

# ResearchOnline@JCU

This file is part of the following reference:

**Levine, Brett Murray (2017) *Between intentionality and reception: the politics of curatorial intervention*. PhD thesis, James Cook University.**

Access to this file is available from:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4225/28/5a80cbbb6476e>

*The author has certified to JCU that they have made a reasonable effort to gain permission and acknowledge the owner of any third party copyright material included in this document. If you believe that this is not the case, please contact [ResearchOnline@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ResearchOnline@jcu.edu.au)*

BETWEEN INTENTIONALITY AND RECEPTION:  
THE POLITICS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION

A thesis submitted by

Brett Murray Levine

Bachelor of Arts  
University of South Alabama

Graduate Diploma in International Law  
Australian National University

Master of Arts Administration  
University of New South Wales

in September 2017

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts, Society and Education

James Cook University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would like to thank Professor Ryan Daniel. From the moment I enquired about working on this project at James Cook University—externally, at that—Professor Daniel has made the task feasible, manageable, and enjoyable. I have been fortunate to have had his guidance, support, and patience. I am also grateful to Dr. Katja Fleischmann for her tireless support. Thank you both for helping me write to my strengths, and for mitigating my conceptual, theoretical, logical, and structural weaknesses.

I began the process of my professional arts education over two decades ago, and I imagined giving it up many times along the way. I may not have reached this point were it not for friends including Professor Brad Buckley, who has been a constant support and an even better friend; to Ruark Lewis, who first suggested curating was a profession I should pursue; to Ross T. Smith, whose ongoing mantra of “just get it done” was invaluable; and to Manny Palma and Victoria Norfolk, whose abilities to keep me grounded have always been welcome.

Finally, words are unable to express my gratitude to my wife Mindi Shapiro, both for her love and support and for her unique combination of wry wit and sly humour—particularly when this process was at its most onerous. Thank you.

## **STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS**

Support for the completion of this thesis was provided by the Commonwealth of Australia and James Cook University through the grant of an Australian Postgraduate Award. Support was also provided through minimum resource funding from the College of Arts, Society, and Education at James Cook University.

Professional editor Evie Franzidis provided copyediting and proofreading services according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national ‘Guidelines for editing research theses’.

Professional editor Sarah Chalmers also provided copyediting and proofreading services according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national ‘Guidelines for editing research theses’.

## ABSTRACT

“Between Intentionality and Reception: The Politics of Curatorial Intervention” critically interrogates the theoretical construct and professional practice identified as curatorial intervention. It does so to determine if, and if so how, the actions of curators mediate the artist–audience exchange. The research proposes that, contrary to the extant structures of classical reception theory, curatorial intervention is an essential third component within the artist–audience exchange. The research argues that historical and contemporary constructions of reception theory have not to date adequately accounted for the role of the curator, and, consequentially, those same models cannot account for curatorial agency. As a result, the research asserts that reception theory cannot effectively position curators as agency participants within the artist–audience exchange. On the contrary, curatorial intervention emerges at the site of the artist-audience exchange as an agency relationship that is a manifestation of the structures and methods of curatorial power.

To verify the efficacy of this model, it was necessary to determine the extent to which artists, curators, and administrators working in the museum sector acknowledged the roles curators played in mediating artists’ works within audiences’ experiential encounters. To date, the existing models that have sought to position curatorial roles have instead examined declarations of curatorial authorship, which radically shifts intentionality and agency from artists to curators. To the detriment of both, little research has examined how curators mediate the conception, construction, presentation, and experience of works of art in instances in which a declaration of curatorial authorship is not made.

Based on the existing literature, this research is one of the first sustained examinations of the theory of curatorial intervention. It relies upon interviews conducted with artists, curators, and administrators working in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States — ten from each sector — who provide in-depth responses to detailed questions concerning curatorial practice and their individual experiences and perceptions of curatorial intervention. These responses, coupled with analyses of the current literature on curatorial practice and reception theory, provide parameters that frame the research, that enable conclusions regarding the existence or absence of curatorial intervention, and which facilitate the construction of a theory for its operations.

The participant responses were evaluated against existing theory and practice, including a wide range of recent writings that have appeared in the curatorial field. What is noted, generally, is that although most of these writings address curatorial authorship at length, few (if any) address the notion or construction of curatorial intervention.

The analysis models the research findings using a tri-nodal matrix — identified as the TAP Matrix — which examines curatorial practice, and curatorial intervention, against the variables of transparency, agency, and power. The conclusions, based on the totality of the findings contained therein, propose curatorial intervention as the third element of the artist–audience exchange. They offer an alternative model for the visual experience. Instead of intentionality and reception, the research proposes a structure of intentionality, intervention, and reception, thereby situating curatorial intervention as the foundational framework for interrogating the artist–audience exchange.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF PLATES	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 THE THEORETICAL PROBLEMS: THE EXISTENCE AND OPERATION OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION	2
1.2 SCOPE	
1.2.1 The Research Question	7
1.2.2 Limitations of the Project	11
1.3 THE PERSONAL IS PROFESSIONAL	12
1.4 A READER'S GUIDE TO THE DISSERTATION	
1.4.1 Definitions	13
1.4.2 Structure	14
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICISING THE AESTHETICS OF RECEPTION	
2.1 THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM: A CONCISE INTRODUCTION	16
2.2 POSITIONING FOUR FOUNDATIONAL THEORETICAL FRAMES: ARTIST, AUDIENCE, INTENTION, RECEPTION,	19
2.3 THEORETICAL DEFINITIONS	21
2.3.1 Reception, Intervention, and Nihilism	24
2.4 THE JAUSSIAN MODEL OF RECEPTION THEORY IN CONTEXT	29
2.5 CONSTRUCTING AND CONTEXTUALISING A THEORETICAL DEFINITION: CURATORIAL INTERVENTION	33
2.5.1 Constructing a Definition	33
2.5.2 Contextualising a Definition	41
2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY	54

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1	SITUATING THE RESEARCH PARADIGM	
3.1.1	The Interpretivist–Constructivist Frame	56
3.1.2	Artist, Curator, Administrator, and the Institutional Frame	58
3.2	STRUCTURING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.2.1(a)	Attempting Quantitative Cohort Research	61
3.2.1(b)	Recognising the Limitations of Cross-Cultural Research	62
3.2.2	The Qualitative Research Framework Design	63
3.3	THE TAP MATRIX: TRANSPARENCY, AGENCY, AND POWER	65
3.4	RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INVITATION AND SELECTION	
3.4.1	Invitations	68
3.4.2	Purposive Sampling and Research Bias	70
3.5	DEFINING THE COHORTS	
3.5.1	The Artist Cohort	70
3.5.2	The Curator Cohort	72
3.5.3	The Administrator Cohort	73
3.6	DEFINING AND STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	
3.6.1	Confidentiality–Anonymity of Participants	76
3.6.2	The Artist Interview Protocol	77
3.6.3	The Curatorial Interview Protocol	78
3.6.4	The Administrators’ Interview Protocol	79
3.6.5	Issues Influencing Question Construction and Evaluation	80
3.7	INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION, CODING, AND ANALYSIS	
3.7.1	Coding and Interpretation Approach and Strategies	82
3.7.2	Coding Structure	85
3.8	CHAPTER SUMMARY	86

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM THE ARTIST COHORT INTERVIEWS

4.1	CHAPTER SYNOPSIS	89
4.2	COHORT FINDINGS OVERVIEW	89
4.3	STATEMENT ON COHORT FINDINGS	91
4.4	COHORT-SPECIFIC ANALYTICAL VARIABLES	93
4.5	NARRATIVE FINDINGS	
4.5.1	Artists’ Experiences of Curatorial Intervention	94
4.5.2	The Impacts of Curatorial Intervention	103
4.6	CHAPTER SUMMARY	112

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM THE CURATORIAL COHORT INTERVIEWS

5.1	CHAPTER SYNOPSIS	115
5.2	SELF-REPORTED EXAMPLES OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION	116
5.3	SITUATING THE CURATORIAL COHORT FINDINGS WITHIN THE TAP MATRIX	120
5.3.1	Operations or Instances of Curatorial Intervention Between Transparency and Agency	122
5.3.2	The Pure Economics and Political Economy of	128



	Curatorial Intervention	
5.3.3	Curatorial Intervention Operating as Institutional Agency	133
5.3.4	Curatorial Intervention as Collaboration	137
5.3.5	Measuring the Implications of Curatorial Intervention	140
5.4	CHAPTER SUMMARY	142

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR COHORT INTERVIEWS

6.1	CHAPTER SYNOPSIS	146
6.2	SELF-REPORTED FINDINGS: ADMINISTRATORS AND CURATORIAL INTERVENTION	147
6.3	COHORT FINDINGS	
	6.3.1 Administrators and the Politics of Curatorial Intervention	150
	6.3.2 Administrators, Collaboration, and Curatorial Intervention	155
6.4	CHAPTER SUMMARY	167

## CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

7.1	ANALYTICAL SUMMARY	171
7.2	SITUATING THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE	174
7.3	ANALYSING CURATORIAL INTERVENTION ACROSS THE COHORTS: EXAMPLES FROM THE TAP MATRIX FRAMEWORK	
	7.3.1 Transparency	183
	7.3.2 Agency	187
	7.3.3 Power	191
7.4	CONSTRUCTING A TRI-NODAL MODEL OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION	
	7.4.1 Curatorial Intervention as a Mediating Structure	200
7.5	TOWARD AN INTERVENTION THEORY	203
7.6	CHAPTER SUMMARY	207

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1	INTRODUCTION	209
8.2	RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS	210
8.3	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD	212
8.4	LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	
	8.4.1 Further Research	215

	REFERENCE LIST	218
--	----------------	-----

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Final Quantitative Research Survey	229
APPENDIX 2: Ethics Information Sheet	244
APPENDIX 3: Ethics Informed Consent Release Form	245
APPENDIX 4: Questions for Artists FINAL	246
APPENDIX 5: Questions for Curators FINAL	247
APPENDIX 6: Questions for Administrators FINAL	248

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Artists' Reports and Assessments of Curatorial Intervention	90
Table 5.1: Curators' Reports and Assessments of Curatorial Intervention	117
Table 6.1: Administrators' Self-Reported Experiences Regarding Curatorial Intervention	148

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Coding Structure for Variable Analysis in NVivo	83
Figure 7.1: Summary Graph of Curatorial Intervention by Agent Across All Cohorts	173
Figure 7.2: Binary Artist–Audience Dialectical Relationship	195
Figure 7.3: Mediated Artist–Curator–Audience Relationship	198
Figure 7.4: Hierarchical Power Structure of Curatorial Intervention	199
Figure 7.5: Intervention Theory as Tri-Nodal Transparent Structure	204

## LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: Peter Tyndall, A Person Looks at a Work of Art–Someone Looks at Something: LOGOS–HA HA, (1983) oil on canvas, Collection the Art Gallery of New South Wales	16
Plate 2: Billy Apple, PAID: The Artist Has To Live Like Everybody Else, (2001), Screenprint and Invoice on Paper, courtesy the artist and Starkwhite, Auckland	100



The presentation of works is autonomous, as formally decided by the artist. The role of beholder or visitor therefore resides in differentiating the levels of reality in the work, something with which the artist is not concerned.

Harald Szeemann, preface to the catalogue for *documenta 5* (1972)

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), the writer, critic, and curator Slavoj Žižek observes a “curious accident”—the absence of Louis Althusser in Jürgen Habermas’s *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985). Žižek writes, “Of course, we are using the term ‘curious accident’ in a Sherlock Holmesian sense: Althusser’s name is not even mentioned in Habermas’s book, and that is the curious accident” (Žižek 1989, 1). Žižek describes Habermas’s omission of Althusser as a form of “theoretical amnesia” (Žižek 1989, 1).

I begin here because there is perhaps another curious accident—another theoretical amnesia, another missing person whose obscurity could require the assistance of Sherlock Holmes: the curator. Of course, curators are not invisible. Quite the opposite; curators are everywhere. It is if they are hiding in plain sight. They assert their presence through statements of authorship, constructing exhibitions, publishing volumes of collected writings, and receiving top-line billing at international events. Curators are missing, instead, because the audience cannot see them. How, where, and why curators operate within the artist–audience exchange is marked by invisibility and opacity rather than visibility and transparency. Where one should see structure, one sees fluidity; where one should see the curator, one sees...one is not sure what one sees.

### 1.1 THE THEORETICAL PROBLEMS: THE EXISTENCE AND OPERATION OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION

None of this would be problematic were it not for a more complex set of circumstances that constructs the experience of a work of art and structures the artist–audience exchange. What follows begins with a single observation that grounds the project’s theoretical framework: when reception theory (the body of knowledge that

within the visual arts is more commonly referred to as the artist–audience exchange, and for which the problematics of misunderstanding are termed the questions of intentionality versus reception) is appropriated from literature and overlaid wholesale onto the visual arts, it cannot (and does not) adequately account for the role of the curator. This becomes apparent particularly and specifically when addressing the conundrum of the artist–audience exchange, and audiences’ experiences of works of art. The problem arises, in part, because reception theory deals predominantly with experiencing literary works, so overlaying it onto the visual arts is structurally flawed from the outset.

What complicates the issue are the questions concerning how curatorial agency and power manifest within what is classically regarded as a dualistic, possibly dialectic, exchange. The existence, or absence, of curatorial agency grounds and positions how the established structure of the artist–curator exchange, more commonly known as institutional discourse, is altered. The questions derive in part, from an interrogation of whether curatorial agency is implied, meaning that there is an expectation of its existence, or if it is positioned as a supplement to the traditional artist–audience exchange.

Assertions that curatorial practice, and by extension the notion of curatorial intervention, might mediate the structural and metaphorical relationships between both author and viewer and artist and audience are not new. For example, curator, writer, and educator Robert Storr noted the following when speaking at a symposium titled *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility* in 2000:

I do think curators have a medium, and if they retain some humility and master their craft, their relation to that medium and to art itself is like that of a good editor to a good novelist. Although it’s not the same thing as being a novelist, being an editor involves a deep identification with a living aesthetic. That aesthetic vantage point is as important or, in many respects, more important than what we usually call “ideas” about art. As

a curator, you can work through problems by working with materials and working with artists who are working with materials, instead of always approaching things as if a curator was primarily an explainer or educator. (Storr 2000, 9)

As an editor to a novelist: if it were only that simple. The logical flaw, so the theoretical paradigm posits, is that reception theory—modally dual and structurally binary—cannot (and does not) address the fact that in mediating the visual arts exchange, the curator (and their agency) shifts from being collaborative to being imperative. Quite simply, it shifts from the curator saying, “you could. . .” to “could you. . .?” And in doing so, not only does the potential for curatorial intervention appear but the binary nature of reception theory itself also appears to rupture. Obviously, if true, this would be problematic. Thus, classical reception theory in the visual arts presents the curator as absent. The problem Storr raises is discussed by Rossen Ventzislavov (2014, 2016) and Sue Spaid (2016) over several issues of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, in one of the few extended theoretical and philosophical exchanges on the potential operations of curatorial intervention. Briefly, Ventzislavov argues for a construction of curatorial practice, and thereby curatorial intervention, in which curators are viewed as creative practitioners, just like artists (Ventzislavov 2014). Spaid disagrees, arguing that the cognitive value added by curators is not equal to the aesthetic value created by artists (Spaid 2016). Ventzislavov replies, suggesting that he sees few areas of disagreement between their positions, and that in fact curators provide artists with a benefit through recognising the interpretative extensions that curatorial intervention may provide (Ventzislavov 2016).

Perhaps the reason for the apparent absence of the curator is that they are in fact a spectre. Or, if not curators themselves, their agency is spectral, at least to the extent that by its action there is intervention. One might think here of the famous dictum of

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that opens the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1848), which would be applicable were it slightly revised:

*There is a spectre haunting curating, and that spectre is intervention.*

As is implied above, the act of curatorial intervention—should it exist—would be the foundational differentiation and the primary rupture that distinguishes curators from artists. This would potentially even situate intervention as a necessary function of curatorial practice.

What is at stake then becomes even more complex, as the curator is placed at the intersection of three unintended variables: communication, historiography, and counter-narrative. Communication here is defined as the initial frameworks within which a work of art operates. At its simplest, this is the discrete object's multiplicity of meanings and its interrelationships. Historiography is the body of knowledge that situates all art and, by extension, all art writing. And counter-narrative here is defined as the exercise of curatorial agency and, thereby, the practice of curatorial intervention. For, when a work of art enters into the artist–audience relationship in which it becomes detached from the stability of its initial communication value—its initial meaning—it also becomes subject to the counter-narrative of curatorial intervention. The logical extension of this process is the construction of the exhibition narrative. And within that narrative, there is always already the perception that curators do not always necessarily place the artist—or their work—in the position they deserve. As curator Katerina Gregos observes,

The problem is that there is still today a lack of care and thought in the proper installation of film and video. Too often it is pushed into a black box or projected on a white wall, without considering the notion of spatiality and architecture, which is an integral part of viewing video



installations in particular. One needs to start with the wishes and intentions of the artist. (Gregos 2010, 7)

More directly, one can consider Harald Szeemann, musing along with his co-conspirators—I use that term, rather than co-curators, decidedly—Bazon Brock and Jean-Christophe Amman, about their ideas for *documenta 5*. In a piece published in 1971 entitled “Second Concept for *documenta 5*,” the three asserted:

Since the stimulating of the reception of the event and experience-character can only be one—if important—precondition for proper reception of the theme, there is an absolute need for a smaller second exhibition in addition to the central exhibition, where the accent lies unequivocally on categories other than those of event and experience. In this second exhibition the public should above all be offered the cognitive, psychomotor, and socio-emotional conditions for adequate reception of the theme. This exhibition within the exhibition is *The Visitors' School of documenta 5*.

[. . .]

This work has to be done above all by means of reproductions, plans, and models, and verbal expressions, which do not enjoy excessive popularity among regular art exhibition visitors.

But whereas conditions of production and reception of artistic creation are not just without complications and problems, there [*sic*] cognition and adoption cannot happen in an easy way or without effort. (Derieux and Aubart 2007, 102)

This missive could just as well be titled *The Curatorial Interventionist's Manifesto*. For what it does, and what it asserts, is directly motivated by a curatorially driven desire to shift audiences' experiences towards those which may feel unfamiliar or disconcerting. In their words, their goal is to construct experiences for audiences using means “which do not enjoy excessive popularity among regular art exhibition visitors” (Derieux and Aubart 2007, 102). One must wonder what could have compelled Szeemann, Brock, and Ammann to position themselves at the periphery of classical aesthetic experience while they were centring themselves at the centre of curatorial intervention in the

artist–audience exchange? This is the theoretical genesis of what follows.

## **1.2 SCOPE**

### **1.2.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question that structures this interrogation is grounded within the theoretical framework of reception theory. Reception theory is primarily concerned with how an audience experiences something, typically a literary text. One of the foundational texts on reception theory is Hans Robert Jauss's *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. In this work, Jauss begins by radically deconstructing the history of the aesthetic experience as the foundational framework for understanding the possibilities of experience itself (Jauss 1982a). He considers experiential aesthetic structures described by Theodor Adorno, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others, determining that each has elements of validity but none truly provides a holistic view of aesthetic experience. Given the parameters within which reception theory was outlined in Section 1.1, for the purposes of this research the terms 'reception theory' and 'artist-audience exchange' may be read as generally synonymous, and by extension to mean the antagonisms between intentionality and reception. The issue reception theory seeks to interrogate involves negotiating the disparity between what an artist intends (which, hypothetically, the audience will never know) and what an audience experiences or receives (which, hypothetically, the artist will never know). That the issue is hypothetical could be even more problematic, to the extent that should either state their intentions or experiences, one would have to take them on good faith, accepting that a philosophically founded bad-faith assertion was not, unless otherwise apparent, part of the exchange. Uniquely, cultural institutions such as the museum and the gallery

occupy precisely the spaces where these exchanges occur, becoming functions of a disjunction.

Museum theory then tries to reconcile this problem. Museums and galleries spend a great deal of time considering the audience experience precisely because these institutions believe they have the capability to bring the two participants to the exchange together. Yet, what problematises the matter further is that within the contemporary museum there are additional considerations that position the artist–audience experience, including access, equity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, preference and identity, locational politics, power and economics. In countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, specific cultural institutions exist to interrogate these issues. Researchers have interrogated these complexities through their writings. For example, Conal McCarthy’s *Exhibiting Maori* (2007), a longitudinal analysis of the representations of Maori culture within the New Zealand museum context, specifically references colonialism and the problematics of power. McCarthy speaks of instances in which contemporary Maori painting and sculpture have been severed from wider creative contexts or discourses to “set [Maori] ‘art apart’ from the broader field of visual culture” (McCarthy 2007, 122).

A possible explanatory theory for this phenomenon—that of severing specific contemporary art from its historical antecedents, or from other contexts—is that the museum is the third participant within the artist–audience exchange. As such, the museum or gallery is by necessity an agency participant in the intentionality–reception exchange, and, by its existence within that exchange, mediates any visual cultural experience so radically that the fundamental structure of reception theory should be restated. Yet, to date, there is no new model that accommodates the museum or gallery within this exchange, nor one that wholly supplants reception theory, positioning the

curator—and hence the museum—as an equal third party within the exchange. So, rather than create a new structure, or restructure the existing model, the approach has typically been to set aside the third participant to the exchange—the curator.

Instead, the emergence of the curator as author has become so predominant in contemporary curatorial practice and critical thought that scholarly journals in the field dedicate entire issues to the practice. Examples include the entirety of issue 10 of *Manifesta Journal*, entitled, “The Curator as Producer” (2010), and the “Overture” to the inaugural issue of *The Exhibitionist* (Hoffmann 2010). In the latter, editor Jens Hoffmann sets the tone for the publication’s future endeavours, writing, “*The Exhibitionist* does not intend to occupy itself with all forms of curatorial practice. Rather, it is specifically concerned with the act of exhibition making” (Hoffmann 2010, 3). The act of exhibition-making becomes an alternative frame in which one can situate the curator as author at the centre of the issues being addressed.

Problematically, however, theorists and academics state that the model for interrogating the artist–audience exchange that is grounded in reception theory is no longer applicable, yet the majority fail to outline its replacement. This led theorist Paul O’Neill to state: “[i]n the context of more recent curating, the triangular network of artist, curator, and audience is replaced by a spectrum of potential interrelationships” (O’Neill 2009, 44), which leaves practitioners and professionals knowing only what is not, rather than what is. O’Neill fails to define or specify what any of those potential relationships might be. Is he implying that those interrelationships will extend beyond the existing triad, or simply be a construction of new relationships bounded therein? In this absence, the prior, triangulated relationship—with its curatorial interventions and its associated displacements of the dyadic artist–audience fiction—seems relevant indeed.

Consequently, a key driver for this research is the perception that there are several knowledge gaps in our understandings of how contemporary curatorship functions within the conventional artist–audience experience. The first knowledge gap derives from the fact that there is presently no concrete evidence that substantiates the hypothesis that curators do in fact mediate the artist–audience exchange. As a professional museum curator and gallery director with over twenty years’ experience in the field, I have personal and anecdotal evidence that this mediation occurs, but there is little, if any, sustained research on the subject to establish that this is the case. The second knowledge gap stems from the fact that there appears to be little, if anything, to establish that the implications of curatorial intervention would be significant to artists or audiences were there evidence of mediation or intervention occurring. It would be impossible to ascertain whether single instances of intervention by an individual curator (or institution) within the artist–audience exchange was significant. Third, there is presently no framework or language within which to place the curator should it be determined that they have agency within the artist–audience exchange. Based on this preliminary analysis, three knowledge gaps seem apparent: the existence of the intervention; its significance, should it be extant; and, a new model, paradigm, language, or structure that could be derived from its analysis.

Hence, the core research question will focus directly on the paradigm of intentionality versus reception that is dominant within contemporary curatorial discourse. Using reception theory, it will explore the hypothesis that the exchange that occurs between an artist and their audience is unmediated by a curator and their institution, and thereby exists outside a structure that *prima facie* positions the experience. The research question further interrogates the possibility that the existing construction of reception theory—that of intentionality and reception—is

fundamentally flawed for the purposes of the visual arts. The proposition is that there is a third variable that drives, deflects, disturbs, and at times destroys the relationship between artists and audience. This variable is here termed “intervention,” and is explained as a function of the curator, altering both the agency of the artist *and* the alleged objectivity of the audience. The actions of the curator are then actively overlooked despite their significance in influencing and even altering the aesthetic exchange. The overarching research question driving this PhD thesis is as follows: To what extent does the curator or curatorial expert impact on the transactions between artist, object (and/or experience), and audience?

### **1.2.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT**

It is not feasible to analyse every possible permutation of curatorial practice against the multifaceted realm of the multiple practitioner. When the artist–curator—that hybrid practitioner who oscillates between roles—emerges, for example, they blur the boundaries between previously defined roles. This creates what I term “indistinctions,” situations and circumstances that cloud the different capacities each party to the visual arts exchange previously filled. For the purposes of this research, and for the purposes of the research paradigm proposed (drawn as it is, initially, from the binary construction of pure reception theory), this type of multiple practitioner is not specifically addressed.

Therefore, the curatorial practitioner examined in this thesis operates within one of two distinct frames: either as a member of an institutional or organisational structure (i.e., a museum curator, or even a kunsthalle-style curator) or as an independent practitioner, constructing project-based work outside the usual confines of an institution, but producing outcomes capable of operating within such definable frames.

A second limitation is geography. It is not possible to examine the intricacies and differentiations that may arise as the result of specific cultural, social, or political structures, opportunities, or impediments that may occur worldwide. As a result, this project deals only with selected artists, curators, and administrators working within Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Administrators have been included in the research because they have the capacity to both direct the operations of, and mitigate the implications from, the hypothetical construct tentatively identified as curatorial intervention. Instances of artistic experience, curatorial agency, and administrative practice are described in the narratives contained herein.

Third, as the research of a contemporary practitioner and theorist, this project focuses on contemporary practice. The emergence of new methodologies for deconstructing historical collections, or for new ways of interpreting and presenting existing collections, provides valuable data and useful examples with which one may consider contemporary practice. But in this instance, the examples that follow are drawn from the experiences of contemporary artists making contemporary works within contemporary institutions. The issues, theoretical hypotheses, and conclusions that arise may be applicable to a diverse range of institutional or organisational frames, but their primary emphasis, and impetus, is the *now*.

### **1.3 THE PERSONAL IS PROFESSIONAL**

This research is also grounded in my professional experiences working as an arts administrator, museum curator, and gallery director in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. My research question arose as the result of two decades of participation in, and observations of, the exchanges between artists, curators, and administrators.

The disparate power relationships generated by the artist–curator exchange have been evident from the outset of my professional career. Repeatedly, specific instances have indicated both the imbalances evident within the artist–curator–administrator dynamic and the varying degrees of transparency or opacity that attach thereto. From my initial experiences as a Master’s degree student completing an internship with a publicly funded organisation in a major metropolitan area in Australia to my experiences as an institutionally based director, I have encountered instances that could, subject to the findings borne out by this research, fall within the ambit of curatorial intervention. It is because of these observations and experiences, both individually and anecdotally, that I have been driven to pursue this issue further and formally.

## **1.4 A READER’S GUIDE TO THE DISSERTATION**

### **1.4.1 DEFINITIONS**

To avoid ambiguity, and to allow for alternative constructions where appropriate, it is necessary to outline a series of key definitions in relation to this project. For the purposes of what follows, the following definitions apply:

- **Artist:** a person who generates a creative product, whether object-based or experiential, that is predominantly structured to be experienced within a visual arts context;
- **Curator:** an individual, whether institutionally affiliated or independent, who has a professional role that is situated between an artist and their audience in relation to the experience of an artwork;
- **Administrator:** a person, generally affiliated with an institution, who is situated at the apex of the organisational structure, or who has the



capacity to take actions or make decisions which directly affect the actions or agency of the curator.

For the purposes of these definitions, the issue being clarified is who is being identified as a curator rather than what role that individual plays within the artist–curator–audience transaction. This more detailed analysis follows, as per the structure outlined below.

#### **1.4.2 STRUCTURE**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters that, taken in their entirety, propose a new theoretical model that is tentatively and initially termed “intervention theory.” Its construction results from a detailed analysis of the existing materials surrounding the application of reception theory to the visual arts, and to the additional, original critical and theoretical research undertaken in the production of this project. It is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 has provided the rationale and a brief outline of the theory that underpins this research;
- Chapter 2 is a detailed analysis of the interconnections, interstices, and implications of reception theory as applied to experiences of the visual arts, with specific emphasis on the writings of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and a range of contemporary writers and theorists considering the frameworks of contemporary curatorial practice;
- Chapter 3 outlines the project’s methodology, structuring its referents, relevance, and validity;
- Chapter 4 presents the findings from the artist cohort;
- Chapter 5 presents the findings from the curator cohort;

- Chapter 6 presents the findings from the administrator cohort;
- Chapter 7 is an analysis of the cohort findings in context, considered against the theory and existing literature, including a proposal for a tri-nodal, theoretical model for curatorial intervention—termed intervention theory—derived from, and building upon, the fundamental concepts of reception theory;
- Chapter 8 concludes with an analysis of the implications of this model, an assessment of the limitations of the research, and suggestions for possibilities regarding its significance for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICISING THE AESTHETICS OF RECEPTION

### 2.1 THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM: A CONCISE INTRODUCTION

Imagine a museum that has a curator but is not open to the public. It has no viewers, makes no attempt to interpret its collection, and plans to make no further acquisitions nor to deaccession any works. If such an institution existed, as Kafkaesque as it sounds, one might argue that within it one would find the curator in their purest form: a keeper of objects. Against this imaginary, consider the Australian artist Peter Tyndall's series *A Person Looks at a Work of Art/Someone Looks at Something*.



**Plate 1:** Peter Tyndall, detail *A Person Looks at a Work of Art/someone looks at something*. . *LOGOS-HA HA* (1983), oil on canvas, wood, powder-coated metal rod and cardboard, collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

In this particular work, Tyndall encapsulates, perhaps ironically, the entirety of the problematics of curatorship. What he does with and through the—seemingly tautological—title is to partially detach the viewer from the act of viewing and, by doing so, from the activity of creating specific, situated meaning. In Tyndall’s words, “someone looks at something,” although one does not necessarily know if his two phrases are meant to be synonymous or to describe differing experiences. If the fundamental research question driving this thesis interrogates curatorial intervention in the context of reception theory, then it is also important to state from the outset what this research will not consider: it does not explore the notion of speech-acts in depth. They were considered initially, particularly the implications of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s writings in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), and Saul Kripke’s thinking in *Naming and Necessity* (1980), but in each instance the specific applications of the speech-act to the processes of intervention itself seemed structural, meaning that this approach made the issue one of linguistics rather than agency location. The artist, writer, and theorist Mieke Bal might disagree, as she does in her essay “Curatorial Acts” (Bal 2012). For these reasons, while certain linguistic concepts are applied within the sections that follow, speech-act theory does not wholly ground this research.

Instead, it is the unmoored curator emerging in absence within reception theory that situates what follows. The research is also grounded in questions concerning how this individual, should they have agency within the artist–audience exchange, mediate the experiences that the absent audience member encounters. In many ways, this emphasis on the notion of the general spectator, rather than the specific individual, and questions concerning how their experience is mediated, forms the foundation of intervention theory. This idea, without the terminology, is brought to the fore by

theorists including Claire Bishop, who notes the significance of this interconnectedness in a discussion with Terry Smith:

. . .we are always dealing with an ideal spectator—the one silently presupposed by the institution—rather than actual spectators in all their statistical diversity. But this way of thinking allows us to see the extent to which a museum’s decisions about how to hang its collections are always profoundly ideological. When I presented these ideas recently to colleagues in other departments at my university, I was surprised to find that some of them never think about a museum’s construction of meaning through the arrangement and juxtaposition of objects. It was news to them that art historians do a two-fold reading whenever we go to a museum: we look at the works, and we look at how the museum has arranged these works. We deploy two registers of looking simultaneously. (Bishop 2015, 142)

What develops is a revisionist question; this interrogation asks if reception theory could accommodate a dynamic that was historically constructed as:

ARTIST–AUDIENCE = INTENTION–RECEPTION = MAKER–VIEWER

if it were instead to be modelled as:

ARTIST–CURATOR–AUDIENCE = INTENTION–INTERVENTION–RECEPTION

=

MAKER–CURATOR–VIEWER

The issue with these two equations, however they are formally constructed, is that the first—the existing model of reception theory—does not seem capable of arriving at the latter outcome in any way. To put it simply, it does not add up. As a result, if it is to be interrogated further, one must determine how curators can derive their powers of agency and mediation within the constructs of classical reception theory, and what the significance and implications of those practices might be.

## 2.2 POSITIONING FOUR FOUNDATIONAL THEORETICAL FRAMES: ARTIST, AUDIENCE, INTENTION, AND RECEPTION

To situate the issue of curatorial intervention within its wider theoretical context, one must first determine its limits within the existing theoretical literature. Close readings of key texts in this area parse the existing artist–audience relationship into two distinct binaries: one binary positions the artist against the audience, as it were—or if not against the audience, at least not theoretically positioned in an equal relationship to them; the other binary situates the artist–audience relationship within the classical discourse of reception theory. It interrogates, in seemingly straightforward terms, how one both constructs and experiences works of art. To return, momentarily, to the model that Peter Tyndall intimates, one could argue that this notion of “someone” looking at “some-thing,” while acknowledging the alteration of these two terms, should be read synonymously with the idea of “*das Ding*,” or “the thing,” in the writings of Martin Heidegger. This substitution would suffice were it not for Heidegger’s rejection of a simplistic construction of the thingly character of an artwork as being its sole defining characteristic. He states,

Presumably it becomes superfluous to inquire into this [thingly] feature, since the art work is something else over and above the thingly element. This something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature. The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuei*. . . (Heidegger 1975, 19)

For Heidegger, it is not the thingliness or the objectness of a work that positions its being, but instead its capacity to be something else. What then is one to make of an audience’s experiential relationship with an object? If it is not one simply of encountering the thingliness of a work, what else might it be? For Heidegger, it is the potentiality of allegory. Furthermore, this capacity to generate multiple meanings, to

create elisions and slippages, is worth more than the surface readability of the work itself. The recognition that a person looks at a work of art, that in the process a person looks at an object (generally), and that in that moment the object exists in the potentiality of allegory do not deflect from the fundamental issues of intentionality and reception. The core questions of intervention that lie at the centre of this research are not destabilised by allegory's possibilities. Allegory itself does not destabilise the fundamental assertion that—regardless of what is received or how it is received—the processes and experiences of reception still exist in the space between artist and audience, and, therefore in a space that allows mediation. That mediation, when known by its other name of intervention, is the hidden operation of the third node of the triad under consideration. In this space between intentionality and reception is an operation that in its core agency may be disconnected from both artist and audience, and connected to either the curator or the institution.

This shift from artist–audience engagement to curator-mediated engagement exists based on an analysis of classical reception theory, which fundamentally has an inability to properly situate the curator. For example, how can curators have agency within a system from which they are—apparently—theoretically absent? Appropriating reception theory as a structural framework that proposes a relationship between creative artist, work, and audience, what seems evident is that the structure itself has a lack that exists at the site of exchange—precisely where one has the fundamental experience of the work of art.

Academics, critics, and theorists have typically not focused on the ways in which curators mediate audiences' experiences of works of art through exercising agency and power, but instead on the history of exhibitions themselves. This leads to key textual considerations of major historical projects, among them Bruce Altshuler's

*Biennales and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History 1962-2002* (2013), as well as Charles Green and Anthony Gardner's *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta* (2016).

What both do incredibly well is analytically deconstruct larger exhibition frameworks. And, while Green and Gardner's book begins with Szeemann's *documenta 5*, and they do consider his emergence as a "star-curator," there is greater emphasis on the impact of his actions in respect to intentionality rather than toward reception. To place this in context, they remark,

[e]ven if the form of many of the works in *documenta 5* was open-ended, artists like Haacke et al.—the signatories of the artist's petition against curatorial hegemony—wished to return the artist's intentions to the center of intention, and definitely align and stabilize a viewer's experiences in relation to these intentions. (Green and Gardner 2016, 34)

This is not to imply that reception is not a concern—it clearly is, since it is situated within the larger argument outlined above. But the transgressive character of curatorial intervention is grounded in curatorial, rather than artistic, intentionality. Green and Gardner describe this as curatorial hegemony, which is far more like curatorial authorship than curatorial intervention, and which is situated at the centre of their discussions of Szeemann.

### **2.3 THEORETICAL DEFINITIONS**

For the purposes of this research, the definition of reception theory is constructed from and synthesised through a range of theoretical writings, including those of Hans Robert Jauss, who was one of the first theorists to systematically structure its fundamental frameworks. Jauss also positions reception theory conceptually, in relation to its historical and theoretical antecedents. He hypothesises a triadic relationship of author, text, and audience, in part by alluding to the ways in



which an author and reader (and hence, by extension, an artist and viewer) engage with texts or works. He writes,

[t]he historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them. (Jauss 1982b, 19)

Author and audience form two parties within a contested exchange. The work, seemingly shared, becomes a battleground. The reason the exchange is contested, and the reason there is a battle for its interpretation, is because the process is active. Michel Foucault, interrogating the function of the author, asserts in *What Is an Author?* that “this ‘author-function’. . . is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author” (Foucault 1997, 127). What Foucault suggests is that it is not merely enough to attribute the signifier “author” to an individual. Instead, that person must create or construct the conditions whereby the signifier—that being the work—reflexively attributes the signified author through experience. It would be simpler if this were attributed through rationalism, but this is not the case. In the current era, in which “curatorial constructionism” and “authorship” are becoming synonymous, Foucault’s “author-function” defines a model of reception theory that would displace any possible construction of curatorial intervention that included the curator as well as the two prior participants in the exchange.

Fundamentally, Jauss’s formal structure of reception theory does not allow any frame that admits a third party. He constructs the aesthetic exchange as one within which experience occurs outside the potential frame of intervention, meaning that both

intention and reception appear to operate as both closed and holistic. In his preface to *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Jauss states,

[a]esthetic experience occurs before there is cognition and interpretation of the significance of a work, and certainly before all reconstruction of an author's intent. The primary experience of a work of art takes place in the orientation to its aesthetic effect, in an understanding that is pleasure, and a pleasure that is cognitive. Interpretation that bypasses this primary aesthetic experience is the arrogance of a philologist who subscribes to the error that the text was not created for readers but for him, to be interpreted by such as he. (Jauss 1982a, xxix)

In the Jaussian model, the curator therefore is always already absent, existing only in the hypothetical of potentiality as if the Heideggerian *allo agoreuei* of the editor were sufficient to insert the curator into the exchange. The historical theoretical models for curatorial practice have failed to adequately allow for the agency of intervention precisely because there is this fundamental lack. That lack is (even the possibility of) the existence of the curator within the exchange. And, since reception is often only mentioned as one element of the new museum experience, an alternative theoretical model that could acknowledge or include the curator's "intervention" has not yet been interrogated. As Jennifer Pappararo, curator of the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, observes, "[r]eception is part and parcel of any exhibition" (Papararo, quoted in Marincola, Nesbett, and McEneaney 2013, 43). This blanket statement only references the experience of reception, reinforcing the existing theoretical duality of artist and audience, but again also only addresses the if, not the how. She continues, "[m]y aligning of artist and audience is not to put them on equal footing. The artist will almost always play a greater role in that equation" (Papararo, quoted in Marincola et al. 2013, 43). Yet, the issue is not the unbalanced power relationships between maker and consumer. Instead, it is those between maker, mediator, and consumer.

Historically, Jauss may also have given primacy to the artist, but even this is arguable. In his long essay, “Sketch of a Theory and History of Aesthetic Experience,” which forms the first chapter of *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Jauss refers to the post-war painters Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman as having contributed to countering the “sumptuousness of the world of consumption by making it ascetic once again, and thus displeasing to the bourgeois” (Jauss 1982a, 27–28).

While one can imagine Newman’s almost gnostic mysticism being a literal reference for Jauss’s assertion of painting’s anti-bourgeois qualities, it seems difficult to imagine how Pollock, whose works were literally and figuratively dripping with manifestations of Cold War American capitalism, would have figured into an ascetic equation—either socially or aesthetically. Thus, a Nietzschean, radical revaluation was necessary: Enter the interventionists.

### **2.3.1 RECEPTION, INTERVENTION, AND NIHILISM**

Before proceeding to the interventionists, however, one must beware the nihilists. For this is where one would arrive if the processes of reception were—according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who addresses this issue in *Truth and Method* (2014)—entirely individuated, independent, and arbitrary. Therein, he questions the role reception plays within the visual arts, remarking that

[i]f it is true that a work of art is not, in itself, completable, what is the criterion for appropriate reception and understanding? A creative process randomly and arbitrarily broken off cannot imply anything obligatory. From this it follows that it must be left to the recipient to make something of the work. One way of understanding a work, then, is no less legitimate than another. There is no criterion of appropriate reaction. Not only does the artist himself possess none—the aesthetics of genius would agree here; every encounter with the work has the rank and rights of a new production. This seems to me an untenable hermeneutic nihilism. (Gadamer 2014, 82)

Jauss does not specifically address Gadamer's concerns; he does not consider the value implications of the act of reception itself. Yet, Gadamer's observations regarding the processes of reception do not seem inherently untenable or nihilistic. Nor do the two operational frameworks for reception theory proposed by Wolfgang Iser. His writings theorised these two frameworks, while asserting that Jauss had considered only one. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Iser differentiates between the notions of reception and response, arguing that reception should be regarded as both the apex and nexus of aesthetic experience, while his theory would focus on aesthetic response. In the introduction to *The Act of Reading*, he writes,

a theory of aesthetic response is confronted with the problem of how a hitherto unformulated situation can be processed and, indeed, understood. A theory of reception, on the other hand, always deals with existing readers, whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature. A theory of response has its roots in the text; a theory of reception arises from a history of readers' judgments. (Iser 1978, x)

Iser then postulates that only a synthesis of these two separate paradigms—one of experience and one of response—can truly construct a totality of reception theory. This is a subtle distinction that positions content versus response. It juxtaposes an “is” against a “may be,” because it posits an actual against an interpretive.

Furthermore, although reception theory forms one of the foundational frames for interpreting the visual arts, a thorough review of the existing literature on reception theory that focuses on contemporary art elicits very few results. In 2014, my search of JSTOR, the online academic journals and books repository, revealed that combining the terms “reception theory” and “contemporary art” as search parameters returned only forty-three results, and not all focused on reception theory within contemporary

galleries or museums. The circumstances were no better in 2017, when a search for this same combination returned only an additional three findings.

When the existing literature is examined for specific references to “curatorial intervention,” the results are similar: in both 2014 and 2017, a Google Scholar search I inputted for the phrase “curatorial intervention” returned 250 results, although only a small percentage dealt specifically with the construction interrogated here, while a 2017 JSTOR basic search for the combination term returned a mere twenty-four results. Of these results, seventeen returns were drawn from a diverse range of journals, while the remaining seven came from books. When these specific returns were interrogated, a more significant pattern emerged. To date, the meaning and interpretation of the phrase “curatorial intervention” has varied widely. Mieke Bal references it in a 2010 essay in the *Papers of the MLA*, when referring to the artist–curator collaboration between Marthe Wéry and Pierre-Olivier Rollin, who exhibited at an Art Nouveau building in Tournai. Bal remarks:

it is in relation to [the] danger [of the emergence of the theatrical model in relation to the exhibition design and installation] that the most brilliant aspect of the collaboration between the artworks and the curatorial intervention comes to the fore. (Bal 2010, 16)

Bal is identifying and situating the nature of the artist–curator collaboration into both the exhibition and experiential contexts within the framework of contemporary practice. This differs from the more common references to “curatorial intervention,” which concerns how curators position historic objects within contemporary frames. In this latter context, the term “curatorial intervention” means the practices or processes by which curators historicise objects for dialogue, working within the parameters of the cultural, social, moral, and ethical responsibilities and obligations that attach thereto, but often outside the realm of living artists or contemporary producers. Consider, as an

example, Timothy Luke, writing about the American Museum of Natural History's well-known dioramas in the *Australasian Journal of American Studies*: "The American Museum's dioramas, then, rationalize the randomness of fatality, redirecting the outcome of extinction and evolution into knowledge's control and power's intervention" (Luke 1997, 20). Luke relates specific instances of curatorial intervention, but he does not describe them using the specific term; instead, he references the notion of curatorial power (which is a theme that will be discussed in Chapter 3).

