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Curating Expertise:

An Anthropological Approach

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Supervised by Dr Paolo Fortis and Professor Tom Yarrow

Department of Anthropology

Durham University

2024

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators using an anthropological approach. By engaging with anthropology's methodological and ethnographic promise, this thesis explores the lived experiences of UK-based professional contemporary art curators. It will consider their professional knowledge, identity, and practice for the purpose of illuminating their expertise.

An extensive ethnographic and anthropological study of contemporary art curators in the UK does not currently exist. By extension, there are very few examples of ethnographic studies of contemporary art curators generally. Art curators do not feature within anthropological studies of professionals or indeed more widely within industry-focused literature, for example.

Through taking an ethnographic approach, the thesis sheds light on the everyday lives of contemporary art curators in the UK. Moving beyond a generalised focus on curatorial narratives as 'discourse', it aims to reveal a more nuanced version of their professional expertise that. These situated examples will demonstrate the types of contradictions, ethical dilemmas, ideological aspirations, and personal aspects that reside in the everyday lives of UK-based contemporary art curators. Therefore, this thesis will provide novel perspectives on their practices and sociality, with a focus on the professional culture of curators that constructs art.

Building on anthropological approaches to expert knowledge and professional culture, this research sheds new light on professional narratives surrounding the curatorial profession. A consideration through the lens of social anthropology of UK-based contemporary art curators in their metamorphic state, provides an ideal opportunity by which to consider the impacts of professional narratives, and to make a case for a different way of thinking, predicated on a consideration of curatorial expertise based upon ethnographic insights into their everyday lives.

Contents

Title Page

Abstract 1

Contents 2

List of Illustrations 6

Declaration 15

Statement of Copyright 16

Acknowledgements 17

Dedication 19

Preface 20

The Methodological Approach 20

i) Establishing the field site 20
ii) Interviews 23
iii) Participant observation 25
iv) Visual anthropology 27

An Ethical Approach 28

An Ethical Reflection 28

Introduction 33

The Parameters of the Field and Ethnography 35

Theoretical Framework: Interrogating Curatorial Expertise 35

i) Anthropology of contemporary art curators: An emerging field 36
ii) Framing an ethnographic approach 37
iii) The study of professionals in anthropology 38
iv) Developments in the study of professionals 43
v) What constitutes curatorial literature? 45
vi) History of art as context 53

A Theoretical Framework for the Anthropological Study of UK-based Contemporary Art Curators 54

Chapter Content and Structure 55

CURATORIAL CONTEXTS 58

Chapter One - The Quest for Expertise 60

Biographical narratives and performativity 60

The effect of normative structures and discourse 61

Themes performed within the biographical narratives of art curators 63

i) First impressions: Creativity at the core? 64
ii) Curatorial generations – (divisions?) 72
iii) Institutional experience 78
iv) Aligning the curatorial self with a genre of art 87

In summary: Claims of curatorial expertise 88

Chapter Two - Navigating Curatorial Identities 90

Curatorial terminology and associated curatorial identities 90

Projecting curatorial identities …… 92

i) The cautious curator …… 93
ii) Making peace …… 97
iii) Courting certainty …… 101
iv) Assessing their influence: Finding meaning …… 103
v) A process of comparison …… 110
vi) Curatorial vision …… 112

In summary: Prospects of expertise …… 114

THE CONTEMPORARY ART CURATOR IN THE UK AND THE ART SPACE …… 117

Chapter Three - Between the Individual and the Institution …… 118

Ethnographic Case Study No.1: Expertise in an institutional context …… 120

Leadership: A Sea of Intentions …… 120

The Team: Navigating Identities and Hierarchies …… 136

i) Staff structure …… 137
ii) Diverse responsibilities: A curatorial hierarchy …… 140
iii) The office space …… 142
iv) A flexibility of curatorial "types" and the consequences …… 149
v) An institutional identity outside of the curatorial? …… 150
vi) The team meeting: Internal communication …… 153

In summary: The curator and the institution …… 161

Chapter Four - Curatorial Activity in the Art Space …… 163

Ethnographic Case Study No.2: Expertise within curatorial activity …… 164

i) Receiving artwork 167
ii) Condition reports 177
iii) Placing and creating 183

In summary: Curatorial activity in the art space and their expertise 215

NETWORKING EXPERTISE 219

Chapter Five – Knowledge Networks 220

Ethnographic Case Study No.3: Expertise and value in everyday life 220

i) A professional network? 222
ii) Location-orientated knowledge networks 225
iii) Dress codes as networks of knowledge 230
iv) Networking industry knowledge........ 239
v) Utilising textual resources 248
vi) The value of a shared calendar 256

In summary: Establishing the value of knowledge networks 265

Thesis Conclusion: Fielding the Professional 268

i) Curatorial propositions 268
ii) The problematic qualities of the professions 271
iii) A curatorial ethics for curatorial expertise 271
iv) What does this study of the curatorial profession reveal about professional expertise? 275
v) Ways ahead for the curatorial profession 277

Summary 279

References 280

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Frieze Sculpture, Regent's Park, London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2. The reception wall in the Tate Modern staff entrance – 'How to Work Better', 1991 by Peter Fischli & David Weiss. Tate Modern, London. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3. View from the window into Turbine Hall from the staff entrance at Tate Modern. Photograph by the author.

