 6 May 2017.

marks on stones, modern people work with electronic devices. Being able to operate and control them gives people a feeling of controlling earthly forces by some kind of ritual.¹⁰⁶

These Vicens's ideas of technology surrounded by the religious aura and paralleled with humans and human bodies were something new for me and something that I wanted to learn more about. The range of the artist's favourite topics and their connections with each other allowed me to come up with many different ideas and directions in which our collaborative project might go. I thought about art made of old electronic junk and the following ideas of recycling and green art; about art and technology, technological unemployment, solutianism, and automation; some of the past Vicena's shows made me think about reality and dreams, memory and sublime. Up to that point I learned that curators work a lot with their intuition. Curators should know how to foresee the outcomes of their decisions. They need to be sure that the work that they do with the artist will either withstand the test of time, or at least will be a meaningful step in the artist's career and help him or her to further develop their personal style and professionalism. Curators are the link between an artist and everything else – public, institutions, market and other parts of the artistic world. They put the work of the artist into the context, in this manner finding his or her place in the world of art and also helping the audience to really appreciate it. They serve as an agent communicating with galleries, pr agencies, publishing houses, press, etc., to make sure the artist has enough time to concentrate on the creation of artworks.

So, after I contacted Ondrej we met, talked, and decided on the general direction we wanted to take with the project. In order to do this, we had to take into account the type of the gallery we were supposed to use. Usually a project proposal has to be written long time in

¹⁰⁶ AM 180 collective. AM 180 Gallery. Curatorial text. < <http://ondrejvicena.com/>, 6 May 2017.

advance (very often it is one year, but sometimes even more) and it has to fit the general concept of a gallery. In our case the gallery space was chosen based on its availability in terms of short time frame and finances given for a student project. Therefore it seemed reasonable to organize a pop-up event, instead of renting a space for a long period of time. The art space Berlinskej Model specializes on one-night shows. They provide one exhibition room with a large window and two entrances from both sides - one is from the street and another one is from the gallery space, which serves as a bar where people can spend some time during the events socializing. I like this concept because it creates a casual atmosphere and also gives people a chance to stay longer and discuss what they've just seen in the exhibition space.

The visual identity of the gallery is created with the help of the website¹⁰⁷ that uses a separate webpage for each artist with a unique animation on the background, and event posters that the gallerist Richard Bakes designs himself. Therefore, the deadline for all pr materials is no less than a couple of weeks in advance, and they create a new facebook event approximately ten days before the opening.¹⁰⁸ It was decided to distribute the general annotation of the event within the university community a month before, and the official press-release – ten days prior. It was also decided to send the pr materials to Artmap¹⁰⁹ - the website, which is available in Czech and English, that publishes a calendar of art events in Prague and the neighboring cities; and Artalk¹¹⁰ - a Czech online source of art-related reviews, interviews, comments, and blogs.

Because Ondrej does not only do installations, but also makes his own music and performs, it was decided that the project will not consist only of some kind of installation. It will be accompanied by sound and there would be some action happening during the evening.

¹⁰⁷ Gallery website. <<http://berlinskejmodel.cz/>>, 7 May 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Official facebook page. <<https://www.facebook.com/berlinskejmodel/>>, 7 May 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Artmap official website. <<http://www.artmap.cz/en>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁰ Artalk official website. <<http://artalk.cz/>>, 7 May 2017.

Music¹¹¹ and performance¹¹² are inseparable parts of Vicena's creative work. From time to time he performs in different venues¹¹³ and on different events¹¹⁴. In his interview taken during the show at AVOID Floating Gallery, Vicena says that he derives inspiration from the Czech and international bands of the 80's.¹¹⁵ He is inspired by techno music, and in his own works makes a fusion of techno and some other styles.¹¹⁶ For his songs the artist uses English, which allows him to be understood and perform internationally. It can also be very symbolic, since English is the language of the internet – the concept that appears very often in Vicena's works.¹¹⁷

When deciding what approach to take while working with the artist, I used the understanding of the term *curator* as I personally saw it. While conducting the research about the meaning of the term, which is described in the theoretical part, I examined different options. Taking into account all the discussed opinions, I decided that the closest definition of a curator for me is the one where he or she is viewed as a *helper* of the artist. An artist's helper in this case is someone who is more like a friend; not supervisor, but advisor; someone who is on the same wave with an artist. Since I was not limited by any kind of theme or topic, I decided to give the artist a full freedom and, if needed, help with a piece of advice or an idea. Ondrej already has a significant experience with solo shows. He worked with different kinds of spaces and with

¹¹¹ Vicena – Black Segway EP. Official channel, Youtube.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fd8OXyG11AI&list=PLuD8-Bxc7RxdPPz0VtXHIW-ZXY8sgdx0m>>, 7 May 2015.

¹¹² AVU-AVU, To má ale šmrnc!. SM kabaret. Ceska Televize, 18 October 2014.