While the centrality of curatorial intervention as a discursive practice may appear in these limited references, situating its theoretical and practical implications remains problematic. Valerie Casey, in her essay "Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum," focuses on the implications of these types of interventions when she highlights the lengths to which the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) went to reconstruct Jackson Pollock's studio but omitted anything that represented the conditions in which he worked:

As the contemporary museum has sought to appeal to its experience-oriented audience, the centrality of curatorial intervention has increased, and the processes of display used to convey information are often privileged over the particularity of objects. This strategy of stage-setting is expressed quite literally in the physical installation of artworks—even the ordinarily purist MoMA employed extra-ordinary display techniques in the Jackson Pollock 1998–99 exhibition [. . .] Scrubbed free of the paint spills and splotched surfaces in the actual studio, the sterilized diorama at MoMA was reinterpreted and reinscribed as a different kind of sacred space, one which conformed to the ordered voice of its curatorial intermediaries. (Casey 2005, 84)

Lastly, in relation to the issue of curatorial intervention's emergence and its positioning relative to reception theory, one may consider Lars Bang Larsen, speaking with Suely Rolnik about Lygia Clark's work. Rolnik specifically addresses the choices Larsen has made using the terminology "curatorial intervention," which Larsen does

not dispute. Instead, he engages with the significance of his choices regarding the organisation and installation of the exhibition in question. He outlines his specific curatorial principles regarding the exhibition; defines how the physical exhibition was installed; and explains why additional multimedia materials were included, and how they influenced audience reception of Clark's works. In doing so, Larsen differentiates himself as one of the few curators who acknowledges his practice as interventionist and seeks to define how is curatorial agency influences both the artist's works and the audience's reception thereof (Rolnik 2007, 28–29).

If one returns to reception theory, then the foundational issues for the problems that have arisen concerning how and where to situate the curatorial role, and curatorial intervention within its context, become clearer. In 2005, the applicability of reception theory to the visual arts was still being outlined in footnotes. For example, in her first footnote to "From Praxiteles to De Chirico: Art and Reception," Rosemary Barrow traces the lineage of reception theory from Jauss and Wolfgang Iser to Stanley Fish in 1980; to A. Richard Turner in 1993; to Mieke Bal in 1999; to Richard Brilliant in 2000; and to Bernd Andrae in 2001 (Barrow 2005, 344). Barrow does, however, recognise that because reception theory is drawn initially from literary theory, there are extensions and inflections to be drawn from works that attempt to focus solely on the visual aesthetic. For the purposes of this research, reception theory will be grounded first in the frameworks constructed by Jauss, while acknowledging that later readings and experiences of works of art extend beyond the visual. The fundamental principles of intertextuality and intersubjectivity dictate that examining creative works positioned solely within the pictorial frame means only partially interrogating the contemporary art experience, for these readings may not adequately account for works that include elements of sound, performance, interactivity, or time.

## 2.4 THE JAUSSIAN MODEL OF RECEPTION THEORY IN CONTEXT

Within Jauss's construction of reception theory, grounded as it is in notions of textuality and reception, both the hierarchical relationship of the author-function mentioned above and the problematics of the two-dimensional are not made explicit. This implies that the artist is arguably not more significant than the audience, nor is painting more significant than any other form of creative expression. I draw these distinctions for two reasons. First, because the term author-function and the signifier painting are frequently used in late-modernist and early-postmodernist writings about reception; and second, because, in many ways, painting was until recently (perhaps even arguably to the present day) deemed to have primacy over other forms of creative visual expression. Instead, deriving his overarching frame from literature, Jauss outlines the two aspects of aesthetic experience that mark the limits of both the artist and the audience, defining these as poiesis and aesthesis: the production and reception of aesthetic experience (Jauss 1982a, 34). Yet, at neither of these points in the creative exchange—either at poiesis/production or at aesthesis/reception of the aesthetic experience—does he provide a theoretical site for the curator. Jauss's theoretical model, derived from a combination of *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982a) and *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982b), remains binary. If a curator's space existed in this originary model/paradigm, it would have to displace one of the two extant parties to the aesthetic exchange—and since in Jauss's aesthetic exchange one party makes, and the other receives, which one could that possibly be?

Iser is also theoretically differentiable from Jauss to the extent that Iser distinguishes very clearly between the capacity of a viewer to perceive an object and the capacity of a reader to comprehend a text. Iser does, however, make two hesitations—two intellectual pauses really—in the act of this cleavage of object and



word. First, Iser acknowledges that the capacity to perceive an object wholly is only conceivable; second, he argues that one always stands outside an object whereas one is inside a text (Iser 1978, 109). It is difficult to argue with either of these viewpoints. To reconcile this conundrum, one might turn to Wolfgang Kemp's essay "The Work of Art and Its Beholder" (1998), where he extrapolates the functions of reception theory within the visual arts. After acknowledging its primacy within literary theory and its more recent, and more emergent, applications within the field, he observes that

[L]iterary theory refers to the *blank* or the aesthetics of *indeterminacy*, both conceptualizations meaning that works of art are unfinished in themselves in order to be finished by the beholder (Ingarden 1965, Iser 1978, Kemp 1985). This state of unfinishedness or indeterminacy is constructed and intentional. But it does mean that as spectators we must complete the invisible reverse side of each represented figure, or that we mentally continue a path that is cut off by the frame. In this way, everyday perception is no different from aesthetic perception. The work of art lays a claim to coherence, though, and this impulse turns its "blanks" into important links or causes for constituting meaning. With regard to texts, but also in a process easily applicable to paintings, this means that the blanks "are the unseen joints of the text, and as they mark off schemata and textual perspectives from one another, they simultaneously trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part. Consequently, when the schemata and perspectives have been linked together, the blanks 'disappear.'" Blanks can be regarded as "an elementary matrix for the interaction between text and reader". (Kemp 1998, 188)

Academic and theorist Richard Schechner, Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, theorises further. Writing in *The Drama Review*, Schechner postulates that there may even be a construction of reception that exists outside the experience of reception itself. He writes that "[a] performance is a 'was' even as it occurs; its value is mostly as a 'was.' The 'owners of meaning' are those who construct the aftermath where was is" (Schechner 1987, 6). One could argue that an exhibition's reception exists in this "was"—in the space of the supplement, in the curatorial statements, the ephemera, the catalogues, the productions that prove an event occurred

outside the experience of the viewer. While Jauss's theory does not address this, either as an extension or as a doubling, Schechner's hypothesis of the "experience outside the experience" recalls what Walter Benjamin describes in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* as what can be termed the copy without the original: "[f]rom a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" (Benjamin 1968, 224). Schechner's theorising also suggests both Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal return and Jean Baudrillard's "hell of the same" (Baudrillard 1996, 113). Baudrillard speaks of how cloning flattens affect. He remarks, "the Other as gaze, the Other as mirror, the Other as opacity – all are gone. Henceforward it is the transparency of others that represents absolute danger." (Baudrillard 1996, 122.) The theories and ideas surrounding the space of experience construct the areas where curatorial intervention might, hypothetically, occur. They also specifically raise issues that Deleuze explores in his conceptualisation of the construction of dramatisation. As Jean-Paul Martinon observes in *The Curatorial*,

the exhibition, the gallery or museum, the talk, the theatre, the screening and so on, all of these things—provide a structural framework that pre-exists the encounter with the body but they do so as a kind of virtual or possible that is itself dramatised through the encounter with the body. In this way, the sensible stage proposes a path between the emergent intensity of Deleuze's dramatization and Badiou's articulation of theatre as the meeting of bodies and text. (Martinon 2013, Kindle Locations 3859–3863)

Finally, although only touched upon briefly, there is the issue of the role of intervention—which follows below—as the necessary outcome of a reception that is so non-discriminating that it is simply an action. This criticism is levelled against the reception theory outlined by Jauss and critiqued by followers of Theodor Adorno. Writing in "An Aesthetics of Negativity/An Aesthetics of Reception: Jauss's Dispute with Adorno", Pauline Johnson remarks that Ferenc Feher observes, perhaps rightfully,

that if each act of reception is equally constitutive of a work—meaning that the act of reception is enough to construct the value of the work—“then there will be no difference between good and bad, true and false judgments, only the arabesques of arbitrary taste judgments that never transcend the personal level of *sic volo, sic jubeo* [thus I will, thus I command]” (Johnson 1987, 52, translation mine). One might extend this indiscriminate approach further, allowing it to subsume all aspects of cultural critique. But this seems to be an almost reactionary subjectivity, a construction that is designed to remove the possibility of subjectivity itself. Against this, one might consider Okwui Enwezor’s 2002 statement regarding the curatorial paradigm for *documenta 11*. This essay becomes a high point in existing theoretical constructs or assertions of curatorial intervention to the extent that it recognises and proposes to situate economics, globalisation, multiculturalism, power, postcolonialism, the oscillating relationships between centre and margin, and the abject horror of global consumption of anything—images, ideas, resources—in a post-9/11 world as part of the overarching curatorial frame. Enwezor, understanding that an exhibition functions in part as aesthetic distance does in the theatre, asserts that a work of art

present[s] for scrutiny all its constitutive formal, conceptual, and analytical relations to the language of the exhibition's ideology. Under such a condition there is no life for the artwork outside the system of art, no autonomy outside the framework of an art exhibition. The artwork—which, in any case, is understood *a priori* to be extraterritorial to an exhibition's logic-functions as time spatialized, but only inside the space in which it is corseted, which does not refer to an external world. (Enwezor 2002, 42)

The notion of intervention does appear as a component of critical discourse but it has yet to be considered at length as the crucial additional element of either reception or curatorial practice. It is considered rarely, such as in Amanda de la Haye and Judith Clark’s *One Object, Multiple Interpretations* (2008), which examines how curatorial

interventions affect the interpretation and display of a type of historical garment across a range of specific venues. In place of intervention, theoretical writings focus on constructions and histories of curatorship—how curating arrived at its present structure, or how one might best assume the mantle of author/not-author today.

The oscillating relationships between curator, museum, and artist also come into view here. For what one must consider is whether the role of the curator is or should be always already one of mediation in contemporary practice. What is at stake is the doubling posed by Mary Anne Staniszewski:

A museum should not be devoted only to preserving, presenting and archiving the object, but I don't think it should be only text- based, performative and interventionist either—with no objects and no collection. A truly radical and vital museum would embrace the full spectrum of the tradition of artistic practice and the full spectrum of current possibilities. I am very much into a transforming and dynamic museum, but I still think you should acknowledge the power of a Frida Kahlo painting or Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup. (Staniszewski 2010, 3)

What Staniszewski suggests is that there must be space at and in which curatorial intervention can exist but does not occur. This is a crucial and critical component of this project. But before one can begin to understand what curatorial intervention may do, a preliminary definition of it is necessary.

## **2.5 CONSTRUCTING AND CONTEXTUALISING A THEORETICAL DEFINITION: CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

### **2.5.1 CONSTRUCTING A DEFINITION**

For this research, a definition of curatorial intervention is required, and to date none is universal. In fact, in most instances, curators, directors, and other administrators do not even use the term. “Mediation” is its most common synonym, describing the ways in which institutional professionals find themselves engaging with art. Consider

the following statement made by curator and director Johannes Cladders to Harald Szeemann:

I have always believed that it is the artist who creates a work, but a society that turns it into a work of art, an idea that is already in Duchamp and a lot of other places. In most cases, museums have failed to see the consequences of this notion. I have always considered myself to be a "co-producer" of art. Now, do not misunderstand me. I do not mean this in the sense of dictating to an artist: "Listen, now paint the upper left-hand corner red!" but rather in the sense of participating as a museum—as a mediating institution—in the process that transforms a work into a work of art. (quoted in Obrist 2013, 57)

Although Cladders uses the term “mediated,” other contemporary curators use terminology that is at times romanticised and, in many ways, deflects the significance of what is occurring: for example, Szeemann’s “adventure” (Thea 2001, 19); Hou Hanru’s “collaboration” (Thea 2001, 29); or Vasif Kortun’s literal (and figurative) intervention (Thea 2001, 64). Kortun’s is the only descriptor to acknowledge explicitly the power disparities extant in his curatorial practice. If one considers one of the Oxford English Dictionary’s usual definitions of *intervene*, then the very nature of curatorial intervention is by necessity and definition always already a process or action that alters the function of reception: “To come between in action; to interfere, interpose; also, to act as intermediary; to take a share in” (OED 1989). As noted in Section 1.2.1, O’Neill regards aesthetic exchange as triangular, but concludes that it produces potentiality, generating a “spectrum of potential relationships.” (O’Neill 2009, 44) This notion of the triangulated relationship is again expressed by curator Ingrid Schaffner, although hers is a triangle of artist, artwork, and audience (Schaffner, quoted in Marincola et al. 2013, 38). The problem with Schaffner’s structure is that the curator is yet again noticeably absent, an error at least mitigated by O’Neill—although in his structure the object is missing, though implied. In a close reading, O’Neill’s structure

obliterates the ground of engagement for reception theory, which, if one applies the Jaussian model, must include the created work.

Any potential theory of curatorial intervention would differ from the framework for “demystification” that O’Neill describes as having emerged from the mid-1960s writings of Seth Siegelau. Demystification gained prominence throughout the next two decades, only to become internalised in the 1990s, and then “remystified” in the present day (O’Neill 2012, 19). As O’Neill notes,

[f]or Siegelau, demystification was a necessary process in revealing and evaluating the more hidden curatorial components of an exhibition, making evident that the actions of curators had an impact on which artworks were exhibited and how they were produced, mediated, and distributed. In his words, to understand what the curator does is to understand, in part, what you are looking at in an exhibition. As Siegelau later stated about his generation, “we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, role of the collector, and the production of artwork; for example, how the size of the gallery affects the production of art, etc.” (O’Neill 2012, 19)

What happens here is that Siegelau’s demystification encompasses every aspect of curatorial practice, becoming an overarching approach that cannot differentiate between the structural implications of visibility and transparency and the individual and individuated implications of curatorial practice. Strangely, Siegelau appears to confuse a static fact with a mediated event: the scale of a space is not objectively variable, it is fixed. So why would one argue that it is a mystical or mystifying quality? On the contrary, as will be shown in Chapter 5, it is the implications of addition—meaning implied subjectivity—rather than stasis that presents the greatest number of challenges within the exhibition context. Furthermore, for several reasons, O’Neill asserts demystification’s role more stridently toward the group exhibition. In “Co-Productive Exhibition-Making and Three Principal Categories of

Organisation: The Background, the Middle-Ground and the Foreground,” O’Neill

states,

[s]ince the 1960s, the group exhibition has opened up a range of curatorial approaches to demystify the role of mediation, and as such, has also enabled divergent artistic practices to be exhibited together under a single rubric. The term ‘demystification’ became a recurring trope within art, and curatorial discourse for how the changing conditions of exhibition production were made manifest in the final exhibition-form. Curators, artists and critics were acknowledging the influential mediating component within an exhibition’s formation, production and dissemination. Demystification was a necessary process in revealing and evaluating the more hidden curatorial components of an exhibition, making evident that the actions of curators had an impact on which artworks were exhibited and how they were produced, mediated and distributed for the viewer. (O’Neill 2014)

Yet, what in the framework for constructing a group exhibition would result in a greater significance for, or occurrence of, curatorial mediation? This, too, further distinguishes the concepts of mystification and intervention, for within the hypothetical framework for curatorial intervention, agency operates at the level of the individual artist. It may be extrapolated to the group level, but it operates and functions at the structural level of the single practitioner.

These distinctions would be of little relevance were the very nature of the ‘created work’ not in doubt. But when that issue comes into question—in the phenomenological sense of a discrete object, with being-in-itself—this becomes more complex:

Last month US District Court Judge Michael Ponsor ruled MASS MoCA could open [Christoph Büchel’s] unfinished installation to the public. Instead museum director Joseph C. Thompson (no relation to Nato) decided to dismantle it. The yearlong battle had worn down his staff, and a Jenny Holzer exhibit was due to open in the space soon. Mass MoCA, Joe Thompson said, wanted to move on. (Edgers 2007)

So ended and began two chapters in one of the better-documented examples of institutional and curatorial intervention in contemporary arts practice. Chronicling the saga of the failed Christoph Büchel installation *Training Ground for Democracy*, curated by Nato Thompson at The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in the United States, the story highlights the oscillating relationships and responsibilities between artist, curator, and audience. Such well-documented examples are rare.

The story evolved because in 2007 the museum believed it had received a summary judgment against Büchel, and could proceed in good faith in whatever manner it wished regarding the *Training Ground* project that it regarded Büchel as having left unfinished. For the curator Thompson, this was likely an ethical and professional conundrum, mitigated in part by the actions of the museum's director, who decided in general not to proceed with the full exhibition despite having displayed the partially finished work to a small group of viewers. Three years later, a decision by a federal appeals court in Boston held that "[t]hat convergence between artist and artwork does not await the final brushstroke or the placement of the last element in a complex installation" (Kennedy 2010), meaning that the authorship and agency for *Training Ground for Democracy* should have remained with Büchel always, and in perpetuity. The museum responded, stating "...we are confident that we exercised appropriate curatorial care and diligence in our handling of the work in progress" (Kennedy 2010).

This scenario highlights both the theoretical and practical issues in question concerning curatorial intervention. Imagine that an artist partially completes a work, then deems it unfinished and chooses to participate no further in its realisation. The institution decides to proceed, interpreting the artist's vision. Whatever results is always already mediated, based on a complex set of negotiations between the artist, the



curator, and/or institution. Yet, for the viewer—in this instance, those who ultimately created the conditions whereby Büchel’s artist’s rights were violated—the transparency of the shift from artist as creator to curator or institution as creator could reasonably be expected to have been known. One might wonder, philosophically, if Büchel’s rights under the *Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990* would also have been violated if work had continued on *Training Ground for Democracy*, but it had been destroyed prior to being exhibited? It is possible to infer from the circumstances of the Büchel–museum schism that the shift from artist-as-creator to institution-as-creator was well known to anyone who encountered the piece, but this is not necessarily the case. So where does the responsibility for transparency regarding curatorial or institutional intervention lie?

To find a site where reception can be located or situated, one must tease out threads within other source materials. What is at issue then is which nexus will be the *point de capiton*, or quilting point, the moment that Jacques Lacan defines as one in which the constant slippages between signifier and signified are temporarily halted (Lacan 1993, 258). For the purposes of this research, that quilting point becomes the curator, and the structure being interrogated is that of artist–curator–audience, rather than the more traditional one of artist–object–audience as expressed by Schaffner. If this alternative structure is applied, then theorists such as Brian O’Doherty, writing in his essay “Content as Context,” can observe that the artist–audience relationship is one that tests the social order, and is absorbed by social institutions (O’Doherty 1976, 74). By extension, one may argue that the site of this absorption is the museum and the sponge is the curator. As Robert Storr remarks,

[c]uratorial practice’s area of competence is, first and foremost, art. When curators lose sight of this fact, and of art itself—no matter how critical any particular body of work may be for one or another aesthetic tradition or even for the idea of art—they almost invariably end up doing art and the public a serious disservice. (Storr, quoted in Marincola et al. 2013, 50)

Where intervention does emerge consistently is within recent analyses of non-traditional or non-institutional frameworks and in models or experiences that focus on independent curatorial practice. Nancy deFreitas, in her essay “Breathing Space for Experience,” observes that interventions commonly occur within structures with a strong educational component, remarking that “Other interventions, crossing over the art/curatorship/education boundaries, have also contributed to the exploration and critique of curating as a contemporary practice in different cultural contexts” (deFreitas 2011, 306). DeFreitas cites the SUMMIT Initiative, the Resistance Art Festival, and The Go-Between as community- or educationally based projects that intervened precisely at the points of community engagement rather than within the confines of the traditional art institution (deFreitas 2011, 306).

The idea of curatorial intervention also briefly appears in discussions surrounding conservation and sustainability in artworks. In his 1983 essay, “Impermanence: A Curator’s Viewpoint,” Peter Cannon-Brookes asks, “[c]an, in fact, the efforts of the curator be construed as deliberately distorting the artistic intentions of the creator of the work of art? And thus do they constitute an unjustifiable intervention?” (Cannon-Brookes 1983, 34) Cannon-Brookes pinpoints two key questions that do not appear to have been pursued further. One, are there instances in which curatorial actions truly do distort artistic intentions? If so, how should institutions and audiences address this possibility? Two, how would these curatorial interventions be considered? Would there be situations in which they would seem justifiable intervention? Not only does Cannon-Brookes question the action but he also raises the ethical issues inherent in the action. Because Cannon-Brookes is dealing specifically with issues of impermanence, he is able to make distinctions: where artists

knowingly make such qualities key components of their works, they should be left alone; where the instability is the result of a lack of knowledge, curators and institutions should be able to intervene (Cannon-Brookes 1983, 34–35).

And what of the instances in which the curator invites the artist to engage with both the audience and the institution, and then decides that the engagement should be mediated prior to being actualised? One need only recall artist Andrea Fraser speaking of her experience in the *1993 Whitney Biennial*; after a series of failed proposals for her project, the institution approved one that involved interviewing museum staff for the creation of an audio ‘guide’. Fraser explains,

I wanted to represent the same issues that the curators were trying to address in the Biennial, but in terms of their own interactions and the conflicts within the museum, and to communicate those issues directly by constructing the tape so that they would be enacted in it. And although I knew that that wasn't the way they would want me to engage those issues, I still felt that I did it in good faith. (Blazwick et. al. 1997, 135)

In the end, the museum became nervous about Fraser’s tape and its contents. The project became compromised because of museum demands regarding final approval, including script oversight and audiotape editing (Blazwick et. al. 1997, 135–36).

This is the same problem Claire Bishop explores in various manifestations in her essay “What Is a Curator?” (2007). She mentions the famous letter signed by ten artists protesting curator Harald Szeemann’s curatorial vision for *documenta 5*. She supplements this with Robert Smithson’s essay “Cultural Confinement,” published in the same catalogue, and Robert Morris’s missive withdrawing from the show. In every instance, the impetus for their actions was Szeemann’s perceived overreach. Bishop concludes her initial remarks on *documenta 5* with:

What Morris wants from a curator is someone who respects the artist’s wishes, communicates clearly, and is available for negotiation. In other

words, a figure who is subservient to the artist and who does not contest his/her authorship.

There is no clearer way to grasp these expectations than to imagine these complaints applied to an installation, or to an artist-curated exhibition. Although both curating and installation are concerned with selection, they function within different discursive spheres: curatorial selection is always an ethical negotiation of pre-existing authorships, rather than the artistic creation of meaning *sui generis*. (Bishop 2007, Section 3)

### 2.5.2 CONTEXTUALISING A DEFINITION OF INTERVENTION

If the question of intervention is to be examined thoroughly, the function of the curator must be considered. This function is an extension of curatorial intervention. It contextualises the action of intervention, shifting the analysis of it from a simple question of yes or no to one of how, when, and why. If the issue were simply one of determining action, capable of being answered in the negative or the affirmative to questions such as “Have you done this?” then the issue of curatorial intervention would be of little or no value. However, the issue is not simply one of the existence of this action. Instead, this research centres on the premise that the curator, and by extension the museum/institution, is an active participant in the previously diametric or dialectic relationship between artist and audience.

It explores the potential of four modes that situate curatorial practice. The first is the perception that curatorial constructs stand outside the frameworks of artistic intentionality. This is expressed clearly in statements by those such as Ivan Gaskell, who, when speaking at the symposium *How Museums Do Things with Artworks*, observed that

when discussing display we may disagree among ourselves about the specific use of any given artwork on a particular occasion, even to the extent of believing that its maker’s intentions are being betrayed, but the multivalency of artworks, and the temporary nature of any such display, should allay any fears that irreparable harm is being done... (Gaskell 2003, 59)

The second is expressed by Joseph Del Pesco, Program Director of the Kadist Foundation in San Francisco, who describes the standard exhibition as an “exhausted format” and asserts that audiences are either oblivious to, or over-influenced by, the narratives that curators devise (Del Pesco, quoted in Marincola et al. 2013, 48). Del Pesco proposes, but does not define, something he describes perhaps archly as “not-exhibitions,” although what they might be, how curators might be positioned within them, and how they might engage with audiences is unclear. Furthermore, despite their nomenclature, the “not-exhibition” would not necessarily displace the curator from a position of authorship. It would simply position them within this space in the context of something with another name.

A third possibility is outlined by Namita Gupta Wiggers, formerly Director of the Museum of Contemporary Craft, who describes the curatorial role as one which leverages the site of intervention, given its position between artist and audience. She states, “I basically approach every encounter and environment as an opportunity to rethink curatorial practice. My iPhone, laptop and iPad are the most productive tools to access people, images and discourse and to prompt conversations that lead to curatorial projects” (Gupta Wiggers, as cited in Marincola et al. 2013, 22).

In a fourth approach, one must determine the implications of curatorial intervention in circumstances in which collective intentionality displaces its individuated manifestation, as described by Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerde Elise Morland in their 2015 essay “Request for a Radical Redefinition: Curatorial Politics after Institutional Critique.” Here, Amundsen and Morland outline the complexities that Juliana Engberg faced when situating her curatorial intentionality for the 2014 Biennale of Sydney against the larger problematics generated by the actions of one of the

exhibition's major funders (Amundsen and Morland 2015, 26). That patron, Transfield Holdings, owned a subsidiary that operated an immigration detention facility in Nauru, and had recently been awarded the contract to operate another on Manus Island. Twenty-eight artists wrote a letter in protest, and a total of ten participating artists withdrew as a result (SBS 2014).

What the four positions above represent are four possible constructions of curatorial intervention, and the unique space that each compels the curator to occupy. In the first framework construct, which one could term Gaskell's multivalent approach, both the artist and the artwork (or artefact) can be termed objects situated within larger frameworks or intellectual contexts constructed by curators. This would be a completely mediated site, and one that could be considered as wholly interventionist. Here, both the artist and the object are at the total service of the curator for their intellectual, critical, social, cultural, and philosophical constructions, with the caveat, as Gaskell puts it, that no "irreparable harm" is being done (Gaskell 2003, 59). This notion of "irreparable harm" reflects Gaskell's perception that the capacity to fully deconstruct and define the parameters of either exhibition practice or the implications of curatorial intervention would be so challenging that to attempt to do so would be impossible.

Using Gaskell's approach, the curatorial goal is simply to mediate the object in as limited a manner as possible. In understanding how this might occur, one must consider how the process of situating curatorial intervention against exhibition practice could operate: is the frame within which curators want to function extant? If so, can it allow for some form of intervention by curators and to works that would operate without any corollary or ancillary implications? Simon Sheikh, in an interview with Gerd Elise Mørland and Heide Bale Amundsen considers this, in what could be regarded as a second interventionist framework, remarking,

[y]ou mentioned the difference between alternative spaces of self-organization and large-scale exhibitions like the biennial. In a way these are two ends of the economic ladder. The problem is that it's almost impossible to compare them. These two exhibition forms are somehow loosely connected in what we call "the artworld", and certain agents in the artworld are going for both of them. This goes for both artists and curators, you could be in a biennial one day, and in an alternative space the next. Not just at different stages in your career, but also within the same year, or even at the same moment. And both formats might fit well into each other.

But again, the problem is in terms of the reception, that they're presented to the public as if the exhibitions were made as fully formed articulations, and obviously they are not, they are both based on a lot of constraints [*sic*]. And specifically when it comes to alternative or self-organized exhibitions. Here, I am also drawing from my own experience of having worked within this context. The exhibition is perceived in the media, and sometimes by the audience as well, as belonging to the same public and as being produced in the same way as a museum exhibition. And therefore it is considered under produced. But you obviously can't compare these formats because they don't have the brief or the same economy. (Sheikh 2010, 8)

One might define this as the model of mediated intervention. Whereas Gaskell hypothesises that in certain instances curatorial interventions may be marginal or significant, Sheikh suggests that, in the reception of artworks, viewers begin from an always already mediated position relative to each work.

As a foil to these two positions, Del Pesco offers the third potential construction of curatorial intervention, which suggests that the overall concept of the exhibition itself is simply not worth considering. This removes both the operation of reception theory and the possibility of curatorial intervention. The problem with Del Pesco's assertion is that whatever the idea of the "non-exhibition" might be, it appears to be little more than semantics. One struggles to find a way to construct an engagement between artist, curator, and audience that is not broadly defined within some framework of an exhibition—even if it is labelled a performance, a happening, an experience, a movement, a moment, an event, or any other semantic or linguistic construct. One

might assert here that just as in the law one may stand in the stead of a parent, *in loco parentis*, one might stand here in the role of the curator, or if one will, *in loco curatoris*, to assume this role, or to take on this identity, regardless of what one says it is. By noting the economics of curatorial intervention, Sheikh opens the question of the political economy of curatorial intervention—an issue that I will address in detail in Chapter 5—to the extent that questions will arise concerning the motivations for such interventions and, should they be found to exist, if they are better positioned by pure economics, political economies, or neither. As Anton Vidokle notes, the very ideas of the political economies of art, artistic exchange, and curatorial practice have become blurred. He writes,

[t]he term “political economy” is more or less synonymous with “economy” in our contemporary lexicon: both designate the distribution of goods and services under a certain political regime—be it capitalist, feudal, or communist—along with all the regulations, laws, and conventions governing such distribution. According to Aristotle, however, “economy” is the way to arrange things within a household (“*oikos*” means “house”), and “politics” is the way to arrange things *between* households—between “*polites*” or citizens, within the polis. So political economy combines both things. At some point in the late nineteenth century, the adjective “political” was dropped in English-language writing, and we ended up with simply “economy” (Vidokle 2013)

In her passage on Page 42 above regarding the implications of the digital realm as a space for intervention, Namita Gupta Wiggers reinforces and extends Del Pesco’s third framework for curatorial intervention—particularly when she situates its capacity to exercise its influences beyond traditional frames. She positions her curatorial practice as an opportunity to rethink formal institutional curating in general, which could extend the potentialities of intervention. Or, her practice could destabilise the assertion that intervention is the outcome of any artist–curator–audience exchange, especially those that occur in non-traditional spaces such as the digital realm.



A significant issue to address before moving forward is defined by O’Neill in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012). O’Neill asserts that there may be a fourth framework within which the curatorial role exists in relation to the artist. This is one in which the curatorial role itself affects every aspect of the work: the literal and physical boundaries of the art, the responsibilities for the art’s authorship, and the mediation of the work in relation to both the institution and the audience (O’Neill 2012, 14). As he explains, in a late 1960s curatorial project by Lucy Lippard, her involvement was so substantial—and her prior practice as an artist so well known—that it was difficult to tell whether she was engaging in the work as an artist or as a curator. Using this as a primary example, O’Neill questions the concept of the curator as *Ausstellungsmacher* or “independent exhibition maker,” a person with a role more significant than a traditional curator and more involved with the overall conception and realisation of an exhibition. This may have significance for the ongoing research surrounding curatorial intervention.

Regardless of speculation or construction, Kate Fowle (2007) suggests that the idea of the curator as creator has been a central element of exhibition practice since Harald Szeemann’s 1969 exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*. Fowle cites Bruce Altshuler who, remarking on the curatorial work of Szeemann, observes that it was he who first shifted the paradigm from one in which artists were trying to alter the ways audiences experienced art to curators who could have agency regarding the ways in which this engagement was experienced (Fowle 2007). This authorial approach is echoed by O’Neill and Mick Wilson when they define the traditional model of the curatorial as “commissioning or working with extant artworks for a public manifestation within an exhibitionary frame or organising principle defined by a curator” (O’Neill and Wilson 2015, 12).

If the independent exhibition-maker represents an expanded role for the curator, then one must consider if there is an actual structure for which the interventionist role is blurred entirely. This question is significant merely because the growing role of artists as curators has caused the issue of curatorial intervention to become blurred. In a solo exhibition, this blurriness is less pronounced—an artist does not usually curate their own exhibition in the absence of a curator or other institutional representative. But in a group exhibition that may include the works of an artist who is standing in the role of the curator, this question becomes more significant.

In “Another Criteria . . . or, What is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of Its Time?” Marion Von Osten proposes the idea of the ‘project exhibition’ which is described as

distinct from thematic or curated art shows, in which artworks are selected in relation to a specific topic or issue. Project exhibitions, as well as other forms of exhibition-making by artists and cultural producers, established a counter-model to conventional group and solo show formats. (Von Osten 2010, 57)

Von Osten’s counter-model is not applicable in all circumstances, nor does it displace the fundamental issue of intervention at the core of the research. While it is a value-added consideration, this approach simply displaces intervention onto the first variable, the artist, situating that individual in the oscillating role of creator and curator without resolving the issue in relation to others within the exhibition.

Also at issue is the point at which curatorial thinking and, by extension, curatorial intervention, becomes manifest to the viewer/audience. Writing in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Terry Smith observes that

[w]ithin the space of the exhibition itself, the curator’s interpretation remains unstated, implicit. In its explicit form, it usually becomes available to the viewer later—in the catalogue, for example—as a

supplement to the understanding that he or she arrived at while taking in the exhibition. (Smith 2012, 45)

Smith goes on to argue that this sequence of events is beneficial to the visitor. One of the goals of the research is to challenge this statement. By its very nature, what Smith states, and what by extension it reinforces in Szeemann's and Altshuler's assertions mentioned above, is that in every instance in which the curator intervenes between artist audience, the intervention is (at least initially) completely opaque to the visitor. Smith seems to suggest that this is positive, and that audiences may find this revelation in supplemental materials (Smith 2012, 45). Although doubtfully his intention, Smith partially reinforces a modernist approach to curating through the notion that the artist–curator relationship is of more significance than the curator–audience responsibility. He does, however, deflect these concerns when he proposes a series of curatorial strategies that may re-site or re-situate the practice, including thinking on the page; historicising curating; re-curation; innovating within exhibition practice; reimagining museums; co-curating with artists; turning the curatorial; engaged, activist curating; and curating contemporaneity (Smith 2015). None of these strategies redefine the fundamental artist–curator–audience conundrum, however. Instead, each suggests a framework within which this relationship may be defined. In re-curation, for example, a curator may respond to a significant exhibition, reconsidering or recontextualising major issues in either historicist or contemporary contexts. Neither mitigates the positional conundrum curators find themselves within. To the contrary, the nature of this methodology of curating may in fact double the problem precisely because a curator is re-intervening on an intervention.

Since Jauss's extant model does not appear to adequately account for any of the four frameworks above, curatorial intervention has arguably developed to account for

the absence of agency. It has then proposed to legitimise this agency through the construction of an interventionist model. This structure has emerged in part as a necessary response to developments in curatorial thinking, and partly as the result of developments in contemporary museum/institutional theory. Since the institution is a party to the artist–audience exchange, there must by necessity be a structure that can position the curator–institution within this model, both as a variable and a participant.

Museum professionals, curators, and cultural theorists, including Gaskell, Smith, Marincola, Storr, and others have encouraged the temporary displacement or reinterpretation of works and roles in ways that are supplemental to or even contradictory with an artist’s intentions. Under the guise of professional responsibility, curators determine issues surrounding the permanence and impermanence of artworks, and engage with works that artists have deemed transient, impermanent, or ephemeral—at times with the opposite intentions to those of the artist. Literal evidence—including courtroom transcripts from the Büchel case—highlights just how divergent the roles curators have and can be when interpreted from the positions of artist or constructed by institutions. While artists may view curators as their champions, institutions may see curators as their servants. Some of these issues are explored in depth by Cannon-Brookes, but he does not propose a model that situates the curator as the point of intervention between the artist and the object or between the artist and the audience.

When curators attempt to position themselves, they fare little better. Since many contemporary curators find the exhibition framework a constraint, they are stepping outside it, adopting new roles that remain undefined while using florid or rhetorical language—“an adventure” or “a non-exhibition”—to describe new approaches. In each instance, although curators acknowledge that the old descriptors and old methods of

gallery, institutional, and museum practice no longer fit the expanded field of curatorship, no model has yet been proposed that positions the new curator appropriately. It is within the framework of reception theory, one that already comprises two parties to the museum experience—the artist and the audience—that the role of the curator is here being considered. The Pew Charitable Trust forum *Pigeons on the Grass, Alas: Contemporary Curators Talk about the Field* brought the ideas of forty-three curators to the fore. While none specifically dealt with the issue at hand, each explored a variable of the equation and provided a foundation for further research. One of the challenges of an interventionist structure of curatorial practice is how to model the exchange as a functional transaction between more than two participants. Just how does this third party, the curator, truly come into being within the exchange? Consider, for example, that phenomenology will always already be an exchange between object and viewer, between the being-in-itself of the object and the being-for-itself of the individual. Where can a curator be positioned within this transaction if not at a point of intervention? By necessity, in mediating the being-in-itself of the object, one Other (a curator) affects the experiences of another Other (a viewer), resulting in a transformed exchange and, by extension, an intervention. The power dynamic of this exchange provides one of the few emergencies of the notion of intervention itself, although not from the perspective of a curator, but from the critic and editor David Balzer who, in the book *Curationism*, remarked, “increasingly, curatorial and institutional interventions prevent quiet contemplation, compelling prescribed ways of looking and listening and encouraging superficial methods of engagement like smartphones and activity centres” (Balzer 2014, 135). What results are circumstances, constructed by curators and curatorial theorists, in which intervention, authorship, and mediation are already passé, having been dispelled from critical and constructive

consideration without ever having been fully situated. Consider Paul O’Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds’s introduction to *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Research? What to Study? What to Practice*:

While in the 1990s the role of the curator was discussed largely through the gloss of the 'exhibition-maker,' and the expansion of the curatorial role since that time may be understood as the overcoming of the authorial function of the curator, the problematization of the exhibitionary complex—and particularly the development of exhibition-making—has arguably given rise to a less dichotomous construal of the exhibitionary and the curatorial. A notable point of interchange emerges around thinking through exhibition-making, and the interrogation of curatorial knowledges—made manifest in the increased profile given to questions of curatorial labor or exhibition-making when this work is broadly understood, for instance, as actions of practical inquiry congruent with, but not reducible to, other modes of scholarship and experimental research. (O’Neill, Wilson, and Steeds 2016, 7)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, and far removed from individuation, would be the experience of what Nicolas Bourriaud terms “relational aesthetics,” or, “art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space” (Bourriaud 2009, 14). One could argue that by and through situating the social at the centre of the exchange, the experience of the work is already outside mediated space, that its intentionality *is* its reception. For reception theory to function, it must operate beyond the scope of the being-in-itself of the object of phenomenology, which means it must operate beyond the Gnosticism of a closed system of objects, yet it must also operate within the confines of a system that is not so holistic that its mere existence is its intention. When it fails to operate within this frame, as Bourriaud believes it in fact must, it enters an exchange that begins to obfuscate the very transaction that Bourriaud wishes to reinforce. This becomes evident in an essay by Alex Farquharson, who asserts that there is a possibility that what matters is not who is sited within the

exchange—artist, curator, and audience—but who is responsible for effectively completing the work. He writes,

[t]he aversion to so-called ‘finished’ art works, whether they be finished on site or in the studio, often betrays a rather naive and over-literal interpretation of the death of the author – birth of the reader maxim derived from Roland Barthes. All works of art, especially good ones, are open systems that the recipient reformulates in his or her own way at the point of reception. A supposedly finished work will be reformulated as often as a so-called relational or unfinished one. Nicolas Bourriaud quotes Jean-Luc Godard saying as much: ‘If a viewer says, “the film I saw was bad”, I say, “it’s your fault; what did you do so that the dialogue would be good?”’ (Farquharson 2003, np)

Perhaps, the issue is that the idea of reception theory within the constructs of the visual arts is itself problematic. The function of reception is itself not in doubt; works are received because they are experienced. But, as Kasper König observes, even the distinctions between participants within the production–mediation–consumption processes are blurred:

the artist is also an observer of himself or herself. You can’t clearly anticipate or participate between reception and production. The criteria for understanding are quite often being offered along with the work. It’s a very dialectical relationship between the maker, the viewer, the museum, or the places where you expect. (König, quoted in Thea 2001, 131)

Finally, one must consider whether the frameworks for discussing “intention” and “intentionality” in a contemporary context are flawed from the outset. Fred Orton and Carolyn Wilde, writing in *On the Intention of Modern(ist) Art*, remark that

[t]he idea—almost a conventional wisdom now—that the ‘intentional fallacy’ refers to or applies to any kind of work of art rather than only to poetry, and that it is an argument about interpretation—that it maintains that interpretation should be concerned with only what can be read or seen to be the case without reference to the author’s purpose—came later as either, at worst, a care- less reading of Wimsatt’s and Beardsley’s essay or, at best, with American New Criticism, an extension of its concern with value judgement to new ways of

understanding balance, contrast, rhetorical structure and so on. (Orton and Wilde 2002, 248)

Orton and Wilde propose that intention has largely been absent from the thinking and writing surrounding the experience of works of art. As they so rightly note

[i]ntention and meaning are opposites which language tries to unite. Intention is always directed towards meaning but it is not the meaning. Meaning is always to some extent intentional but it cannot be reduced to the intention that occasioned its material signifier” (Orton and Wilde 2002, 248)

This distinction between intention and meaning is significant. What these authors theorise, and what positions reception theory itself, is the presupposition that intention is the impetus for reception—and that in the visual arts, this exchange hinges upon an expectation of shared meaning. The problematics of reception lie, in part, in the realisation that the two are not synonymous. And were this simply an interrogation of meaning, the issue would go no further. But even in Orton and Wilde’s deconstruction of the exchange, they too omit the agency of the curator, and, thereby, leave the true issue of the mediated exchange open. This is because reception theory, and the intention/meaning conundrum, hinges upon accepting the fact that the fallacy, or the failing, of the exchange exists in the interstices between artist and viewer, between curator and receiver. Somehow, the curator is still missing. It is this absence, this lack, that positions the remainder of this thesis.

Intervention and the resulting reception remain complex questions within contemporary curatorship. The existing literature explores each field at its peripheries to the extent that it fails to find, or even to acknowledge, the possibility of what in law one would term “the party of the third part.” That “third party” would be the curator to the extent that they would not be viewed within classical reception theory as one of the



two principal parties to the transactional exchange. Reception is valuable enough to be considered, and significant enough not to be entirely overlooked, but it also presents questions complex enough that they have not yet been explored in depth. This research proposes to critically interrogate the gaps within reception that literally give rise to the existence and necessity of intervention through a considered analysis of curatorial practices that have implications for both.

## 2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has examined and critically interrogated the existing literature on curatorial intervention. It began by focusing on the writings and theories of Hans Robert Jauss, specifically *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, and *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, using each to outline the fundamental structures of reception theory, and its applicability to the visual arts and visual culture. The framework models for intentionality and reception have been outlined, then considered for their efficacy relative to notions of interventionality.

The chapter then considered and evaluated subsequent theoretical models that have altered, amended, or superseded Jauss's constructions of reception theory. These analyses began by considering the writings of Wolfgang Iser, who has constructed theories that differentiate between *aesthetic experience* and *aesthetic response*—two possible modalities within which the processes and experiences of reception could conceivably operate.

The theoretical questions were then tested against a range of writings that position the issue of curatorial intervention within the wider discourses of contemporary thought, moving through writings, structures, and modalities constructed by theorists, academics, and practitioners, including Ivan Gaskell, Paul O'Neill, and

Nicolas Bourriaud, before drawing two conclusions: one, that the existing literature does not effectively address curatorial intervention; and two, that based on the existing literature, curatorial intervention appears to be a significant issue affecting, influencing, and mediating the artist–audience exchange. It is within these two theoretical frames that the following chapters operate.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 SITUATING THE RESEARCH PARADIGM**

#### **3.1.1 THE INTERPRETIVIST/CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAME**

The methodology that structures this research is positioned both by and within an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm. Given its emphasis on social and cultural exchange, its framework hypothesis is derived from a critique of existing theories and models, particularly reception theory and, to a lesser extent, phenomenology. Conclusions regarding the veracity of these findings are based upon the outcomes of cohort research. As is posited by an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm, the research critically interrogates responses from the participant cohorts to construct theories to rigorously test the research question.