Figure 4. External view of Tate Britain. Photograph by the author during a separate visit to the Turner Prize.

Figure 5. Books in Tate Modern director, Frances Morris' office. Tate Modern, London. Photograph by the author.

Figure 6. Rachael Harlow, Projects Curator at South London Gallery,
in a side room at the South London Gallery in the interview.
Photograph by the author.

Figure 7. Street view of South London Gallery. Photograph by the author.

Figure 8. External view of Whitechapel Gallery in London. Photograph by the author.

Figure 9. External view of the House of St Barnabas in Soho, London. Photograph by the author.

Figure 10. External view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 11. Street view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 12. Exhibition posters in the Fruitmarket Gallery Café, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 13. Emma Hart. BANGER. Upstairs gallery view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 14. Emma Hart. BANGER. Upstairs gallery view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 15. Emma Hart. BANGER. *Mamma Mia! 2017*. Downstairs gallery view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 16. Organisational Structure, Report And Financial Statements For The Year Ended 31 March 2019, Fruitmarket Gallery (Companies House, no date, p.3).

Figure 17. Sketch of office layout. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Drawing by the author.

Figure 18. Bookshelf in the office. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 19. The kitchenette, within the office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 20. Temporary allocated desk space with reading provided by curator Ruth Bretherick regarding the Senga Nengudi exhibition. Photograph by the author.

Figure 21. Desk view whilst submitting book records for new library resource, with temporary heater. Round table in the communal office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

Figure 22. Ruth's desk within the communal office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 23. Communal office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 24. Itinerary for the period 7th February – 27th February 2019 including Marco Guidano's *Conjunctive Tissue* exhibition, and various community focused exhibits and events, taped to the inside of the office door for the whole team to see. Photograph by the author.

Figure 25. Round table for group meetings in the communal office. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 26. Meeting itinerary for Thursday 14th March. Location: Fruitmarket Gallery office, Edinburgh.

Figure 27. View of the lower gallery and curator Laurence Sillars, during installation week. Senga Nengudi Exhibition. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 28. *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition Installation. Gallery view. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 29. A technician unpacking *'Oh My ( )'* by Noriyuki Suzuki*. Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 30. Stages of unpacking of the artwork *'Oh My ( )'* by Noriyuki Suzuki. *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 31. Stages of unpacking of the artwork *'Oh My ( )'* by Noriyuki Suzuki. *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 32. Image of the crate label for the artwork *'Horizons, 2018'* by Sebastian Kite. *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figures 33. Delivery and Processing of Artworks. The front page of the A4 document. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 34. Delivery and Processing of Artworks. The back page of the A4 document. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 35. Installation notes by Rebecca Gee, Fine Art Curator. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Figure 36. Detailed view of an artwork within the exhibition *BANGER*, by Emma Hart. Upstairs gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 37. Senga Nengudi*. Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St,* 1981/2013. Nylon mesh, wooden slats. Upstairs gallery at the Fruitmarket Gallery. Photograph by the author.

Figure 38. Senga Nengudi. *Untitled R.S.V.P.,* 2013. Nylon, sand, mixed media. Upstairs gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 39. Unique aspect of the artwork (pencil markings) circled in red for condition report and installation purposes. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 40. Comparative image without the red circle denoting the unique feature of the artwork. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 41. Wall A (image 1) for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 42. Wall A (image 2) photograph from a different angle for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 43. Wall B (image 1) for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 44. One of several photographs supplied without notes to assist with the installation and condition report. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 45. Wall A and Wall B installation guide on grid paper for *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 46. Wall C and Wall D installation guide on grid paper for *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 47. Research and public engagement curator, Ruth Bretherick, photographing the artwork *'Bulemia,'* by Senga Nengudi, for the condition report. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 48. Senga Nengudi. *Performance Piece*, 1978. Silver gelatin prints, triptych. Photograph of the artwork in the upstairs gallery of the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 49. Senga Nengudi. *R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D''*, 2014. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 50. Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 51. Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 52. Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 53. Front page of condition report for artwork *'Bulimia, 1990/2018'* by Senga Nengudi, supplied by The Henry Moore Institute Leeds. A4 paper. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 54. Reverse page of the condition report for *artwork 'Bulimia, 1990/2018'* by Senga Nengudi,

supplied by The Henry Moore Institute Leeds. A4 paper. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 55. Laurence Sillars, director and curator, and technician from The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, installing *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'* by Senga Nengudi. Lower Gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 56. Upstairs gallery view of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, prior to the exhibition opening. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 57. Detailed view of the artwork installation plan, for *'Sandmining'*, 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 58. Installation tools next to the artwork '*Sandmining*', 2019, by Senga Nengudi, which was under construction. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by author.