<<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10558215126-sm-kabaret/214542157500003-avu-avu/obsah/358178-ondrej-vicena>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹³ Vicena live. Narodni Galerie, Veletrzni Palac, Youtube, 26 June 2015.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58tI4TzbUOU&t=1200s>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁴ Vicena @Creepy Teepee 2015. Insideyheart, Youtube, 25 July 2015.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfsD1Z3DhAY>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁵ Vicena v podpalubi. AVOID floating gallery, Youtube, 31 October 2016.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8HPhtDbmVw>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁶ Vicena v podpalubi. AVOID floating gallery, Youtube, 31 October 2016.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8HPhtDbmVw>>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁷ Vicena v podpalubi. AVOID floating gallery, Youtube, 31 October 2016.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8HPhtDbmVw>>, 7 May 2017.

different curators – fresh graduates and established professionals. Therefore, I considered this strategy the best one. I decided that there should be no curatorial “I” in the project. My main goal was, in my opinion, to do my best to understand what the artists wanted to express, put it into context, connect the elements of the exhibition if necessary. Also, in our case, I partially undertook the role of an organizer, taking care of the budget, PR, communicating with the gallerist, and so on.

But it was interesting for me to think about how artists feel in the contemporary situation, when “More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.”¹¹⁸ I find interesting the idea of Ed Atkins who while talking about the curator-artist relationship said:

Curating, it seems to me, might best be understood as a kind of relationship – a friendship – that is both committed and somehow capricious enough to be, in any product of the relation, altruistic. There’s a very real possibility that artists and curators are the same and the other to one another.¹¹⁹

Zuzana Janeckova, the curator who worked with Ondrej on his project HEADSET, says that because of being originally an artist herself, she understands the problems and hardships that might appear if a curator is too strict or pushy.¹²⁰ Her relationships with all artists are casual, but she notes that it might be because she works for Galerie Mladych, where all chosen artists are pretty young, and as a young curator she can be with them on the same wave.¹²¹ Therefore she is

¹¹⁸ Buren, Daniel. Where are the artists? Curatorial text for Documenta V. <http://projects.e-flux.com/next_doc/d_buren_printable.html>, 7 May 2017.

¹¹⁹ Fox, Den. Being Curated. Frieze.com, 13 April 2013. <<https://frieze.com/article/being-curated>>, 7 May 2017.

¹²⁰ Janeckova, Zuzana. Personal interview. 24 April 2017.

¹²¹ Janeckova, Zuzana. Personal interview. 24 April 2017.

“...quite open the artists make the installation like they feel, only if it is not a technical problem”.¹²²

While agreeing with the functions that a curator has to perform while working with an artist, Tereza Hruskova disagrees with the term itself. When she worked with Ondrej on the project HEADCLEANER, she was “helping, advising, correcting and “producing”¹²³, but at the same time wouldn’t call herself a curator. She believes that “...curator is someone who ideologically prepares the frame for the exhibition, name artist and is paid for this work. I don’t believe in curator in solo exhibition - that is either a text writer, an advisor, producer, helping friend or project collaborator.”¹²⁴

At the same time it might seem that if artists have a complete freedom and know better how to present their own works, curators are totally useless. But, as Nick Mauss says: “Nobody likes the curator as functionary or octopus, pushing artists’ profiles through the various templates of the art system. But the emergence of this figure cannot have taken place without the consent of artists, their dealers, apparent critics, collectors, etc.”¹²⁵ The important thing is to what extent can and should artists allow curators “seize power”. While some artists prefer to be independent, others are striving for someone to guide them. And, probably, the terminology doesn’t play a big role here. It doesn’t matter if we use a term curator, exhibition maker, supervisor, manager, etc., because each singular case is unique. Many things have to be taken into account – age, type of the exhibition space, type of artistic works, budget, strategy. Therefore, finding balance, in my opinion, would be a great solution. The best answer is - *negotiation*.

¹²² Janeckova, Zuzana. Personal interview. 24 April 2017.

¹²³ Hruskova, Tereza. Personal interview. 27 April 2017.

¹²⁴ Hruskova, Tereza. Personal interview. 27 April 2017.

¹²⁵ Fox, Den. Being Curated. Frieze.com, 13 April 2013. <<https://frieze.com/article/being-curated>>, 7 May 2017.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this work I looked at several points in history when the understanding of the words *curator* and *curation* underwent significant changes. Initially meaning someone who oversees and manages something, the term curator went through the stage when it was directly associated with the field of arts. Today this term is used everywhere, creating a feeling that it is losing its value. Here and there we can hear questions about who curators are, what they do, and what their role is. Even people from the art crowd are confused and can't decide if it is true that everyone can become a curator today; and maybe it is better to reject the term in order to stop all this confusion. However many of them at the same time admit that it is not possible to abandon this term and profession in general simply because curators play a role of a link between artists and the world.