This research is grounded in qualitative analysis and uses the semi-structured interview as its primary mode of original research. The decision to use qualitative research methodology was made after evaluating available methodological options and chosen because it provides the most substantive framework with which to address the issues at hand (Tracy 2013; Galletta 2013). The research applies methodologies and concepts derived from structuralism, poststructuralism, philosophy, phenomenology, mixed-methods research, and qualitative analysis, among other approaches. At its core, this research explores responses to a series of unique, cohort-specific, structured questionnaires distributed to participant artists, curators, and administrators. Each questionnaire is attached as an appendix and referenced further below.

For the purposes of the research, the predominant philosophies of post-structuralism and deconstruction are the overarching frames. They position an interrogative process that will be grounded in the works of philosophers that Vincent Leitch, among others, describes as being a part of the tradition of “high or grand

theory” (Leitch 2005, 123). It considers, in part, the structuralism inferred by Claude Lévi-Strauss; the scopie and subjective theories of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault; the nihilism that intervention implies, read through Friedrich Nietzsche; the construct of ‘curator as supplement’ through the lens of Jacques Derrida; and additional philosophers within the poststructural tradition, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Fredric Jameson, and others. This is not to say that their thinking is necessarily at the forefront of every discussion, merely that it is foundational to the majority of the intellectual transactions that follow. The thinking of Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, for example, positions a great deal of the analysis that occurs regarding the systemic structures of curatorial practice; particularly, its power dynamics, organisations, and institutional frames.

This research is also strongly indebted to the linguistic philosophies of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Wolfgang Kemp, whose works are referenced initially in Chapter 2.

The research methodology will also apply theories drawn from cultural studies, including an emphasis on the works of theorists including Slavoj Žižek, to interrogate the contemporary issues of intentionality and reception within the subject paradigm. Theorists including Jan Jagodzinski have begun to consider reception after poststructuralism in works such as *The Site/Sight/Cite of Jacques Lacan or Forget Slavoj Žižek? Implications for Art and Its Education* (2010). Here, Jagodzinski asserts that there is a gap in the viewer’s experience of a work of art—he uses the example of René Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images (This Is Not a Pipe)* (1948)—during which one’s capacity to comprehend both the disparity and congruity between image and text is oscillating. This has significance for the research as it explores ideas including the

agency of the viewer and their capacity to be an active participant in the viewing exchange (Jagodzinski 2010).

### **3.1.2 ARTIST, CURATOR, ADMINISTRATOR, AND THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAME**

This research is also partly grounded within the critique of institutions—an ongoing investigation and interrogation that challenges the standard conceptions of museum functions and paradigms. The critique of institutions emphasises organisational structures, and the powers and responsibilities that attach thereto. This research acknowledges those frames to the extent that it initially parses the structural relationship of the exchange to that of artist, curator, and administrator, representing the poles of the transaction. Problematically, the administrator stands in the role of the institution, serving both as an individual and as a trope for the larger organisation that they represent. Writing in the early 1970s, the artist Daniel Buren outlined an initial framework for the practice of critiquing institutions in a series of essays under the rubric of “The Four Functions”—“The Function of the Studio” (1971); “The Function of the Museum” (1973); “The Function of the Exhibition” (1973); and “The Function of Architecture” (1975). This framework of institutional critique comes to its earliest apex in the (in)famous *Flash Art* letter of May 6, 1972, in which a group of artists selected to participate in *documenta 5*—including Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson, but surprisingly not Daniel Buren, voiced their opposition to curatorial practice through a letter published in the abovenamed magazine. Their letter asserted:

I do not wish to have my work used to illustrate misguided sociological principles or outmoded art historical categories. I do not wish to participate in international exhibitions which do not consult with me as

to what work I might want to show but instead dictate to me what will be shown. I do not wish to be associated with an exhibition which refuses to communicate with me after I have indicated my desire to present work other than that which has been designated. Finally, I condemn the showing of work of mine which has been borrowed from collectors without my having been advised. (Reproduced in Altshuler 2013, 158)

The letter, sent directly to Harald Szeemann, as well as to Giancarlo Politi at *Flash Art*, also included four points relating to the display of an artist's work. Briefly, these were as follows: 1) that it was the right of an artist to determine whether, what, and where something would be exhibited; 2) that a work should not be "exhibited in a classification" without an artist's consent; 3) that an artist should be able to do what they wished with their space in the catalogue; and 4) that a complete budget should be made public after an exhibition.

This was one of the earliest instances in which a contemporary art curator, Szeemann, who was applying a new model for professional practice that he was developing was encountering opposition due to having countered the intentionality of artists. This stands as a key conceptual cornerstone that could help form the foundations for intervention theory.

I would note that underpinning the entire methodology of this project are two ideas that run contemporaneously but are not synonymous; to borrow from both Karl Marx (1844) and Fredric Jameson (1992), I will assert that the potential operative structure I have tentatively titled "curatorial intervention" has both a political economy and a cultural logic and that, by having each, the structures and frames outlined above are necessary to determine both how and where one can engage with each within the interrogative process. Political economy means that in the present day, curatorial practice now engages with a wide array of issues, and has a wide range of implications, that extend far beyond those of simply acquiring, collecting, cataloguing, and

displaying artworks. Whether in the 1992 exhibition *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* at the National Gallery of Australia in 1994, *Smoke and Mirrors: Deception in Contemporary Art* in Birmingham, Alabama, in 2007—or any other number of exhibitions—the scope and range of questions that curators address are positioned by notions of political economy.

Cultural logic is a methodology, for it both proposes a hermeneutics for and presupposes a historicity of the practice with which it is concerned. In this instance, there are two practices—curatorial practice and reception theory—that both must be subjected to this cultural logic, that both must be interrogated by and through both hermeneutics and history to determine first whether the idea of intervention theory itself can be framed as plausible and valid and then, if so, if it is substantiable on the evidence derived from this research. Cultural logic is not of itself a field. Instead, it is a methodology; it is how something is done, not the outcome of what is done. One does not arrive at cultural logic, one uses cultural logic to arrive at one's result. One might, therefore, term part of this research the cultural logic of late curatorial reception theory. It is not surprising that one needs to construct a new idea to apply this methodological framework to curatorial intervention. This is what Jameson does in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

In the present instance it seems clear that a range of competing formulations ("poststructuralism," "postindustrial society," this or that McLuhanite nomenclature) were unsatisfactory insofar as they were too rigidly specified and marked by their area of provenance (philosophy, economics, and the media, respectively); however suggestive, therefore, they could not occupy the mediatory position within the various specialized dimensions of postcontemporary life that was required. "Postmodern," however, seems to have been able to welcome in the appropriate areas of daily life or the quotidian; its cultural resonance, appropriately vaster than the merely aesthetic or artistic, distracts suitably from the economic while allowing newer economic materials and innovations (in marketing and advertising, for example, but also in

business organization) to be recatalogued under the new heading. (Jameson 1992, xii–xiii)

## **3.2 STRUCTURING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.2.1(a) ATTEMPTING QUANTITATIVE COHORT RESEARCH**

The original research plan involved both quantitative and qualitative components. The initial quantitative research structure was proposed as follows:

- 1) Distribute 400 curatorial research surveys, proportional by sector density, throughout the curatorial cohort in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States;
- 2) From the responses received, select two curators from each country for follow-up interviews;
- 3) In coordination with the curator, seek participation from both the artist who had experienced curatorial intervention—if any—and the administrator who had managed the arts organisation at the time of the intervention;
- 4) Conduct interviews to establish the concurrent experiences of all three parties to the event;
- 5) Combine the survey returns as the quantitative component of the research with eighteen interviews as the qualitative component of the research;
- 6) Analyse and report findings.

A survey was developed and distributed to professional curators in an attempt to pilot the research within a quantitative framework. The survey is included as Appendix 1. Initially, the survey was distributed to five curators and five museum directors. One was from Australia, three were from New Zealand, and six were from the United States. Due to a lack of responses, a further three surveys were distributed as part of the pilot process, making a total of thirteen. Of those, seven had worked as both curators and directors, and three had worked as either senior curators or assistant directors. Over



the subsequent six months, only five invitees provided any feedback, and in several instances, the feedback was marginal. One curator returned comments via social media, stating, “I didn’t have any issues with [the survey],” but did not actually complete it. As a result, the return rates were statistically insignificant.

For validation purposes, the survey focused on curators and directors because the larger research design included longitudinal, cross-sector analyses of specific interventions from three perspectives: artists, curators, and administrators. Even with a continual redistribution of a survey to an ever-larger range of participants—including the director of a university-affiliated arts institution in New Zealand; the assistant director of a mid-tier museum in the United States; the director of a university museum in the United States; the director of an artist-run initiative and residency project space in the United States; the former director of a regional art gallery, now working independently, in Australia; the director of an independent gallery space in a major metropolitan area the United States; and the director of a regional museum in New Zealand—fewer than five were ever received, and the survey was never validated. It was finally acknowledged that quantitative analysis was unlikely to yield viable results in a time-sensitive manner. A decision was then made to eliminate the quantitative research component.

### **3.2.1(b)      RECOGNISING THE LIMITATIONS OF CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH**

Although the initial quantitative research framework had the potential to generate significant, relevant, cross-cultural data, the failure of this methodology to be implemented resulted in cross-cultural and inter-cultural findings that could not be regarded as statistically significant. As Murray Straus observes in his essay, “Validity of Cross-National Research Using Unrepresentative Convenience Samples” (2009), one

danger that had the potential to emerge from attempting significant cross-cultural analyses from limited datasets was the construction of those same sets to generate the desired responses. As Straus notes, many multi-nation surveys rely on these non-representative samples, “yet they draw conclusions about differences between nations” (Straus 2009, 1). Consequently, the qualitative research structure remained partially intact through the adoption of a the three-nation cohort-design approach. Moving into the qualitative research framework, the three-country structure reflected my professional experience and access more than it reflected a statistically significant capacity to determine individual or intercultural variations as the qualitative research design had intended.

Furthermore, although the criteria were initially developed to recognise variations in cross-cultural research, the five variables identified by Martin Prince in his “Measurement Validity in Cross-Cultural Comparative Research” (2008) provided guidance on how the issues of correlation and variation between the three countries can still have evidentiary and analytical relevance. Prince, citing J. A. Flaherty et al., observes that ensuring equivalencies in content, semantics, data collection, criteria, and concept/construct will result in better understandings of culturally specific variations and on cross-cultural relevance and intercultural analysis (Prince 2008, 212).

### **3.2.2 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK DESIGN**

A revised, qualitative research framework was developed. This new approach proposed conducting formal interviews with ten professionals in each of the three sectors, with participation in each sector divided across the three participant countries—Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The decision to invite participants from the three countries stemmed, in part, from my prior professional experience as a curator and administrator working in each of the three nations. The

research design was also based upon a theoretical hypothesis that there could be variation regarding either 1) the existence of or 2) the tendency towards curatorial intervention based on cultural specificity, whether based on issues relevant to biculturalism or multiculturalism, or upon approaches significant to indigenous practices, structures of the market economy, or capitalism. The research does not include curators drawn specifically from arts organisations providing services to remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, nor from those professionals providing arts consultancy or curatorial services to those same sectors, so I acknowledge that there is a possible gap relative to that sector. It also does not include research specific to curators providing similar services to Maori in New Zealand, nor to First Nations peoples in the United States.

Although a decision was made to focus solely on qualitative research, some attempt was made to quantify this data. As Johnny Saldana remarks in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*,

[q]uantitizing qualitative data is done for varying reasons, but several methodologists I have consulted advised me, “Ask yourself why you’re changing qualitative data into numbers in the first place.” If you are transforming words into numbers solely for what you believe may be more persuasive results and case-making, you may be doing it for the wrong reason. Instead, quantizing may be better applied to content analytic studies, mixed methods studies, and field experiments that test for differences between treatment and second-site (i.e., control) groups, or differences between time periods with a single participating group. (Saldana 2016, 26)

Here, the quantitative data is for probative as much as persuasive purposes. It allows for cross-cohort observations regarding the frequency with which cohorts may or may not intervene in artists’ works, thereby mediating audiences’ experiences. Quantifying selected data also allows for complex analyses including differentiated data based on gender or geography.

### **3.3 TRANSPARENCY, AGENCY, POWER: THE TAP MATRIX**

The TAP (Transparency, Agency, and Power) Matrix was developed specifically for this research. It structures the analyses of the findings from each of the three cohorts. The matrix further proposes the existence of cohort-specific variables that may situate and structure the responses to questions concerning curatorial intervention. Finally, the matrix serves as a measure of the applications and interpretations of transparency, agency, and power against the existing structure of classical reception theory.

The findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) present the specific cohort findings on curatorial intervention, transparency, agency, and power by examining each example in a summary table, then considering specific examples derived from the results of a total of thirty interviews conducted across the three cohorts: ten each with artists, curators, and administrators. The findings are arranged by cohort group, and select narrative responses are provided from each. A wide range of data drawn from the interviews reveals each participant's observations and experiences relevant to the research question. Verbatim quotations form a key component of these findings, as is to be expected with qualitative research, particularly given its emphasis on the specific examples and case studies each cohort participant has been able to provide.

The first research frame considers whether all the participants across each of the cohorts acknowledge the existence and operation of curatorial intervention. Specific and concrete examples of curatorial intervention were provided by the cohort participants, and these participants distinguished the agency of intervention from either intentionality or reception.

The second research frame interrogates if, when, and/or how artists regard themselves as marginalised by the operation of curatorial intervention, seeing its

processes and practices as superseding their intentionality relative to singular works of art, bodies of work, and projects. The findings also indicate that, for artists, curatorial intervention can be—but is not necessarily, or always—the result of the operation of disproportionate power relationships.

The third research frame queries whether curators generally regard intervention as a component of curatorial practice, like other forms of discussion, negotiation, and collaboration. If so, how do they regard its power relationships relative to artists' perceptions of these same operations?

The fourth research frame examines if and how administrators define and regard the multifaceted complexities of curatorial intervention when viewed from the administrative perspective. Many note that curatorial intervention could hinder or enhance both the experience or operation of the artist and the artwork just as easily as it could engage in both these binaries in relation to how it served the responsibilities to third parties, donors, and patrons.

Finally, the findings and analyses may determine how effectively the current model situates the artist–audience relationship, as grounded in reception theory; how adequately that model accounts for the agency of the curator; and how effectively it positions that agency, and to what degree of transparency, relative to a curator's constituencies.

These findings, coupled with the cohort-specific questions, form the foundations for the Chapter 7 analyses.

### **3.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INVITATION AND SELECTION**

Determining how to effectively construct a sample composition and size is a key aspect of qualitative research. To facilitate its effectiveness, researchers

occasionally make decisions regarding how their sample is comprised, and such an acknowledgement is made here. For the purposes of the research that follows, the participants in each cohort have been selected on the bases outlined through purposive sampling. As Bloomberg and Volpe observe,

[t]he logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This method is in contrast to the random sampling procedures that characterize quantitative research, which is based on statistical probability theory. (Bloomberg and Volpe 2016, 148)

Oliver C. Robinson, writing in the *Journal of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, outlines the usefulness of purposive sampling. He remarks that the strategy acknowledges the fact that “that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured.” (Robinson 2014, 32.)

Using this sampling technique, a series of distinct criteria were established to limit the cohort size, and to distinguish between the participants across each cohort. Participants who met the criteria were invited to participate. The following criteria determined an individual’s suitability for participation:

- |                |    |  |
|----------------|----|--|
| ARTISTS        | 1) | have had a professional career of five years or longer;                              |
|                | 2) | be regarded as a mid-career or more established practitioner;                        |
|                | 3) | have had a substantial exhibition history, whether national, international, or both. |
| CURATORS       | 1) | have worked professionally for five years or more;                                   |
|                | 2) | have had an institutional affiliation at some point in their career;                 |
|                | 3) | have self-identified as a contemporary practitioner.                                 |
| ADMINISTRATORS | 1) | have worked professionally as an administrator for five or more years;               |

- 2) have held an administrative-level position within a museum, gallery, or other contemporary arts organisation;
- 3) have self-identified as an arts administration professional.

### **3.4.1 INVITATIONS**

Using these criteria, a total of seventy-three invitations were extended across all three cohorts in my attempt to secure thirty participants (ten from each cohort). Of them, distinctions can be made using the following sampling criteria: 1) geography: fifteen invitees were in Australia; twenty-two were in New Zealand; and thirty-six were in the United States; 2) prior professional relationship: of the seventy-three total invitations extended, I had some form of prior professional encounter with forty-five of them; and 3) participation: of the seventy-three, twenty-six were artists, nineteen were curators, and twenty-eight were administrators. The invitees were selected through an examination of staff lists and registries for museums, galleries, and project spaces in major metropolitan areas in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. These organisations each had a stated emphasis on contemporary art. Within that structure, the organisation could have a single staff member who could participate, fulfilling the role of curator, or director, or have multiple individuals within the organisational structure, fulfilling any combination thereof.

Contact information was obtained either through a professional organisation of which I was a member or through publicly accessible information and research. Where I had a prior association with a qualified research interview candidate, I approached those individuals as appropriate. Resources for securing contact information included the Museums Australia, Museums Aotearoa, College Art Association, Association of Art Museum Curators, and Independent Curators International websites.

As the result of two decades of professional experience in the arts administration and curation sectors, I have either been or currently am affiliated with many of the above professional organisations. All information that led to contacting individuals for the purposes of this research was freely and readily available and easily accessible in the public sphere or through one of the networks or associations listed above. Securing interviews across each sector required an individual approach to each participant, and, given the confidential nature of the research, no participant facilitated the participation of any other invitee.

Of the twenty-six invitations extended to artists, seven invitees were from Australia, eleven were from New Zealand, and eight were from the United States. Eight have resided in at least two of the three countries being examined as part of the research. As a final note regarding participants in the artist cohort, one interviewee did engage in the process to the point of participating in an interview, and receiving and editing their transcript. However, they did not return the transcript, nor did they return their release, so they are not included in the final cohort composition, but they are included in the invitation number contained above.

For artists, twenty-six invitations were extended to secure ten participants; for curators, the ratio was nineteen invitations to secure ten participants; and twenty-eight invitations were extended to administrators to secure ten participants. From the seventy-three invitations extended, thirteen people agreed to participate in the research before viewing any additional research materials. Once they received their additional paperwork—a cohort-specific questionnaire, a copy of the Human Research Ethics Information Sheet, and a copy of the Informed Consent Form—they each chose not to participate, and in the majority of instances responded to no further communications.



### **3.4.2 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING AND RESEARCH BIAS**

Of the thirty total participants across all sectors, I acknowledge some form of professional relationship with twenty-three. For full disclosure, in many instances, this was little more than having met at a professional conference. Given my twenty-year career in museums and galleries, this is not unexpected. Regardless, all individuals participated on a voluntary basis, and each received their cohort-specific questions and any supplemental materials prior to agreeing to participate.

This emphasis on qualified professionals is a hallmark of qualitative research, and serves best to generate the highest probability of generating responses most likely to address the overarching research question. This approach is described as “purposeful sampling” (Bloomberg and Volpe 2016, 148), which suggests that as much as objectivity is a goal, a more significant goal is generating information that is valuable and material to the issue at hand. As Bloomberg and Volpe note,

[r]epresentativeness in qualitative research, and extrapolating from the particular to the general, is secondary to the participants’ ability to provide information about themselves and their setting. (Bloomberg and Volpe 2016, 148)

For these reasons, the sample selections were made to generate as large a volume of sector-specific material from as skilled a set of museum professionals and practicing artists as was possible. This ensured a diverse set of experiences with a breadth of knowledge regarding the issues at hand.

### **3.5 IDENTIFYING AND DEFINING THE SPECIFIC COHORTS**

This research focuses specifically on curatorial practice within a contemporary context. Although the term ‘contemporary’ is itself problematic, it is used here to refer to individuals currently working in, or having only recently left, the field. Participant

artists, curators, and administrators were all contemporary practitioners, predominantly either mid-career or established. Participation in the research, conducted under the auspices of Human Research Ethics Approval H5762, was voluntary, and participants were advised that they could cease participation at any time, and redact any material that they had submitted to date. The formal structure of artist–curator–administrator, rather than artist–curator–audience, emerged in recognition of the fact artists could potentially experience mediation from one of two institutional levels: either curatorially or administratively. Either would impact upon the resulting construction of the work, and either could occur prior to the work’s reception by its intended audience. For the viewer, the impact of the intervention would arguably be the same. As a result, this research focuses primarily on the mediated work as if it were interrogated during the phases of its intention and intervention, meaning those stages that occur prior to its being received. This then, defines the three cohorts that follow, positioning both the selection of participants and the questions that attach thereto.

### **3.5.1 THE ARTIST COHORT**

Of the ten participant artists, three were female and seven were male. Of the total number of artists who were invited to participate, twelve were female and fourteen were male. A diverse range of artists who work across a range of media are represented in the sample; as well as Caucasian artists, there are African American, Latino, and Maori artist-participants. All ten artists who were interviewed have exhibited internationally and are highly regarded as practitioners within the field.

A criterion for artist participation in the research was that they be mid-career or established. While curatorial intervention, if it exists, could be experienced at any stage of an artist’s career (and, one might argue, the likelihood of intervention could be more

prevalent earlier in an artist's career), this research emphasises mid-career and established artists. This decision was made to generate the largest possible sample in which curatorial intervention could possibly have been experienced. A corollary benefit, though not a specific criterion, was that if participating artists had international exhibition histories, it generated the potential to determine if they had differing experiences of curatorial intervention in their home country versus working overseas.

### **3.5.2 CURATOR COHORT**

Of the nineteen curators who were invited to participate in the research, twelve were female and seven were male. Of the ten who agreed, six were female and four were male. Given the small pool of participants and the need to avoid speculation on their identities, I have not identified the participants any further. All relevant identifiers that appear within portions of their interviews that follow have been redacted. The descriptors used are general for experience, although specific for gender.

Of the total number of curators invited to participate, four were from Australia, four were from New Zealand, and eleven were from the United States.

Objectively, all the participant curators had a minimum of five years of professional experience in the field, which may have been derived at any level of curatorial practice but which must have been derived at the level of curator.

The curators' experiences ranged from directing artist-run initiatives through to working as senior curators or departmental directors at major national and international institutions. The participant curators may have held several positions over the course of their careers. Within both Australia and New Zealand, the process of securing participants was influenced by the number of professionals working within the sector and the implications of their participation: quite simply, there were fewer individuals to

approach given the relatively smaller scale of the contemporary arts within these two countries. Within the United States, emphasis was placed predominantly on practitioners working within mid-tier cities. Those practitioners worked in institutions serving greater metropolitan areas with populations of one million people or more, and in which—generally—there was more than one arts organisation focusing exclusively or predominantly on critical contemporary visual practices.

As a final note regarding the selection and participation of members of this cohort, there are in fact eleven interview transcripts. In one instance, a participant provided a release after the cohort selection had been finalised. She had participated in the process, and been provided with a copy of her interview transcript for revision, but had not had the opportunity to review the transcript or provide a release. As a result, a replacement participant was secured. When the release was subsequently provided, it was filed for records purposes, but the materials have not been included here.

### **3.5.3 THE ADMINISTRATOR COHORT**

Of the ten participant administrators, two were female and eight were male. Of the total number of administrators who were invited to participate, fifteen were female and thirteen were male. Of the invitees, six were from Australia, six were from New Zealand, and twelve were from the United States. Notably, this sector was the most challenging in terms of securing participants. Each participant in this grouping has previous or current public-institution experience. Administrative participants were drawn from individuals either currently working at public-sector or educational contemporary arts institutions, or from individuals with prior experience working within the sectors.

All participant administrators had a minimum of five years of experience working at a senior level within arts institutions, and in some instances participants had over two decades of experience in the sector. No person interviewed within the sector was not working in a sector-related senior administrative position at the time they were interviewed.

### **3.6 DEFINING AND STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS**

The earliest research design proposed constructing questions that would focus on predetermined “types” of curatorial intervention, such as removing works from exhibitions, altering the scope or scale of a work or project, or selecting a different body of work than the one the artist proposed. Prepared questions were developed for participants in each sector. The questions provided a foundational framework for each interview, although, given the semi-structured nature of the process, at times the questions were not delivered in a precise order. While the type and scope of the specific questions varied, the focus areas were similar. The research objective was to ensure that each participant was asked, and answered, the material issue included in the list of questions. Participants were interviewed in person or via Skype, and interviews were audio-recorded. Interviews were then transcribed, and corrected for factual accuracy as well as spelling or grammatical mistakes and errors. Copies of the transcripts were then provided to each participant for further review, including the clarification of factual issues. Finally, edited transcripts were returned, and a signed release allowing the use of the material contained therein was provided.

Although the interview protocol was structured (Tracy 2016), meaning that each interview began with a defined set of questions, interviews could proceed in a semi-structured format. This meant that participants could deviate from the set questions to

provide additional or anecdotal information that added value to the formal questions being asked (Tracy 2016, 148). The types of interviews that were being conducted may be defined in diverse ways. They share some characteristics with the informant interview, meaning that the participants “are experienced and savvy in the scene, can articulate stories and explanations that others would not, and are especially friendly and open to providing information” (Tracy 2016, 148). The interviews also shared characteristics with both respondent interviews and narrative interviews, to the extent that within each cohort, the participants held similar positions and had shared participant experiences. Participants’ responses also generated frameworks for deviating from the standard questionnaire, and the technique of “probing” provided further valuable information. As Anne Galletta observes in *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond*,

[w]hile engaging participants in a process of clarification allows you to have increased confidence about the accuracy of word usage, engaging participants in generating meaning takes the interview below the surface of words, expression, and metaphors to the meaning participants give to their narratives. This is particularly important because the interviews may introduce meanings you did not anticipate. The introduction of new meaning contributes to your interpretation of the data and your efforts to respond to your research question. Frequently the source of surprise, participants’ generation of meaning is likely to complicate your analysis, and it is often the source of new analytical codes and the restructuring of an emerging conceptual framework. (Galletta 2013, Kindle Locations 1493-1499)

As a result, participant interviews were of varying durations, and generated widely differing levels of depth although all participants addressed the specific issues at hand. Given the semi-structured nature of these interviews, the specific language used to discuss the issues and ideas of curatorial intervention varied slightly between the participants, but each cohort member received the full questionnaire in advance. As a result, they were aware of any deviations from the prepared questions, and had the

opportunity to discuss or expand upon any issue they wished to address further. Any variations to or deviations from the standard questionnaire were made clear to the participants before their responses were noted and coded.

The questions designed for each cohort were developed to specifically examine and interrogate the existence and implications of curatorial intervention within the artist–audience exchange. The specific questions for each cohort were designed to explore first, the existence or absence of curatorial intervention; second, the frequency of such interventions, should they exist; third, the implications of such interventions, and the significance thereof. Hence, specific terms were included in both the artist and curator questionnaires, such as “alter, change, or remove,” and the notion of “curator as author” was included in all the questionnaires.

### **3.6.1 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY OF PARTICIPANTS**

All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity as a key condition of their participation in the research process. Their anonymity was guaranteed, in part, through the Ethics Information Sheet (Appendix 2) that accompanied the Informed Consent Release Form (Appendix 3) that each interviewee signed. The Information Sheet states, in part,

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports, as well as in published materials in scholarly and professional journals where appropriate and in findings for a doctoral dissertation. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

In every instance, the names of the participants, their ages, specific professional roles, and participating institutions, as well as any references to other artists, organisations, institutions, publications, or related identifying material have been

redacted from the entirety of what follows. To ensure the anonymity of participants, a simple coding/reference structure has been adopted. It operates on a numerical system from 1 to 10, with abbreviations for the cohorts: AR for artists, CU for curators, and AD for administrators. The numerical annotation attached to each participant reflects the sequential point at which each agreed to participate in the process, so Artist AR.01 was the first member of the artist cohort to formally confirm their participation in this research.

### **3.6.2 THE ARTIST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Since the foundational framework of the research focuses on curatorial intervention, or how curators may mediate the artist–audience exchange, the artist interview questions were designed to emphasise creative practitioners’ relationships and experiences working within (and, at times outside) the museum and gallery sector. The final questionnaire resulted from ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of the questionnaire based on participant responses. Though not included as appendices, draft versions of the questionnaire were provided to professional practicing artists for feedback and revision before the artist cohort questionnaire was finalised, and the final list of questions has been included in Appendix 4. These questions explore the artist–curator dynamic by directly interrogating ideas of intervention, mediation, curatorial agency, or curatorial action. Some of the questions include:

- Have you had experiences in which a curator has asked you to change an aspect or element of your work? Can you elaborate on the circumstances and the outcome?
- How transparent is the role of the curator in the relationships you have with your audience?
- How do curators affect your practice or process in the present day?



The artist questionnaire was designed to generate open responses, meaning that it was structured to allow participants to articulate information additional to the scope of the specific query. It also allowed respondents to address multiple questions, or a range of questions, within the scope of a single response. If at any point during their interview respondents addressed an issue included within any other part of the questionnaire in a material fashion, the response was noted and specific subsequent questions contained within the interview protocol were not asked directly.

### **3.6.3 THE CURATORIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

The final curatorial questionnaire is contained in Appendix 5. Arriving at that point, however, was a complicated process. Over the course of the questionnaire's construction and development, many of the specific issues that had to be addressed emerged in direct, literal fashions. For example, in its first iteration—which was answered in writing by Curator CU.01—neither the word “author” nor the specific term “curatorial authorship” appear. Instead, it was left to the curator to insert that notion into the discourse through an open-ended question, which queried if curatorship was a “creative practice” or if curators were “artistic individuals” (Appendix 1). This was insufficient to address the true question at hand, which was how curators are to be situated regarding intervention given the preponderance of writing and theory surrounding the nature and practice of curatorial authorship. As a result, the final questionnaire asked direct questions, such as:

- Do you consider the curator to be an author of exhibitions? If so, can you explain? If not, why not?
- Have you ever had to ask an artist to alter or change the content of his or her work prior to exhibition? If so, can you discuss the context in which this occurred?

- What moral or ethical responsibilities do curators have in relation to working with artists, whether for solo or group exhibitions? In your experience, how have these aligned with or diverged from the ideas surrounding curatorial authorship?

These questions directly engaged the participant curators with the issues at hand. They also highlighted the linguistic and theoretical difficulties posed by separating curatorial intervention from both reception and curatorial practice. Defining and determining the transparency and agency of curatorial practice as focus areas for curatorial intervention through the construction and evaluation of questions to curators posed one of the most significant and delicate issues presented by this research.

#### **3.6.4 THE ADMINISTRATORS' INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

The final administrators' questionnaire is included as Appendix 6. It was developed to interrogate the specific issues that determined the source of instances of curatorial intervention. Within the institutional frame, were curators or administrators responsible for situating the agency of curatorial intervention? Where there were disparities or overlaps between the two, and how was the agency differentiated? And when disparities in intentionality and intervention emerged, who determined the outcomes? The administrator questionnaire also sought to further clarify the structural and organisational paradigms within which curators operate. It began with questions addressing the formal, professional frameworks of the institution, then explored the philosophical and analytical elements of professional practice. Some of the questions included:

- What terminology does your institution use to describe the position commonly referred to as a "curator"?
- Apart from general professional standards and practices, are there any other policies or procedures that your institution has that guide curatorial practice?

- What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator–artist relationship in relation to the construction of exhibitions? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this dynamic either within your institution or within other exhibition contexts?
- What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator–audience relationship? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this dynamic either within your institution or within other exhibition contexts?

### **3.6.5 SPECIFIC ISSUES INFLUENCING QUESTION CONSTRUCTION AND EVALUATION**

While there are no specific issues that influenced question construction or evaluation, it is acknowledged that the questions do operate with the presupposition that curatorial agency does have an impact upon the artist–audience exchange. No assumption is made regarding whether the impact is positive, negative, or neutral, but the questions were designed to parse information that could discern this fact should intervention emerge as an operation of the curatorial function.

### **3.7 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION, CODING, AND ANALYSIS**

Upon completion of the interview process, the interviews were transcribed by myself and by two additional outside transcriptionists. Those transcribed externally were reviewed, edited, and corrected before being forwarded to the participating artists for review. The approach adopted for transcription was the “clean verbatim” approach, meaning that pauses and phrases not relevant to the interview—such as “umm,” “ahh,” or “you know”—were edited out (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013, 287). The interviews were also edited for grammatical clarity as part of this process, meaning that if a sentence began or ended with one of the above, or similar, phrases, it was corrected to reflect proper grammar/syntax.

The transcripts were then provided to the interviewees who were invited to review, correct, and/or redact the transcriptions prior to their being analysed. In most cases, participants amended their transcript in some manner. The initial transcripts that were returned were not redacted, so in certain instances participants undertook that process themselves. Assurances had been extended that all identifying material would be removed prior to source referencing, but to ensure that occurred, Artist AR.01 returned her draft transcript in this form:

My main studies were in photography, but I've [deletion here] had [deletion here] obviously broader interests than that. [deletion here] Professionally, my first solo exhibition was in 1984. [deletion here] I can send you the CV; you can see of all of this, if I haven't already sent it. [deletion here] I've exhibited pretty regularly.

This led to a recognition that, in general, further information and instructions were necessary regarding the steps that would be undertaken to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and to reduce the amount of editing that participants would be required to undertake.

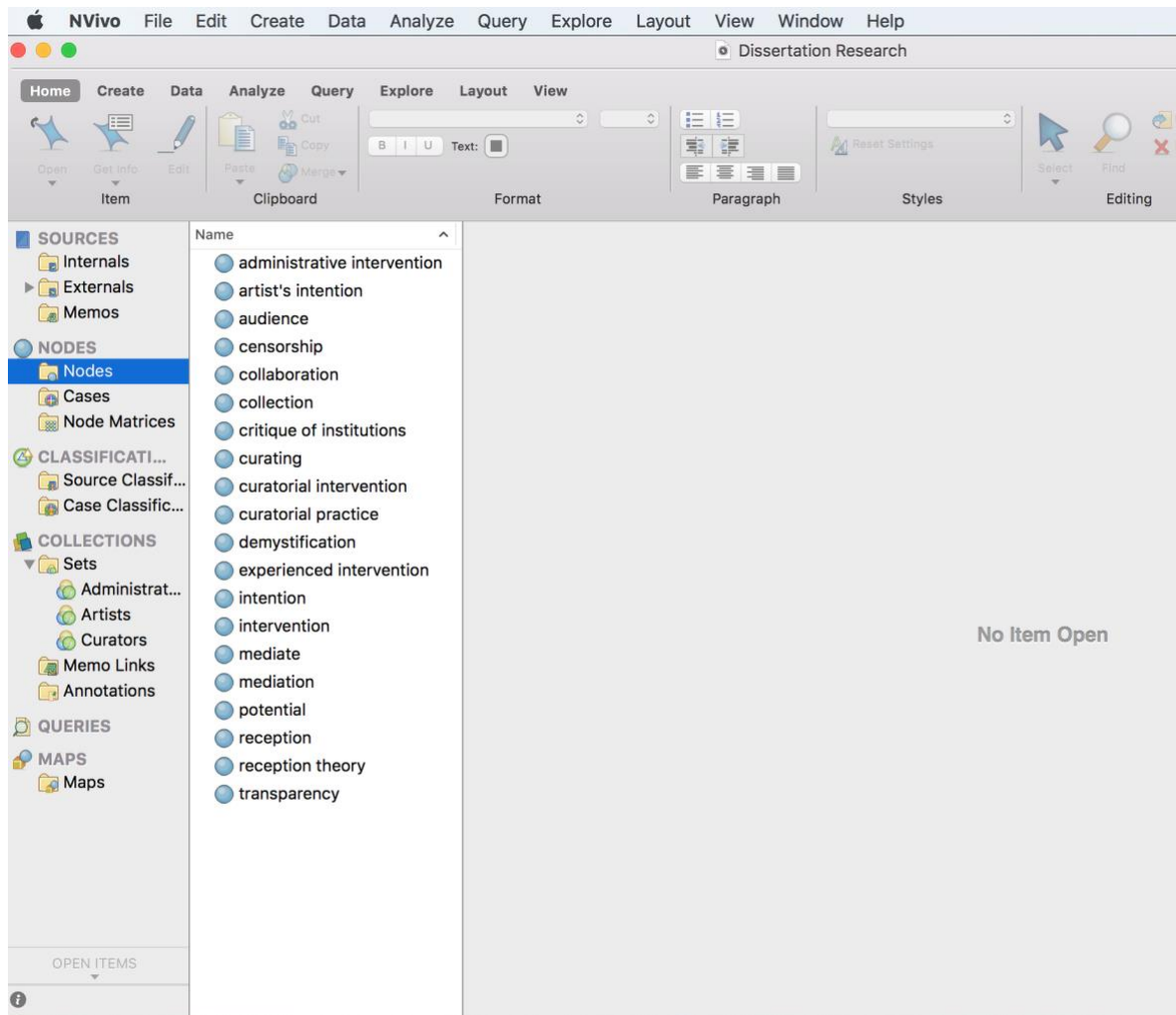
In many instances, participants made minor corrections—such as amending the titles of exhibitions—despite the information being redacted in every instance for confidentiality purposes. In the few instances in which participants made no emendations whatsoever, each sought assurances that confidentiality agreements would be respected. In two specific instances, participants stated that they did not have to remain anonymous, although both were advised that under the terms of their ethics agreement with the university, they were not allowed to be identified.

Once the participants were satisfied with the contents of their transcripts, the materials were returned, accompanied by a signed release form. Interviewees were invited to sign the release when returning the transcript rather than when undertaking the interview as a good-faith indication that the terms of the interview, its contents, and

their opportunity to review and edit it before it proceeded further had all been met. In two instances, research participants received their transcripts to edit them, then did not return them. In those instances, two new research participants were secured, and the unedited, unreturned transcripts have not been included in the research.

### **3.7.1 CODING AND INTERPRETATION APPROACH AND STRATEGIES**

Both the newly generated interview materials and the existing source and reference materials were coded using standard qualitative research practices. Specifically, all relevant data were imported into the qualitative analysis programming tool NVivo, where they were then subjected to close reading and examination, and then coded for a total of twenty different terms, phrases, and interconnections, all derived from issues generated from the theory and the literature review. The coding nodes were selected and determined based on the research question. The nodal interpretation constructed in NVivo is depicted as Figure 3.1: Coding Structure for Variable Analysis in NVivo:



**Figure 3.1: Coding Structure for Variable Analysis in NVivo**

The nodal coding and interpretative structures provided through NVivo generated frequency, distribution, and location data across the range of original and secondary source materials examined as part of this research. Subgroup interpretation was constructed for the three participant cohorts—artists, curators, and administrators—meaning that the specific coding categories and nodes could be examined at both the general and specific levels.

Since NVivo allows for the importation of reference materials, this facilitates examining the existing literature formally against the research findings, and against

components of each segment of the other. Regardless of the examination mode used, the term “intervention” occurs across each sector, and in each information set, very infrequently at best. This finding had been borne out in the literature review in the preceding chapter. NVivo supplements the literature review’s initial findings. Its analyses reinforce the lack of existing materials relative to curatorial intervention—the subject under consideration.

What follows is a pyramid for which analysis is the base. The cohort interviews—the experiences of the individual artists, curators, and administrators—form its three visible sides. Interpretation becomes the mortar that holds the pyramid together.

Some may argue that this research is incomplete because the audience does not have a defined voice. The reasons for this were outlined above in Section 3.3—yet there is an audience node in the interview coding; cohort members specifically mentioned the term “audience” in twelve of the thirty interviews. As has been noted, to the extent that audiences are unaware that curators may intervene—or may be intervening—in works of art, their experiences remain receptively unmediated. And, until the findings of this research are concluded, one may not yet say with any modicum of certainty whether curatorial intervention exists. As a result, all that interviewing audience members would do is open a double-possibility, and create a double-bind, for the interrogation would begin with the question, “If curators have the power to intervene in works, AND if they do so . . .” These responses would be speculative. Furthermore, such an approach would result in open-ended research that would be unmanageable within the current research protocols and frameworks. For these reasons, this research focuses on those participants that create the conditions through which works are the subject of reception.

### 3.7.2 CODING STRUCTURE

The codes used to interpret the data have provided the parameters within which the subsequent chapters are constructed. What this means is that in every instance in which either a general analysis or a specific narration of a cohort participant is examined, it is done so by and through the specific lenses of the analytical nodes that are listed above. One will only find curatorial intervention narratively if it has been found nodally: example illustrates generality, and the specificity of the research participants is tested against the more broadly based theoretical frames of the existing literature.

The narrative structure of the dissertation reflects the findings from the nodal analyses. While initial hypotheses outlined the possibilities of structuring the findings along national lines, a closer analysis revealed that the most effective framework involved situating each cohort in an individual chapter, then synthesising these outcomes in a single analytical aggregate that followed.

As a result, Chapter 4 provides the extended findings from the artist cohort; Chapter 5 provides the extended findings from the curator cohort; and Chapter 6 provides the extended findings from the administrator cohort. Each chapter begins with a Summary Table that synthesises the narratives that follow, providing an at-a-glance overview focusing on the following variables: interview participant; person intervening; type of intervention; frequency of intervention. Specific narratives regarding curatorial intervention then follow.



### 3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

To summarise, the interpretivist/constructivist methodology selected—reinforced by qualitative analysis grounded in interview-based research—is both probative and substantive for the issues at hand. This methodological approach was deemed the most effective for critically interrogating the research question: To what extent does the curator or curatorial expert impact on the transactions between artist, object (and/or experience) and audience? This question critically examines reception theory to determine if it can effectively account for the role of the curator and, if not, if a supplemental theory better situates the curator's interventionist role. A quantitative research method was initially attempted. However, the inability to generate statistically significant returns resulted in the decision to abandon that approach. A revised methodology, using purposive/purposeful sampling was adopted, and cohort-specific questionnaires were developed. Seventy-three professionals across the three cohorts were invited to participate in the research. Of those, forty-three either did not respond or chose not to participate. The other thirty—ten from each participant cohort—were interviewed. Those interview transcripts form the foundation for the original research on curatorial intervention that is contained in the following chapters.

The choice of artists, curators, and administrators—rather than artists, curators, and audiences—was made to reflect the complexities inherent in an institution's capacity to mediate artists' experiences prior to engaging with the audience. While an audience's experience of art is subjective, one may more effectively interrogate the roles these three parties play within the aesthetic exchange. Furthermore, since two of the three parties already operate within reception theory, the addition of the curator reflects the true nature of the exchange—which the current theoretical model arguably lacks.

Using those findings, detailed information from each participant cohort can be presented. The presentation of these findings begins with Chapter 4 (the artist cohort), continuing with Chapter 5 (the curator cohort), and concluding in Chapter 6 (the administrator cohort).

. . . it is important to point out, as a specific characteristic of communication in the visual arts, that author and recipient do not deal with one another directly, as is the case in the daily occurrence of face-to-face communication.

Wolfgang Kemp, *The Work of Art and Its Beholder* (1998)

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM THE ARTIST COHORT INTERVIEWS**

### **4.1 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

This chapter outlines the findings from interviews conducted with ten artists to determine the existence or absence of curatorial intervention. In circumstances where artists have experienced such intervention, questions also addressed its frequency, as well as its perceived impact from their perspectives. The individual responses detail specific instances of curatorial intervention, with each cohort member narrating personal experiences surrounding varying degrees of curatorial intervention as measured against the criteria outlined above.

### **4.2 COHORT FINDINGS OVERVIEW**

Table 4.1 summarises curatorial intervention from the artists' perspectives. Column 1 identifies the cohort member, including information regarding their gender and geography; Column 2 briefly outlines a specific instance of curatorial intervention that the cohort member discussed over the course of their interview; Column 3 is an evaluation given by the cohort member regarding the impact they perceived the curatorial intervention had on the specific exhibition or project in question; Column 4 categorises the institutional or individual agent—curator or administrator—that the artist identified as being ultimately responsible for instigating the instance of curatorial intervention; and Column 5 is a subjective evaluation of how each artist-cohort member perceives curatorial intervention, based on their experiences over the course of their career.