Figure 59. Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) and Jamie (Fruitmarket Gallery Manager) assisting with the recreation of the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 60. Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) assisting with the recreation of the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 61. Laurence Sillars (Curator and head of the Henry Moore Institute), Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) and Jamie (Fruitmarket Gallery Manager), recreating the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 62. Installation photographs, materials, and tools for the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi, alongside general installation equipment. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 63. Installation photographs, used as a guide for recreating the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 64. Laurence Sillars (Curator and head of the Henry Moore Institute) brushing colour into the sand with his own individual movements, for the purpose of recreating the artwork '*Sandmining'*, 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 65. The brush used to apply the coloured powder to the sand, temporarily discarded during installation of the artwork '*Sandmining'*, 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 66. Lower gallery view with installation equipment. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 67. Mop and bucket for the final cleaning of the floors post-installation, ready to be used, propped up against the wall beside *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'*, by Senga Nengudi. Lower Gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Figure 68. Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris*, 2018-19. Photograph by the author.

Figure 69. Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris*, 2018-19. Tourists circling the sculpture. Photograph by the author.

Figure 70. Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris,* 2018-19. Professional circling the sculpture. Photograph by the author.

Figure 71. Area surrounding the Encounter Contemporary pop-up gallery space. Photograph by the author.

Figure 72. External view of White Cube, Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Figure 73. Entrance view of White Cube, Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Figure 74. Litter and street art in the alleyway to Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Figure 75. Street view with the gallery on the left. Photograph by the author.

Figure 76. Adam Ball. *Indebted,* 2018. Hand-cut paper and acrylic on aluminium. 80 x 60 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 77. Adam Ball. *Indebted,* 2018. Detail. Hand-cut paper and acrylic on aluminium. 80 x 60 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 78. Exhibition information sheet. Page 1. Photograph by the author.

Figure 79. Exhibition information sheet. Page 2. Photograph by the author.

Figure 80. Adam Ball. *Foundations*, 2018. Hand-cut paper and raw pigment on canvas. 160 x 200 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 81. Adam Ball. *Erosion,* 2016. Charcoal on canvas. 80 x 100 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 82. Adam Ball. *Interfade,* 2016. Charcoal and hand-cut fabric on canvas. 125 x 100 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 83. Adam Ball. *Foundations*, 2018. Hand-cut paper and raw pigment on canvas. 160 x 200 cm; Intercession, 2018. Hand cut paper and graphite powder on paper. 130 x 180 cm; Unleashed, 2018. Burnt birch plywood. 112 x 243 cm. Photograph by the author.

Figure 84. Table view with magazine. Photograph by the author.

Figure 85. Table view with exhibition information sheets and Encounter Contemporary business cards. Photograph by the author.

Figure 86. Window ledge view with exhibition information sheets, Encounter Contemporary business cards and magazines. Photograph by the author.

Figure 87. Deutsche Bank Wealth Management Lounge entrance at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 88. Book shop at the entrance of Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 89. Table view of a gallery showing work at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 90. Smithson Building. Photograph by the author.

Figure 91. John Baldessari. *Penguin*, 2018. Frieze Sculpture, 2018. Regent's Park, London. Photograph by the author.

Figure 92. Art fair attendees interacting with a *Live* artwork by Camille Henrot. Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 93. Preview of Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 94. Art fair attendees looking at artwork at one of the gallery stands. Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 95. Julia Scher. *Performance art.* Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 96. Tour guide at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 97. Private tour at preview. Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Figure 98. Attendees of the Sculpture Networking Breakfast being given a tour of the Smithson building mid-renovation. Top floor. Photograph by the author.

Figure 99. View from the top floor of the Smithson building mid-renovation. Photograph by the author.

Declaration

The material contained in this thesis is my own work, unless otherwise specified within the thesis. This research has been undertaken for the purpose of attaining a PhD in Anthropology and I have engaged in this research as a doctoral candidate within the Department of Anthropology at the University of Durham.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.
No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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you have given everything to and given so much love and support. You are all my inspiration. You are my biggest supporters and I love you.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to:

My grandmother

Brenda Susannah Kerr

1926-2021

Had you lived in a different time, this thesis would likely have been yours.
Your strength will forever be an inspiration. Your love will be never-ending as it lives in us, and your Scottish tones will always be in my ears.