The reality is that even though Harold Szeemann revolutionized the understanding of the curation process, it can be considered the first step towards the current confusion as well. Because since that time many curators separated from art institutions and became independent, their responsibilities grew enormously. Very often today independent curators play roles of cultural mediators, art managers, PR and marketing specialists, directors, and so on. Such range of responsibilities made the term spread to other fields, and today everyone who works in project coordination and management or any other type of activity where one has to supervise and oversee something, can call himself or herself a curator.

Maybe it is true and the art field should come up with another term to avoid the confusion, but personally for me terminology here does not play a significant role. For me the most important thing is to define what curators should do and how they should act when

working with artists. What bothers me is the tendency of curators to outshine artists. Because of so many things that curators do while working on some project, the final outcome can seem like their own work and artists become almost invisible. The answer for it is collaboration, negotiation, balance and compromise. Moreover, in times when art is extremely conceptual and connected with many other fields like natural sciences or modern technologies, it is very important to make it understandable for the audience. Therefore the role of curator is also to contextualize artist's work and present it to the audience in a clear way. Nevertheless, what I as a curator find the most important is the realization that each artist and each work of art is and must remain unique - and a work of art is, after all, what lies at the heart of any curator's work - and the main goal of curators must therefore be to find the right way to make the artists and especially their art shine.

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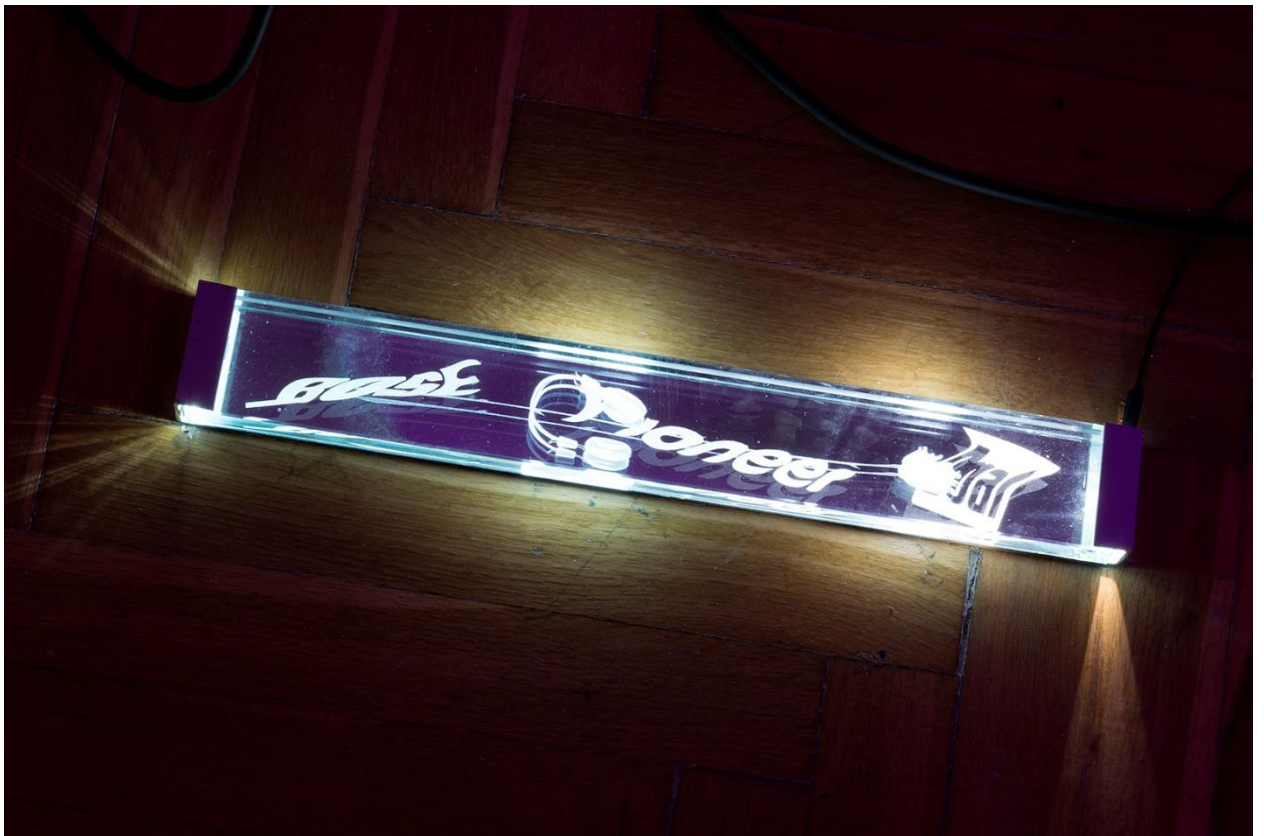
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APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B



APPENDIX C



APPENDIX D



APPENDIX E