**TABLE 4.1 ARTISTS' REPORTS AND ASSESSMENTS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

<b>Artist (Gender/Location)</b>	<b>Specific Experience/s of Curatorial Intervention</b>	<b>Artist Assessment of Intervention Impact</b>	<b>Person/Agent Intervening in Artist's Work</b>	<b>Career Frequency of Experiencing Intervention</b>
AR.01 (F/AU)	Multiple instances relating to the installation of projects	Neutral/ Negative	Curator	Frequent
AR.02 (M/NZ)	Altered number of works in exhibition	Negative	Curator	Frequent
AR.03 (M/AU)	Requested that artist not use Japanese flag in installation artwork	Neutral	Curator	Infrequent
AR.04 (M/NZ)	Overemphasised and focused upon peripheral aspect of artist's project; misrepresented artist's intentions	Negative	Curator	Occasional
AR.05 (M/NZ)	Contextualised artworks in exhibition contrary to artist's intentions	Negative	Curator	Occasional
AR.06 (M/US)	Altered key components of installation project contrary to artist's intentions; added text altering work's context	Negative	Curator	Occasional
AR.07 (M/US)	Suggested artist could alter elements of in-process work	Positive	Curator	Infrequent
AR.08 (F/AU)	Installed work contrary to artist's intentions	Negative	Curator	Occasional
AR.09 (M/AU)	Administrator directed Curator that contractually agreed exhibition could not be displayed	Negative	Administrator	Infrequent
AR.10 (F/NZ)	Physically/conceptually situated work outside artist's intended intentions or exhibition dialogues	Negative	Curator	Occasional

Table 4.1 highlights variations in the experiences of curatorial intervention as well as differentiations regarding its perceived impacts across the interviewed artist cohort. It also lists the frequency and impact of perceived curatorial intervention for each individual artist. It reveals that the majority of the artists in the cohort perceived curatorial intervention to be pervasive. All ten cohort participants reported having experienced curatorial intervention in some manner: either indirectly (in the form of a suggestion or encouragement) or directly (as an alteration to an artwork, or the exclusion/replacement/selection of an alternative work). This suggests initially that the theoretical paradigm for curatorial intervention has a high likelihood of validity.

### **4.3 STATEMENTS ON COHORT FINDINGS**

The detailed findings are structured using a model grounded in formal logic, and framed using the conditionals that attach thereto. They operate from an initial sufficient statement that implies formal logic's rules: If *a*, then *b* and/or *c*. In this instance, the "if" is the question of the existence or absence of curatorial intervention, given that it has not previously been established as something that is an extant operative factor within the artist–audience exchange.

Generally, proof of existence is probative rather than determinative, because one must first establish a thing's or phenomenon's existence—in this case, that of curatorial intervention—before one may begin to interrogate its implications. As a result, these findings, to the extent that they relate directly to questions concerning the existence of curatorial intervention, are of probative value only when taken on a case-by-case basis. When taken as a whole, one may argue that the findings suggest the existence of curatorial intervention on the balance of probabilities, and could further

infer that these initial findings could serve as foundational elements for additional research. They could be perceived to have valid, persuasive evidentiary value.

Should the preponderance of the evidence derived from the cohort's responses suggest that curatorial intervention does in fact exist, then its existence would be addressed as per the conditional logic outlined above. For these research purposes, the B and/or C conditions become,

A: If curatorial intervention exists, then:

B. Is curatorial intervention a frequent occurrence?

AND:

C: It its impact significant?

Both B and C may be answered either affirmatively or negatively without impacting the fundamental internal logic of the equation once the existence of A has been established, meaning that once curatorial intervention has been found to exist, its occurrence may be frequent or infrequent, and its impact may be significant, neutral, or insignificant, resulting in the following potentialities:

- Frequent/high impact
- Frequent/neutral
- Frequent/low impact
- Infrequent/high impact
- Infrequent/neutral
- Infrequent/low impact

Fundamentally, the artists in this cohort were asked to critically evaluate a series of key questions: did curators alter or influence the way/s in which you made or

make your work? Was or is it a regular occurrence? And, to what extent do these actions impact your work?

#### **4.4 COHORT-SPECIFIC ANALYTICAL VARIABLES**

To structure the TAP analysis, each sector is interrogated against a specific set of variables that generate unique findings. The findings then produce results from which the TAP matrices can be extrapolated. For the purposes of Artists, the sector-specific variables have been defined as follows:

- Meaning: do artists perceive that curators allow them to effectively convey their works' meanings without undue influence, intervention, or mediation?
- Method: do they perceive that they do so using their preferred methodologies?
- Medium: do they do so in their preferred media without intervention and as envisioned?

As the literature discussed in Chapter 2 suggested, curatorial intervention differs from both standard curatorial practice and curatorial authorship. The Questions for Artists Protocol was developed to explore issues specific to both the ideas and practices of curatorial intervention. Selected examples of these questions were included in Chapter 3. A complete questionnaire for the artist cohort can be found in Appendix 6. Given the semi-structured nature of these interviews, the specific language used to discuss the issues and ideas of curatorial intervention varied slightly between the participants, but each cohort member received the full questionnaire in advance. As a result, they were aware of any deviations from the prepared questions, and had the



opportunity to discuss or expand upon any issue they wished to address further. Any variations to or deviations from the standard questionnaire were made clear to the participants before their responses were noted and coded. These safeguards allowed the cohort participant interviews to be coded and analysed consistently, and to be assessed both against other cohort participants' responses and against the TAP Matrix.

## **4.5 NARRATIVE FINDINGS**

All ten artists interviewed reported experiencing instances of curatorial intervention over the course of their professional careers. This suggests its existence, but provides little information regarding its operation. Based on the variables of meaning, method, and medium outlined in Section 4.4, the questions then become threefold: despite intervention, are artists able to convey the meanings of their works effectively; may they do so using their preferred methodologies; and are they able to use their preferred media? Findings from the ten cohort members, structured with these variables, will begin to situate the artists' perspectives regarding where they might be positioned, and position themselves, relative to the TAP Matrix.

### **4.5.1 "IT WAS COMPLETELY HER CHOICE": ARTISTS' EXPERIENCES OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

From the outset, the findings indicate that the prevalence of curatorial intervention has had an ongoing impact on the capacity of artists to effectively convey their works' meanings. Frequently during the in-depth discussions, artists narrated specific instances exemplifying when intervention affected the specific intent of a work.

Artist AR.01, an established artist based in Australia, narrated an experience in which a curator suggested that a work that was part of a larger, group installation

project be placed in a location the artist had not necessarily envisaged. While she was amenable to the request, she noted that it stemmed from the curator's preference for a narrative for the exhibition that differed from the specific intentions she originally had for her work, explaining,

Yeah. The thing is, it wasn't so much that he was trying to stop me from what I wanted to do; it was like—I could see that in his mind, he had an idea of the overall shape of the exhibition, and by putting my work where I wanted it to go, it was very dominating. It looked great, but it was very dominating, and maybe that was not his intention. He wanted it to have a lesser place. And that's understandable, that's okay. I'm only one artist of six, so I can understand that [ . . . ] But apart from those specific instances, I would say that I haven't been pushed around much. (Artist AR.01, interview, 14 December 2015)

In this specific instance, the artist recognised that the curator's intention was to situate her work within a wider exhibition context based on its location rather than to mediate it within the content of the work itself. When asked why she had not addressed the issue of site further and more directly if she felt that her work had not been installed as she had intended, she responded that she would not be “mollified” by a curator taking responsibility for a decision contrary to her own artistic intentions, nor would it make her feel “any bit better” (Artist AR.01, interview, 14 December 2015). She remarked that she understood the circumstances surrounding the curator's decision, but given its opposition to her intention, it still falls within the ambit of intervention.

Artist AR.02 drew distinctions between interventionist decisions driven by thematic concerns and those driven by functional or material concerns. When describing the circumstances surrounding the reduction of images included in an exhibition that had travelled overseas, he recounted this experience:

[The exhibition] was reduced when it went to London, because the space that was available, they couldn't hold thirty 1-metre-square images. They really wanted the show, but the gallery wasn't big enough, so it was cut back to about eighteen or twenty images; I can't remember. And I think

also at the [next venue] it was slightly reduced, because of space as well. But this was a long time ago; I don't remember. And it wasn't to do with the images; it was just a space issue, you know? Rather than cram it all in, they just decided to—

RESEARCHER: Okay, so who did the culling of the images?

ARTIST: It was between me and the curator or director of the galleries, I think.

RESEARCHER: So, you worked consultatively with whoever was in...?

ARTIST: Yes. (Artist AR.02, interview, 28 February 2016)

Yet, he also asserted that when such decisions impacted the impact of the works themselves, then the implications of curatorial intervention were more significant.

Speaking of a subsequent exhibition, he described another experience:

I arrived at the gallery and she'd painted the walls sort of mustard yellow; oh, we had words. And I just said to her, "Why is the wall painted mustard yellow?" I said, "The work's really neutral; it's soft greys, it's tea toned, so the white in the prints is just very creamy, warm." I said, "This mustard yellow, it just changes the whole feeling of the work, and it just doesn't look right." And she read me the riot act and told me that she was the curator and I had nothing to do with it, and she—it was completely her choice. (Artist AR.02, interview, 28 February 2016)

As these two examples indicate, curatorial intervention in Artist AR.02's experience oscillated between neutral and negative. Where it operated neutrally, it also resulted from a higher level of artist–curator collaboration and consultation; where the outcome and implications were negative, there was no consultation.

Artist AR.06, an African American mid-career artist with an international practice and reputation, holds similar concerns regarding the relationships between the physical installation of works and its constructions of meaning. He related numerous instances over the course of his career during which his work was mediated or subjected to curatorial intervention. He described a specific instance in which his work

was recontextualised and marginalised specifically through its installation and presentation:

I was doing the [. . .] series, which is the head shots of people with the same lighting, same facial expression, but different faces, different clothing, based on the clothing that they all own. [. . .] And they wanted to blend them together, and I didn't really like how that turned out. I let them do it, because I was like, "Alright, I'll see how this looks," even though I wasn't that into it. But then what added to it was the way they contextualized, like, the write-up in their materials. It just didn't really get to the heart of what I was attempting to do with that series [. . .] So everyone brings [. . .] a certain response to a certain face and a certain outfit. And I think they made it more into an examination of race, which is definitely part of it, but that depends on who you are; there's definitely a different examination of race, depending on your race. And so it also kind of felt like they were taking a very mainstream, white approach to it, which was fine, but they didn't contextualise it as, like, "We—" or I, whoever was writing that, "see it this way, because this is my background." They kind of made it into what I was saying was how it impacted them, and I didn't really like that.

RESEARCHER: Had there been discussions around the context of the work?

ARTIST: I had conversations with them, but they didn't send me the text for approval first, so that was something where I was just like, "Okay, I need to make sure I get approval of the text first." That wasn't something where I was, like, really, really angry, but I was like, "You know, I really wish we would've had a conversation about this." (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015)

Without delving too deeply into the application of the TAP Matrix, one can see quite easily that it indicates that in each of these instances there were varying degrees of transparency and agency, and that in each instance the practicing artist regarded the power relationship as having been skewed in favour of the curator. In the first example, there is greater transparency, as the exchange was collaborative, and, to some extent, shared agency. In the second example, there was the illusion of transparency because Artist AR.06 had the perception that consultation both had occurred and was occurring, when in fact decisions contrary to his intentions were being made without his input. At the same time, agency had transferred wholly to the curator.

Artist AR.04 related an experience in which curatorial intervention would have altered the meaning of an existing work contrary to its original intention. The artist—a mid-career New Zealand artist with an extensive international exhibition history—had been invited by an institutionally affiliated practitioner to participate in an exhibition with a focused, curatorially driven exhibition theme. The curator’s stated intention was to recontextualise one of the artist’s existing works into the frame of the new exhibition. As Artist AR.04 explained,

there wasn't any opportunity to reconfigure the work or re-present it, so it all of a sudden got a little bit uninteresting. And she was also wanting to overemphasise that little bit in that one artwork as more of a global theme of mine. So she wanted to exaggerate how much I used the influence of spell-making or whatever in my work, even in the ritualistic way of making the work; you know, sort of trying to make me out as some sort of shaman or warlock or something like that. And I sort of said, “No, no, you're going over the top with this.” So it sort of got to a point where I said, “Oh no, I can't come up with any new ideas around this theme,” so I didn't take part in that show. (Artist AR.04, interview, 3 November 2015)

He then went on to narrate a subtler experience of curatorial intervention in which a commercial space where he exhibited regularly encouraged him to make work that could be more easily marketed:

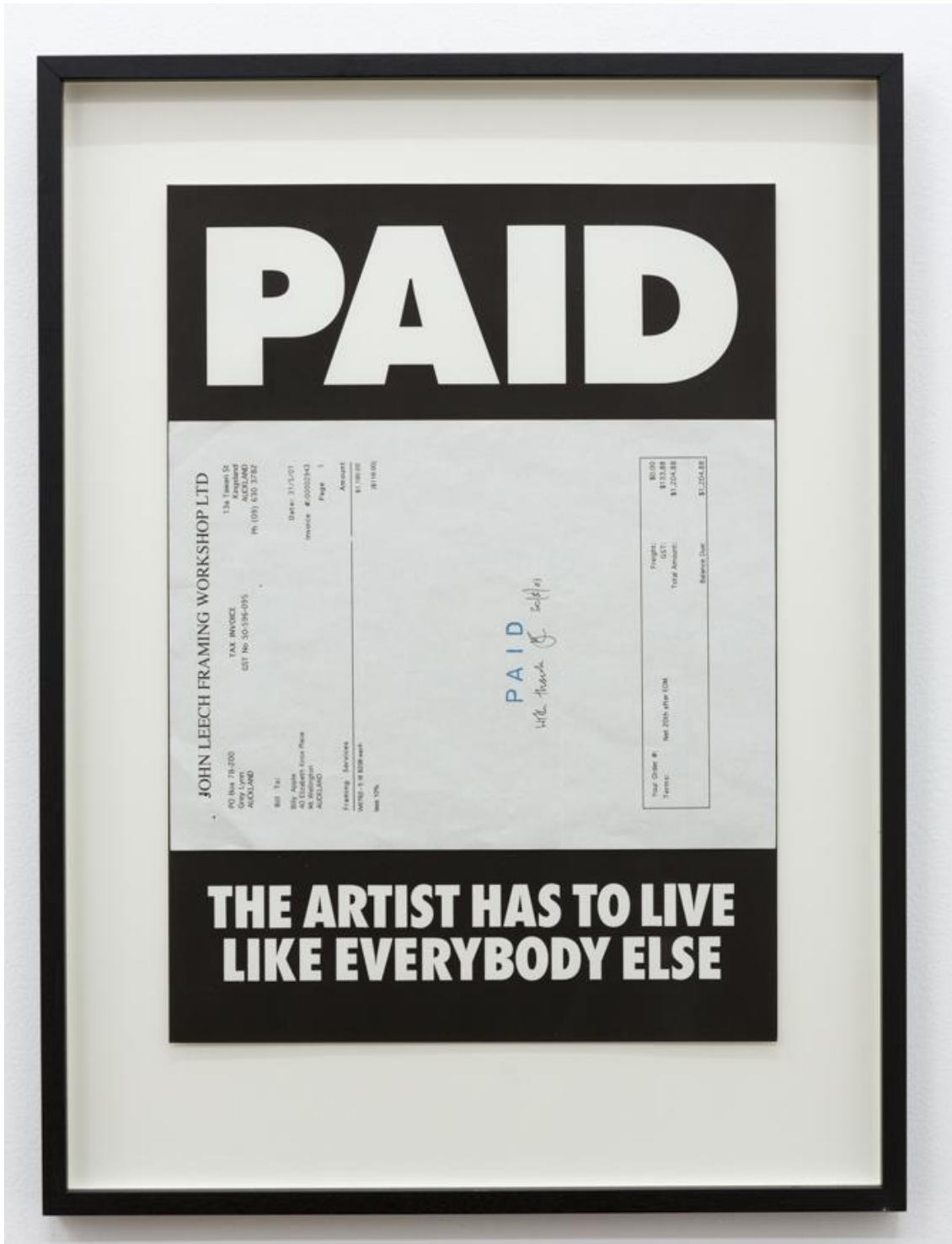
[. . .] every time I had an exhibition with them, I always got a sense that [the gallerist] was challenged by my work, in terms of, “How the hell am I going to sell this shit?” [laughs] So as a dealer, [they] were kind of trying to encourage me to be a little more commercially minded, but I was pretty staunch on that. (Artist AR.04, interview, 3 November 2015)

These experiences mark what might be considered some conceivable limits of curatorial practice. In one, a curator encourages an artist to consider recontextualising an existing work—or to simply make new work—which would easily fit within their predetermined curatorial framework. In another, a curator (or gallerist) encourages an

artist to alter both the materiality and the context of their work so it can more readily become a part of the system of economic exchange. Neither of these examples is artistically driven. Instead, these are curatorially driven frames within which creative activity would be situated. Similar experiences were reported by Artist AR.05, who recounted an exchange during which a curator informed him that his own description of a work's meaning was incorrect. With a mix of humour and irony, he remarked, "I remember there were many times you'd go, 'I think this work is about this,'—you'd be talking about your own work—and they'd go, 'No, no. That's not it. That's not what it's about'" (Artist AR.05, 27 August 2015).

Describing the problematics of this dynamic further, Artist AR.05 noted "curators are between the artists and the work, so they sort of give context, kind of interpret the meaning of the work" (Artist AR.05, 27 August 2015). Artist AR.05 has reconciled himself to the absence of the totalised experience of the work of art. While this idea will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, what it foreshadows is the possibility that hermeneutics provides a foundation through which the constructed experience of works of art relies upon multifaceted frames: artist, curator, administrator, and, although absent from directed research for these purposes, the audience.

Artist AR.05 was very direct in his critiques and conversations regarding intervention's role in the political economy of art, particularly in correlation to an artist's need to generate income, or, as New Zealand artist Billy Apple stipulates an ongoing series of artworks: *The Artist Has To Live Like Everybody Else*.



**Plate 2:** Billy Apple, PAID: The Artist Has To Live Like Everybody Else (2001)  
 Screenprint and Framing Invoice. Image courtesy the artist and Starkwhite, Auckland.

As Artist AR.05 observed,

. . . the thing I get is more like someone approaches you to be in a show, and they talk about the ideas of what the show's about. And you say, "This is the work I'm working on the moment, and this is how this could fit in." And then they look at it and they go, "Actually—aren't you making any of those figures anymore? Are you making those?" and you kind of go, "No one was interested in them, so I moved on," and then they kind of go, "Well, it would be great if you could do one of those." You sort of go and revisit something, and go and make something kind of [. . .] something that may be slightly annoying or something. [. . .] you're often so broke that you kind of go with the offer [. . .] (Artist AR.05, 27 August 2015)

The findings indicate that both Artists AR.04 and AR.05 have experienced instances during which either the intentionalities or the meanings of their works have been mediated through the applications and operations of curatorial intervention. Furthermore, it is evident from their interview transcripts that such mediations were not, or would not have been, transparent to their audiences.

If one combines their experiences with the observations of Artist AR.06, then one may begin to see the constructs of curatorial intervention emerging. Starting with requesting changes to works, then engaging in the recontextualisation of works, and, more problematically, inferring that a creative practitioner themselves is not clear about the meaning of a work of art, each example solidifies the construction of curatorial intervention as an active, mediating practice. This perception is reinforced when considering another instance relayed by Artist AR.06 in which a colleague was asked to alter a key component of a work. He explained,

. . . there definitely are those ways that the people organizing the exhibit, the curators, kind of try and get you to shift things in a certain way. I've never dealt with anything where it completely compromised the work, but I know people who have had really odd requests. I had a colleague who had little, small kitchen knives, little small, sharp kitchen knives that were part of a sculpture, and the curators told her they didn't want those on the sculpture because someone could brandish it as a weapon. And I was like, "Okay, is that likely in an art gallery?" And I was like,



“Who is in there who's going to think, ‘Hmm, I'm going to take this sharp thing off of this sculpture and use it as a weapon’”? To do what? Just, like, randomly start stabbing people in a non-profit gallery? (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015)

Selected members of the cohort related their experience with curatorial intervention in other ways, but did not directly denote its impacts as positive, neutral, or negative because of their tendency to attempt to mitigate its impacts. Such were the findings in the case of Artists AR.03 and AR.04, whose comments on their intentionality will be discussed in the following subsection, and Artist AR.10, who situated her experiences of curatorial intervention generally between positive and neutral, although she did acknowledge that there was variation in the value of interventionist tendencies by certain curators. In this regard, Artist AR.10 remarked,

. . . I think back to when I was working closely with [Curator CU.01], and he did get his fingers in there. I guess it's the quality of the suggestions or the feedback or the bouncing ideas, because not all curators are created equal. I mean, I have a lot of respect for [Curator CU.01], and I think he is quite interventional as a curator, in terms of steering things. But he is also very clever at what he does, and his suggestions are usually good ones [laughs]. Whereas other people might not be so worth listening to. . . (Artist AR.10, interview, 26 January 2016)

Artist AR.08 addressed this same issue through an analysis of curatorial intervention, and its subsequent rectification, thereby mitigating the perceptions of positive, neutral, or negative overall impacts. I will discuss this in the following section.

The following subsection includes a comment by Artist AR.09 where he addresses the specificities of curatorial intervention. He comments specifically on the implications of ceding creative power to curators, the implications of curators executing their authority, and of having been compelled through the use of curatorial agency to

radically alter an exhibition. Speaking of the project that is discussed further in the following section, Artist AR.09 described how the curator came to select the pieces that were ultimately displayed:

she didn't bother picking anything that was going to get her into hot water—that she thought might get her into hot water. So it was a culled show, put it that way. It wasn't merely curated; it was culled. And I didn't mind it, because the [. . .] series doesn't have to hang in its entirety; it was not created like that. (Artist AR.09, interview Part 1, October 15, 2015)

Three aspects of this statement are noteworthy: one, that the agency for selecting the works had been wholly ceded to the curator, emphasised by the language “she didn’t bother”; two, that Artist AR.09 regarded the methodology used to make the selection of works to be radical, describing the works as having been “culled”; three, despite having had his initial exhibition censored, he was not opposed to a selection of works from an alternative series being selected to the extent that the latter series had not been designed to be seen in its entirety, unlike the series that was removed.

#### **4.5.2 “CONCEPTUALLY, IT WAS A TRAVESTY”: THE IMPACTS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

What emerges from these findings is a distinction between creative and consumptive agency, the latter being the processes that situate works within the public sphere, ready to be experienced. From the findings above, it appears that some creative agency resides with the artist and, from their perspective, some with curators, while consumptive agency is in many instances subject to the specific agency and operation of the curator without any transparency attaching thereto.

As a result, the TAP Matrix becomes even more nuanced: not only must one situate the issues of transparency and power within their respective modules, but one must also attempt to parse agency relative to where it might best be situated.

Furthermore, this distinction between these two types of agencies means that a curator might in fact assert their power relative to one but not the other, or against both against the artist. So, when one begins to evaluate the findings, one must map each of these issues against a diverse range of variables, and plot each against its respective point on the graph. It seems it is not simply a matter of existence, but instead a matter of application.

This distinction between the types of intervention and the variations in agency is what allows artists to first respond in one manner, and then to reassess. For example, Artist AR.03 initially did not share any concerns regarding curatorial intervention, nor did he relate any instances in which intervention had occurred. An established Australian artist with a long history of exhibiting nationally and internationally, Artist AR.03 regarded his history of artist–curator exchange as largely collaborative and non-problematic. During his initial interview, he narrated a career spanning more than three decades, and addressed the issue briefly and succinctly, remarking:

[m]y experience is that there has been no intervention—no one has asked me to change [. . .] My experience is that you explain the project to whoever it is I'm working with in the institution before we proceed[.] (Artist AR.03, 2 August 2015)

Somewhat surprisingly after making such a categorical statement, he sent an email a few hours after the conclusion of the interview. This correspondence included a story of a remarkable intervention, reading, “[o]ne example of curatorial 'intervention' was the show in Japan. The curator asked that I don't use the Japanese flag, as it would create problems with nationalists” (Artist AR.03, email with the author, 2 August 2015). This revelation generated a series of written follow-up questions:

RESEARCHER: Did you comply with the Japanese curator's request?

ARTIST AR.03: Actually, we started with a discussion about a work which explored how the Japanese killed my great uncle—who I am named after—in Burma, as a prisoner of war. This seemed to worry him. We then moved to the idea of the extended flag piece, which he thought was provocative but would work well in the university gallery. Later he asked if I intended to use the Japanese flag. Without actually saying so, he obviously had reservations. He told me of a recent incident in which right-wing activists had killed a professor who was translating Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. They didn't want Islamic ideas polluting the Japanese spirit. When I asked about this situation he replied that "it was very inconvenient for the university".

RESEARCHER: Did it affect the concept or project you had already planned?

ARTIST AR.03: See above.

RESEARCHER: Was this request ever known by others or made public?

ARTIST AR.03: No—and the flag work and also the video created quite a stir anyway. (Artist AR.03, email correspondence with the researcher, 15 August 2015)

Therefore, Artist AR.03 had narrated another experience of curatorial intervention that was not transparent, for which he had relinquished a portion of his artistic and creative agency, and for which the disparate power relationships between artist and curator emerged. The TAP Matrix was skewed in favour of the curator, with no indication as such visible to the recipient audience. In certain instances, institutions may seek to pre-empt, or address, this imbalance. The *Guidelines for Presenting Sensitive or Controversial Content* from the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, states in its preamble that "the Museum is committed to the principles of creative and intellectual freedom and free universal access to information which are key components of an open and democratic society. These include: [ . . . ] the right of access to intellectual and cultural heritage" (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, ND). One must consider how this notion sits alongside requests by curators for artists to mediate elements, aspects, or components of their works. One must also consider how to situate

these requests within the more broadly based context of mediation as a trope of intervention.

In certain instances, artists perceive the TAP Matrix as facilitating positive net effects for the creation of their works. For example, Artist AR.07, a mid-career artist based in the United States, believes that curatorial intervention can and should have net positive effects on the creation and construction of both works and visual experiences. He related just such an experience, in which a curator suggested an alteration to work of art in progress:

[a curator] came in and she was like, “You're making these [. . .] paintings and they're great, they're good, they're exciting. It deals with abstract expressionism, it deals with action painting, it deals with body involvement. But quit being so fuckin' insular, and why is everything so square? Why don't you take out a chunk on the left? Take out a piece in the centre. Make that a sculptural wall relief.” And I was like, “Damn, you're right. Why does it have to be square? Why do we have to leave it that way? We don't have to leave it that way.” That happened just recently. (Artist AR.07, interview, 15 December 2015)

When asked how he regarded the role of curatorial intervention within the larger framework of his creative practice, he stated that he regarded it as an integral component of creativity, remarking succinctly, “I'm very much open to the ideas of collaboration. I believe that a good curator will make the show and will make my work stronger. I truly believe that.” (Artist AR.07, interview, 15 December 2015)

However, while in certain instances, artists view the collaborative relationship they have developed with curators positively, in others, the agency and power relationships are viewed as being more problematic. In certain situations, artists are even reticent to engage in actions, processes, or practices that are directly requested by

curators even if those same actions are to fulfil an artist's stated intentions. Artist

AR.08 spoke of just such a circumstance:

I was in a show [. . .] last month, and it was with quite a young curator, and she just didn't involve me in the process at all. Even when I suggested I'd come down for the installation, she just didn't seem to want me there. And then when I got there and I saw the work, she'd put a really tiny screen on quite a big arm that came off the wall, so it looked kind of like a postage stamp on a huge, big, boom [. . .] It just was really wrong, and I was horrified [. . .]

RESEARCHER: [. . .] that was someone who didn't actually want to engage with you, and yet, in the end, they made a series of installation decisions that actually affected both the work and your perception and intention for the work.

ARTIST: Well, the following day, after the opening, we went and bought another arm and replaced it. I just said, "I'm sorry, I can't have it like that."  
[. . .]

RESEARCHER: So, you actually changed the work after the opening?

ARTIST: Yes, which is always just bad; you just feel like it's all bad form all around. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: So, was she aware of the fact that those actions had actually affected both the content and the context of your work?

ARTIST: I think she understood the importance. I just had to insist, once and firmly. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: So this is an instance in which you'd let her know prior that there...?

ARTIST: Yes. We went to the opening and had this huge, horrible arm on it. I said I hated it and we needed to change it first.

RESEARCHER: Oh wait, so even after the fact, she didn't want you to come back for the reinstallation?

ARTIST: Yeah, exactly [laughs]. And I just thought, "Okay, I think I've been clear. I think that this is just a simple replacement; nothing can really go wrong. I'm not going to insist on going down there," do you know what I mean? Plus, this is taking up all of my day. (Artist AR.08, interview, 26 July 2016)

Both the above examples illustrate that determining the significance of intervention is not simply a matter of recognising its existence. In fact, its presence or absence is the least problematic issue that may be illustrated within these initial findings. The findings become more nuanced when unique artist responses are considered for their perceptions of intervention's impacts, particularly if those responses are viewed separately regarding meaning, method, and medium. Then, those responses are further considered to determine, if, and if so to what extent, those impacts fundamentally altered the structure or function of the work or project in question. If not, one might then argue that intervention was of little, or no, significance. If, in fact, it was to be found to be of material impact, then one would have to determine at which variable the intervention in fact operated, and to what extent the intervention represented a collaboration, a compromise, or a command.

Certain examples indicate that even within the framework of curatorial intervention, its applications vary, with differing effects. In the instances where artists feel that their agency is most usurped, such as the experiences described by Artists AR.02 and AR.09, the subsequent impacts upon intended meaning, or envisioned intention, are most evident. Artist AR.02 remarked, “[u]ltimately, the curators have the ultimate decision, because it’s their gallery [. . .] The curators are in control of the artists, and if you want to show, you do what they say, that’s it” (Artist AR.02, 3 November 2015). This notion of functional, structural, and ideological ruptures between curator and artist is regularly echoed within curatorial theory. Yet, Artist AR.02 asserted something else entirely, postulating that the power dynamic and structural relationships result in circumstances in which the artists are always already subjugated to the curator regardless of either content or context. He reinforced this perception through relaying another exhibition experience in which both the

intentionality and the contextualisation of the project were altered by and through the exhibition's presentation. In his words,

[In Sydney], they didn't have the right lighting, and I fuckin' lost it. [. . .] there weren't enough lights, and they weren't either strong enough or adequate enough, or they weren't—they were weak lights that were doing general illumination; they weren't sort of highlighting all the images. And so, some of them just were in darkness and some were in light. And because the galleries were always painted for [the exhibition]—because I designed paint colours for the walls for the shows, for quite a few shows; it was this dark liquorice green, and so the room was already very dark. And when the work was on that sort of background, each image had to have its own individual lighting to bring it off the background, and then it looked amazing. So, I remember being very disappointed in that show, because it just—it looked okay, but it just didn't look great, and I couldn't do anything about that. (Artist AR.02, interview, 3 November 2015)

Artist AR.02 described two instances in which the contexts of his projects were altered. In the first, he was partially involved in the process: to the best of his recollection, he was partially involved in the selection of the images that remained on display, although he regarded—and regards—the process as one in which the ultimate decision remains with the curator not because of any specific expertise, but because of disparate institutional power relationships. In the second, the exhibition suffered because it was altered from its original context due to an exhibition design decision, effectively altering viewers' capacities to engage with the works the way the artist had intended. In the artist's opinion, this resulted in an exhibition that “looked okay, but it just didn't look great,” and for which the artist was powerless to make any correction—or to inform audiences in any way.

One might also consider Jauss's construction of the “horizon of expectations,” a quality of artworks that is essentially determined by the extent to which they affect or influence audiences (Jauss 1982, 25). In each of the instances Artist AR.02 recounted, this horizon of expectations was obscured: in the former, it was partially obscured due



to his separation from the final selection of images, so the capacity of the work to influence an audience was mitigated by physical distance; in the latter, the works themselves were fully obscured by a lack of light. In this sense, then, the work became wholly invisible in its visibility, for it already lacked the capacity to be seen how the artist intended: it could be viewed as it should have because the exhibition space lacked the capacity to display it in the proper manner. Therefore, artists—not viewers—must situate themselves incredibly low on the horizon of expectations.

Works of art may also be obscured in their entirety simply by not being displayed. Artist AR.09 recounted an experience that illustrates this directly, discussing an instance in which he was directed to select a body of work separate from the one he had been contractually invited to display:

RESEARCHER: Were you willing to explore the idea of an image-by-image evaluation, or did you just take the approach that your works would be seen as a body of work? And you, as the artist, had made the selection, in consultation with the curator—and it was that or nothing?

ARTIST: Well, I wasn't really given that choice. I'd like to say I was given that choice, and had I been given that choice, I might very well have rejected it on the basis that this particular series is very much intended to hang together as a series; it's not—individual images are not the point. [. . .] I was simply told, “This show cannot go up. You either change the show or you don't have a show.” (Artist AR.09, interview Part 2, 31 October 2015)

What is particularly significant in Artist AR.09's account is that he was not offered the opportunity to reconfigure the original exhibition's content. Instead, he was compelled to alter the exhibition in its entirety.

In each occurrence, the findings indicate that curatorial agency had displaced artistic intentionality. And, in each instance, the artists perceived themselves as subjugated to curators within the power relationship that structures the third variable of

the TAP Matrix. Despite being requested to alter components of artworks—as both Artists AR.03 and AR.07 were—artists may still perceive the power relationships that exists between themselves and curators to be more equitable than disparate. Should they do so, then their responses to the issues raised would not signal such a marked shift toward subjugation relative to the agency and power spectrum.

Finally, one must recognise that in certain instances, such as in the cases of Artists AR.06 and AR.08, the perception was that the agency and power dynamics were structured so that authorship and curatorial authority were either vested with the artist or rested within a shared collaborative space. Yet, both artists narrated instances during which curatorial interventions with an authorial, narrative impetus occurred despite shared, open dialogues that should have prevented these possibilities.

Should this occur outside the frame of the artist’s intentionality, one encounters the experiences recounted by Artist AR.01 in relation to a show installed in her absence:

ARTIST: I'd only seen the gallery once, and it was hard [. . .] to figure out how this work would go into that space and make sense [. . .]. In the end, I just said to them, “You're going to have to figure it out, because I'm not here, I can't do it, [. . .] Just do your best,” and then they did a couple of things that I thought were terrible [laughs]. Like they double hung works that were never [. . .] supposed to be hung that way. It looked OK but conceptually it was a travesty, as far as I was concerned. But it was done, it was on the wall.

RESEARCHER: So, this is perfect. This is where I—this is not where you wanted to be, but this is exactly where I wanted to be.

ARTIST: If I'd been there, it wouldn't have happened.

RESEARCHER: And was there any indication in the exhibition [. . .] that any of the decisions that had been made about the installation had been made by any member of the exhibitions or curatorial or administrative team at the institution?

ARTIST: No. You know that that doesn't happen. (Artist AR.01, interview, 15 December 2015)

What emerges is the existence of a theoretical paradox in which curators are expected to have agency vis-à-vis artists, but the manifestation and execution of that agency may in fact be *contra* artists. This creates both structural and theoretical paradoxes in which the relative positions of the participants to the exchange are marked most significantly by their very oscillation.

#### 4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began with a table that sought to situate curatorial intervention within a critical framework from artists' perspectives. It presented a synopsis of findings from interviews with ten professional practicing artists, synthesising the existing data to highlight individual experiences of curatorial intervention; the artist's assessment of the perceived impacts of such interventions; the perceived agents of curatorial intervention, from each artist's perspective; and a subjective evaluation of the frequency of curatorial intervention over the course of each artist's career. The table sought to illustrate how curatorial intervention is experienced, if those experiences are universal, and if they manifest differently along cultural, gender, or geographic variations. Both the narratives provided by the artist cohort and the narratives derived therefrom indicate that although curatorial intervention has infrequently been experienced by some respondents, it has been experienced by all cohort members.

In summary, the table reveals that two out of the ten artists have frequently experienced curatorial intervention; that five out of the ten have occasionally experienced it; and that three out of the ten have infrequently experienced it. In nine of the ten narratives, the person intervening in the artist's work/s was a curator. In one

instance, the perceived impact was positive; in two, neutral, and in the remaining seven, negative.

The chapter then examined a series of detailed narratives of curatorial intervention from each artist's perspective. Subsection 4.5.1 explored how curatorial intervention specifically affected individual artists' projects; subsection 4.5.2 explored their perceptions regarding the impacts of those interventions. Each example of curatorial intervention expanded the parameters that bounded the scope of acceptable curatorial practice, as well as the ways in which curatorial intervention was made manifest within the transactional relationship. In Subsection 4.5.2, the impact of curatorial intervention was examined against each artist's intentions specifically, as well as against the scope of their creative project overall.

In Chapter 7, these findings will be analysed and evaluated using the three-node TAP Matrix. Where curatorial intervention is determined to have occurred—as it was in all ten instances reported by members of this cohort in this chapter—it will be further evaluated for its impacts to determine how it affected creative projects in a positive, neutral, and negative manners.

Objectively, the initial cohort responses suggest the following: 1) the existence of curatorial intervention; 2) a disparate power relationship between artist and curator; and 3) a lack of transparency regarding the exercise of curatorial intervention as a practice. To further analyse curatorial intervention, it is necessary to consider it from curators' perspectives. The findings from that cohort are presented in Chapter 5.

I believe the professionalization of curatorial practise to be one of the most reactionary moments in the history of contemporary art. And that is because it separates the presentation of art from the creation of it.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *A Twist of Paradox* (2010)

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM THE CURATORIAL COHORT INTERVIEWS**

### **5.1 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

The responses from the curatorial cohort provide the first sustained research findings specifically focused on professional perspectives regarding curatorial intervention. Should the research question have validity, it should be reinforced by the specific experiences narrated in the participant responses. Since the binary nature of the relationship of artist and audience simply reinforces the structure of reception theory, the emergence of intervention theory could only be generated in part from the responses derived in the findings from the curator cohort.

The agency and validity of intervention theory depends on the existence of two criteria in the findings from this cohort: one, that curators have mediated the works of artists prior to their reception by audiences; and two, that these mediations were completed with agency and forethought, and with the intention of altering the content, or experience, of the work of art. For if the former occurs without the latter, one could argue that curator's role in this exchange is little more than a foil, something an artist presses up against without its having either a purpose or a determinate outcome. Curators neither would nor could admit that this was the case, nor should they.

The following sections examine the responses from ten curators regarding their roles in negotiating the artist–audience exchange. Their responses are positioned by two presuppositions: one, that in each experience of reception, the audience's experience was mediated by a curator in some way; and that two, that the mediation has been visible to the audience.

## 5.2 SELF-REPORTED EXAMPLES OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION

Table 5.1 outlines specific instances of curatorial intervention as described by the ten participants in this specific cohort. Table 5.1 differs from Table 4.1 to the extent that although it describes specific instances of curatorial intervention, and provides examples, by doing so, each cohort participant is *prima facie* acknowledging his or her role in mediating the artist–audience exchange. And, one may argue—although this will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 7—cataloguing and chronicling specific instances of curatorial intervention in these specific contexts implies (by logical extension) the existence of curatorial intervention as one modality of curatorial agency and, arguably, grounds it more firmly within the theoretical construct proposed by this research.

The table lists a series of variables specific to the curatorial cohort. Column 1 provides the gender and location of the cohort member; Column 2 outlines the circumstances surrounding a specific instance of curatorial intervention that the cohort member has narrated, if applicable; Column 3 identifies the agent of intervention in the example that has been narrated in Column 2, recognising that it is possible that the intervention was driven either by the curator or by pressure from an institutional administrator or other individual operating at another level within an institution; Column 4 presents a subjective evaluation of the curator’s perceptions regarding the anticipated impact of their intervention on the project in question, the perceived actual impact of the intervention; finally, Column 5 is a subjective individual evaluation by each cohort member regarding their perceptions of how often they may have intervened in artists’ works over the course of their career.

**Table 5.1: CURATORS' REPORTS AND ASSESSMENTS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

<b>Curator (Gender/Location)</b>	<b>Nature of Curatorial Intervention</b>	<b>Intervention Agent in Example</b>	<b>Expected v. Evaluated Impact</b>	<b>Overall Career Probability of Curatorial Intervention in Specific Project</b>
CU.01 (M/NZ)	Regularly altered works' contexts <i>contra</i> to artists' intentions if physical objects not compromised	Curator	Significant/ Significant	High Probability
CU.02 (M/AU)	Has never explicitly requested an artist to change an artwork or project	Curator	None/ None	Low Probability
CU.03 (F/US)	Intervened on instruction of administrators who compelled curator to select alternative artwork	Administrator	Significant/ Significant	Possibility
CU.04 (F/NZ)	Requested that artist consider elements of artwork safety and environmental issues that affected work's sustainability	Curator	Significant/ Insignificant	Possibility
CU.05 (M/AU)	Suggested artist extend the scope/range of proposed project	Curator	Significant/ Significant	High Probability
CU.06 (M/US)	Used exhibition framework and formal physical context to disguise and structure a complex cultural critique	Curator	Significant/ Significant	Possibility
CU.07 (F/US)	Often requested additional or alternative video/moving-image edits for specific project/exhibition contexts	Curator	Significant/ Context-specific	High Probability
CU.08 (F/US)	Offered installation artists exhibition opportunities within defined spatial/formal institutional parameters	Curator	Significant/ Context-specific	High Probability
CU.09 (F/US)	Rebuffed request from both administrator and artist to fundamentally redefine exhibition context	Administrator	Significant/ Significant	Low Probability
CU.10 (F/NZ)	Collaboratively constructed culturally specific exhibition outside traditional museum framework	Curator	Significant/ Significant	High Probability



Table 5.1 illustrates that the majority of curators reported having engaged in some form of curatorial intervention. Every cohort member except Curator CU.02 reported an instance in which she or he requested that an artist change an aspect or element of their work. In the case of Curator CU.02—the single instance in which the cohort member did not report a specific occurrence of curatorial intervention—he attributed its absence to his mode of curatorial practice coupled with professional anticipation. During his interview, the following exchange occurred:

RESEARCHER: Have you ever had experiences curatorially where you've either asked or had to ask an artist to change an aspect of their exhibition after a project you were working on was in process?

CURATOR: No, not really. And I say not really because I guess my approach is relatively open. It's all about how engaged the artist is. I am extremely sensitive to the fact that if there's a work in an exhibition, whether it's being created—commissioned specifically for the exhibition—or if it's just alone, I'm not going to go to any great length to try to manipulate it without them knowing first and foremost.

[. . .] So I can't say that there has been anything where we've said, "Oh, wait, you can't include that, we have to change it" (Curator CU.02, interview, 4 September 2015)

Including the observations by Curator CU.02, these ten brief descriptions in Table 5.1 serve as the first concrete illustrations of the phenomenon of "curatorial intervention." On an initial reading, Table 5.1 appears to reinforce the experiences of intervention narrated by the artist cohort presented in Table 4.1 in the preceding chapter.

For the purposes of evaluation, Curator CU.02's responses are included in Columns 3 and 5. With that caveat, in eight out of ten instances curators were the agents driving the curatorial intervention in the narrated examples. In the remaining two instances, the interventions were being driven by administrators. Nine of the ten cohort participants anticipated that the impact of the curatorial interventions upon the projects would be significant, while only six of the ten evaluated the impact of the interventions as actually

having been significant. Of the remaining three interventions that had been anticipated to have had a significant impact, one was regarded as having had an insignificant impact, and two were evaluated as having had varying levels of impact that the respective curators determined to “context-specific” (Curators CU.07 and CU.08). Curator CU.07 regarded the impact of her interventions as context-specific because her evaluations were based on requests that were made to edit or re-edit video works for specific installations, performances, events, or festivals; in certain instances, the edits were not made, or were not made to her specifications or requests, meaning that the impact of the intervention is difficult to gauge. In the case of Curator CU.08, the curatorial interventions in question relate to an ongoing series of installations by various artists that took place in a specific space, the framework for which included caveats regarding what could occur as the space continued to operate as a multi-use, income-generating facility. Since the participating artists were provided with the information as part of the initial negotiating process (although the curator was involved with the projects on an ongoing basis), the interventions’ impacts were also more difficult to evaluate except on a case-by-case basis. For the specific installation project that the curator described at length, both the intervention and its impacts were regarded as positive constraints.

Finally, the cohort participants were evaluated regarding the probability with which they were likely to intervene in a project they were curating. The probability table is tri-nodal, with measures being a high probability, a possibility, and a low probability. Cohort members with a high probability of curatorial intervention were self-evaluated to be more likely to intervene in artists’ projects, and to have had a professional history of having done so previously; cohort members with a possibility of curatorial intervention may have previously intervened in artists’ projects, but were neither more nor less likely to intervene in such projects subject to circumstances and perceived need; cohort participants with a low probability of curatorial intervention were less likely to intervene in current or future

projects, and had fewer instances of curatorial intervention within their self-reported prior curatorial projects. Of the ten cohort participants, five regarded their careers to date as being marked by a high probability of curatorial intervention; three assessed their preponderance towards curatorial intervention to date as possible; and the remaining regarded the possibility of curatorial intervention as a key component of their career practice to date as low.

Despite these variations in frequency over career, all ten cohort participants apart from Curator CU.02 related occurrences of curatorial intervention in some manner or fashion, and to a greater or lesser degree. Based on those individual narratives, a close reading of curatorial intervention from this cohort's perspective is provided in the following subsections.

### **5.3 SITUATING THE CURATORIAL COHORT FINDINGS WITH THE TAP MATRIX**

The findings in this chapter illustrate the specific issues surrounding transparency, agency, and power, as well as some of the specific individual and institutional transactions that bound the artist–curator exchange. When established as conceptual or theoretical limits, the structures of transparency, agency, and power serve to frame how much autonomy artists have when creating and constructing their works within the exhibition context—particularly when one considers a work's methods, materials, and meanings. More simply, one needs to explore examples of the existence of curatorial transparency, agency, and power to determine how these variables impact upon an artist's ability to determine how their works are presented, contextualised, and received. Admittedly, an exhibition context differs markedly from a studio context, and the two frames are not interchangeable, so what an artist might intend when conceiving a work in the studio may not be what is possible, achievable, or allowable when a work emerges to be experienced and consumed.

And while the variables that situate the artist–curator exchange—i.e., transparency, agency, and power—appear to both be the same and to operate in the same manner as they would for artists (in part, because the relationships between the two cohorts should be binary), in fact curators are concerned with issues of structure, significance, and symbolism within the exhibition context. This means that these variables materialise again outside the frame within which the work was first conceived or created. The operative variables were defined in the methodology chapter but to reiterate, for measurability in the research context, they are considered as follows:

- 1) did or do curators ask artists to alter the physical or contextual structures of their works or projects?
- 2) if the answer to Question 1 is yes, did or does this action result in an outcome which is significant? and
- 3) was or is the curator’s role in this exchange symbolic (meaning philosophical, providing discussion and dialogue) or was or is it functional/structural (meaning physical, directional, or operational, providing demands, directions, and decision-making)?

The answers to these three questions were then assessed against the TAP Matrix to determine their relative or absolute levels of visibility, agency, and autonomy. Next, the questions developed for this cohort explored perceptions regarding whether curatorial interventions were conscious, calculated, and/or consequential.

Regardless of whether curators recognise the distinction or not, in their contemporaneity they are always already mediators. The role of curating itself constructs two distinct possibilities (or opportunities), which create two distinct responsibilities, each with their own agency. One develops as curatorial strategy, meaning that conscious curatorial

choices are made to achieve the desired individual or institutional results; the other is curatorial interconnectivity, meaning that the curator is the conduit by and through which a tripartite relationship of artist, curator, and audience—and through it an experiential institutional relationship, whether with a museum, gallery, kunsthalle, or related structure—could even come into being.

### **5.3.1 OPERATIONS AND/OR INSTANCES OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND AGENCY**

While the issues surrounding transparency and agency may at first appear insignificant within the wider constructs of curatorial practice, within the specific framework of this research they are primary considerations. The issues surrounding the operations of transparency and agency relative to the exercise of curatorial intervention itself become evident from the moment they surface in Curator CU.01's statement. And when the two variables of transparency and agency are combined with the findings regarding curatorial power, one may then evaluate how these variables impact upon curators' abilities to re- or de-contextualise works—or even to intervene within works outside an artist's original intentions.

To begin to explore the phenomenon of curatorial intervention from the curatorial perspective, one may consider Curator CU.01's response to specific questions regarding the development of his practice:

I started curating [. . .] working with collections. There, my approach was informed by “the death of the author.” I operated with the view that, so long as you didn't hang a work upside down, you could present it in perverse company and make it operate in ways that were outside the scope of the artist's intention. Back then, I thought the role of the curator was to take such liberties. (Curator CU.01, interview, 12 August 2015)

Curator CU.01 asserted that the role of the curator includes, and always has included, both autonomy and agency. But in his example, there is no accompanying requirement for

transparency. The implication is that curators have no obligation to adhere to artists' intentions, at least as long as the physical integrity of the work is not compromised.

Curator CU.01's remarks do include a partial caveat: since much of his earlier practice was collections-based, he acknowledged that as he became more reliant upon artists, galleries and collectors to source works, he was less able to work in this same manner. In his words, "things became harder, more constrained, less creative." That Curator CU.01 should regard the processes of working with institutions, artists, and collectors as an impediment to creative curatorial practice is indicative of the interventionist nature of his methodology.

Curator CU.01 remarked on these concerns in a later exchange:

RESEARCHER: Where might we sit as curators at the intersections of artist, administration, and audience?

CURATOR: A lot of what you are describing comes down to ethics—the ethical relation between curators and artists, and institutions and publics. I have to say, I think curators can take on too much of this ethical burden on behalf of the other parties. My model is more agonistic. I am less motivated by imperatives to serve audiences, artists, and institutions, more interested in serving my own ideas and what I can make of them. I want to take opportunities to advance my own enquiry. I think that's the pathway to making better exhibitions. Hopefully, that works better for the other parties. (Curator CU.01, interview, 12 August 2015)

Curator CU.01's approach prioritises curatorial autonomy over artistic intentionality. By extension, this would appear to also prioritise curatorial intervention. In many ways, his perspective is shared by Curator CU.05, who also appears to prioritise curatorial intervention within the lexicon of available experimental or established curatorial practices. Curator CU.05 has worked both independently and within the institutional sector, and he regards the roles that curators play in each distinct professional context as interrelated but not necessarily interdependent. In considering how curatorial intervention might be situated against reception theory, or against relational aesthetics, he remarked:

these types of interventions are happening all the time, but they're just probably more nuanced. But I also think [. . .] when I read the questions that you sent me, I was thinking the framing of the questions implies a [. . .] very particular kind of curatorship. And when I have taught students in the past around curatorial studies, I always identified that there are many, many different types of curators. You could be working for a private collector with a really narrow understanding of what they're interested in, and you could be a curator working for an auction house or in a public institution or an independent space. And all of these situations have different historical contexts and they demand what I would call different ethical approaches. It's not necessarily a question of whether or not one is being more or less interventionist, it's a question of what are the ethical boundaries. And those ethical boundaries, I think, are determined by the broader cultural, and political, and social context which surround those individual spaces. (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016)

Curator CU.05's observations are correct, but they continue beyond the scope of this research to the extent that they could dissociate curatorial intervention from curatorial ethics. This research focuses solely on curatorship and curatorial intervention precisely because they both involve negotiating and mediating the artist–audience exchange. When asked whether he engaged in acts of curatorial intervention, Curator CU.05 acknowledged that

as a director [. . .] I was quite interventionist, but also understanding that I wasn't an artist, my role as a curator was to really try and push the meanings of works in different ways. Or, to play the role as a commissioner, because that was the other thing that we would do, find pots of money for artists to make things. It was an opportunity for us to really look at what an artist may have been dreaming about, but not necessarily had the opportunity to fully conceptualise, or never had the money to actually produce. So, the role I think then of the director, the commissioner, and the curator is quite interesting, and it necessitates a type of intervention. (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016)

What transpires is a conundrum for curatorial intervention. On the one hand, Curator CU.05 described this construction of curatorship as “old-fashioned,” suggesting that in his opinion the issues surrounding intervention itself are better situated within discussions concerning cultural, social, and political contexts. On the other hand, position, he described

both his curatorial practice and his practice as a top-level arts administrator/ gallery director as being “quite interventionist” and as being activities that literally necessitated interventions.

Curator CU.07 takes the position that engaging with dialogue-driven conversations designed to facilitate better outcomes for both artists and projects, while being interventionist, is not necessarily ethically suspect nor necessarily problematic. During her interview, she spoke of circumstances in which she regularly asked artists to alter or edit elements of larger projects to either better meet her needs, or to fit within the scope of exhibition opportunities that were available. As she explained,

When I was doing film screenings, there were many instances in which an artist had a looping video installation, and if the context that I was showing the work in was a sit-down screening, then I would ask for an excerpt. . . (Curator CU.07, interview, 16 October 2015)

Yet the issues that remain unresolved in her artist–curator exchange are whether both the content and context of the works have changed. And, if so, have they done so outside the frame of the audience’s knowledge? When asked if the process would have been conveyed to an audience, Curator CU.07 remarked:

For the excerpts, yeah, I would write in the program notes or on the title card on the video “excerpt” or “excerpts.” But for a different edit, I don't think so. (Curator CU.07, interview, 16 October 2015)

When asked directly, Curator CU.07 reported that she regards both the exercise of curatorial agency and the possibility that it would be interventionist as both problematic and unlikely. Yet, when asked to describe her practice narratively, a regular and ongoing practice that involves curatorial intervention emerges. This disparity is not and was not apparent to Curator CU.07, and the findings indicate that this disparity is not evident in all the cohort



responses.

Curator CU.04 described having similar concerns to those that Curator CU.02 described in Section 5.2 above, particularly regarding the problematics of curatorial intervention relative to transparency and agency. She asserted that with proper planning, the issues that are likely to require intervention can be addressed as part of the exhibition planning process. She spoke of an exhibition being installed in a space in the Middle East that involved live animals, and the specific issues that resulted in her decision to intervene. She made the following observation:

I think that was a cultural thing, as well [. . .] I come from what was perceived as a culture where—you know, it was quite affluent, and people spent time and energy and money on keeping pets—which is not something that people from every culture have access to, especially in the Middle East, where you don't really keep pets. You have animals that work for you in some way, or that lay eggs that you eat [. . .] but the idea of going to a supermarket and buying food for animals they think is crazy. And I get that [. . .] (Curator CU.04, interview, 1 November 2015)

As seen from the comments above, Curators CU.01, CU.02, CU.04, CU.05, and CU.07 each described established parameters within which their frames for curatorial intervention operate. While the specificities that define their approaches to intervention will be considered further in the analysis chapter, these findings do suggest a high level of intra-cohort consistency among five of the ten members.

Of the remaining five cohort participants, both Curators CU.06 and CU.10 have extensive experience working in community-based, culturally focused exhibition spaces that emphasise the types of externally and progressive dialogues described by Curator CU.02. Curator CU.06 described his professional practice as emphasising a diversity of creative practices:

most people believe that museums are spaces where only final products by professional people can have space to be displayed. At the [museum], we don't believe that. We believe that anybody can make anything and share it with each other, as long as it has a story and it has meaning to them. [. . .] we believe that that leads to bonding, bridging, and empowerment, and that makes our community stronger. (Curator CU.06, interview, 11 August 2015)

He then positioned his frame for curatorial intervention using principles that he described as being inspired by the Fluxus movement, remarking that “Fluxus was very interventionist a lot of times, so while there was a lot of back story, like, you know, 'These people are doctors; they're doing this project.' You don't necessarily need to know that; you just can get a sense of it” (Curator CU.06, interview, 11 August 2015) He prefers projects to develop organically, and then for information to be shared as necessary. When asked about his willingness to reveal these specific operations, or to share how curatorial interventions within the scope of a specific project, the exchange was as follows:

RESEARCHER: How much of this type of behind the scenes pre-planning or pre-production work—and that's probably the word to use—how much of that information might be shared with an audience, if any?

CURATOR: I think it depends on the context. If we were able to set up an artist or curator talk, I would share whatever people wanted to ask me about. I probably wouldn't advertise it in public, on wall labels or in marketing. (Curator CU.06, interview, 11 August 2015)

Curator CU.10 regards curatorial intervention as generating two problems that impact directly upon transparency and agency: one, that curatorial intervention misstates artists' intentions; and two, that curatorial intervention has the potential to only serve the needs of curators—particularly when living artists do not have opportunities to participate in dialogues. As she remarked,

I also don't do that thing where I shoehorn artists into my kind of ideas. I'm not saying I don't have any agency, but I mostly—you know, the ideas or the

way that I work comes out of the artists' work, and out of my respect for them. (Curator CU.10, interview, 7 February 2016)

The findings indicate that the positions taken by the ten cohort members diverge markedly regarding the implications of both transparency and agency. Curator CU.01 began the narration of these findings with an example that suggested absolute agency and limited transparency, while Curator CU.10's example suggests limited agency and absolute transparency. Both curators did, however, acknowledge the existence of curatorial intervention, and recognise its impacts upon mediating the artist–audience exchange, to the extent that they engaged in discussions surrounding the problematics of curatorial agency and curatorial transparency. How issues have been individually addressed, and how the agency has been exercised, have varied according to the curators.

### **5.3.2 THE PURE ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

The preceding section's findings detailed if, and if so how, curatorial intervention was situated by the exercise of agency, or power—and if the exercise of those variables was transparent. This section presents the cohort findings concerning the economics of curatorial intervention, both pure and political. Using the term “pure economics” means that the cohort findings have been evaluated for instances of curatorial intervention that have been motivated by, or intended to achieve, economic outcomes. The term “political economy” is used to refer to the qualities and concerns specific to curating, particularly those discussed by Anton Vidokle and outlined previously in Chapter 2. To return to those concerns, the drivers for curatorial intervention within his thinking—to be considered further in the analysis chapter—are situated within the collapsing distinctions between “political economy” and “economy”

(Vidokle 2013). The findings in this chapter both oscillate between and blur the boundaries and distinctions among clear-cut differentiations between the two. In certain instances, curators have made concrete statements regarding measurable economic values (e.g., Curator CU.06)—thereby positioning their responses initially within the frames of pure economy. They have then moved towards more subtle discussions of political economies, situated later by the intricacies of Vidokle’s and others’ thinking.

Seeing curatorial intervention as a predominantly economic concern—in contradiction to the notion of intervention as the operational agency of the individuated curator—first occurred in the responses from Curator CU.06. Speaking about working within an international context, he recounted an instance in which the economy of exhibition cloaked a project’s more complex meanings, and how he used the lures of economic value and exchange as “smoke and mirrors” to mask the more radical and meaningful content that was the exhibition’s true focus. As he explained,

I put together a group of artists, either female or trans, female to male, artists from North America that use the body to struggle against kind of heteronormative values. And then at that time, serendipitously, a gallery, through a friend of mine [. . .] asked me if I would curate a show for them. So I said, “Sure, let’s do a video show, so I don’t have to ship anything.” [. . .] I proposed nine videos, I censored three of them, six got through. [. . .] they were six super wild videos. So, I showed this video show in Iran. And then Shanghai is a little bit more flexible, because China, unless you’re overtly talking about the Party, they don’t really care so much about other stuff. So, I’m showing a different body of work from the same artists there at a museum, and then at Photo Arts Shanghai, which is an art fair, [. . .] You know, underneath the commercial rubric, you can actually get away with a lot. If you’re telling people it’s worth a lot of money, and that people are going to pay you money, and bring money into your nation, a lot of censors then drop off and [are] like, “Well, that’s okay. As long as [. . .] somebody makes \$10,000, it’s okay.” So anyway, the foil of capitalism was used in my favour this time. (Curator CU.06, interview, 11 August 2015)

By stating that “the foil of capitalism was used in my favour this time,” Curator CU.06 exposed a fundamental conceptual schism between curatorial intentionality and

economic reality. He used the power of global financial exchange—literally, the perceived power of the dollar—to mitigate the problematics of artistic intentionality. He then overlaid his intentionality on the project, stating, “I proposed nine videos, I censored three. . .” It is unclear which videos addressed what subject matter—did the videos that queried identity politics have higher perceived dollar values, for example—but Curator CU.06 grasped that by asserting the notion of pure economic value, he could likely overcome any censorship issues. This finding illustrates curatorial intervention as an operational mode of pure economy.

Alternatively, Curator CU.08 described that the political economy by and through which her institution operates situates her larger curatorial practice, and thereby compels curatorial intervention. As she explained,

[. . .] as far as art accommodating the museum's needs, I mean, a notable example would be the parameters of [a large-scale, ongoing, changing exhibition series], in that they made the space available for site-specific commissions by contemporary artists, but it was with the acknowledgement that the space was also used for weddings and special events. So, they put the interesting restriction of nothing being able to be exhibited in the centre of the floor space, which on the outset, you might think, “What a drag.” (Curator CU.08, interview, 11 December 2015)

The curatorial interventions outlined by Curator CU.08 were constructed as mediations driven by pure economies. She recounted transparency being generated through dialogues that defined the parameters of the project. This should, hypothetically, have resulted in exhibition proposals or projects that did not require additional modification. She further positioned the process by remarking that

I'm of the mentality that it's better to just go in completely transparently with the artist and say, “I really believe in your work. I think you're a good person for this project. I will tell you, from the very beginning, the restrictions on the space. If this is something you want to work around, great. If not, fine.” (Curator CU.08, interview, 11 December 2015)

When she invited an artist to construct a site-specific project in her institution, she made this statement directly, adding a caveat that any work had to remain *in situ* while the museum maximised the space's revenue-generating potential. Curator CU.08 acknowledged that within these parameters, curatorial intervention could both enhance and hinder artists' creative practices. She addressed these issues directly, observing that, "sometimes restrictions make artists more creative, giving them a little variable to work—it just depends. Not everyone. Not everyone and not every occasion, but sometimes. . ." (Curator CU.08, interview, 11 December 2015).

Curator CU.10, a curator working in New Zealand, sites the question of curatorial intervention within the realm of political economy. In her words,

I curated a show [. . .] which was probably the first major survey of Ngāi Tahu art and taonga ever [. . .] And so it was huge [. . .] I went to 10 iwi kaumātua [tribal elders], and I was the meat in the sandwich between them, the iwi kaumātua who were supposed to bind those communities, and [the museum] [. . .] I boiled it down to [several] major ideas, which I said were cultural characteristics of the tribe, which were culture, tenacity, sustainability, and innovation. And then I put all those—all of the work into those kinds of boxes. [. . .] And I remember presenting it at [the museum], and someone said to me, "But that could be any culture," and I said, "We're a part of the human race, aren't we?" (Curator CU.10, interview, 7 February 2016)

Curator CU.10 intended to engage with the existing organisational and structural systems that operated within her institution, to leverage them for the artistic community she served, and to work with tribal elders to construct a representative exhibition marked by cultural, creative, and artistic significance, excellence, symbolism. At the same time, she recognised that to do so she would also have to negotiate any possible pre-existing institutional prejudices. Through her curatorial agency, working collaboratively with tribal elders, she constructed an exhibition narrative that situated the works of indigenous New Zealanders within a wider cultural context, thereby placing them within the more complex curatorial and cultural dialogues that existed within the museum. At the same time, the

specific issues of curatorial transparency and agency remained opaque, and the question of curatorial power remained difficult to situate. Of concern in this instance is the existence of cultural power that is not transferrable—quite simply, there are issues that attach to the specificities of agency within Maori culture that could not have been ceded or acquired, regardless of where she was situated within the wider museum frame.

What is imperative to remember in relation to these findings is that artists, curators, and administrators do not and cannot approach the issue of intervention itself, or any of its variables, from any position other than subjectivity. Both individuality and institutionality make this impossible. These findings reflect this difficulty.

As a result, many curators, including Curators CU.02, CU.03, and CU.09, can be situated within the same frame that CU.10 outlined: the realm of mediating between artists and administrators while wearing an interventionist veil.

Curator CU.02 suggested that the process of curatorial intervention may be an antecedent to the exhibition construct itself. He remarked,

I am extremely sensitive to the fact that if there's a work in an exhibition, whether it's being created—commissioned specifically for the exhibition—or if it's just alone, I'm not going to go to any great length to try to manipulate it without [the artist] knowing first. (Curator CU.02, interview, 4 September 2015)

Curator CU.02 acknowledged the existence of curatorial intervention, then outlined how he perceived it, as well as his operational framework for intervention, in ways similar to Curator CU.10. His model for intervention is both collective and collaborative; it is derived specifically from the outcomes driven by working with the key stakeholders—community arts organisations, audiences, artists, educators—who have primary, shared responsibilities for institutional outcomes, although they may not necessarily have shared goals within those outcomes. If one operates within the framework and model proposed by Curator CU.02, then

the necessity of curatorial intervention after a project has commenced can be mitigated, having taken place during a project's development stage. This does not mean that it does not occur. It simply means that within Curator CU.02's operational model, transparency, agency, and power are all shared values distributed among participants at the collaborative organisational level—at least in the ideal, theoretical world. This in fact mirrors the goals stated by Curator CU.10 in relation to the consultative processes for the Ngai Tahu exhibition, although the variables' outcomes differ.

Curator CU.01 did not address the economic issues of curatorial intervention specifically, so it is not possible to situate his curatorial practice relative to these constructs. And while Curator CU.03's specific example is included in Section 5.3.3 below in detail to illustrate issues of curatorial intervention as exercises in institutional agency, that same example stands as an example of curatorial intervention as an operation of the political economy of exhibition practice. What the findings indicate is that in many cases, the same instance of curatorial intervention may be situated within several frames: that of an exercise of curatorial agency, curatorial power, pure economics, political economy, or institutional agency. What binds the operations together is that each is an operation of curatorial intervention itself, meaning that the findings indicate it shares the qualities of mediating the artist–audience exchange and not being visible as a mediating event in between the intentionality and reception of the art experience or object.

### **5.3.3 CURATORIAL INTERVENTION OPERATING AS INSTITUTIONAL AGENCY**

These findings are also considered for any recurring indications of curatorial intervention as a tool for, or reflection of, institutional agency. Curator CU.03 suggested that institutional agency may mediate the ways in which curatorial intervention engages with a



work's structure, significance, and symbolism. She narrated instances in which institutional demands drove a project's changes, but the alterations were situated in a manner that gave the perception the decisions had been made by the curator. This institutionally driven opacity creates additional challenges, addressed in the following chapter, concerning where and how one might best situate institutional agency. The specific circumstances Curator CU.03 described involved trying to both anticipate and extrapolate an audience's interpretations:

There was one piece I was actually trying to put into the exhibition last year [. . .] it was an artist that was dealing with vanity in America and this overarching consumerism, and he played off this idea of QVC [an American shop-at-home cable-television network] and the things we see on QVC.

RESEARCHER: Okay, yes.

CURATOR: [He had a figure who was] all dressed in white and had a shopping bag on his head and that was a part of the piece [. . .] And I wanted to put that in a window that had three panes, and the committee was actually like no, because—I think—when people drive by it they'd think just at a glance they might think it's the KKK. [. . .] So, I had to listen to their concerns while I tried to say, “oh well it's not the KKK, it's actually talking about consumerism.” [Chuckles]. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: So, has that information ever been shared publicly in any way?

CURATOR: No [chuckles], oh no, never. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: And have you ever given talks about the role of the curator or any other public presentation in which you might have used this as an example?

CURATOR: I have not. (Curator CU.03, interview, 4 March 2016)

In this instance, Curator CU.03 intervened in the work, literally, by substituting one work for another—a decision made in consultation with the artist. This substitution altered the fundamental content and context of the exhibition; although the symbolism was similar, it had shifted philosophically from interrogating the literal and philosophical frames of television-based home shopping to reflecting upon references toward bricks-and-mortar,

mainstream shopping-mall capitalism.

That curators find themselves in this theoretical predicament might come as little surprise since one may argue that their role has shifted from keeper and creator to mediator and manufacturer, or, from keeping objects and exploring interpretations to mediating between constituents and manufacturing meanings. This is most evident in the exchange narrated by Curator CU.09, in which she was not only able to thwart an administratively driven curatorial intervention but was also able to ensure that the artist remained connected to the intentionalities that were outlined when the project had begun. Having been encouraged, though not required, to place a restricted-content warning at the beginning of the exhibition, the curator declined to do so—much to the artist’s disappointment:

I didn't put the note on the door. And the artist was actually kind of like, [clicks fingers] “Oh, darn. I wanted you to put the note on the door.”

RESEARCHER: Oh, interesting.

CURATOR: Because she [. . .] runs towards any kind of controversy. Or I guess she thought that it would draw attention. And I said, “I appreciate that [. . .] but I don't want that kind of attention, because that's not part of our intent with this show.” [. . .] I mean, men would put on these costumes, and then they'd say things like, “This is heavy.” And to me, that's what it was about, and I felt that if we put that note on the door, and then someone walked in in black leather, [clicks fingers] boom; of course, they're going to immediately think—but there was never a problem. (Curator CU.09, interview, 18 May 2016)

The challenge is that the findings indicate a differing syntax among curators regarding how they situate the concepts and the practices of curatorial intervention. As is clear from the responses from Curator CU.05, for example, in certain instances, independent curators may both consider and engage with a far wider scope of practices than they might within an institutional frame. And, within an institutional frame, a curator might engage in a form of curatorial intervention that alters a fundamental, core component of institutional practice—

such as a collection—if it were deemed to not fully reflect the community with which it is supposed to engage. He remarked,

what's kind of interesting is that, and I'm talking outside of the institution, but I'm looking at other institutions in this instance, no one questions the types of narrative trajectories in established collections. So, no one talks about whether or not there's an interventionist role in the development of Australian collections, or international collections, or nineteenth-century collections in museums. But when you're talking about things that have maybe a closer alignment to the types of politics that emerge from communities or from non-dominant groups, then there's always an issue. (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016)

Consequently, it can be difficult determine the implications of curatorial intervention as it operates both within and against established frames. Curator CU.07, for example, also having worked independently and institutionally, attempts to bridge the gaps between existing/traditional and interventionist practices in varying ways. She reported requesting edits of film, digital, and moving-image works for specific projects as and where appropriate. This approach derives, in part, from her perception that at times artists do not necessarily produce works that function equally well across all projects. As Curator CU.07 described,

Sometimes, artists would send me works in progress, and I think that probably in those cases, I felt more comfortable asking for a particular kind of edit—like if they were looking for feedback or just wanted me to know what they were working on, in case it worked for a future project of mine [. . .] As for other kinds of edits, off the top of my head, I can't think of a specific example. But I think there must have been a time in which I thought maybe a section was—maybe the pacing was not great; like, maybe it was very slow. (Curator CU.07, interview, 16 October 2015)

In these instances, Curator CU.07 had no hesitation in working with artists to make suggestions or engage in dialogues that produced mediated works. At the same time, the findings also indicate that these discourses or dialogues do not appear as transparent transactions within the artist–curator relationship. Continuing, she expanded on this:

RESEARCHER: Is there scope within the framework of this type of practice, or are there ways in which this information might be shared with an audience? Is there a way to say, “This unique structure, a collaborative design between the gallery and the artist, dot, dot, dot”? Or is that something that might never appear, just because it's too—it's either not significant, or it's too problematic?

CURATOR: How have I framed it publicly or in written format?

RESEARCHER: Yes.

CURATOR: I think I've usually buried [laughs] or kind of glossed over how much production or hands on-ness I was doing, because that might be seen as controversial—and of course, again, it would only happen with the artist's consent. (Curator CU.07, interview, 16 October 2015)

In this instance, Curator CU.07 acknowledged the problematics of intervention to the extent that not only is the curator's role not brought to the forefront, but it is also often “buried or glossed over.” This is the foundational point of interventionist practice to the extent that in this moment and action (or lack thereof) the capacity of the audience to distinguish between agents or to situate authorship becomes destroyed.

#### **5.3.4 CURATORIAL INTERVENTION AS COLLABORATION**

Viewed from the artist's perspective, this same issue is precisely the problem inherent in curatorially driven collaboration. Do artworks by necessity become collaborative when they are curated? Are artists simply subjects, or artworks components? Curators CU.01, CU.06, and CU.10 do not address “collaboration” specifically in their interviews, although the concerns surrounding the issue remained apparent. Consider Curator CU.04, a New Zealand curator who has worked extensively overseas, who spoke at length about the challenges of being both culturally and professionally marginalised while working on a major international exhibition. She related the specific challenges of working in a Middle-Eastern context, and of some of the circumstances that had arisen:

So, all these rabbits were in this tiny cage with no water and no food [ . . . ]

what people don't realise is that rabbits' feet are not designed to support their weight on stainless steel bars. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: It wasn't the correct one?

CURATOR: No [. . .] And the thought that someone had left them there overnight with what turned out to be no water and no food, and just the total disregard for these animals' welfare sort of enraged me at a time when everyone had been working very hard and everyone was very—you know, kind of borderline exhausted, and tempers were frayed anyway [. . .] I phoned the artist at her hotel and asked her to come back in—which was sort of like a 10, 12-minute drive away—to actually do something about this. [. . .] there weren't places around that you could buy pet food; it wasn't a Western-type place. You couldn't go to a supermarket and pick up some rabbit food kind of thing. And the next day, I got in huge trouble for ringing the artist [. . .] who was an artist that I had been—you know, had a few things to do with in the previous couple of days, so I felt quite comfortable phoning her and asking this of her, and I got in huge trouble for it. But I think that was a cultural thing, as well [. . .] I come from what was perceived as a culture where it was quite affluent, and people spent time and energy and money on keeping pets, which is not something that people from every culture have access to, especially in the Middle East, where you don't really keep pets; you have animals that work for you in some way, or that lay eggs that you eat, or something like that, but the idea of going to a supermarket and buying food for animals they think is crazy. And I get that, too. I totally get it. [. . .]

RESEARCHER: Was it just symptomatic of a larger issue?

CURATOR: Yeah, I think so. There was kind of a disregard, I felt, for—yeah, I mean, I found it an uncomfortable place to work, in lots of ways; not the culture of the place so much as the culture of the office. (Curator CU.04, interview, 1 November 2015)

The above outlines a problem not addressed previously in the research: the question of where curatorial intervention might best be directed. Is it best directed toward interventions with the artist in rectifying issues with the structure of the work? Or would it be better directed toward infrastructure issues within the framework organisation itself? Or, in this instance, would the curator have been better served by being concerned with the animals' welfare and by mitigating the issues the artwork presented to them to the extent that it did not affect the range, scope, or scale of the artist's project? Because this was a new experience, it presented an issue in which multiple interventions were necessary or could have been

necessary. Each might have resulted in a different mediation of the work—from its possible removal due to the plight of the animals to a more structured system for their care and wellbeing. The impact and visibility of each intervention would have had varying impacts on the viewer. In the end, it is difficult to situate curatorial intervention significantly, apart from the curator ensuring the wellbeing of the rabbits for the duration of the project. This occurred outside the scope of the audience, and with no visible effect.

Curator CU.02 considers collaboration to be an element of curatorial practice, but not necessarily a key aspect of curatorial intervention. He remarked,

I'm questioning what a curator does and how they go about doing what they do and the conventions of curators constantly. I see myself as program manager, and yes, I see myself as an author in many ways—but I also see the artist I work with as the authors of those exhibitions. I don't feel like I'm the sole author or sole authority. (Curator CU.02, interview, 4 September 2015)

In constructing this duality—that of artist as author, and curator as co-author—Curator CU.02 situates curatorial practice at the site of a curatorial collaboration that operates with agency, but also with transparency. The issue that arises in this context is the extent to which this authorship becomes visible to the viewer (its transparency) which is addressed by Curator CU.02 as follows:

I do think that if I were to be transparent towards and be focused towards an audience with what I am doing with an artist, right down to the administrative level, I don't know if that would be portraying the right message. I don't think it's necessary for them to know in many respects. I don't know if the audiences are interested, as such, in how much an artist gets paid. (Curator CU.02, interview, 4 September 2015)

For Curator CU.05, collaboration is a dialogic process. He recounted an instance in which he suggested to an artist that the project the artist had proposed was limiting—that it merely adhered to existing codes of exhibition and display—and that there were alternative, more engaging, more community-based, and more dynamic ways in which the artist could proceed. He explained their process:

I said to him I really don't understand it, you're coming to a contemporary art organisation, you're asking me to put these objects under a glass case, it doesn't make any sense. I love the work, but to present them in the way in which you are proposing would be to really limit what is really beautiful about them. I asked him wouldn't it be more interesting if we actually had dinner with these things. Because he had made this massive dinner service. He went away and thought about it, and it was the beginning of one of his very important series of projects where he orchestrated this beautiful meal, in strangers' homes eating off his ceramics. (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016)

Yet, when asked specifically about the implications of his engagement with the artist, Curator CU.05 revealed two facts: one, that the process of collaboration had been made public on many occasions, and two, "it's not a relationship of co-author. I'm not a co-author of this work." (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016) Despite engaging in a constructive process that enhanced the project's outcome, Curator CU.05 did not regard his involvement as amounting to authorship in any way.

### **5.3.5 MEASURING THE IMPLICATIONS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

A final issue to be considered within this chapter concerns the measurable impact of curatorial intervention from the perspective of curators. It is important to determine whether, in their opinions or from their vantage points, they perceive curatorial intervention as being positive, neutral, or negative.

A significant difference exists between the perceptions relative to curatorial intervention that are individually motivated and curatorial intervention that is motivated at the behest of other individuals. The distinction may be best drawn by returning to the example illustrated by Curator CU.02, in which he suggested that through proper planning, dialogue, and consultation, the need for subsequent curatorial intervention can be mitigated.

What occurs, in this example, is essentially an *a priori* curatorially driven, positive-outcome intervention. The intervention is driven by the curator, and powered by individual agency, resulting in a net positive outcome. Furthermore, across the cohort, the findings indicate that when the motivations for intervention stem from or are driven by individual agency, the outcomes are positive. Finally, in every instance in which these variables were manifest, the perceptions from the respective curators were that dialogues between artists and curators—and the implications of these dialogues on alterations to the project that audiences finally experienced—were positive. Such was the case for the examples recounted by Curators CU.04, CU.05, CU.08, CU.09, and CU.10.

On the contrary, when the generative causal factors for curatorial intervention were driven by other agents—institutional administrators, trustees, or related parties—the findings differ. In those instances, such as in the KKK/QVC Home Shopping narrative described by Curator CU.03, the perceived impact described by the curator was negative. Furthermore, the curator was still compelled to act as the interventionist agent relative to the artist. While the perceived outcomes of curatorial intervention in the occurrences described by Curator CU.07 were generally positive, they were contextualised as neutral to the extent that they were driven by the curator's intention to construct alternative exhibition materials or outcomes. The motivations for her curatorial intervention—alternative video cuts, reorganised edits, and related approaches—were to extend the scope within which artists could exhibit. Since the opportunities were driven by the curator's perceptions relative to each artist's intentions, evaluating the outcomes as positive or negative remains difficult. Curator CU.01's curatorial interventions can be seen as both positive and negative: they are positive to the extent that they created unique interpretative and experiential opportunities for audiences; they are contextualised as negative to the extent that they appear—based on statements by the curator himself—to have potentially devalued the intentionality of artists in the process. Clearly, his



practices were interventionist. What their impact was, relative to the artist–audience experience, is difficult to determine. However, Curator CU.01 did not describe his interventions or his processes as transparent to audiences, despite having agency and exercising power.

#### **5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented the findings derived from the curatorial cohort when evaluated against a series of specific criteria. It has sought to determine the relative values of frequency and/or occurrence when considering consistency and universality of curatorial practice across geography and gender.

The findings indicated that curatorial intervention is a common occurrence among cohort participants. Of the ten cohort participants, nine had engaged in some form of curatorial intervention, which was related over the course of their narrative interview. The tenth, while acknowledging its existence, did not provide a specific example.

Table 5.1 outlined the findings from this cohort for a series of variables: the nature of the curatorial intervention; the agent who had implemented the curatorial intervention (the curator or a museum administrator); the perceived versus actual impact of the intervention; and the overall likelihood that a curator will regularly intervene in a project over the course of their career.

This chapter's key results are summarised as follows:

- Curatorial intervention, as a practice, is recognised across the cohort, but opinions differ regarding its applications and implications;
- Curators' opinions vary regarding the level of transparency that should be attached to the processes and practices of curatorial intervention; and

- The relative significances of agency and power, as components of curatorial intervention, diverge across the cohort.

As a practice, curatorial intervention was examined in detail across the curatorial cohort. It was considered against the variables of transparency, agency, and power to determine if exercises of curatorial intervention were transparent to audiences. Did the findings indicate that audiences were aware that curators mediated the artist–audience exchange? If so, how was the power exercised by curators made apparent to these audiences? Finally, how was the power dynamic between artists and curators structured, and where did the institutional dynamic situate it?

The chapter then considered curatorial intervention as an operation of economies, both pure and political, to determine if there were differences among cohort members based on issues derived from either variable. The findings indicated that pure economics was an issue that curators were aware of, and of which they were likely to make use of when it was beneficial, but that the economics of an artwork or exhibition was not the sole issue that influenced curatorial intervention. The chapter then considered issues of the political economy of art relative to curatorial intervention. Again, the findings indicated that political economies were significant influences on curatorial intervention: however, often curatorial intervention was directed by the curator toward the institution rather than by the curator toward the artist. In each instance, however, the findings did not indicate that the interventions were apparent to audiences. Findings on the question of transparency diverged between cohort members.

Finally, the chapter examined curatorial intervention as collaboration. Here, the findings indicated that although many curators regarded their practice as collaborative, they did not regard their discussions or engagements with artists as implying or conferring any authorship in a project. Curator CU.05 was categorical on this point.

To further understand the potential impact of curatorial intervention, analyses must be undertaken from the administrative perspective. This is found in the following chapter.

Some years ago I was working as a pedagogical curator for a museum. I made an educational proposal for a particular exhibition and the director's curt response was "This is a museum, not a school." I was angry and as a revenge I sent him a photo-shopped facade of the building bearing in big letters "The museum is a school: The artists learn how to communicate; the public learns how to make connections." After venting I realised that I liked it as an art piece. It is basically a con piece that I am still peddling to institutions. The set-up is an implicit contract drawn between the museum and the public, so that subsequently the public may hold the museum accountable when failing to implement the text.

Luis Camnitzer, *The Source of Our Nobility and Our Path to the Highest Things* (2016)

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR COHORT INTERVIEWS**

### **6.1 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

This chapter explores curatorial intervention from the administrators' perspectives. It interrogates the issue from two primary positions: first, it examines the curator–administrator relationship to determine its efficacy, and the implications such a structural hierarchy has for curatorial intervention. This means that it critically considers whether curatorial intervention operates primarily as a top-down or a bottom-up structural response to its institutional frames. Second, the findings interrogate the artist–curator–administrator–institution linear structural relationship through analyses of the methodologies used by curators when acting as interventionist agents. While these two structures overlap in many (if not most) instances, they also deviate. On one hand, the findings indicate a tendency toward close syntheses between curators and administrators in instances in which both are encouraging artists to explore or extend their capacity to make works — even though these requests may place the onus on the artist to provide for such extensions. On the hand, the findings reflect occasional curator–administrator clashes, with disparate results, such as in instances in which administrators suggest or direct curators to take direct, specific actions in relation to artists' works. In both instances, the issues of transparency, agency, and power are also significant. What follows are specific examples that outline instances of each of these issues from the administrative perspective. The table is structured in the following manner: Column 1 lists the participant cohort members, their genders, and geographies; Column 2 is a simplified narrative list citing a single example of curatorial intervention; Column 3 identifies the intervention agent in the specific examples cited by each administrator; Column 4 outlines the anticipated versus actual impacts of the curatorial interventions discussed; and Column 5 reveals the administrators' evaluations of the frequency with which they have requested that curators intervene in specific projects over the course of their careers.

## **6.2 SELF-REPORTED FINDINGS: ADMINISTRATORS AND CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

Table 6.1 provides an initial framework for examining curatorial intervention from the perspective of administrators. It begins to outline an often-hidden aspect of curatorial intervention—that the intervention may be driven by administrators, but executed by curators. It also highlights the disparities between the intentions of administrators versus the interventions of curators, such as in the example listed in Administrator AD.07’s brief narration, in which she had asked for supplemental materials and the curator simply removed the challenging work from the exhibition. In each instance, questions regarding intention, meaning, intervention, and outcome become more complex simply by adding the overlay of administrative responsibility on the landscape of curatorial practice.

**Table 6.1 ADMINISTRATORS' SELF-REPORTED EXPERIENCES REGARDING CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

<b>Administrator (Gender/Location)</b>	<b>Nature of Curatorial Intervention</b>	<b>Intervention Agent in Example</b>	<b>Expected v. Evaluated Impact</b>	<b>Probability of Requesting Interventions over Career</b>
AD.01 (M/AU)	Requested artist edit video to ensure intention of work not misinterpreted	Administrator	Positive	Possibility
AD.02 (F/NZ)	Occasionally requests artists to extend the scope or scale of their projects	Curator	Positive	Low Probability
AD.03 (M/AU)	Focuses on labelling, signage, and related materials rather than requesting alterations to works	Administrator	Neutral	Low Probability
AD.04 (M/NZ)	Uses administrative and curatorial practice as tools to shift institutional discourse	Administrator	Positive	High Probability
AD.05 (M/AU)	Regularly and consciously uses administrative and curatorial roles to animate objects for audiences	Administrator	Positive	High Probability
AD.06 (M/US)	Altered images displayed in exhibition to avoid community standards issues	Administrator	Neutral/ Negative	Possibility
AD.07 (F/US)	Requested curator provide interpretative material for exhibition; curator removed work	Curator	Negative	Low Probability
AD.08 (M/US)	Advised curators that exhibition had to comply with original proposal.	Administrator	Positive	High Probability
AD.09 (M/US)	Advised artist that their project deviated drastically from proposal.	Administrator	Positive	Possibility
AD.10 (M/NZ)	Encourages curator and artists to propose projects that extend their capacities	Administrator	Positive	High Probability

In evaluating the findings in Column 2, one can see that many cohort participants narrated only a single instance of curatorial intervention. Exceptions to this are Administrators AD.02, AD.03, AD.04, and AD.10. Administrator AD.02 discussed strategies by and through which he works with curators to request that artists extend the scope or scale of their projects. Administrator AD.03 prefers to work strategically with ancillary exhibition materials that supplement exhibitions rather than directly request that a curator intervene in an artist's works. Administrator AD.04 works with artists through dialogue and engagement to ensure that their projects are situated within their intentional frames; the manifestations of the projects themselves are then driven by individual institutional curators. And Administrator AD.10 outlined that his preferred administrative methodology involves encouraging both artists and curators to extend and test the limits of the institution's capacities as and where possible. When interpreting the findings in Column 3, it is important to note that in eight out of ten of the examples cited by administrator cohort participants, the curatorial intervention that occurred was requested or driven by the administrator. In only two instances was the curatorial interventions motivated or driven by curators. While subjective, the measure in Column 4 outlines the anticipated versus actual impacts of the curatorial interventions discussed, and is based on administrators' perceptions of anticipated audience outcomes. In seven of the ten reported instances, the impact of the intervention upon the project was positive. One administrator situated the impact as neutral, one addressed the intervention's impact as situated between neutral and negative, and one administrator regarded the intervention's impact as decidedly negative. When asked to evaluate the career frequency with which they have requested curators to intervene in specific projects, as outlined in Column 5, four of the ten participants responded that there was a high probability they would make such requests; three regarded requests for curatorial intervention as a possibility; and the remaining three regarded the probability for any such requests as low.



### **6.3 COHORT FINDINGS**

As was specified first in Section 4.4.3, the TAP Matrix forms the foundation through which each cohort's findings are evaluated. In this instance, the additional factors against which the findings are considered are as follows:

- Intention: how do administrators mediate the intentionality issues between artists, curators, and outside forces, and would or should they engage in these practices?
- Inflection: how nuanced would these mediations be?
- Inversion: would such interventions result in meanings that were outside an artist's intentions and, if so, how would/did the administrators position or situate their roles in relation to curators?

The findings derived from this cohort comprise the third framework through which one may analyse the operations of curatorial intervention against the paradigm of reception theory. This framework is particularly relevant, since administrators drive the overarching policies and procedural frameworks that could mitigate the operations of curatorial intervention. Should they not mitigate curatorial intervention, then administrators may serve to make its operations either more transparent or opaque.

#### **6.3.1 ADMINISTRATORS AND THE POLITICS OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

Whether relating to the smallest art spaces or the largest cultural institutions, the research findings indicate that administrators encourage curatorial intervention if it positions a work so that it further engages with critical or cultural discourse. One needs to first determine whether the structure of the contemporary institution, either theoretically or

practically, is fundamentally framed to facilitate or allow curatorial intervention. The issue of how an institution is structured, and whether that structure results in a model that facilitates or thwarts curatorial intervention, depends in part on where and how the curator is situated within the institutional frame. Do they exercise autonomy, for example, or is their institution hierarchical? Are they the sole curatorial voice that emerges from the institution, or are they part of a curatorium? These questions were the subject of some discussion during the first interview to occur over the course of this research, when Administrator AD.05, the director of a major US museum, remarked,

as the curatorial field has expanded, you have an incredible divergence between on the one hand, what young curators are learning in programmes of curatorial practice, reading curatorial journals, and, on the other hand, what is actually happening in a lot of museums. And that is partly why, if you talk to many museum directors, they will say it has been really hard to hire a contemporary art curator because there is a different expectation between what the curator has and what museum director has about the role. So, I think that there is a real misalignment happening right now with these crazy expectations. There are ten jobs in the world that really embody the kind of theoretical analysis that so many of these journals are exploring. Those are the biennial exhibitions that really create this sort of canvas for a curator to explore ideas through art and through curatorial practice and I just don't feel like that's happening within institutions apart from biennials and those sorts of independent agencies. (Administrator AD.05, interview, 8 June 2015)

More simply, are the structures inherent within most institutions even capable of allowing curatorial practice to engage in complex interrogations of contemporary art apart from curatorial intervention? Can the structure itself be such that the narrative of artist–curator–institution arrives to the audience unmediated? To illustrate these issues, one needs to determine where the interventionist responsibilities lie when a mediated work engages with an audience. Administrator AD.06 recounted such an experience when discussing an externally curated exhibition in which the politics of nudity and sexuality had unexpectedly come to the fore. He described the event as follows:

. . .it was literally only two days before the exhibition opened when I was in the gallery that I discovered what other images were in this book. [. . .] it was

a disaster, from my perspective, because this was in our main gallery. It was our biggest show, probably, of the year, and I had this work in there that was going to just completely destroy any other dialogue that the exhibition might have had the potential to create, as well as potentially impact our funding. And the resolution of this was that we put the work under glass, open to a page that did not have the nudity in there. But the fact that it was under glass meant that the audience had no ability to see the other images of the work [. . .] I'm fairly sure that we, at least in the didactic materials, alluded to the images that could not be seen. But I doubt that we did an extended discussion of—in a way that really would have supported a dialogue about the self-censorship that went on there. (Administrator AD.06, interview, 29 September 2015)

This comment highlights several relevant issues. First, the administrator made a decision regarding the exhibition that was contrary to the curator's intentions; second, there was some mention, to the best of the administrator's recollection, of the material that had been censored, but this was not brought to the fore; third, there was no mention of the fact that the decision to alter the content of the work had been made specifically by the administrator—at least from our conversations—thereby leaving the possibility of the perception that the curator had selected the specific work on view, despite the fact that she had selected an entirely different work, for a range of differing reasons.

Administrator AD.07, a museum administrator working within a major US cultural institution, recounted an instance during which a curator had chosen a course of action that thwarted, rather than encouraged, more significant discourses around a complex issue. A video work had caused concern to certain viewers because the subject matter depicted specifically political experiences, in a documentary fashion, that were problematic to certain members of specific communities. Its display within the museum had given some of those community members pause, and complaints had been made to upper levels of the museum administration. She recounted the circumstances, outlined the concerns, and described what followed:

a trustee [and his spouse] came in one Sunday afternoon, watched the entire [video] and spent a lot of time with it. And I talked to [the curator], and I said, you know, "I think we need to—this is a great moment to talk about, to have people in and have this conversation about intention, non-intention, what the

piece is about.” And [the curator], instead, just took it down. And I said, “[. . .] that wasn’t—” and he said, “I’m just going to take it down.” He said, “It was going to come down in another week anyway.” And I said, “Well, I don’t think that solves the problem, though.” I said, “We’re not talking about it.” And he said, “You know [. . .] the reason I don’t want to is that it’s just not a great piece, and we’re going to take it down in a week anyway, to do a change on the gallery. . . .” [B]ut to me, it was just a laziness of not wanting to. (Administrator AD.07, interview, 20 May 2016)

In a separate instance, Administrator AD.07 refused to intervene to direct a curator to alter a work. A work of contemporary art that had been displayed on the exterior of the museum depicted issues of violence, and a member of a local government agency had suggested the work be removed due to its culturally charged content:

ADMINISTRATOR: [. . .] you have an African American mother of a son who’s been slain saying, “What’s the museum doing?” [. . .] it’s the only time city leadership has ever called me about an object on view. And the mayor’s chief of staff called, and he was very uncomfortable, an African American man, very uncomfortable calling me, and sort of like, “Yeah, um, uh, I don’t know if you’re aware of the big poster that’s on the outside—”

RESEARCHER: [laughs] No, it just got there. . .

ADMINISTRATOR: Oh yeah, “Am I blind? Is that what you’re asking me?” And I said, “Yeah, yeah, I know what you’re talking about,” and I explained. [And he said] “Oh, well, that’d probably be fine, but—I mean, you know, if we were New York or Atlanta, but, I mean, you know, a lot of people are asking; they just don’t understand what it’s about.” And I said, “Well, let me write something for you, and you can share it with the city employees who are asking you.” But the newspaper didn’t want to write about it; they wanted [the artist] to write the op-ed, because I said, “This would be a great time for you to bring the mother’s voice in, the artist’s voice in, communities who are being beset by black-on-black crime. That’s what this is about; it’s about violence, you know? It’s not—it’s condoning it, it’s mourning it. It’s his cousin, his beloved brother.” But, “Well, he should write an op-ed.” (Administrator AD.07, interview, 20 May 2016)

Administrator AD.01 had encountered similar problems when addressing a work dealing with the politics of sexual identity and sexual preference. The work, which included sexual intimacy as one component but not its key focus, had been submitted for exhibition. A discussion between the artist, the curator, and Administrator AD.01 ensued. Administrator

AD.01 remarked,

it was only one conversation that [the curator] and I had with him [the artist], and it was immediately dealt with before the exhibition was launched. And in the end [the artist's] response to it was he didn't want that issue to become the focus of the work, because it wasn't. (Administrator AD.01, interview, 2 September 2015)

Other issues administrators need to consider are the extent to which curators wish to foreground or ignore their existing resources, as well as the extent to which external forces—trustees, boards, councils, or related pressures—compel them to act in this manner. Consider the observations of Administrator AD.02, who remarked,

if you continuously bring in blockbusters, then you are training your audience to only visit you when you bring in a blockbuster, and you are not actually using your natural resources, which are your collections and your relationships with artists. If you are spending all your time every two years preparing for a show that you've trucked in from the V[ictoria] & A[lbert], you're doing underwear because it will bring in the crowds, why would anyone bother to come see your ceramics collection? (Administrator AD.02, interview, 29 June 2015)

Here Administrator AD.02 reveals what could be termed the problematics that exist between curatorial intervention and the politics of expectation. Her example illustrates the issues that arise when curators focus more on external resources than those available internally, and on the challenges administrators face when confronted with how to compel curators to work either with artists to utilise existing resources or with curators to do the same. Furthermore, Administrator AD.02 suggested that issues surrounding artists and how they are situated within the framework of an exhibition, and where the curator might place them therein, are complex due to the nature of the artists themselves. She remarked that in many instances, the artist's personality was not the best lure for an audience: "I don't think there is really a relationship with the artist unless you make the curatorial and institutional choice to foreground the artist's personality and life as part of the way of understanding their work. [ . . . ] [audiences] respond to that in a way that for many of the artists we work with,

their personalities would not be put out on the floor” (Administrator AD.02, interview, 30 June 2015).

At the same time, Administrator AD.03 discussed circumstances in which institutions challenge curators to practice or intervene in spaces in which they might not be completely comfortable, but within which the museum at large wishes to operate. Having worked within both contemporary art spaces and major public museums, Administrator AD.03 remarked that,

we would never [. . .] tell a curator they have to do a show they're not completely committed to. If the curator's not passionate about what they're doing, we're already starting on the back foot, so we won't do that. Part of my job is to enthuse and be passionate about a wider range of things and to challenge individual curators [. . .] we have curators that have really particular strengths and incredible knowledges and incredible networks, and they do great things with those. But for their own professional practice, and for the museum's benefit, it's also good that they step outside that conversation. But we would only make them do so when we're convinced that they're really committed to doing so, so I often have to do that convincing. (Administrator AD.03, interview, 20 August 2015)

### **6.3.2 ADMINISTRATORS, COLLABORATION, AND CURATORIAL INTERVENTION**

This same reticence to engage with complex issues was not recounted by other administrators, nor was the framework within which administrators operated generally the same. Instead, most other administrators described more collaborative relationships both with curators and practising artists. Administrator AD.04 spoke of how both curators and administrators at several institutions he is familiar with have intervened within artists' creative processes, becoming positive contributing partners that helped artists focus their intentions. He shared one experience derived from an artists' mentoring programme of which he is a part, providing senior-level services to emerging artists in New Zealand. In this instance, he spoke from the perspective of an individual who has worked institutionally both as a curator and as an administrator, and he addressed the specific issues of intentionality and

transparency:

And I was helping [the artist]—she was in the Walters Prize quite early, she has been teaching at UNITEC, she is a social documentary photographer and she photographs Pacific Island people in domestic, work, religious and sports contexts. Very, very quiet, beautiful work. I was sitting with [her] in a cafe in Ponsonby, and I said, “Okay, why do you take your photographs?” And in a way, that’s astonishing, because so few people can answer the question, she very quietly said, “I want to make my subjects world famous.” And I went, “So you’re saying like New Zealand Idol?” and she said, “Yeah, yeah yeah.” And I said, “So what would happen if we said—on a piece of paper—‘Because it’s really important to me that my subjects become famous, are there different ways I think about the ways I take photographs?’” And she just sat there and looked and looked at it, and got her iPhone out, and said, “Can I take a photo of that?” The reason I’m saying this is because this isn’t the way a curator would normally work, but the outcome of that was that I said to her, “well, we could sit here and talk about how to think about approaching the MCA or West Sydney or whoever,” and she held her hand up and said, “You don’t need to say it. That would just make me famous and that’s not what I want.”

[. . .]

RESEARCHER: Talking about your project with [the artist], you were having a conversation which caused her to radically expand her project and have something that was really a different project. [. . .] Are these types of conversations, or negotiations, or discourses [. . .] types of things that should be, or could be shared?

ADMINISTRATOR: I use that example quite often when I’m doing strategic planning with organisations, whether it’s arts organisations or business. I put up a traditional purpose-based model, driven by happiness, and I say that a better example is [the artist], and I PowerPoint through that story, because what is amazing is that she actually knows what she wants to happen in her world—and that she very quickly worked out that what she was doing was never really going to deliver the *why* [emphasis added] she was doing it. (Administrator AD.04, interview, 24 August 2015)

Unlike Administrator AD.07’s example, in this narrative, Administrator AD.04 specifically addresses the range of variables that have materialised as part of the TAP Matrix. His questions positioned an intentionality that could emerge within a wider institutional frame, to the extent that the questions situated and addressed a specific, potential outcome. The interventions—and for the purposes of this project, he served in multiple roles, and

operated within multiple frames—were highly detailed and incredibly nuanced, addressing the specific needs of the artist; and they served to specifically address and reinforce the original and primary intentionalities of the artist. The interventions stood as manifestations of curatorial transparency that situated the agency with the artist—changes to the project were not driven by Administrator AD.04, but were the result of conversations designed to further determine the artist’s objectives; they did not alter the works’ meanings or methodology; and, where they did affect the materiality of the project, they did so in a way in which the project was enhanced through extension, rather than reduced or diminished. These findings indicate an alternative scope and range for administrative practice, one that hybridises both curatorial and administrative practices.

Administrator AD.01’s transcript provides evidence of yet another, third approach. Here, an administrator, working in collaboration with a curator, structured an intervention through the curator to facilitate a positive exhibition outcome. This was the approach that was intended in the series of events described by Administrator AD.07 who had earlier recounted the experience of the video work being removed. In this specific instance, the administrator and the curator worked with the artist to ensure that the specific intentions of the artist were in fact achieved. What had transpired was that a cut of a video work emphasised certain aspects of a project that were not primary to the work’s reception. As Administrator AD.01 explains,

[An artist] did this beautiful project where he would be online, I guess trying to find a same-sex sexual partner. And he managed to establish a relationship [. . .], and that became a part of his work, a really intimate video piece about their liaisons. And in that was the distance of being away from this person and documenting their life in their apartment, from urinating to showering to having a bath to making a cup of tea to sexual encounters and masturbations and things like that. And most of it was really good, because [the artist] understood that the exhibition would have young people, and we provided the appropriate signs. It wasn’t the public that we were concerned about; it was more the conservative element within the council that had sort of shifted over a period of my directorship. And [the curator and I] did—I did ask [the artist] if the money shot on the masturbating piece could be perhaps darkened a little



bit—and [the artist] said, “No worries; I know what to do.” So, he was wonderful; he just made it a bit darker. And sure, we did, in a sense, ask [him] to censor his work, but it kind of would've put all the work in building up the exhibition on [his] work, and it really was fifteen other excellent works. And he was wonderful in that process, because he was not just thinking about his own work, but also the others. And no one [. . .] everyone walked past it. (Administrator AD.01, interview, 3 September 2015)

This collaborative approach was key for both Administrator AD.01's administrative practice and for his expectations of the operations of curatorship within an institution. As he outlined later in the same interview, he regards the contractual exchange between artists and curators, or artists and institutions, as bilateral: artists should be able to withdraw their works from an exhibition should the institution not fulfil its obligations to them, and institutions should have the expectation that artists will deliver the agreed-upon work on time and on budget. With these caveats in place, he had not generally found a need to intervene within curators' practices from an administrative position or perspective. He did, however, relate many other instances throughout his earlier career as a curator during which his practice had been subjected to administrative intervention, attempted mediation, or what he regarded as undue influence. Administrator AD.01 describes the act of artist–curator engagement in direct terms, which, if they were applied universally, would limit curatorial mediation after the fact. In his words,

That's, again, the role of a curator, to ensure that the initial intention is very clear and that there are no misunderstandings, either from the organisational perspective or from the artist's perspective. Because once we sort of remove this kind of halo around the artist and bring them down to earth, and we are a worker and they're a worker, and they're a professional and we're a professional, then no longer are we looking with glittering eyes to the skies at this wonderful hovering artist, and we're actually down on the ground, having a discussion. (Administrator AD.01, interview, 3 September 2015)

Here, Administrator AD.01 positions the curator precisely at the nexus between artist and audience. He states categorically that it is the responsibility of the curator to ensure that

there are no misunderstandings from either perspective—whether creative or institutional—about what the artist’s intentionality is. He says, instead, that the curatorial role is to ensure that the artistic intention is clear. And, since there is no structural or theoretical frame within which one can situate this responsibility within existing reception theory, it must reside within what would be termed curatorial intervention.

Administrator AD.01 also outlined contexts by and through which works would not be subjected to curatorial intervention but, in fact, audiences would be subjected to curatorial or administrative intervention, at times without their knowledge. He spoke at length about a collaborative project that interrogated aspects of Aboriginal-Pacific Island cultural conflicts within Western Sydney, and the resultant outcomes, some of which had the potential to offend members of a segment of one community. Even though the work in question had been created by a member of that same community, it was determined that the best approach for the purposes of the larger project, which included a cultural component, was to create a physical impediment to viewers engaging with the piece until after the cultural event had occurred within the exhibition space. As Administrator AD.01 explained,

. . . no public access would happen at the beginning of the performance. [. . .] I was lucky that the gallery had two levels, so we were in the upstairs part [. . .] And I had security at all entrances, and [was] just saying, “No, we want to focus on the performance,” so [I] made no issue about the painting. And then the decision was that the community would be given the right to vacate the performance at the end, and all their people would be able to go, not knowing anything about that painting. And so that's what happened. We then opened up the exhibition. And of course, there were some people who stayed behind and there was some criticism, but [. . .] we gave everyone forewarning before they actually went up to the gallery, and then they had the option of proceeding or not proceeding. And in the end, the artists were relatively happy with that, and the exhibition just continued without any incident [. . .] (Administrator AD.01, interview, 3 September 2015)

What emerged from this approach was that both the administrator and the curator intervened in the work prior to its reception. They anticipated the problems the work might create, and acted to mitigate them through engaging in limited access, direct signage, and

wayfinding—meaning that apart from physically preventing the potentially problematic work being seen prior to the community event, they also provided warning signs once the event was over. The challenge with this event may be that it encourages individuals to see what may cause offence; at the same time, it is the most prudent approach to preventing potential issues that may arise because, at face value, visitors and viewers cannot say that they have not been forewarned.

The administrative interviews each reinforced an element of these positions. Individual administrators sought to clarify that curators have a responsibility to define the roles of the parties to the artist–institution exchange, as well as to the artist–audience exchange. In certain instances, administrators even admitted that there is scope for some degree of curatorial intervention, such as in instances for which the unfettered exercise of artistic expression within a specific community may knowingly cause outrage or offence from the outset, as part of an artist’s intent—with no other significant value or component. As Administrator AD.09 wryly remarked, “it’s distasteful, at best, for a curator to say, ‘I don’t like that shade of blue; could you try something more aqua.’ You know, that’s just stupid, and a curator who acted like that wouldn’t be a curator for very long. But to say, ‘Would you mind not putting swastikas in that painting?’ or, I don’t know, that seems like a different thing.” When asked if those types of negotiations should be transparent, he continued, “[t]here’s all sorts of compromises that we make, and we’re not telling everything to everyone. I think as a general question, we shouldn’t hide these negotiations from the public” (Administrator AD.09, interview, 30 March 2016). This suggests a litmus test for mediation, establishing that in certain instances an interventionist approach may be appropriate, while at other times it is at odds with the fundamental structures of both artistic and curatorial practices. This same position was echoed by Administrator AD.10, who remarked,

. . . if the artist comes to me and says, “Look, I’m trying something new; I don’t want to do my last series,” I’m 99% of the time willing to work with the

artist to develop the new project. [ . . . ] And there's occasions where that backfires, you know. But it also means that you can be the first place to show that show; you'd be the first place to do that project. It provides agency for the artist. I think it's better for their practice, rather than—and I think it's better for our institution, if we're seen to be showing new works by these artists, rather than being just the latest place to do the same show that everyone else has kind of done. (Administrator AD.10, interview, 4 April 2016)

If one examines each of the other cohort participants, their perspectives align closely with one of the three positions outlined by these administrators. Either they are inclined to allow the curator to make their decisions predominantly unhindered and unencumbered, as did AD.07; or they may prefer a more engaged approach, as with AD.01; or yet again, they may focus instead on facilitating the artist's engagement with the institution while operating outside it, as with the strategies of AD.04. In each instance, what results is a methodology for engaging with curatorial intervention, and attempting to prefigure its outcomes.

Alternatively, in certain instances, administrative intervention arises as an antidote to curatorial intervention specifically to situate curatorial practice within the parameters that it initially set for itself. As an example, one might consider a project described by Administrator AD.08 in which key components of an exhibition's framework were altered after grant funding had been received. One must determine at what level the alterations to the project were significant. In this instance, Administrator AD.08 regarded all the changes as material concerns:

it's very hard for us to get curators out of the head-set. So the show in [the Caribbean] was a show about colonialism, and we congratulated the people and everything, and after we do that, they're supposed to flesh out what the exhibition is and say, "That's the show." So, the show that was supposed to originate in [the Caribbean] and be in the downtown area, all of a sudden started in Scotland; with a number of Scottish artists in it. And they were going to get a container and do that horrible installation; you cut out the windows and stuff—that's fine for people building houses—but I've seen this in Africa, where they make studios, and it's, like, a million degrees and it's like, "No." Okay, anyway, so—and they had applied to this Scottish council for funds, and it was just morphing into something that was—so we went back to them and we said, "Look, first of all, this show can't originate in Scotland, because that wasn't part of your proposal. It can't be in a container, because

that wasn't part of your proposal.” And, we don't allow anybody to co-sponsor a show, unless they're actually putting up a lot of money that matches what we're putting in. And even then, we don't because we're not going to put their logo on anything that we do—because we don't put logos on anything—because that's advertising. (Administrator AD.10, 4 April 2016)

Each narrative in this subsection has presented a unique approach to administrative perspectives on curatorial intervention. In the first, the administrator intervened in a curatorial framework that had been altered after an exhibition plan had been agreed to in an attempt to limit complex issues for the institution; in the second example, the administrator tried to use potentially difficult issues raised by an artwork held by the institution that was on display to construct a larger discourse surrounding politics, reception, and meaning; in the third example, the administrator had to resituate the curator's proposal back within its original stated framework, limiting the curator's ability to alter it once it had received funding. Each administrative action illustrates a response to a challenge of or by curatorial intervention—the first example illustrates curatorial authorship; the second transparency and power; the third, agency.

There may yet be a further position that operates outside the scope of the approaches outlined above, and this is noted in the findings from Administrator AD.10. He spoke, in part, on the type of practice that exists outside traditional curatorial thinking, and that epitomises much of curatorial practice today. Within that framework, the curator is an individual who serves to extend the scope and range of an artist's capacity or capabilities. And while Administrator AD.10 acknowledged the complexities and problematics of such an approach, he noted that the approach was now as much an element of his administrative expectations as it had previously been an aspect of his interventionist curatorial practice. As he explained,

I feel like a curator is somebody who looks for trends that are happening in the art world and identifies them, and that's their role, to identify those things that are interesting, and then to work with artists or communities to advocate for those communities within the institution. And I think that's great, if the curator

can do that. So, they will work with the artist and they'll come to me and they'll come to me and be like, "We need to do this," and I tell him, "Push me really hard, ask me for as much money, even though you know we can't afford it. Go beyond what you know we can actually do. If the artist wants to do something crazy, let's try and do it, because it's your job to convince me that we can do it, and I have to find the money to make these things happen." (Administrator AD.10, interview, 4 April 2016)

Using this interventionist model, Administrator AD.10's comments reveal four critical curatorial engagements that emerge in the process of exhibition-making: 1) curators identify emerging trends in contemporary art; 2) curators work with artists or communities that can make these trends manifest creatively within the institution; 3) curators encourage artists or communities to propose projects that extend their usual or perceived limits; and 4) curators advocate for the institution's actual capacity to realise the project. At least one of these responsibilities is clearly interventionist—encouraging an artist or a community to propose a project that extends their traditional limits. By and through making such an assertion, Administrator AD.10 acknowledged several key issues, including both that curatorial intervention operates at the institutional level and that it mediates the creative process.

This approach was echoed by Administrator AD.02 when she stated,

. . . I do think that curators often see part of their role as encouraging artists to extend themselves—"I love what you do, but can you make it 'bigger'?" Bigger paintings, bigger sculptures, bigger shows [...] we do ask for that occasionally, but one of the things that I've become increasingly aware of is that when you ask an artist to make something bigger you're actually asking them to absorb more production costs as well. So, we give materials grants to buy materials in order to offset the requests that we're making. (Administrator AD.02, interview, 30 June 2015)

By recognising this, Administrator AD.02 *prima facie* appears to mediate the issues surrounding curatorial intervention, but, in fact, this is not the case. The intervention stems from the request, not from the result, so despite the economics of the exchange being

equitable, the transparency of the act remains opaque. For the artist, this is positive, for they benefit from the institution recognising the problematics of scale and price, but the audience remains unaware. They still enter the space not knowing that the artist was encouraged to work large-scale, to extend both their ideas and their practice. What transpires is that the issues that hinder the realisation of the larger-scale projects are resolved, while the issues that underpin the fundamental philosophical problematics of presentation remain: the fact that the curator or the institution encouraged the artist to work in this way remains hidden to the viewer.

When administrators or institutions do attempt to mediate works in favour of audiences, it is driven by the assertion that these practices are in fact in the audience's best interests. As AD.03 explained, while his institution is not in the habit of interfering with artists' works, they will engage in dialogues that involve protecting the public's safety, whether physical or conceptual. He remarked,

we're not trying to impose some of kind of rigid structure that withholds your [artists'] creativity and your spatial thinking. We're doing something because it's very real, and because the experience of the audience is important; you know, we want them to be able to move through a space in a way that is appropriate for the work. And often an artist will intend to make these challenging or tricky or whatever, but we want them, nevertheless, to be able to have an appropriate experience, but we also want to protect your work and your experience. So, it's actually about us mediating that. (Administrator AD.03, interview, 20 August 2015)

Consequently, the first challenge becomes situating the work physically, and the ways in which an institution will engage, collaboratively, to achieve this goal. Once the work is positioned, or negotiated, the more complex questions surrounding the problematics of subject matter can emerge. As Administrator AD.03 continued,

We will, if we've got really, really difficult work, or we anticipate things being difficult or offensive to some people, whether that's nudity, sexual content, language, whatever; we might consider how the work is displayed and placed.

It might not be at the—I might suggest it's not the first work that everybody who walks into the gallery sees, et cetera, and maybe a little bit of warning labelling. And a lot of it's around the way in which our hosts host people. We don't have guards; we have hosts. But nothing has been withheld, pulled, altered. And we've had a lot of conversations about where we're going—what that means for us. (Administrator AD.03, interview, 20 August 2015)

In certain institutions, the issues that emerge surrounding the siting and situating of complex materials are guided by established, formal policies and principles. Australia's Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences follows the *Guidelines for Presenting Sensitive or Controversial Content* (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, ND), which is founded upon the right of creatives to generate such content in an unfettered environment and, within certain strictures, to present that content without undue restriction. These ideas were mirrored in the statements of AD.03 when he asserted that, in general, the opportunities for artists are not hindered within his institution—either physically or conceptually—by those working at an administrative or a curatorial level. At the same time, when asked directly, no participant within the administrative cohort offered any formal, written material that guided their institution administratively or curatorially regarding the display or exhibition of artworks apart from those put in place by national or international bodies, including Museums Australia, Museums Aotearoa, The American Association of Museums, or the International Council of Museums. In fact, one is more likely to encounter such policies when exhibiting in secondary schools, tertiary education institutions, public sector offices, or related facilities than when working formally with arts-based organisations. To illustrate this point, a Google search for the phrase “guidelines *on* the display of artwork” returns 800,000 results, while a search for the phrase “guidelines *for* the display of artwork” returns 801,000 results. In both instances, no nationally or internationally recognised museum, gallery, or exhibitions-based cultural institution returns as one of the top ten results.



Administrator AD.09 also asserted that any curator working with an artist has a responsibility to be fully aware of their practice—to the extent that such knowledge should have the capacity to mediate any need for curatorial intervention. Over the course of his interview, he observed,

curators go into relationships with artists—or should—with their eyes open. If you hire an artist to do a commission piece, you should know a lot about that artist. You should know what they've done in the past, what they're likely to do in the future. And if there are any questions about what they may do, a conversation upfront about expectations I think is totally reasonable. And if the artist does not choose to work within that framework, they're free to walk away. I mean, that's their—once a process has begun, however, and an artist is taken on and there is a shared framework of understanding about the outcome, if something happens within that framework that suddenly the curator is not comfortable with, I think then it is problematic to intercede, at that point. And that's a very general statement, and probably in the specifics, I find exceptions, but I think that is a greyer area to me. (Administrator AD.09, interview, 30 March 2016)

Administrator AD.06 suggested that the same approach should be taken toward curators, meaning that institutions should position their curatorial strategies and their institutional messaging in such a manner that the need for curators to intervene in artists' projects, or the need for administrators to direct curators to do so or not, is mitigated. Speaking of the third major institution he had directed, he commented

[. . .] social practice I think is requiring a stronger role and participation from the curators to help coordinate the activity that needs to go on. There's really a way in which I think people who are very ego-driven—and who might, in some other life, have been artists themselves—have become curators. And the risk for me, from an institutional perspective, is that the entire institution becomes about the curator, rather than about the artwork. And that's a problem I've run into with some frequency. And so, for me, trying to harness the energy of the curator, both to serve the purposes of art and to serve the purposes of the institution, is a constant challenge, essentially. (Administrator AD.06, interview, 29 September 2015)

## 6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the findings drawn from interviews with ten professional museum and gallery administrators. The findings situate the modalities for administrative intervention within various frames. Few administrators narrated circumstances during which they specifically intervened against a curatorial decision, although this did occur in two instances described by Administrators AD.06 and AD.08. Five other administrators—AD.01, AD.04, AD.07, AD.09, and AD.10—narrated instances during which they made suggestions to curators or artists about how they might alter, amend, or change an existing or forthcoming work, and none narrated having shared this dialogue with their audiences.

In this context, it is also important to note that the level of curatorial intervention driven at the administrative level, or by administrators, varies based on the intended outcomes or consequences: in the example provided by Administrator AD.01, the scope was simply to alter elements of the artwork without dramatically altering its content or context; in the situation described by Administrator AD.04, the intervention resulted in a markedly different project, including elements that had not been components of the artist's original work; for the circumstances occurring with Administrator AD.07, the curator removed the work in question from the exhibition, both extending and extinguishing the dialogue, and generating an unintended extension of curatorial intervention and its consequences; for Administrator AD.09, the outcome involved recognition and negotiation; and with Administrator AD.10, the impetus for curatorial intervention involved constructing an institutional frame within which curators could extend their—and artists'—project potentialities beyond what they might have initially intended.

Given the wide range of potential outcomes driven by curatorial intervention, it is imperative to attempt to situate these within a wider framework constructed by transparency, agency, and power. The findings establish, within a range of key results, the following:

- Within reasonable limits, administrators regard curatorial intervention as anticipated, expected, and valuable, providing opportunities for creative and constructive dialogues that may extend the range or scope of artists' projects, as well as encouraging professional development by curators;
- These dialogues can reflect the intentions of the institution and address the diverse needs of its audiences; and
- When administrative decision-making impacts upon curatorial practice, or causes or instigates curatorial intervention (whether positive or negative), determining who is responsible for the intervention, or where the theoretical responsibilities for its impact reside, can be difficult.

The next factor that emerges is that curatorial intervention motivated by administrative concerns, or driven from the administrative level, may operate with, through, or against curatorial intentionality. In certain instances, as in one of the two examples narrated by Administrator AD.07, the curator engaged in an intervention that limited dialogue, audience engagement, and artist intentionality. The net impact of the intervention was clearly negative. In the example narrated by Administrator AD.01—involving the edited video work—the curatorial operation operated by, with, and through the exhibition's curator, with the consent of the artist, and the measurable impacts and outcomes were positive. In neither instance, however, were the interventions evidently transparent to audiences. While the issues of transparency and agency may oscillate at the administrator to curator level, the implications of curatorial agency, reflected as intentionality, remain opaque to audiences as interventionality.

Clearly, then, the issues surrounding curatorial intervention are altered both by administrative decision-making and the administrative frame. As these examples indicate,

curatorial intervention can be driven by, and mediated positively or negatively through, administrative decision-making as well as through institutional opportunity or opportunism. The fundamental implications of these actions, their positions relative to the TAP Matrix, and the synthetical operations of curatorial agency remain largely unaffected. It is worth considering what the overall findings from these three cohorts establish in relation to reception theory: specifically, what are the implications, if any, of curatorial intervention on reception theory based on the findings from the artist, curator, and administrator cohorts?

Much has been said about the level of transparency with which [the collective] What, How, and for Whom tried to infuse its curatorial work. It was an interesting, even provocative, idea to make public the machinations and economics of the exhibition's organization and related costs [ . . . ] But transparency is a double-edged sword, and in revealing some things, the absence of other crucial considerations can be exposed. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details, in this case a particular detail: the fact that none of the artists were paid an honorarium or fee for their participation. This seems a striking omission in a project with commitments to, among other things, the creation of a world with a Brechtian sense of economic justice, which most certainly includes artists.

Jill Winder, "Conceal and Reveal" (2010)

## CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1 ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

This research began by considering whether reception theory can account for the role of the curator. It queried whether one could properly term the curator's role as interventionist, and, if so, where and how was that role situated within the artist–audience exchange? The question of curatorial intervention appeared timely given the prevalence of curatorial authorship within contemporary discourse, seemingly negating questions concerning curatorial intervention in the artist–audience exchange. Given curatorial authorship's potential to define distinct roles and spaces for curators, it was necessary for both theorists and practitioners to reconsider reception theory: seemingly devoid of a defined role for curators, reception theory instead delineated the parameters of the artist–audience exchange. Because of the disparity between artist-audience and artist-curator-audience, curatorial intervention against reception deserves critical interrogation. For, whereas curatorial authorship requires only objects, reception theory appeared not to require curators.

The issue becomes one of accounting for the potential lacks that reception theory presupposes. The problems stem from the spectator, who is always already caught in the act of reception itself, viewing some-thing, and mediating an artist's intentionality (so they believe) without the additional frame of curatorial intervention. What the research explores is whether a tri-nodal framework for negotiating the artist–audience exchange could properly depict an institutionally based visual exchange that would more accurately reflect the processes and practices of experiential viewing. This tri-nodal framework of artist, curator, and audience would result in a theoretical structure that stood outside reception theory, specifically since reception theory lacks conceptual and theoretical spaces for curators at the site of the exchange. Curators have no specific site, so there is no place from which their agency can derive. Seemingly simple, and yet frustratingly complex, the research question

queried whether both the agency and the visibility of the curator can be made evident within the theoretical frame of the act of reception, but not reception theory. This could occur by defining, then revealing, the roles that curators have as agents within the processes that bound reception theory, and then by determining if curators can fit therein. For reception theory to account for curatorial intervention as practice, it would have to become (or always already have been) a triad, and its invisible third participant would need to become visible.

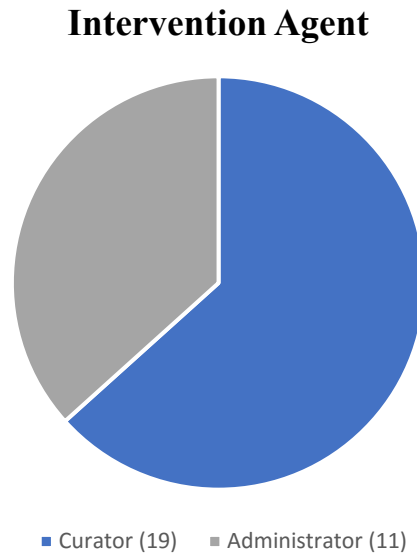
Finally, the research question sought to critically interrogate two primary concerns: one, if it is correct that the curator's agency cannot be derived from reception theory's current structure; for whatever the role of the curator is or is not, it is arguably not synonymous with the role of the critic or the editor. Two, the research question also sought to determine if reception theory's current structure can account for compel curatorial transparency. One of the overarching objectives of the research was to deconstruct what seemed to be a logical conundrum: To have agency appears to imply one also has transparency; yet, curators often have agency without any accompanying transparency. Does this allow curatorial intervention to operate outside the bounds of reception theory, thus constructing the conditions by and through which curatorial intervention can exist, or is it simply a logical fallacy?

The research question—To what extent does the curator or curatorial expert impact on the transactions between artist, object (and/or experience) and audience?—situated the entirety of the project, forming the foundations through which reception theory was subjected to qualitative analyses. This chapter provides a brief analytical summary that synthesises the findings from the preceding three chapters on both intra- and inter-cohort bases, highlighting each cohort's perceptions of curatorial intervention, and each cohort's observations regarding the other two cohorts' tendencies toward intervention.

The cross-cohort findings show as much inter-cohort consistency as the intra-cohort results suggested. When one combines the findings from all three cohorts, the prevalence of

curatorial intervention can be mapped more fully. What emerges in Figure 7.1 is that curators are far more likely than administrators to intervene in artists' works.

**Figure 7.1 Summary Graph of Curatorial Intervention by Agent Across All Cohorts**



“Furthermore, Figure 7.1 suggests that curatorial intervention is driven by curators more frequently than by administrators. The logic is that since curators intervene more frequently than administrators, the intervention agent is on balance of probabilities also more likely to be a curator.” Of the thirty interviewees, nineteen reported intervention in some form by curators, while the remaining eleven reported some form of intervention by administrators. While one curator, CU.02, did not relate specific examples of curatorial intervention from his practice, his response was included in the Curator category since his agency mediates artists’ projects proactively to prevent the need for intervention after the fact. One could term this proper professional practice a form of proactive intervention.

An intra-cohort summary of curatorial intervention has revealed the following:

- Curatorial intervention exists;
- It operates outside the frame of other issues such as “censorship”;
- Its agency is not readily transparent; and,
- It mediates the audience experience.



Each of the above statements has emerged as a key, generally agreed-upon outcome from qualitative analysis. However, the findings diverge when they are considered across cohorts. The findings suggest that artists view intervention by curators and administrators differently than curators do. Curators view it as a professional responsibility toward artists and institutions. Curators also view their responsibilities to artists as differing from the interventions they are compelled to implement based on administrative agency or third-party institutional affiliation. Administrators view and manage curatorial intervention relative to the needs, expectations, and responsibilities they have toward artists, audiences, and institutions, but this varied widely within the administrative cohort. Whereas there was consistency within cohorts, this was not found across them. Detailed cohort analyses are provided below.

## **7.2 SITUATING THE FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE**

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 have presented and considered the findings from each subject cohort in detail. The findings from the first of these cohorts, artists, grounded the subsequent research, because these findings provided the foundations upon which further interrogations were undertaken. At issue is how the research findings confirmed or differed from the existing literature on curatorial intervention. As was outlined in Chapter 2, there is little extant literature on curatorial intervention, but what is available has been considered here in depth.

The findings from Chapter 4 provided the factual bases upon which reception theory's perceived shortcomings were considered, and against which intervention theory's foundations are set. This framework is established in part because the existing literature addressed the notion of collectors as curators, such as in the Lindsay Hughes's essay "Do We

Need New Spaces for Contemporary Art?” After describing works by British artists including Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, Hughes remarks,

The text situated around the gallery suggests a framework from which to look at the exhibition, comparing and contrasting work by different artists. My question here is does the viewer need this information to be able to view the exhibition in the ‘correct way’? And what impact does this have on the viewer’s own interpretation? (Hughes 2005, 29)

Hughes asks what impact curatorial intervention has on the viewer’s interpretation, a question addressed by several artists in Chapter 4. Other theorists, however, remain unconvinced that it has any impact whatsoever. Paul de Man observes in his introduction to Jauss’s *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, “Some writers, not very remote from Jauss in time and place, have denied the efficacy of a theory of interpretation based on the public reception of a work of literature and have discarded it as a mere side effect devoid of hermeneutic interest” (Jauss 1982b, xv). Yet, the artists in this study agreed that curators are mediating audiences’ experiences, and they recognise the problems that these mediations create. Artist AR.10 differentiated between artistic intention and audience experience, generally observing that it is the curator’s role to focus on the overall exhibition and the audience’s experience, while it is the artist’s responsibility to “protect the totality of their work” (Artist AR.10, interview, 26 January 2016). These comments reference curatorial agency, speaking of the processes of installation, interpretation, and presentation, rather than reception. This reinforces the theoretical distinctions between intentionality and reception, something the findings indicate are differentiated. Just as Hughes questions the choices made by the curator (or as she suggests perhaps by extension by Charles Saatchi himself), Artist AR.06 remarked, “there definitely are those ways that the people organising the exhibit—the curators—kind of try and get you to shift things in a certain way. I’ve never dealt with anything where it completely compromised the work” (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015). Questions that arose during the course of this research were whether the literature critically positioned

the existence of curatorial intervention as a specific practice, and, if so, how that practice was made transparent. What emerged were selected acknowledgements of curatorial practice altering artists' intentions to mediate audience experiences, but these actions are rarely apparent. More problematically, the implications of these interventions are difficult to ignore. Consider "How Documenta's Curators Failed Its Artists," where Alexander Forbes concluded, "Inclusion in a major show like *documenta* can mark a major leap forward in the critical, institutional, and market reception for these artists. But first, you have to be able to read their names on the wall" (Forbes 2017). Alternatively, consider Ben Davis's suggestion, "If it feels like it [*documenta 14*] represents art imploding under its own contradictions, it is also true that it appears to be a controlled demolition on [artistic director Adam] Szymczyk's part" (Davis 2017).

These examples reflect ongoing curatorial interventions that mediate the experiences of artists and audiences alike. As Forbes suggests, the absence of wall texts, while arguably a strategy, appears lazy to viewers and disrespectful to artists. A corollary (but contradictory) position to this experience, which situates the mediating power and significance of curatorially driven wall texts, can be found in Administrator AD.09's interview when he described using wall texts to contextualise an exhibition as a "poetic excursion," as long as it doesn't intervene to the extent that the artists regard their work as having been distorted "beyond recognition" (Administrator AD.09, interview, 30 March 2016). Whereas Forbes asserts the lack of wall texts is a disservice to both the artists and the audiences, Administrator AD.09 suggested the wall texts serve to take viewers on a "poetic excursion" that may differ from or extend the artists' original intentions. The existing literature suggests that in certain instances artists may not care about curators' intentions. Established artists can mitigate the unintended consequences or additional issues that arise from curatorial intervention. As Daniel Buren remarks,

I can do my work, even if the [curator] says something stupid or if he really shows that he did not catch a thing. I do not blame him; I mean, it's his problem. And you never know; even with the simplest things, you never know how people are going to see them. (Zerocv 2005, pp. 178–179)

In Chapter 4, Artists AR.02 and AR.09 related opposite experiences. Both recounted instances in which their works were radically altered. In one case, the exhibition space was painted the incorrect colour, despite specific instructions having been provided; in the other, an administrator deemed the entire exhibition unsuitable via the curator, resulting in a series of unacceptable options. In both instances, the problems were partly driven by the curator because the artists had most, if not all, of their contact with the curator. While the literature suggests that in certain instances it may be possible to mitigate the impacts of curatorial intervention, in practice the findings indicate that this is seldom the case.

To mitigate the above issues, transparency remains key. Yet, curatorial intervention need not be central to curatorial practice since curatorship is not based upon the idea that curators must actively mediate artists' works. This distinction puts curatorial intervention, but not curatorial practice generally, at odds with reception theory—which is precisely the problem Jauss alludes to in his preface to *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982a), as discussed in Chapter 2. There, Jauss's description of aesthetic experience was both *a priori* and individuated. As such, there is no way to mediate aesthetic experience or to make it the subject of *a posteriori* interventionism. To intervene in the experience means that it becomes something other than aesthetic experience, whatever that may be. But, strangely, this prohibition only relates back to the intentionality of the artist. The constructed experience of the receiver—better termed the aesthetic response—may be individuated, but its return toward intentionality has already been thwarted through the exercise of curatorial intervention. The intervening mediation has already displaced the return, and already displaced the potentiality.

Since the fundamental construction of reception aesthetics demands that the aesthetic exchange remains fixed between object and viewer, rather than mediated by curator *qua* constructor, the appearance of the curator as the third participant to the transaction would make reception theory fall apart. This interpretation is alluded to by Wolfgang Kemp when he observes,

In the same way that the beholder approaches the work of art, the work of art approaches him, responding to and recognizing the activity of his perception. What he will find first is a contemplating figure on the other side of the divide. This recognition, in other words, is the most felicitous pointer to the most important premise of reception aesthetics: namely, that the function of beholding has already been incorporated into the work itself. (Kemp 1988, 181)

Kemp asserts that it is not the curator but the beholders themselves that are incorporated into the function of the object. It is as if the object is imbued with a Heideggerian beholding-in-itself; the object only exists to be beheld. But curatorial intervention is the hunchback inside the chess-playing automaton; it mediates the intentionality of the artist without ever being seen (Benjamin 1968, 253). This is reminiscent of Artist AR.05's remark that a curator he worked with was part of the "curator is God" methodology in terms of how they constructed exhibitions, continuing to assert that it was an "odd relationship" and that "[w]e both needed each other in some ways" (Artist AR.05, interview, 27 August 2015). Here, Artist AR.05 assigns the role of creator of meaning to the curator, within which one finds the Heideggerian being-for-itself. This completeness should be imbued in the object, and should attach to the wholeness of the object itself, completing the construction of the object's meaning. By transferring this agency to the curator, Artist AR.05 transfers the agency of the work to a third party to the aesthetic exchange.

The existing ontological and epistemological constructions of reception theory imply that reception aesthetics define the aesthetic exchange as a linear duality, ruptured by the

object. The object is always the foil. Reception theory constructs an either experiential or object-centred exchange: it is experiential in performance, or object-centred in literature or the visual arts. In the latter two, it situates the actual exchange (reception of the object) in a gap the two participants never share. One could argue that the existence of the object displaces both. Clearly, the object always separates the two—it is even what, Gadamer explains, makes us understand that the artist and the audience should always be viewed as irreconcilable. He remarks,

Basing aesthetics on experience leads to an absolute series of points, which annihilates the unity of the work of art, the identity of the artist with himself, and the identity of the person understanding or enjoying the work of art. (Gadamer 2014, 82)

Within these exchanges, the curator never appears. Gadamer constructs the experiential nature of aesthetics as linear—and thereby problematic—precisely in the structure that he creates. It is the nature of his exchange, as unidirectional, that removes the agency of the participants to the transaction. It is as if experience overtakes position. What Gadamer suggests is that by its nature, the experience of the work of art becomes totalising, meaning that by necessity it carries its meanings regardless of the intentionality of the artist or the receptive capacity of the audience.

As a result, understanding where to situate the curator within the artist–audience exchange remains problematic, particularly given the curator’s capacity to alter these exchange dynamics. Curator CU.01 made the profound observation that curating was “all semantics” and that it “straddled the spheres of production and reception.” Somehow, Gadamer’s linear, holistic, and closed construction needs to be reconciled with Curator CU.01’s assertions: Gadamer’s construction of the linearity of experience suggests that the insertion of the curator into the transaction would have little impact, while Curator CU.01’s assertions indicate the contrary. Historically, even artists have been perplexed by this

conundrum. By the 1970s, artists including Martha Rosler were interrogating the implications of works made for audiences. In her essay “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers,” she remarks,

Once we even think to pose the question of how to construct an audience, we are confronted by questions that intervene. We must, for example, ask ourselves what the point of our art is (despite the injunction against posing this question). (Rosler 1979, 216)

Rosler is not examining the idea of intervention here. Instead, she is questioning the notion that through the process of constructing an audience—of making work that will attract, entice, and seduce an audience—questions arise concerning the proper construction of the artworks themselves. Rosler is querying if the artist is constructing their work for an audience, or for themselves. She asks if the work is being made for its content, or for its context. If one extrapolates from her position, then the notion of curatorial intervention as a contingent creative practice could emerge. Many artists who participated in this research have acknowledged this potentiality. A single example is found in the interview transcript from Artist AR.07. He regards the intellectual exchange between artist and curator to be an integral part of the creative process, observing that the “right curator, the right gallery dealer, their job is to basically work with the artist and develop the exhibition in a way, and develop work in a way that would be successful. You take that artist and you make them into gold, do you know what I mean?” (Artist AR.07, interview, 15 December 2015). His opinion is that curators develop works in ways that make them successful. Yet, where he situates this responsibility in terms of its authorial or interventionist role is key to determining how one measures the success of the intervention itself. This problem creates two further issues: one concerns where best to situate the practice of developing a work, or of working with an artist to enhance a work’s potential for success, however that might be measured; the other concerns the expectedness, regularity, or frequency with which a curator might intervene in a work,

and to what end that intervention might occur or be directed. Intellectual and conceptual distinctions must be drawn both in the areas concerning how one defines collaboration and how one situates transparency. For example, Artist AR.07 approves of these types of artist–curator collaborations precisely because he is actively engaged in dialogues with curators that can enhance the outcomes of his projects, particularly since he regards the ultimate agency and autonomy as remaining self-contained. Rosler’s sentiment and Artist AR.07’s statement could mark the theoretical limits of curatorial intervention: at one end of the spectrum, an artist constructs the critical implications of a work before making it available to an audience; at the other, a creator works collaboratively with a curator to construct a work for an audience. In both instances, the place and the role of the curator is such that it is not (perceivably) positioned by hierarchical power, but by collaborative power and it is, by necessity, imbued at least with the potentiality of transparency. One might argue that there is no way to guarantee that the curator’s power is positioned in a transparent way in relation to Artist AR.07—meaning that there is no way to guarantee that his dialogues with curators make themselves evident to audiences—but the collaborative nature of the mediations *a priori* to creation mean at least that it is not intervention after the fact. This is arguably the better approach, and if not a different type of intervention, at least a differing degree.

More challengingly, if one agrees with Heidegger, artists and their agency remain separate from the holistic nature of a work’s intentions, meaning that even the most interventionist actions by curators could at times be insignificant. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he writes:

Yet is the work ever in itself accessible? To gain access to the work, it would be necessary to remove it from all relations to something other than itself, in order to let it stand on its own for itself alone. But the artist's most peculiar intention already aims in this direction. The work is to be released by him to its pure self-subsistence. It is precisely in great art-and only such art is under consideration here-that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge. (Heidegger 1971, 40)



Artists in this study, including Artist AR.06, argue that there is no way to release the work into a being-in-itself in which it could be “pure self-subsistence,” nor can curators mediate works to such an extent that they deviate from their core meanings and operate outside their intentions. To do so would be to fundamentally alter the work. As Artist AR.06 explained, his work often deals with social issues or specific communities, meaning that the level of intervention or compromise that can be allowed should be measured against the implications and representations of the community in question, and the obligations toward them that he has and that are attached thereto (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015).

Thus, the question of where one sites curatorial intervention remains. This may be a phenomenological issue, but it needs to be resolved. Does it reside with the curator, as a mode of operation, or does it reside within the artist–audience exchange as a mode of mediation? Against this, curatorial authorship stands as a foil against the problematics of curatorial intervention, and has been situated within the dynamics of this research. Did the existing literature, when viewed within the contexts of these findings, indicate that curatorial authorship presented a viable operational framework? Returning to the problematic outlined in Chapter 2, where O’Neill, Wilson, and Steeds refer to “overcoming of the authorial function of the curator” (O’Neill, Wilson, and Steeds 2016, 7), the findings indicate that this question is a variable for contemporary curators. The distinctions between curatorial authorship and the agency relationships of curatorial intervention are such that, at one end of the spectrum, curators appear to remain attached to the creative and constructive ideals of authorship, and, at the other, they remain averse to the notions of interventionist practice. This creates a conundrum within which curators must operate: bounded by a reticence to claim authorship for creative practices and processes, yet averse to missing out on opportunities to address specific issues that might enhance a project. In this regard, consider

the ways in which Administrator AD.01 approached the issues surrounding the video project that emphasised male sexuality, and its potential for hypersexualised content, versus the statements of Curator CU.01 regarding the ways in which he might intervene in a work's display if he did not fundamentally alter its physicality.

### **7.3 ANALYSING CURATORIAL INTERVENTION ACROSS THE COHORTS: EXAMPLES FROM THE TAP MATRIX FRAMEWORK**

Across every cohort, the findings indicate that if curatorial intervention exists, and if it is to be realistically communicated and addressed, the TAP Matrix variables may provide an effective frame within which a model for its applications may be constructed. However, a close reading of the findings across the cohorts indicates that the participant groups do not agree regarding the value or validity of the variables, and their implications for siting curatorial intervention.

#### **7.3.1 TRANSPARENCY**

The professional practising artists surveyed disagreed on how transparent curatorial intervention should be. Most regarded curators they have worked with as interventionist and, in many circumstances, as engaging in practices that were opaque and detrimental to their works. Of the ten cohort artists, eight provided the following direct experiences of curatorial intervention: changing the way a project was installed (Artist AR.01); reducing or altering the number of works in an exhibition (Artist AR.02); asking for an alteration to an existing project, or that certain elements not be included in a project even prior to its completion (Artist AR.03); requesting the recreation of prior work or the creation of new work that mirrored older work, rather than working with existing or new work (AR.04); asking that an

artist return to earlier series (Artist AR.05); recontextualising a work as part of its installation process, despite having discussed the matter with the artist previously (Artist AR.06); physically installing a work incorrectly, despite being provided with proper instructions, and then being reticent to rectify this (Artist AR.08); and being advised to choose an entirely different body of work or face abandoning a contractually agreed exhibition (Artist AR.09).

When asked about the practice of curatorial intervention directly, Artists AR.02, AR.05, and AR.09 acknowledged its operations and, from their statements, appeared resigned to the power disparities it creates and its implications; Artists AR.03, AR.04, and AR.06 acknowledged its existence, and work to create around it; Artist AR.07 viewed curatorial intervention as a net positive, and does not regard the issues of agency or curatorial transparency in relation to the audience to be of significance; Artist AR.08 acknowledged its existence, reacts against it when it compromises her expectations, and is uncertain about the level of transparency such agency should necessarily have; and Artist AR.10 acknowledged curatorial intervention, and questions an audience's need or interest in having further information with regard to it.

The question concerning transparency, and the extent to which curatorial practice should make curatorial intervention transparent, remains unresolved. Artist AR.02 remarked that audiences are generally not interested in the machinations of curatorial practice or curatorial intervention; Artist AR.06 regarded the issue as even more problematic, remarking that when you begin to open a discussion regarding curatorial intervention or dialogues between artists and curators, audiences will wonder why a work did not appear in that manner initially if the issue was significant. He prefers unmediated audience experiences, with additional information regarding the process available upon request (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015). By doing so, he constructs a multivalent structure for transparency versus opacity, allowing viewers to have varying degrees of information

regarding the ways in which curatorial intervention may occur, and to what extent that may impact, or have impacted upon, an artist's intentionality. To the contrary, Artist AR.08 was only willing to allow curatorial intervention, and its accompanying opacity, to the extent that such actions did not interfere with her own autonomy (Artist AR.08, interview, 26 July 2016). This distinction is significant, for in the former the transparency relies on the active participation and desire of the viewer—they must want to know more about the work—while in the latter both the transparency and the agency hinge upon the motivations and the actions of the curator. Arguably, the curator's interventionality should not compromise the artist's autonomy, before any further issues can be addressed.

The curators interviewed generally regard curatorial transparency to be of little value for audiences. While they acknowledged the impacts that curatorial agency and mediation have within curatorial practice, many regard transparency as revealing the procedural or administrative aspects of curatorial practice. Curator CU.01 not only deems curatorial transparency to be of little interest or value to audiences, but also suggests that such transparency would affect his ability to subtly manipulate viewers by removing his capacity to create the perception of interpretive agency on their part (Curator CU.01, interview, 12 August 2015). He explained that at some point in his career he realised that he could curate exhibitions across or through spaces and still draw connections between them, and that viewers could be given the impression they had interpretive agency even if their experiences were generally very structured. In recognising, describing, and asserting the lack of interpretive autonomy on the part of audiences, Curator CU.01 outlined both the significance and implications of curatorial intervention. He was the first curatorial cohort member to be interviewed. He also presented the first assertions of both absolute curatorial opacity and seemingly unfettered curatorial agency.

Curator CU.02's assertions regarding this point were less didactic. He parsed the

issues of agency and transparency into those of content versus administration. He is less inclined to share information that is purely administrative—such as how much and artist’s fee might be—with an audience, and does not regard this as either an issue of intervention or an issue of curatorial process. Relating the history of a project in which his institution implemented a framework of “innovative curatorial approaches”—key markers for the exhibition as a whole—he recounted how their significance was not shared with the audience either prior to or during the project. Curator CU.02 further elaborated that it was not until the model was being used as a focus for grant applications that it was synthesised and distributed outside the institution. (Curator CU.02, interview, 4 September 2015)

As a result, he acknowledged that curatorial frames that mediated the exhibition were not transparent to the audience despite being of theoretical, structural, and institutional significance.

Throughout the course of the research, this question remained unresolved among curators. There was no general agreement regarding either the type or the degree of transparency one might expect within curatorial practice, nor the extent to which such transparency would either govern or mitigate curatorial intervention. There was also no agreement regarding the extent to which transparency would benefit audiences. Curator CU.06 regards transparency as something that is more suitable to gallery or artists’ talks, remarking that “I probably wouldn’t advertise it [pre-planning, pre-production, or negotiations with the artist] in public, on wall labels or in marketing.” (Curator CU.06, interview, 11 August 2015) Without making value judgments regarding the benefit or detriment of curatorial intervention, Curator CU.03 observed, “I like that you’re talking about this idea of transparency, and that you convey to the general public [. . .] because there’s a lot that goes behind the scenes.” (Curator CU.03, interview, 4 March 2016) Curator CU.08 made a significant observation that adds a level of nuance to the issue at hand when she remarked

that even mediated works of art must eventually be evaluated on their merits. As she explained, “in the end, you have to respect [the work] on its own terms as a piece. And a successful piece, you're not even—it doesn't call attention to [any restrictions or curatorial interventions].” (Curator CU.08, interview, 11 December 2015) This is a challenging observation, as it asserts that although curatorial intervention may alter a work significantly, the true measure of the capacity of the artist, or of the communicative power of the work, is to be able to be effective and impactful outside any mediation or alteration. This issue—the impact of intervention on a work—was not addressed generally by the other participant curators, and was addressed generally as having had a negative impact on the works in the majority when addressed by artists.

As outlined in Chapter 6, the administrators’ opinions varied regarding how transparent curatorial practice—and thereby curatorial intervention—should be toward audiences. While the administrators acknowledged the existence and operation of curatorial intervention, they regard its visibility relative to audiences as remaining challenging. By problematising curatorial intervention, administrators can salvage the extant intention–reception model, keeping its concomitant interpretive structures intact.

### **7.3.2 AGENCY**

Unlike the question of transparency, all three cohorts generally agreed that curators have agency. The issues become one, how to most effectively address its exercise, and two, how to make this exercise transparent to audiences as appropriate. And whereas in prior models of curatorial practice this agency was situated simply as curatorial authorship, challenges emerge if it is positioned as curatorial intervention. A motivation for making curatorial agency evident can be found in the interview with Artist AR.09, who remarked,

“someone has to say, ‘Yes, these are the pieces that are going in the show, and only these pieces.’ And it's almost never the artist who makes that decision.”

Artists must address differing agencies in divergent manners: one type of agency derives from their own practice, while another emerges from how their works become situated within the wider museum context. Statements from Artist AR.06 illustrate this clearly; in one, he outlined how the issue of who has agency—whether regarding telling stories or creating images that examine cultures—lies at the heart of his practice; in another, he acknowledged that museums and institutions are generally aware of these differing types of agency (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015). As Artist AR.06 explains, since the question of who has narrative agency is a key component of his work, engaging with his practice means acknowledging the institutional issues of transparency and agency that attach thereto. Institutions must address how to effectively engage with these works without undermining the artist’s intentionality or disempowering his agency.

Another challenge for artists concerns unintentional agency—of curators situating artists’ works where they were not intended theoretically. This can be even more problematic, particularly when works are contextualised by a specific identifier (race, religion, or gender). Artist AR.06 addressed this problem, observing that artists of colour face specific challenges because their work can often be wholly and solely contextualised through a lens such as race, which may have little to do with the overall content or context of the piece itself (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015).

In recognising the institutional tendency to work in this way, Curator CU.06 acknowledged the problems inherent in questions of agency, but he transferred or deferred those surrounding transparency onto artists. He suggested that the amount or degree of public discussion surrounding an artwork’s manifestation should be the artist’s decision. This differs from the position taken by Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja in their 2012 essay “What Comes

After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating”, where they posited “three agency-oriented perspectives: Performing the Archive, Curating as Organizing and Turning to the Educational, which together open up a yet unfinished catalogue of criteria for post-representative curating” (Sternfeld and Ziaja 2012, 23). Their apparent manifesto for a new form of curating highlights a key challenge that curatorial intervention generates: that the process of intervening in works destabilises the existing exchange models, meaning that its various elements are also called into question. This is one of the primary shortcomings of curatorial authorship against curatorial intervention: the former merely superimposes the curator onto the creative production of artists and the interpretive capacities of audiences; the latter situates the curator as an interventionist participant in the creative process, compelling a need for visibility through the exercise of agency.

Problematising the issue further are questions concerning how best to address this agency. If a curator exercises their interventionist agency in a manner that stands outside the guidance of an institution, how and when should that become visible to audiences? Think of the artwork removal example provided by Administrator AD.07. Does the issue of curatorial intervention generate administrative responsibilities *contra* the curator and towards the audience? Does it require that an administrator advise audiences that a curator made a unilateral decision to remove a work contrary to institutional preferences? Is this possible?

Whatever the nuances may be, each example illustrates the existence of an agency outside the two defined by reception theory. In each instance, the active engagement of the curator, whether self-motivated or institutionally driven, altruistic or egotistic, mediates and redirects the audience’s experiences of the work in question. There must be a way to account for this practice, and constructing a theoretical model that acknowledges its existence is a tangible first step.



When analysed from the curators' perspectives, the findings on agency are similar. Of the ten cohort participants, the majority reported either intervening in an artist's work or being instructed by an administrator to do so. No curator reported having made this information available to an audience directly. Curator CU.01 advised that he began his career by considering collections-based works to be objects that could be interpreted or misinterpreted as fit an exhibition's curatorial objectives; Curator CU.03 was directed by an administrative body to compel an artist to install another work in an exhibition; Curator CU.04 was reprimanded for discussions surrounding a component of an artist's work; Curator CU.05 outlined how a modified proposal could construct a more complex and potentially engaging project—which it did, to great sustained critical acclaim; Curator CU.07 asked artists for various edits of video works, reconfigured works for exhibition with the artist's consent, and reconstructed or refabricated historical pieces for exhibition as and where appropriate; Curator CU.08 implemented a series of site-specific installation projects constrained by the physical structure of the exhibition space, but did not make these constraints visible to the public directly; Curator CU.09 refused to install warning signage on an exhibition despite her employer's suggestion and despite the artist's request—asserting that the issues in question were not part of the artist's original intent; and Curator CU.10 recontextualised then situated works within more broadly based institutional frames despite colleagues' objections, arguing that their prior definitions served to limit access.

None of these decisions were ever made visible to audiences. Curator CU.01's choices regarding installation practice were not evident to visitors. The initial work proposed for Curator CU.03 was never given the opportunity to be misconstrued, nor was the administrative intervention made evident. The smaller project initially proposed to Curator CU.05 was not given an opportunity to succeed or fail. One must question if asserting the existence of curatorial intervention is akin to breaking down the fourth wall or lifting the

corporate veil. It is neither. Instead, it is addressing the fundamentally absent power dynamic that inhabits the interstices existing between artist and audience, then making them evident. That viewers are unaware of this aspect of the exchange is structurally problematic. And, most problematically, it remains opaque throughout the process.

### **7.3.3 POWER**

The significance and implications of curatorial power remain issues of debate. In certain instances, administrators in this study asserted that curatorial power and curatorial authorship may not be as significant as has been suggested. For example, Administrator AD.05 suggested that curators have little ability to influence artists' intentions, remarking,

I actually don't see a general trend towards increased curatorial authorship. [ . . . ] I see artists having enormous power at this moment because of the marketplace. [ . . . ] The ability of the Museum to be able to work with an artist who is so incredibly successful in the marketplace means the museum often has to make a lot of compromises to be able to satisfy the standards the artist is accustomed to from the gallery or commercial world. (Administrator AD.05, interview, 8 June 2015)

This was one of the few instances in which participants in any cohort indicated that artistic power was more significant than curatorial or institutional power. The writers surveyed in the literature review do suggest that there are additional variables that have the potential to influence the exercise of curatorial power, or to more definitively situate where it resides, but those occurrences were not recounted by members of the three participant cohorts. Over the course of the research, seventy-six separate sources were coded for the specific term “power,” with a total of 1,047 references attached thereto. The fundamental problem of power, outlined by Administrator AD.05, was mirrored by Administrator AD.09, who had similar concerns regarding curators who viewed themselves as a “creative power,” and who could come into conflict with artists' expectations regarding an institution's transparency as a platform for creativity and creative expectations (Administrator AD.09, interview, 30 March

2016). One observation Administrator AD.09 made that did not emerge in the findings from other members of the administrative cohort is that there is “a sort of right to creative voice in the curatorial role,” and that this voice can, and does, come into conflict with artists’ expectations. Administrator AD.09 did not address the question of whose voice should be more significant in instances in which such conflicts do emerge, although he did suggest that artists’ intentionalities should be respected to the greatest extent possible.

The implications of this power disparity are alluded to in the comments from Curator CU.03, who suggested that although constructive and communicative power should reside predominantly with artists, or artists’ collectives, this power has shifted for a range of reasons, and artists have subsequently become disenfranchised. As with both transparency and agency, however, the artists interviewed remained convinced of the power disparities inherent in both the public and commercial art worlds.

This notion of power resting entirely with a gallery or an institution was a recurring perception of most research participants. From the earliest remarks by Artist AR.02 regarding curators making choices concerning what works are exhibited, to the above observation by Administrator AD.09 (and the many similar experiences recounted across all cohorts), the findings indicate that artists generally regard their position within the power structure to be subservient to both the curator and the institution. Still, institutions often regard the power dynamic to be the exact opposite. One struggles to determine both where and to what extent curatorial intervention constructs significant, specific impacts upon the artist–audience exchange that may be documented, described, and inscribed within a specific and defined set of parameters.

The evidence indicates that the matrices of transparency and agency situate curatorial intervention in a frame in which it has power. More significantly, curatorial intervention could be the modality of power that destabilises intentionality itself. If Walter Benjamin is

correct, the dialectical structure of intentionality–reception was always already incapable of addressing the problem of curatorial intervention. He alludes to this fact in *The Author as Producer* in a comment so unremarkable that it seems almost throwaway: “For the dialectical treatment of this problem—and now I come to the heart of the matter—the rigid, isolated object (work, novel, book) is of no use whatsoever. It must be inserted into the context of living social relations” (Benjamin 1973, 87). This is significant to the extent that Benjamin suggests that the structure of the dialectic is incapable of discerning the nature of the object’s relationship with the ‘Other’. If this is so, then by extension the dialectic of author and reader can no more position the relationship of text and reception than can the relationship of artist and viewer do the same for the object. Benjamin continues to hypothesise by suggesting that “[t]he reader is always prepared to become a writer, in the sense of being one who describes or prescribes” (Benjamin 1973, 92).

One might argue further that the findings support the notion proposed by Hirsch, of the rupture between the “mere intention to do something and the concrete accomplishment of that intention” (Hirsch 1967, 29). This distinction opens the space in which intervention can occur, and yet it is not specifically addressed by any cohort apart from the artists. Neither curators nor administrators addressed the issue of the implications of intervention in depth, meaning that the slippage from intention to accomplishment was not paramount in their thinking. Nevertheless, would a theory of intervention situate this differently? Would the emergence of a structure that posited the curator as an agent/participant in the triadic exchange mean that they by necessity were situated within the meaning structure of the artist–audience exchange?

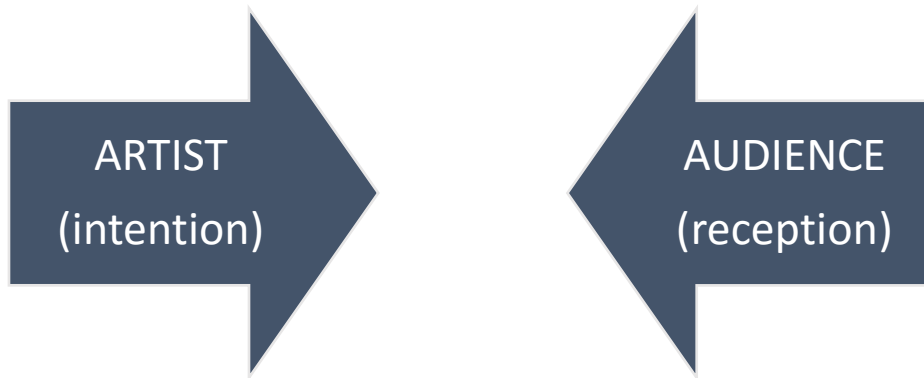
#### 7.4 CONSTRUCTING A TRI-NODAL MODEL OF CURATORIAL INTERVENTION

Given the totality of the research findings, it is necessary consider and construct their theoretical and practical implications to determine if, how, and where they position curatorial intervention. These implications come to the fore when one considers how curatorial intervention destabilises intentionality. Consider the artists' findings through the theoretical and conceptual lens of Paul O'Neill, a curator who acknowledges the implications of curatorial intervention. Writing in *The Politics of the Small Act*, he remarks,

The forming of an exhibition has an accumulative structure, and it gathers shape as private intentions are made public in correspondence with others' intentions. Of course, this evolving practice will never fully reveal itself in the exhibition moment, but I try to make the processes of contested negotiation evident in what ends up on public display. (O'Neill 2010, 7)

In this statement, one finds the limits of interventionality without using the term: private intentions, coupled with others' intentions, that are not fully revealed in the exhibition moment. As O'Neill writes, "... but I try to make the processes of contested negotiation evident in what ends up on public display." And yet, even here the curator's private intentions are not fully revealed—and *that* intentionality differs from the intentionality of the artist, and is some *thing* other than the creative process of the maker. Interventionality destabilises this process through its insidious interoperability, interposition, and interdiction. Curatorial intervention emerges in precisely this moment, and the dialectical exchange structure between artist and audience ruptures. It changes from reception theory's dialectical exchange, which situates the non-existent exchange between artist and audience at its centre. What results is this non-synthesis precisely at the non-exchange, non-experience, point where the binary artist–audience dialectical relationship fails to meet (Figure 7.2):

**Figure 7.2: Binary Artist–Audience Dialectical Relationship**



The shortcomings apparent in this perceived dialectic remains a fundamental flaw of reception theory relative to the visual arts for two reasons: First, reception theory cannot—and does not—join the object to its maker or its viewer, either conceptually or physically; and second, it does not and cannot construct either a theoretical or a practical frame that the curator is situated within. The problem is that this model is binary. Yet, this is the model that reception theory constructs. As Kemp explains, “it is important to point out, as a specific characteristic of communication in the visual arts, that author and recipient do not deal with one another directly, as is the case in the daily occurrence of face-to-face communication” (Kemp 1998, 183).

Once this binary structure of reception-based exchange is established, opportunities emerge for aesthetic experience and aesthetic response. These extend the initial experience of reception, but still only allow for the positions of artist and audience, or writer and reader. They address the one with intention and one who receives, all the while keeping any possible space for the curator—the one who would mediate or intervene—closed. The potential for intervention is what continually makes the question relevant. It grounds the transactional nature of the artist–audience exchange, and whether it should be examined further. The research indicated a high degree of consistency regarding a reticence to do so, revealing that

the idea of curators being formally situated at a point of intervention is problematic for most artists. This began with Artist AR.01, who remarked, “there's no protocol for saying, ‘This is what the artist decided, and this is what we curators decided, or we exhibition managers decided when they were out of the country.’” The statement demarcates clear distinctions between the innate agency that artists have and the agency curators could be said to either construct or usurp: furthermore, it indicates that the question of agency is key when attempting to construct a model of intervention that differs from the relational model of reception theory. Even when artists understand that the interventionist structure exists, there may be scope for it to operate consultatively, as it does—at some level, although not ultimately, for Artist AR.02, who remarked that the ultimate exhibition agency lies with curators. Prior to making that assertion, he remarked, “But they want to know what you—how you feel about it and what your preferences are and what you think works, or which the strongest images are. But that's fine.” According to him, artists have little interest in artist–curator dialogues being visible, remarking, “Oh, it's irrelevant. I mean, the audience is not interested.” (Artist AR.02, interview, 3 November 2015)

Artist AR.02 established two distinct parameters for curatorial intervention: one, that artists are subjugated to the whims of curators; and two, that audiences are disinterested in the artist–curator exchange. In his view, Artist AR.02 positions curatorial intervention at its most extreme, as does Artist AR.09. The latter made this assertion, when he recounted an instance in which an administrator had—to the best of his understanding—directed that a curator instruct him to select an alternative body of work for exhibition, or not have an exhibition at all. He regarded one of the core issues that resulted in the curator being directed to intervene as being the impossibility of addressing audiences in relation to the proposed exhibition’s content—a problem he regarded as the institution’s, not the artist’s. As he described the situation, issues such as these, which specifically involved the artist–audience

exchange, were not necessarily the purview of the administrator, the curator, or the institution, although he understood the gravity of the situation. From his perspective, the curatorial intervention, and the accompanying lack of transparency, was driven solely by anticipation and expectation, which he regarded as speculation. This problematises much curatorial intervention to the extent that it anticipates problems in reception, creating a disparity between actual and anticipated reception.

The disparity evident in reception theory leads directly to intervention theory. Reception theory hinges on the binary nature of the artist–audience exchange. As the examples of curatorial intervention provided by artists suggest, there are two flaws with this construct. One flaw is that artists perceive a disparate power relationship between themselves and curators, meaning that the works that audiences receive are often not those that the artists intend. Therefore, the intentionality of the artist relative to what the audience perceives becomes subjectively suspect. The other shortcoming is that additional information that might make this mediation more apparent is, in artists' opinions, of little interest to audiences, so there is little motivation to make these interventions evident.

This same (almost marginal) intervention bounds Artist AR.06's interview:

what you're talking about is it's, like, subtle shifts. It's not necessarily the overall project; it's, like, an aspect of it, and you have to decide whether that aspect is worth fighting for, or whether we should just get the general benefits of participating in whichever event that it is that they have us participating in. (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015)

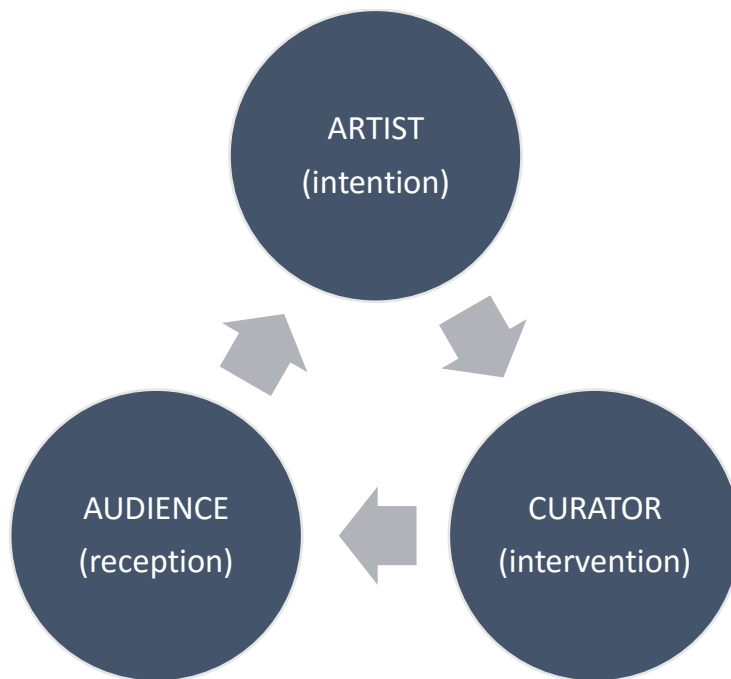
Each artist cohort member acknowledged that curators are agent-participants within the artist–audience exchange. So, any alternative theoretical construct must both allow for and situate curatorial agency: the artist–audience exchange cannot effectively operate as a binary, closed model based on the notion of a dialectic at the centre of which is the art object. Instead, it must operate within the potentiality of the triadic exchange, and that tri-nodal structure would be marked by its assertion of the equal participation (theoretically) of the



artist, the curator, and the audience. Yet even if the existing structure of reception theory is superseded by this alternative model, it still appears to operate hierarchically.

Rather, a non-hierarchical model of curatorial intervention should function like the mediated artist–curator–audience relationship depicted in Figure 7.3.

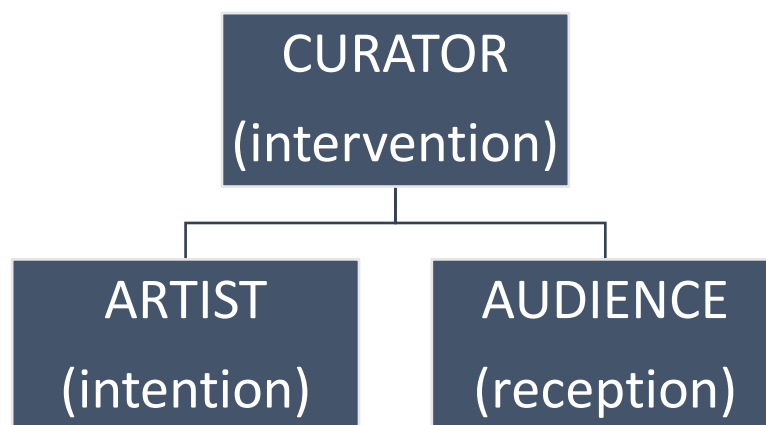
**Figure 7.3: Mediated Artist–Curator–Audience Relationship**



In Figure 7.3, the conceptual, structural, formal, and functional exchanges all move in a unidirectional fashion, from participant to participant, unmediated. This is the model that many institutions purport to operate within. One may surmise this is the intention, if not the outcome, of Administrator AD.05’s decision to describe his position as director and chief animator: “I gave myself the title director and chief animator. And I gave myself that title because in many ways I feel that an animator reflects more of what interests me about my job, because an animator is somebody who brings images to life for people. Maybe that is more of what I care about than actually a curator” (Administrator AD.05, interview, 8 June 2015). Even in this structure, the expectation is that the person operating in the space between

artist and audience is engaging with and mediating the work in some way, and that the mediation may or may not be visible to the spectator. If the circular dynamic functions, it requires the complete absence of intervention, situating the curator as a conduit without agency. On a perceptual level, this might appear valid, but the functional power relationship that emerges is outlined in Figure 7.4.

**Figure 7.4: Hierarchical Power Structure of Curatorial Intervention**



The hierarchy represented in Figure 7.4 repositions the curator at the pinnacle of the exchange. What occurred was that the reception theory's dialectical relationship of artist–curator first became a non-hierarchical triad, which then was subsumed by an interventionist hierarchy, with an individual who neither *intends* nor *receives* sitting at its interventionist apex. More unexpectedly, for the curator, this hierarchy can be both active and invisible. That power dynamic that previously situated the artist at the top of the artistic/symbolic exchange has crumbled, leaving the curator in their place. This shift leaves artists such as AR.02 to have remarked, ruefully, about curators simply doing what they will with artists' works, and Artists AR.01 and AR.05 sharing the same sentiments.

#### 7.4.1 CURATORIAL INTERVENTION AS A MEDIATING STRUCTURE

If the mediated artist–curator–audience relationship model in Figure 7.3 is theoretically possible—and more correctly situates the artist–audience exchange—then it could also begin a renegotiation regarding the reception of art by siting curatorial intervention at the point where receiving or experiencing the object was once thought to be located. This would mean that the artist, as creator, would no longer simply leave the object to be received by the audience, creating the linear experience that Gadamer lamented. With the advent of curatorial intervention, no longer is a work encountered without construct, but it is also no longer received unmediated. If this is the case, one must wonder what the implications are for intentionality, and how one could situate the theoretical and practical outcomes from this modified system of exchange.

Manifestations of the fear of curatorial intervention have been evident since the emergence of the protest letter from *documenta 5*. For whatever reasons, *documenta 5* perpetuated the hierarchical power disparities that were constructed by positioning curators *contra* artists. This was reiterated in *documenta 7*, when Rudi Fuchs sent his letter. As theorist and curator Douglas Crimp observes,

this letter revealed Fuchs's fundamentally contradictory objectives. On the one hand he claimed that he would restore to art its precious autonomy, while on the other hand he made no secret of his desire to manipulate the individual works of art in conformity with his inflated self-image as master artist of the exhibition. Whether the participating artists intended it or not, Fuchs would endeavor to ensure that their works would in no way reflect on their environment [. . .] (Crimp 1993, 239–40)

How the curatorial role emerges so emphatically as interventionist should be surprising, but the fact that it is unchallenged by much of the art-world infrastructure is more disturbing. Fuchs elevates curatorial intervention to a place of primacy within curatorial theory. Using the international exhibition as a platform, Fuchs effectively shifts the paradigm

to the model found in Figure 7.4. This creates a model in which Curator CU.01 can speak of his ability to “present [art] in perverse company and make it operate in ways that were outside the scope of the artist’s intention,” as he did early in his career, before noting,

[. . .] I realised that I didn't need to put works together on the same wall or even in the same room to make a point. People can come across a related work three rooms later and make the connection. That also creates the impression that they have some interpretive agency, that they are not being led by the nose (even if they are). (Curator CU.01, 12 August 2015)

Curator CU.01’s comments make it clear that the distinctions between production and reception are well established, and that neither is a space that the curator can ever truly occupy. This means that any structure that creates only these poles can never accommodate this role, and that some other structure or paradigm must be modelled to do so. Whatever else curators are doing, they are not situated within intention or reception.

Across all three cohorts, the participants agreed on three fundamental issues: 1) that intention and reception are the modes of the artist and audience respectively; 2) that the curator is not situated within either of these modes; and 3) that the curator has agency within the artist–audience exchange that must be accounted for conceptually, theoretically, and transparently outside the existing model.

This notion of curatorial intervention as a mediating structure—the fundamental idea that makes it significant—is one of the most coded terms over the analysis of the cohort interviews. Its emergence of curatorial intervention over the course of the analysis reveals that the practice sits precisely at the intersections of intentionality and reception, and, as early as the interview with Curator CU.01, mediation situates curatorial intervention at this junction. The problem is the disparity between motivation and transparency. Curator CU.05 remarked,

The reason why I wanted to work with artists is because—in a way—you can actually effect very broad social and cultural conversations that might lead to

cultural change through having very close relationships and working closely with artists. (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016)

While he acknowledged his role's capacity to "effect very broad social and cultural conversations," one does not know if these conversations reflect the intentionality of the artist or the interventionality of the curator. That point remains opaque, in the realm of value-added significance for the artist experience. This, then, becomes interventionist, and a point at which the curator—who may or may not have negotiated the issue with the artist—extends the scope of the project. Yet, without direct indications to the contrary, audiences always already believe these issues are derived from the artist, and intentionality attaches thereto.

Even more problematically, at times, artists are willing to acquiesce to these types of interventionist mediations, even if they go against the intentionality of the work. Consider here the comments of Artist AR.06, drew distinctions between the significance of particular aspects of a work, the overall benefits of participating in a project, and the difficulties of sometimes differentiating between the two. (Artist AR.06, interview, 3 November 2015).

The implications of such a statement are profound. The artist, who is the creative practitioner, acknowledges that at times curators mediate works to such an extent that their meanings are altered beyond recognition. And, artists acknowledge it can be difficult to attempt to speculate upon the outcome. As Artist AR.06 commented, "You have to decide whether that aspect is worth fighting for, or whether we should just get the general benefits..." That the power dynamic between institutions and established artists should be so skewed that artists are willing to weigh their careers in terms of "general benefits" seems extraordinarily problematic, but the fact that these same artists would allow the intentionality of their works to be altered in the process is even more so. Coupled with the fact that such alterations remain opaque, the politics of curatorial intervention seem even more challenging. Still, other artists do not find the issue so problematic, even showing a willingness to

participate in the construction of these same narratives if their integrity is not at issue. Artist AR.08 remarked, “I am happy to be a part of someone’s narrative if my autonomy is not compromised.”

Overall, the findings are inconclusive regarding the implications of curatorial intervention on mediating artists’ works. Eighty percent of the artists who participated in the research regarded curatorial intervention as having had a negative impact on their works, while sixty percent of the curators regarded their interventions as having had a significant—and generally positive—impact on the artists’ works in which they had intervened. More problematically, the issues that frame curatorial intervention for artists, such as content, material, body of work, or subject matter, may differ from the issues a curator considers when they are determining whether curatorial intervention is necessary.

Seventy percent of the administrators regarded curatorial intervention as having had a positive impact on the project in question, which skews the results in favour of curatorial intervention generally. Of that, eighty-five percent of interventions were driven by administrators through curators, rather than by curators.

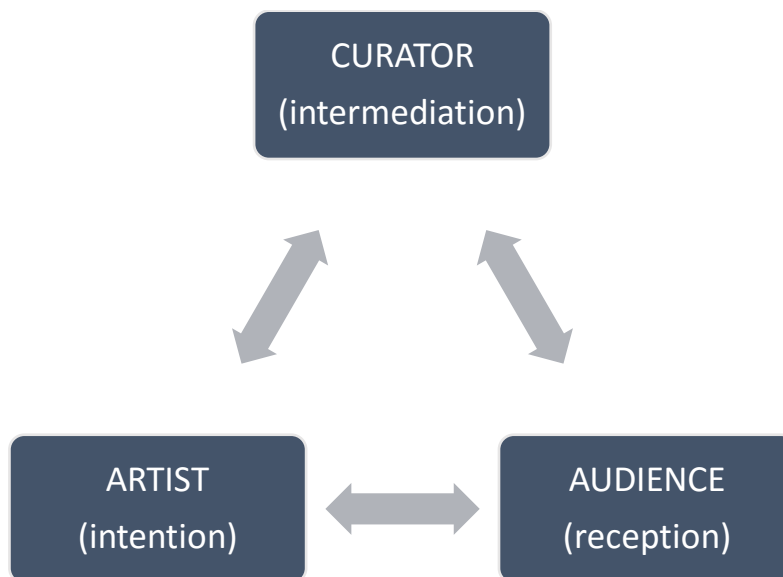
## **7.5 TOWARD AN INTERVENTION THEORY**

Since the role of the curator must be situated outside the existing binary paradigm of reception theory, one could postulate a new, tri-nodal theory. This approach would both account for the existing roles of the participants within the traditional reception theory exchange, and create the spaces by and through which curators could engage in the practices of intervention transparently and with agency. This is not the model that was illustrated in Figure 7.4 because that constructed a hierarchical relationship that positioned the curator at the apex of the relationship and—despite curators’ assertions to the contrary over the course of this research, and throughout much contemporary theory on the subject—the true function

of ‘intervention theory’ cannot be to subjugate artist and viewer to the constructed power of the curator.

Instead, what would operate more effectively than what is illustrated in Figure 7.4 would be to propose a new synthetic. This would be a tri-nodal structure in which each of the transactional relationships is transparent. The existing relationship of reception theory is perceived to be artist and viewer not meeting at the object; the new model would encompass artist to audience; artist to curator; and curator to audience. Each relationship is bilateral and bi-directional, as seen in Figure 7.5, and, as such should operate within a series of theoretical

**Figure 7.5 Intervention Theory as Tri-Nodal Transparent Structure**



and formal relationships that would operate non-hierarchically. The notion of hierarchy within the field should only emerge in relation to structuring the visitor experience: the only element that has remained outside the research scope. It is important to note, however, that the construct of reception that would ground the overarching totality of reception theory

would be the foundation of conventional museum experience hierarchies. As John Durel observes,

At the base [of the hierarchy of experiences] is everything that the guest does: walks through an exhibit, examines an object, reads a label, listens to an audio presentation, talks to an historical interpreter, watches an actor, talks with a friend, has lunch in the café, buys a souvenir, and so forth. (Durel 2004, 1)

Furthermore, the role of the curator in this new model would be one of intermediation. What is meant by intermediation is that the process and effects of mediation are multi-directional, affecting both the intentions of artists and the reception experiences of audiences as part of the same transactional relationship. Traditionally, what one would have encountered would have been circumstances by and through which the curator would mediate the artist's work, resulting in an intervention. While that exists, one might argue that there is scope for this to extend to the idea of an intermediation, a concept that does not yet exist.

What occurs is that the former generates the latter: the processes of curatorial intervention generate the circumstances by and through which curatorial intermediation can, and must, occur. Curatorial intervention creates curatorial intermediation. The expectation of mediating artists' works emerged regularly across the cohort interview responses, from Curator CU.05's response to the question of whether he had mediated artists' works, "Of course. But I see that that is the role of an independent curator, an independent director working in an independent space," (Curator CU.05, interview, 17 March 2016), to that of Administrator AD.06's statement about a piece: ". . . the fact that it was under glass meant that the audience had no ability to see the other images of the work. So, this is close to your hypothetical [. . .] as a single work of art that consists of multiple images, and we were hiding most of them" (Administrator AD.06, interview, 29 September 2015). At the other end of the spectrum, however, is Administrator AD.09's remark, "if an artist said 'What you've done or



what you're planning to do distorts my work beyond recognition. It's not my work anymore,' I would defer to them, for sure" (Administrator AD.09, interview, 30 March 2016). The question should not be whether the experiences of works are mediated, because the evidence indicates that mediations extend both toward the artist and toward the audience. Instead, what should emerge in a concept of intermediation are experiences that are accompanied by transparency, by the visibility of the curator's hand. If, for example, Curator CU.05 felt that it was the curator's responsibility in an independent space to intervene in or mediate artists' works, then that intermediation should result in the additional responsibility of making that mediation visible. This would make curatorial intervention transparent and, at the same time, intervene in the audience's receptions of the work by making the possibility of the "what was not" exist. It would be within this space of responsible intermediation that a curator would situate themselves as an equal partner within the tri-nodal exchange through visibility and transparency. By becoming visible, the experiential structure of the viewer would shift from an unmediated spectator (as reception theory would require) to an informed and aware viewer, one who was always already aware that their encounter with the object was structured by an institution or curator in addition to the artist. This would make the experiential space cumulative. It is within this space that the curator would shift from being invisible to interventionist. The processes of reception and experience would, as Jauss observed, remain constructive, but how these interventions arrived at the viewer could remain contested. Jauss remarks,

the activity of the observer who concretizes the significance of the finished work from his perspective neither directly continues nor presupposes the experience that the artist gained in the course of his work. In all aesthetic experience, there is a gap between genesis and effect which even the creative artist cannot bridge. He cannot simultaneously create and reveal, write and read what has been written. (Jauss 1982, 157)

## 7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has synthesised the three preceding chapters' findings, analysing their implications to determine the theoretical validity and veracity of the initial aspects of this research into curatorial intervention. It began by considering the overall perceived impact of curatorial intervention by constructing analyses of the findings concerning the frequency, agency, and probability of curatorial intervention when considered on an inter-cohort basis. As shown, the findings indicate high degrees of consistency when evaluating the probability of curatorial intervention across all cohorts, and the likelihood for and prevalence of curatorial agency driving that intervention.

The analysis next outlined five specific variables that could be used to locate and situate curatorial intervention within contemporary curatorial and exhibition practice: one, the generative reasons for its existence, based on the cohort findings—more simply, what indicated or implicated the emergence of curatorial intervention in the experiential frames of artists, curators, and administrators; two, its specific operations, with a focus on how curators intervened in specific works or, where appropriate, how curatorial intervention emerged generally as a core value; three, its transparency or opacity; four, its agency; and five, how the total effect of the preceding four combined to create the fifth, the power of curatorial intervention. These findings were situated within a framework defined and delineated as the TAP Matrix, which was defined in Chapter 3: Methodology.

Based on the findings contained herein, the evidence suggests that it is more probable than not that curatorial intervention operates to mediate the artist–audience experience. Secondly, the findings indicate that curatorial intervention operates with both agency and power, yet without accompanying transparency. Thirdly, the findings indicate that the agency that structures curatorial intervention may be difficult to situate because it may be driven by

either curators or administrators. Across the cohorts, intervention was driven by curators in nineteen out of thirty instances, and administratively driven the remaining eleven times.

Based on the preceding analysis, one can see that the artists generally regarded themselves as dialectically disempowered within the artist–curator exchange, whereas curators generally regarded the artist–curator exchange as more collaborative. Administrators did not specifically address the complex nature of the power dynamic between artists and curators, although in certain instances individuals did remark that subject matter or content would be cause for intervening in a specific artist’s project.

This chapter then considered the progression of experiential models, from the reception theory’s dual dialectic through the hierarchy of curatorial intervention and to the hypothetical, tri-nodal structure of transparent curatorial intervention as mediation. It has been suggested that such a model could address key concerns within contemporary curatorial dialogues, specifically those of curatorial authorship, agency, and mediation.

Finally, it concluded with the assertion that such a model marks a shift from reception theory toward a new model of intervention theory. It evaluated the research question regarding how reception theory accounted for the role of the curator against the possibility of the emergence of intervention theory, asserting that the new model better situated the curator’s role within the artist–audience exchange. Chapter 8 will outline the implications of these findings in the form of conclusions, and will make recommendations that can be derived therefrom.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This research began with an absence. It examined the experience of viewing a work of art, and drew attention to the fact that in every transaction the curator has agency and power yet appears to be absent. The organisational and institutional structures within which artists and viewers operate require their presence, but the fundamental experience of looking at a work of art seems to omit them entirely. What exists, instead, is the fundamental framework provided by reception theory: the structure that posits that artists create work, and viewers experience work, and the unattended object is situated between them. Yet, both common sense and cultural practice have indicated that this is not the case. In contemporary curatorial practice, as least since Harald Szeemann's *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* exhibition of 1969, and more directly in his 1972 *documenta 5*, the role of the curator has emerged as a powerful force. At times, including that exhibition, the power of the curator has been arguably more powerful than that of the artists themselves—at least, this is what the artists in that instance believed. The aim of this research has been to evaluate the effectiveness and applicability of reception theory for adequately siting the role of the curator within contemporary discourse and, should the theory be found to be lacking, to suggest a structure for a possible alternative.

The emergence of curatorial practice allows its practitioners to define themselves in unique ways. As was illustrated in the introduction, various practitioners use specific language to define their roles: facilitator; collaborationist; interventionist; author; producer; creator. That Vasif Kortun, in his interview with Carolee Thea, was the only curator to explicitly acknowledge the interventionist nature of curatorial practice was surprising, but even more surprising was the fact that despite acknowledging nature of the practice, this perception did not extend to its structure (Thea 2001, 64). For multiple reasons, curators have

continued to situate themselves effectively outside the artist–audience exchange, as if curatorial practice were immune to its dialectic. Clearly this is not the case, and for the benefit of the profession, it would be a valuable recommendation that in its present form it not continue.

## **8.2 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

Having considered and evaluated the findings drawn from interviews with thirty professionals across three cohorts, each of whom provided significant observations, thoughts, and experiences regarding the potential implications of curatorial intervention as a factor mediating the artist–audience exchange, the following conclusions have emerged. First, although the validity of curatorial intervention as a mediating factor within the artist–audience exchange was only speculative at the commencement of this research, the results of these findings indicate that curatorial intervention is extant and that its operations result in mitigations to the visible exchange that are of significant probative value. On the balance of probabilities, one may reasonably conclude that curators are agency participants in the transactional relationships between artist and audience, and that this agency participation is significant. The findings indicate that, in the majority, curatorial agency as an operation of curatorial intervention operates within a veil of opacity rather than with transparency. An alternative model for curatorial intervention that operates outside the scope of classical reception theory would potentially situate this role more visibly for audiences. Intervention theory could provide one such model.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from the totality of the research is that the operation of curatorial intervention is more prevalent than not: more artists experience some form of curatorial intervention than not. What varies are the implications of these interventions, with opinions varied regarding whether the interventions are either positive or

negative, and whether curatorial intervention's impacts on the works are significant. In many instances, the interviewed artists, curators, and administrators recounted experiences by and through which curatorial intervention resulted in enhanced experiences for visitors. The key issue to be noted in this regard is that curatorial intervention is not adversarial, nor is the intention of highlighting its existence one of critiquing curators. It is simply one of making their contributions to the exchange artist–object–audience one that acknowledges the roles that curators play in this transaction.

The third conclusion that may be drawn is that artists regard the power relationship inherent within curatorial intervention as one that gives preference to the curator. Even though artists are the creators of the works that form the foundation for the exchange, in most of the instances recounted, artists described a power dynamic which positioned them at a disadvantage relative to curators, administrators, or institutions, and asserted that, in the majority of instances, the viewing public was either unaware of or indifferent to this power structure. A model that acknowledges curatorial intervention would also make this power dynamic transparent simply through the act of situating the curator—and, by extension, the institution—within the dynamic of the exchange.

The fourth conclusion that may be drawn from the research is that curators regard curatorial intervention as a fundamental part of their practice. Although the respondents may not have used the term, many participants related instances by and through which they engaged in the processes and practices of curatorial intervention, describing them as being of benefit to the artist, the project, or the institution. With the practice being inculcated into the notion of curating, one must consider if it should be more visible within contemporary curatorial practice.

In many ways, these findings run counter to the established writings and theories of contemporary curatorial practice. Consequently, what emerges are differing opinions

regarding how visible curatorial intervention should be. Artists are reticent to highlight its existence because to do so means to engage in dialogues with both curators and institutions regarding what is occurring with their works. Some fear that to do so will mean jeopardising their relationships with the very curators and institutions that are most committed to their practices. In many instances, curators are reticent to make their practices more visible, with some asserting that the public is not interested in knowing about the interventions that have taken place. Where there are preferences for interventionist curatorial practices being visible, curators are not able to agree on the best ways to do so.

This becomes the issue: How does one best make curatorial practice, and thereby curatorial intervention, visible without detracting from the conceptual, contextual, or physical/creative qualities of the artwork, and while enhancing an audience's experiences of it? At what point, and in what ways, should curatorial intervention become visible?

### **8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD**

Based on the above, the findings suggest that curatorial intervention is a factor that mediates the artist–audience exchange, and that artists feel disadvantaged both by the structural dynamics within the artist–curator–institution relationship, and by the opacity contained therein. At the same time, opinions differ regarding how visible curatorial intervention should become. There seems to be little support for wholly lifting the curatorial veil—for making the artist–curator dynamic fully visible to the public.

To mitigate the disproportionate power dynamics that are inherent in the artist–curator exchange, and that are exemplified by curatorial intervention, the following recommendations are made:

1. That, where possible, institutions endeavour to make the artist–curator transactional relationship more visible to the public through fora, educational programs, texts, video or interactive materials, or online experiences;
2. That institutions endeavour to educate the public on the role of curators as mediators of the artist–audience exchange;
3. That institutions endeavour to make the role of curators visible in instances in which curators either curate exhibitions or work with existing collections, particularly when subject-matter exhibition thematics contextualise works outside an artist’s original intentions;
4. That curators acknowledge the interventionist nature of curatorial practice outside the scope of authorship, reception theory, relational aesthetics, or conventional curatorial practice; and
5. That curatorial intervention serves as a visible theoretical framework by and through which curators engage with artists and audiences, making visible the agency and power relationships that empower their roles within the formerly binary exchange.

Specific strategies to address curatorial intervention could also address issues that the interviewed artist cohort raised over the course of this research. Where a curator makes the decision to display only a selection of a larger body of work, text panels or other contextualising material could situate this decision within the artist’s larger practice. Where a decision is made to show a work or series of works drawn from an artist’s archive, contextualising materials could make audiences aware that the artist may now be addressing other subject matter. Such information can be provided within an overarching frame; for



example, “These works, made five years ago, reflect concerns the artist was focused on at that time. Their works continue to interrogate new themes.”

While it is arguable whether curatorial intervention is the sole model by and through which one may account for the role of the curator within the artist–audience exchange, it does appear to function as one method that accounts for curators’ agency within museum and gallery transactions, and addresses the lack apparent in classical reception theory.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that curatorial intervention does not exist or operate outside the framework of the artist–audience exchange. Instead, curatorial intervention requires each element before it can begin to emerge. Regardless of alternative assertions, or alternative nominalisms, that may attach to curatorial practice, what remains is a practice that causes intentionality to deviate from its original course before arriving at its intended receiver. When this occurs, its operation is intervention, and by making it visible one may begin to interrogate the implications of its operation.

#### **8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

First, it is important to acknowledge that while the narratives and experiences related by the cohorts had high degrees of internal consistency, these findings and analyses were generated with a small sample size and is not intended to be read as an overarching survey of the professional field. Furthermore, while the consistency of the findings across each of the cohorts lends credence to the theory of curatorial intervention, it is necessary to acknowledge that this research is an initial step in a more detailed analysis of the phenomena surrounding curatorial mediation and intervention within the artist–audience exchange. Given the range of approaches identified by contemporary curators, one may argue that intervention theory may be regarded as one alternative to theories of curatorial authorship, or theories including relational aesthetics. At the same time, one could assert that, being a function as much as a

theory, further research may indicate that curatorial intervention operates across methodologies, or that other frameworks—including existing models for reception theory, relational aesthetics, curatorial authorship, or emerging models—may effectively account for this transactional relationship. On balance, it appears that a theory of intervention most effectively accounts for the role of the curator within reception theory, but one must acknowledge the possibility of other models.

#### **8.4.1 FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research reveals as many additional practical and theoretical concerns as it examines. There are several strategies for addressing the problematics of reception theory, relational aesthetics, curatorial authorship, and curatorial intervention that could benefit from further research in the subject areas bounded by intervention theory.

One key research area could focus on quantifying the issues raised herein, returning to the questionnaires developed initially to gain further source materials regarding experiences of curatorial intervention. Based on the initial outcomes from this research, it is possible that secondary attempts to quantify these questions could meet with different outcomes. The framework for quantitative research could be modelled on the questionnaires included in the appendices, or through revisions thereto. Additional research data regarding the existence and prevalence of curatorial intervention on both individual and institutional levels would provide for a more highly developed model from which to begin considering issues of transparency, agency, and power in curatorial practice.

Second, there is scope to expand the field regarding the specific qualitative experiences of curatorial intervention, to determine if the findings contained herein are representative of the wider profession. This research focused on three geographic areas—Australia, New Zealand, and the United States—whereas a wider sample could provide more

significant data from which the questions raised herein might be determined. Furthermore, such data could be considered for a wider range of variables, including, but not limited to, those that deal specifically with questions of gender, identity, and difference.

A third focus area could involve situating key questions of curatorial intervention within the wider dialogues surrounding curatorial authorship, curatorial practice, and curatorial education, particularly at the graduate level. Effectively codifying the issues and practices addressed herein would require further analysis and support, however, and determining where best to situate the professional and ethical issues surrounding curatorial intervention would be matters for the various peak bodies within the museums, galleries, curatorial, and education sectors.

While the findings suggest that curatorial intervention, as a practice, is a significant element that does mediate the artist–audience relationship, judging how best to effectively bring this practice to the fore within professional curatorial practice, and thereby to make its implications transparent, will require significant investments of intellectual and professional resources. At present, by recognising the significance of the curator’s role within the artist–audience exchange through making it transparent, and by situating it as one of agency and power, curatorial intervention emerges as either an extension of, or a foil to, classical reception theory. When one considers the fundamental artistic transaction that exists between the artist as maker and the audience as receiver, understanding that the core exchange remains paramount is crucial. By inserting the curator as an equal partner to the exchange, and by making their practice visible, one may begin to construct a model by and through which the true nature of the arts experience becomes visible to an expanded audience: one in which the artist may still produce, but if their production is mediated it is evident; the audience still receives, but if the object of their reception is mediated they are aware; and where the agent of those mediations, the curator, remains ‘transparent’, to adopt the

terminology generated from the research matrix. The implications this model has for reception theory may make it possible to better enhance audience's experiences, new strategies for experiential and didactic engagements within the exhibition frame, and beyond. This research is merely a small step toward that goal.

## REFERENCE LIST

- Altshuler, Bruce. 2013. *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962-2002*. London: Phaidon Press Limited.
- Amundsen, Heidi Bale, and Gerd Elise Morland. 2015. "Request for a Radical Redefinition: Curatorial Politics After Institutional Critique." In *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections*, 15–28. Ostfilden: Hatje Cantz.
- Bal, Mieke. 2010. "Guest Column: Exhibition Practices." *PMLA: Modern Language Association* 125 (1): 9–23. Accessed August 3, 2017. doi:10.1632/pmla.2010.125.1.9.
- Bal, Mieke, and Norman Bryson. 1991. "Semiotics and Art History." *The Art Bulletin* 73 (2): 174–208. Accessed July 11, 2017. doi:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045790>.
- Barrow, Rosemary. 2005. "From Praxiteles to De Chirico: Art and Reception." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 11 (3), 344–68. Accessed August 24, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30221988>.
- Batycka, Dorian. 2016. "The 9th Berlin Biennale: A Vast Obsolescent Pageant of Irrelevance." Accessed June 25, 2016. <https://hyperallergic.com/306932/the-9th-berlin-biennale-a-vast-obsolescent-pageant-of-irrelevance/>.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1981. "The Art Auction: Sign Exchange and Sumptuary Value." In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis: Telos Press Ltd. Available online. Accessed April 28, 2017. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/ baudrillard.theartauktion%20.pdf>.
- . 1996. *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. London: Verso.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 217–52. New York: Schocken Books.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1973. "The Author as Producer." In *Understanding Brecht*, 85–103. London: NLB.
- Bishop, Claire. 2007. "What Is a Curator?" *Idea: Arta Societate* 26. Accessed November 10, 2016. <http://idea.ro/revista/?q=en/node/41&articol=468>.

- Blazwick, Iwona, Susan Cahan, Andrea Fraser, Michael Clegg, Martin Guttman, Ute Meta Bauer, and Stephan Dilleuth. 1997. "Serving Audiences." *October* 80: 128–39. Accessed August 24, 2014. doi:10.2307/778813.
- Bloomberg, Linda Dale, and Marie Volpe. 2016. *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End*, 3rd ed. Kindle Edition.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2009. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- Buren, Daniel. 1971. "The Function of the Studio". In *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 110-119. Cambridge: The MIT Press
- . 1973. "The Function of the Museum". In *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 102-109. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- . 1973. "The Function of an Exhibition". *Studio International*, vol. 186, December 1973, p. 216.
- . 1975. "Function of Architecture". In *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 102-109.
- Camnitzer, Luis. 2016. "The Source of Our Nobility and Our Path to the Highest Things." In *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice*, ed. Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds, 106-117. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cannon-Brookes, Peter. 1983. "Impermanence: A Curator's Viewpoint." *Leonardo* 16 (1): 34–35. Accessed August 23, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1575040>.
- Casetti, Francesco. 2011. "Sutured Reality: Film, from Photographic to Digital." *October* 138: 95–106. Accessed January 31, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41417909>.
- Casey, Valerie. 2005. "Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum." *TDR/The Drama Review* 49 (3): 78–95. Accessed August 3, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488658>.
- Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. 2010. "A Twist of Paradox." *On Curating* (4): 10-12. Accessed April 29, 2015. [http://www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING\\_Isue4.pdf](http://www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Isue4.pdf).

- Crimp, Douglas. 1993. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Davis, Ben. 2017. "Straining for Wisdom, documenta 14 Implodes Under the Weight of European Guilt." Accessed June 20, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-14-implodes-from-the-weight-of-european-guilt-998150>
- Derieux, Florence, and François Aubart. 2007. *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*. Zurich: JRP Ringier Kunstverlag Ag.
- Durel, John. 2004. "Museum Experience Hierarchy." Accessed February 2, 2017. [http://qm2.homestead.com/Museum\\_Experience\\_Hierarchy.pdf](http://qm2.homestead.com/Museum_Experience_Hierarchy.pdf).
- Edgers, Geoff. "Dismantled." October 21, 2007. [http://archive.boston.com/ae/theater\\_arts/articles/2007/10/21/dismantled/](http://archive.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2007/10/21/dismantled/).
- Evans, Steve. 2001. "A World Unsuspected": The Dynamics of Literary Change in Hegel, Bourdieu, and Adorno." *Qui Parle: Special Issue on the Poetics of New Meaning* 12 (2): 57–105. Accessed August 24, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686124>.
- Farquharson, Alex. 2003. "I Curate, You Curate, We Curate." *Art Monthly* 9 (3): 7–10. Accessed August 24, 2015. doi:0324404398002.
- Forbes, Alexander. 2017. "How Documenta's Curators Failed Its Artists." *Artsy*, June 14. Accessed June 14. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-documentas-curators-failed-artists>.
- Fowle, Kate. 2007. "Who Cares: Understanding the Role of the Curator Today." In *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, Kindle locations 506-728. New York, NY: Apexart.
- Fox, Dan. 2013. "Being Curated." *Frieze* April 3. <https://frieze.com/article/being-curated>. Accessed June 8, 2016.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2014. *Truth and Method*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Galletta, Anne. 2013. *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication (Qualitative Studies in Psychology)*. New York: New York University Press.

- Gaskell, Ivan. 2003. "Being True to Artists." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (1): 53–60. Accessed June 14, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559113>.
- Genocchio, Benjamin. 2015. "Okwui Enwezor's 56th Venice Biennale Is Morose, Joyless, and Ugly." Accessed May 8, 2015. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/okwui-enwezor-56th-venice-biennale-by-benjamin-genocchio-295434>.
- Green, Charles, and Anthony Gardner. 2016. *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Guest, Greg, Emily Namey, and Marilyn Mitchell. 2013. *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 15–83. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hirsch, E.D. 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hoffmann, Jens. 2010. "Overture." *The Exhibitionist* (1): 3-4.
- . 2014. *(Curating) from A to Z*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier.
- . 2015. "When Ideas Become Form Become Exhibitions." In *Talking Contemporary Curating*, ed. Terry Smith, 278–99. Vol. 2. ICI Perspectives in Curating. New York: Independent Curators International.
- Hoffmann, Jens, and Julieta Aranda. 2008. "Art as Curating ≠ Curating as Art." *Art Lies* 59: 30–35. Accessed July 3, 2015. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph228024/m1/32/?q=art%20lies>.
- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, and Marc Silberman. 1977. "Introduction to Reception Aesthetics." *New German Critique* 10 (1977): 29–63. Accessed July 11, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/487671>.
- Hughes, Lindsay. 2005. "Do We Need New Spaces for Exhibiting Contemporary Art? A Critique of Curatorial Practice in Relation to the Viewer's Engagement with Contemporary Art." *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4 (1): 29–38. Accessed August 8, 2015. doi:10.1386/jvap.4.1.29/1.



- Iser, Wolfgang. 1978. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 2006. *How to Do Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1992. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. 1982a. *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. Vol. 3. Theory and History of Literature. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1982b. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Vol. 2. Theory and History of Literature. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Johnson, Pauline. 1987. "An Aesthetics of Negativity/An Aesthetics of Reception: Jauss's Dispute with Adorno." *New German Critique* 42: 51–70. Accessed August 24, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488256>.
- Judah, Hettie. 2016. "Has the Art World Had Enough of Curators?" November 15. Accessed January 22, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/has-the-artworld-had-enough-of-curators-746885>.
- Kemp, Wolfgang. 1998. "The Work of Art and Its Beholder." *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, 180–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klopper, Sandra, and Michael Godby. 2004. "Art and Freedom: South Africa after Apartheid." *African Arts* 37, no. 4: 16–17. Accessed August 25, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3338024>.
- Larsen, Lars Bang, Suely Rolnik, and Lygia Clark. 2007. "Suely Rolnik on Lygia Clark." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 15: 24–34. Accessed August 3, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20711637>.
- Lees-Maffei, G. 2004. "Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft and Art." *Journal of Design History* 17 (3): 207–20. Accessed September 7, 2014. doi:10.1093/jdh/17.3.207.
- Leitch, Vincent. 2005. "Theory Ends." *Profession* 122–28. Accessed September 7, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595805>.

- Luke, Timothy W. 1997. "Museum Pieces: Politics and Knowledge at the American Museum of Natural History." *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 16 (2): 1–28. Accessed August 3, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41416329>.
- Marincola, Paula, and Robert Storr. 2001. *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice, Public Responsibility*. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative.
- Marincola, Paula, Peter T. Nesbett, and Sarah McEneaney. 2013. *Pigeons on the Grass Alas: Contemporary Curators Talk about the Field*. Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." 1848. Accessed July 27, 2017. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>.
- Marx, Karl. 1964. "A Critique of Political Economy." In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik, 197-226. New York: International Publishers.
- McCarthy, Conal. 2007. *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display*. Oxford: Berg.
- Misiano, Viktor. 2010. "The Curator as Producer." *Manifesta Journal/Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* (10). Milan: Manifesta Foundation.
- Navas, Eduardo. 2012. "Remix Theory: Artists and Curators in Networked Culture." Accessed January 22, 2017. <http://remixtheory.net/?p=545>.
- Neuendorf, Henri. 2016. "Francesco Bonami Says Curators are 'Self-Delusional' and 'Irrelevant' in Today's Art World." Accessed January 22, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/market/francesco-bonami-says-curators-self-delusional-irrelevant-todays-art-world-512705>.
- O'Doherty, Brian. 1976, 1986. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica: The Lapis Press.
- O'Neill, Paul. 2010. "The Politics of The Small Act." *On Curating* (4): 6-10. Accessed April 29, 2015. [http://www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING\\_Isue4.pdf](http://www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Isue4.pdf).

- . 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- . 2014. “Co-Productive Exhibition Making and Three Principal Categories of Organisation: The Background, the Middle-Ground and the Foreground.” *On Curating* 22 (April). Accessed June 17, 2016. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-22-43/co-productive-exhibition-making-and-three-principal-categories-of-organisation-the-background-the-middle-ground-and-the-foregrou.html#.WcBWInYjHIU>.
- O'Neill, Paul, and Mick Wilson. 2010. *Curating and the Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions.
- O'Neill, Paul, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds. 2016. *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 2013. *Ways of Curating*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier.
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and April Elizabeth Lamm. 2011. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Curating but Were Afraid to Ask*. Berlin: Sternberg.
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Lionel Bovier. 2008. *A Brief History of Curating*. Zurich: JRP/Ringier.
- Orton, Fred, and Carolyn Wilde. 2002. “On the Intention of Modern(ist) Art.” In *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith, 247–61. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- “Oxford English Dictionary.” 1989. Accessed July 28, 2017. <http://www.oed.com.elibrary.jcu.edu.au/oed2/00119825>.
- Peña, Guillermo Gomez. 2006. “Disclaimer.” *TDR* 50 (1): 149–58. Accessed February 5, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4492664>.
- Peyer, Siri. 2010. “The Moving Image: Interview with Katerina Gregos.” *On Curating* 3: 4–7.
- Prince, Martin. 2008. “Measurement Validity in Cross-Cultural Comparative Research.” *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale* 17 (3): 211–20. Accessed September 2, 2017. doi:10.1017/S1121189X00001305.

- Rancière, Jacques, and Gregory Elliott. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.
- Robinson, Oliver C. 2014. "Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11 (1): 25–41. Accessed September 20, 2017. doi:10.1080/14780887.2013.801543.
- Rosler, Martha. 1979. "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers." In *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 206–33. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sauer, James B., and Randall R. Lyle. 1997. "Narrative, Truth, and Self: The Hermeneutical Mistake of Social Constructionism." *The Personalist Forum* 13 (2): 195–222. Accessed July 10, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20708755>.
- SBS. 2014. "Biennale of Sydney Cuts Ties with Sponsor Transfield." *SBS News*, March 7. Accessed July 28, 2017. <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/03/07/biennale-sydney-cuts-ties-sponsor-transfield>.
- Schechner, Richard. 1997. "Ways of Speaking, Loci of Cognition." *TDR* 31 (3): 4–7. Accessed August 24, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145791>.
- Sheikh, Simon. 2010. "The Potential of Curatorial Articulation." *On Curating* 4: 4–6. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-14.html#.WcvrltuZMWp>
- Smith, Terry. 2012. *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. New York, NY: Independent Curators International.
- . 2015. *Talking Contemporary Curating*. New York, NY: Independent Curators International.
- Spaid, Sue. 2016. "Revisiting Ventzislavov's Thesis: "Curating Should Be Understood as a Fine Art"." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74 (1): 87–91.
- Staniszewski, Mary Anne. 2010. "Denial, Delusion and Curating in the US." *On Curating* 4: 2–4. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-4.html#.WcKIH62ZORs>.
- Steeds, Lucy. 2013. *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre 1989*. London: Afterall.

- Sternfeld, Nora, and Luisa Ziaja. 2012. "What Comes After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating." *On Curating* 14: 21–24. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-14.html#.WcvrltuZMWp>
- Storr, Robert. 2000. "How We Do What We Do. And How We Don't." In *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage.
- Straus, Murray. 2009. "Validity of Cross-National Research Using Unrepresentative Convenience Samples." *Survey Practice* 2 (6): 1–6. Accessed September 2, 2017. <http://www.surveypractice.org/index.php/SurveyPractice/article/view/189/html>.
- Szeemann, Harald. 1969. *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*. Bern: Kunsthalle.
- . 2007. "Preface to the Catalogue for Documenta 5." In *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, ed. Florence Derieux and François Aubart, 104–105. Zurich: JRP Ringier.
- Tafler, David. 1998. "The Circular Text: Interactive Video, Reception, and Viewer Participation." *Journal of Film and Video* 40 (3): 27–45. Accessed August 24, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20687830>.
- Thea, Carolee. 2001. *Foci: Interviews with Ten International Curators*. New York: Apex Art.
- Thea, Carolee, and Thomas Micchelli. 2009. *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*. New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers.
- Tracy, Sarah J. 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Veneciano, Jorge Daniel. 2005. "Tinting the American Subject." *Art Journal* 64 (1): 113–15. Accessed August 3, 2017. doi:10.2307/20068372.
- Ventzislavov, Rossen. 2014. "Idle Arts: Reconsidering the Curator." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72 (1): 83–93.
- . 2016. "The Curator as Artist: Reply to Sue Spaid." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74 (1): 91–95.

- Vidokle, Anton. 2013. "Art without Market, Art without Education: Political Economy of Art." *E-flux* 43. Accessed April 28, 2017. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art/>.
- Vintakesan, Priya. 2009. "Reception Studies in France: Social Contexts, Reader Interpretation, and the Role of Julia Kristeva." *L'Esprit Créateur* 49: 111–24. Accessed May 15, 2017. doi:10.1353/esp.0.0047.
- Vogel, Felix. 2013. "Notes on Exhibition History in Curatorial Discourse." *On Curating* 21: 46–54. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/notes-on-exhibition-history-in-curatorial-discourse.html#.WcKKw62ZORs>.
- Von Osten, Marion. 2010. "Another Criteria...or, What Is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of Its Time?" *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 25 (Autumn 2010): 56–69. Accessed August 22, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/657463>.
- Winder, Jill. 2010. "Conceal and Reveal." *The Exhibitionist* 1: 23–25.
- Zerocv, Ben. 2005. "An Interview with Daniel Buren." *Manifesta* 5: 160–75.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

## APPENDICES

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Introduction

#### Curatorial Practice: Audiences, Artists and Exhibitions

This project involves exploring the roles curators have in facilitating the relationships between artists and audiences. It focuses on their responsibilities through considering the processes of exhibition conception, design, selection, installation and display.

The objectives of the research are to determine if curators intervene in the audience/artist exchange and, if so, the extent to which they do so and the implications of that intervention. The fundamental goal of the research is to make the role of the curator transparent, if appropriate, and if substantiated by the evidence to propose a new model for understanding the relationships between artist, institution and audience. As a result, this survey's key objective is to investigate whether or not curators are active participants within the structure of the exhibition experience and, if so, to further interrogate the scope and range of that intervention.

This survey is completely voluntary and you may stop taking part in the survey at any time without prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study. I do not anticipate that any aspect of this survey will cause you any duress or concern. Your responses and contact details will be completely confidential. Data derived from the study will only be used in research publications and you will not be identified in any way in those publications.



## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Consent to Participate

1. I understand that the purpose of this survey is to explore the ways in which curators engage with artists and institutions as part of the curatorial process. I consent to participate in this process, the details of which have been explained to me.

I understand that my participation will involve completing a survey that will take approximately 20 minutes.

I understand that participation in this survey is voluntary and that I can stop taking the survey at any time without explanation or prejudice, and withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided; and

that any information I give will be strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

I consent to participate in this survey:

Yes

No

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Background Information

2. Please indicate your gender.

- Male
- Female
- Other

3. What is your age?

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

4. Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed:

- Undergraduate/Bachelor's degree
- Postgraduate Diploma
- Graduate/Master's degree
- Higher degree by research/Phd
- Other (please specify)

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Your Professional Work Environment

5. In what post code/ZIP code is your museum or gallery located? For independent curators, please list the post code of your primary residence or location of your professional office as appropriate.

6. What is your position title?

- Head of Curatorial
- Team Leader, Collections/Collection Programmes
- Senior Curator
- Curator
- Associate Curator
- Assistant Curator
- Other (please specify)

7. Roughly how many full-time employees work in your organisation?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-200
- 201-500
- 501-1,000
- 1,001-5,000
- I am a self-employed/independent curator
- Other (please specify)

8. How many curators are in your section or department?

9. What percentage of your time do you spend on each of the following tasks.  
(The total of all the values should add up to 100.)

Exhibition conception, design and development	<input type="text"/>
Exhibition preparation (artwork handling, installation, crating, painting and related tasks)	<input type="text"/>
General administration (accounting, payroll, staff management and related tasks)	<input type="text"/>
Designing and/or delivering education programs	<input type="text"/>
Fundraising	<input type="text"/>
Outreach	<input type="text"/>
Grantwriting	<input type="text"/>
Professional development (attending conferences, professional development workshops or other related opportunities.)	<input type="text"/>

10. On what three tasks would you spend the majority of your time? Please select three.

Exhibition conception, design and development

Exhibition preparation (artwork handling, installation, crating, painting, related tasks)

General administration (payroll, staff management and related tasks)

Designing and/or delivering education programmes

Fundraising

Grantwriting

Outreach

Professional development (attending conferences, professional development workshops or related tasks)

Other (please specify)

11. Would you describe yourself as a generalist or specialist curator? If you are a specialist curator, please indicate your area of specialisation in the box below.

Generalist

Specialist

Area of Specialisation

12. On average, how many exhibitions would you or your organization mount in a calendar year?

1 - 5

6 - 10

11 - 15

More than 15

13. How does your organisation solicit projects for exhibition? Please select all that apply.

- By invitation to an artist
- By unsolicited exhibition proposal from an artist
- By recommendation of faculty or staff outside the curatorial department
- By proposal by a curatorial departmental staff member
- By recommendation of a curator from another arts organisation
- By rental from an exhibition rental company
- By offer from a non-profit or other community organisation
- By recommendation from a Board member or trustee
- By recommendation of an upper level Administrator within the organisation
- Not Applicable as I am an independent curator
- Other (please specify)

14. Who within your organisation determines which exhibitions are selected for display?

- You
- Another member of the curatorial team or department
- An organisational staff member not within the department
- An organisational administrator
- Not Applicable - I am an independent curator
- Other (please specify)

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Professional Practice

The following questions focus on your professional curatorial practice.

15. If you are employed within an arts organisation, do you also currently undertake outside or independent curatorial projects?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable - I am not employed within an arts organisation

16. How many exhibitions have you curated in the past three years?

- 1 - 5
- 6 - 10
- 11 - 15
- 16 - 20
- 21 - 25
- 26 or more

17. What additional terms do you feel best describe/define your role as a curator? Please tick all that apply.

- creator
- facilitator
- collaborator
- presenter
- exhibition maker
- director
- mediator
- designer
- author
- Other (please specify)

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Working in the Field

18. Thinking of the preceding three years of your professional practice, have you requested that an artist exhibit one complete body of work in preference to another complete body of work as a precondition to proposing an exhibition (if you are an independent curator) or exhibiting with your institution (if you are institutionally affiliated)?

Yes

No

If yes, can you please explain the circumstances:

19. Thinking of the preceding three years of your professional practice, how often have any of the following occurred?

	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never	Not Applicable
You have asked an artist to remove a work from the exhibition prior to the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A departmental supervisor has asked you to remove a work from the exhibition prior to the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An administrator has asked you to remove a work from the exhibition prior to the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You have asked an artist to remove a work from the exhibition after the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A departmental supervisor has asked you to remove a work from the exhibition after the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An administrator has asked you to remove a work from the exhibition after the opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You have ended an exhibition before the scheduled closing date.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A departmental supervisor has ended an exhibition before the scheduled closing date.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An administrator has ended an exhibition before the scheduled closing date.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. The following questions relate to your experience of working with artists. Thinking of the preceding three years of your professional practice, how often have any of the following occurred?

	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never
An artist has asked you to include a work in an exhibition that is inappropriate because it may violate legal prohibitions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never
An artist has asked you to exhibit one body of work in preference to a body of work that you had requested to exhibit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has stipulated that a work or group of works outside the scope of an exhibition must be included before the works for the exhibition will be released.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has failed to meet his or her obligations for an exhibition prior to its opening and the exhibition has not opened on time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has failed to meet his or her obligations for an exhibition and the exhibition has been cancelled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has withdrawn his or her works from an exhibition prior to the exhibition opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has withdrawn his or her works from an exhibition after the exhibition has opened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has asked that works by another artist be removed from an exhibition prior to an exhibition's opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An artist has asked that works by another artist be removed from an exhibition after an exhibition has opened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. The following questions relate to your experience of working with donors or patrons. Thinking of the preceding three years of your professional practice, how often have any of the following occurred?

	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never
A donor or patron has asked you to include a work in an exhibition that is inappropriate because it may violate legal prohibitions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An donor or patron has asked you to exhibit one body of work in preference to a body of work that you had requested to exhibit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An donor or patron has stipulated that a work or group of works outside the scope of an exhibition must be included before he or she will lend works to an exhibition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has failed to meet his or her obligations for an exhibition prior to its opening and the exhibition has not opened on time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has failed to meet his or her obligations for an exhibition and the exhibition has been cancelled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has withdrawn his or her works from an exhibition prior to the exhibition opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has withdrawn his or her works from an exhibition after the exhibition has opened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has asked that works by another artist be removed from an exhibition prior to an exhibition's opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never
A donor or patron has asked that works by another artist be removed from an exhibition after an exhibition has opened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has asked that works lent by another donor or patron be removed from an exhibition prior to an exhibition opening.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A donor or patron has asked that works lent by another donor or patron be removed from an exhibition after an exhibition has opened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. The following questions relate to your experience of working with audiences. Thinking of the preceding three years of your professional practice, how often have any of the following occurred?

	Every Time	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Infrequently	Never	Not Applicable
An audience member has asked that you not include an exhibition in your schedule because he or she believes it violates legal prohibitions concerning lewdness or obscenity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has asked that you not include an exhibition in your schedule because he or she finds it offensive to his or her social, cultural, political, religious or personal value or belief system.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has asked you to close an exhibition early due to its content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has asked you to remove a work from an exhibition because he or she believes it to be obscene.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has asked you to remove a work from an exhibition because he or she finds it to be offensive but not obscene.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has complained to the press about an exhibition you have mounted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An audience member has complained to your administration about an exhibition you have mounted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey**

**Conclusion**

23. The qualitative component of this research involves interviews with artists, curators and administrators. If selected, would you be willing to participate in an interview?

- Yes
- No

24. All personal information associated with this survey will remain completely confidential. Contact information is being requested as part of the initial survey analysis and to facilitate further research.

Address

<b>Name</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Organisation</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Address</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Address 2</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>City/Town</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>State/Province</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>ZIP/Postal Code</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Country</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Email Address</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Phone Number</b>	<input type="text"/>

## Final Draft Curatorial Research Survey

### Thank You

Thank you for participating in this Curatorial Research Survey. Your contribution has helped further scholarly research on issues surrounding professional curatorial practice. As stated previously, at no stage in the publication of this research will your name be associated with any of the material contained herein. If you have indicated that you may be willing to participate in the interview phase of this research I may contact you in the next few months. Otherwise, sincere thanks for taking the time to complete this survey.

## APPENDIX 2: ETHICS INFORMATION SHEET



### INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: **Between Intentionality and Reception: The Politics of Curatorial Intervention**

You are invited to take part in a research project about contemporary curatorial practice. In particular, the research focuses on the extent to which curators impact on the exchanges between artists and audiences. The study is being conducted by **Brett M. Levine** in the **Doctor of Philosophy – College of Arts, Society and Education** program at James Cook University.

If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be interviewed. The interview, with your consent, will be audiotaped, and should only take approximately 30 minutes of your time. The interview will be conducted via Skype or telephone, or by mutual convenience at a venue of your choice.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications in disciplines relevant to museum and curatorial studies, contemporary arts and the social sciences. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact **Brett M. Levine** or **Professor Ryan Daniel**.

**Principal Investigator:**  
**Brett M. Levine**  
**College of Arts, Society and Education**  
**James Cook University**  
**Phone:**  
**Email: [brettmurray.levine@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:brettmurray.levine@my.jcu.edu.au)**

**Supervisor:**  
**Name: Professor Ryan Daniel**  
**College: Arts, Society and Education**  
**James Cook University**  
**Phone:**  
**Mobile:**  
**Email: [ryan.daniel@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ryan.daniel@jcu.edu.au)**

If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:  
Human Ethics, Research Office  
James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811  
Phone: (07) 4781 5011 ([ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au))

This administrative form  
has been removed



## **APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONS FOR ARTISTS FINAL**

Questions for Artists:

### **THE INDIVIDUAL**

What is your educational background? What is your professional background?

From your perspective, how would you define the term “curator”?

### **THE INSTITUTION**

Apart from curator, what are some of the job titles the people you have worked with in this role had?

Have the roles or responsibilities the arts professionals you have worked with differed depending on their title? If so, how?

### **INSTITUTION, CURATOR AND AUDIENCE**

What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator–artist relationship in relation to the construction of exhibitions? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this dynamic in relation to your personal practice?

What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator–audience relationship in relation to your work or exhibitions in which your work has been featured? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this relationship? If you have observed changes, can you describe them and your experiences of them?

Do you see the roles of curators changing in the future? If yes, how? If no, why not?

There has been some discussion of the idea of curators as authors. Has the ‘curator as author’ been a part of your professional experience? If so, how did that affect your relationship with the curator and/or the institution?

When constructing an exhibition, what types of autonomy or influence, if any, do curators have in relation to your work? Are these influences evident to exhibition audiences?

Should this be evident to audiences?

At what level of transparency might you expect this to happen?

## APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONS FOR CURATORS FINAL

### Curatorial Research Questionnaire Between Intentionality and Reception: The Politics of Curatorial Intervention

What is your educational background?

What is your professional background?

From your perspective, how would you define the term “curator”?

What terminology do you personally use to describe your role? If you work within an institution, what job title do you have?

Apart from general professional standards and practices, are there any other policies or procedures that your institution uses to guide your practice? If you work independently, do you use particular guides or standards as references?

Do you consider the curator an author of exhibitions? If so, can you explain? If not, why not?

If you work within an institution, is the idea of the curator as author discussed at an institutional level?

What moral or ethical responsibilities do curators have in relation to working with artists, whether for solo or group exhibitions? In your experience, how have these aligned with or diverged from the ideas surrounding curatorial authorship?

What particular strengths or weaknesses have you have observed within the artist–curator dynamic either within your institution generally, your professional practice or within other exhibition contexts?

What particular strengths or weaknesses have you have observed within the curator–audience dynamic either within your institution generally, your professional practice or within other exhibition contexts?

How do you see the roles of curators changing in the future, if at all?

Have you ever been asked to alter, change or remove a work from an exhibition? If so, can you discuss the circumstances surrounding the request?

Have you ever had to ask an artist to alter or change the content of his or her work prior to exhibition? If so, can you discuss the context in which this occurred?

Where should we situate curators at the intersections of artist, administration and audience?

## APPENDIX 6: QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS FINAL



### QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

#### THE INDIVIDUAL

What is your educational background?

What is your professional background?

From your perspective, how would you define the term “curator”?

#### THE INSTITUTION

What terminology does your institution use to describe the position commonly referred to as a “curator”?

Apart from general professional standards and practices, are there any other policies or procedures that your institution has that guide curatorial practice?

#### INSTITUTION, CURATOR AND AUDIENCE

What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator/artist relationship in relation to the construction of exhibitions? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this dynamic either within your institution or within other exhibition contexts?

What observations would you make about the current nature of the curator/audience relationship? Are there particular strengths, weaknesses or changes you have observed in this dynamic either within your institution or within other exhibition contexts?

Do you see the roles of curators changing in the future? If yes, how? If no, why not?

There has been some discussion of the idea of curators as authors. Is this an approach that is part of your organisational discourse? If so, how is this shared with artists and your audience? If not, is it something that is in discussion among curators and administrators within your organisation?

If the nature of the curatorial role were to change, would the institution have a responsibility to make these changes apparent to either artists that work with them or their audiences? If yes, how? If no, why not?

At what level of transparency might you expect this to happen?

Is there anything else you would like to add?