My father

Iain Stuart Kerr

1951-2023

My love and admiration for you is infinite.
I will forever draw strength from your example, and I will forever strive to be the kind, supportive, inspiring person you are. No words will ever be enough to describe how much you mean to me.

One of dad's last text messages: "Remember Gabi, The last bit of any race is the hardest part. Huge effort at a point when you are absolutely at the end of your tether. It has to be Gabs I'm afraid, but you are very close, don't compromise now, whatever you do.
Love you lots and I am very proud of you. Dad xxx"

I love you, Dad.

Preface

The aim of this thesis is to foreground and interrogate the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators using an anthropological approach. Consequently, the over-arching question of this thesis is what are the implications of an anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curators and their expertise? This is both a methodological and analytical endeavour. This thesis is the first ethnographic study of UK-based contemporary art curators within the discipline of anthropology. Furthermore, the ethnographic components of this thesis provide an analytical focus which illuminates the everyday professional lives of curators, with novel contributions to curatorial and art historical discourse.

Contemporary art curation in the UK is often framed by key institutions and organisations. For example, it is possible to acquire outlines of the basic roles of the curator based on the definitions provided by arts institutions and organisations. For example, Tate provide an outline of the definition of 'curator' which includes references first and foremost to acquisitions, collections, and loans, followed by an acknowledgement of an expansion of the curatorial role in more recent history to include 'freelance or independent curators' (TATE, no date, a). However, these types of summaries do not reveal the detail and complexity of the lived experiences of art curators. This thesis will step into their daily lives in ways that will demonstrate that the reality is far more complex and nuanced. The shape of argument throughout this thesis is directed by an engagement with fieldwork material.

The Methodological Approach

The methodology of this thesis provides the central argument that supports a study of this nature. This research has been conducted with a methodology that includes both primary and secondary source material with three dominant aspects: Interviews, participant observation and visual anthropology.

i) Establishing the field site

The field site for this research was constructed with the aim for a curatorial sample that represents each of the respective categories; public, private, and independent. The way that the sample of curators emerged was as a direct consequence of curators responding to my blind emails or

relationships established based on existing networks. Over time, the relationships with curators evolved and access to other curators became easier. This thesis is based upon the perspectives of those who in some way identify as a contemporary art curator and with whom I engaged during the year-long period of fieldwork in the UK throughout 2018 and 2019.

The art curators I engaged with were situated within various institutions and organisations primarily in urban centres. This is due to urban centres providing a diverse contemporary arts ecology. In London this included Tate Modern, the South London Gallery, Wellcome Collection, the Hayward Gallery, the British Museum, the Serpentine Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, White Cube Bermondsey, the Parasol Unit, and the Lisson Gallery. These institutions provide examples from both the public and private sector. There was also one individual who operated at a senior level of the art world in association with Tate during the 1990s whose insights, whilst not operating as a contemporary art curator, were contextually invaluable and key to the development of this research. Within other parts of England, I have engaged with contemporary art curators at institutions including the York Art Gallery, the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Tyne and Wear Museums and a small commercial private gallery. In Scotland I also spent a significant period at The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh where curatorial staff (as well as non-curatorial staff) became very central participants within this research. The reason why this institution became such an important focus within this thesis, was due to both their own desire to engage with this research and their specific approach regarding the way that they embraced the identity of the contemporary art curator.

I have selected from the knowledge gathered from fieldwork and I have not utilised the perspectives of every participant. I have edited and selected with discernment as I engaged in the writing of this thesis resulting in the creation of ethnographic vignettes for the purpose of providing a varied sample of curatorial perspectives from within the categories of public, private and independent.
In addition, by focusing on art curators within the United Kingdom this provides the descriptive means of collectively referring to these field sites in both England and Scotland. The locations of fieldwork and the art curators based in these locales are also notably impacted by the social, cultural, political, and economic landscapes of the United Kingdom.

As this research was undertaken in my home country it can consequently be described as home anthropology. However, I would argue that this should be caveated by anthropologist Carol Greenhouse's argument that the 'familiarity' that this infers may be a smokescreen to a rather more complex reality (1985, p.261). As Greenhouse acknowledges there are the unhelpful and often

inaccurate notions of being well integrated into the exact fieldsite with which you are engaging and assumptions accompanying the notion of nationality (1985, p.261).

In the case of this research, my own degree of 'familiarity' in the field (Greenhouse, 1985, p.261) included prior exposure to curators within an earlier period of fieldwork that I had undertaken as part of my MA with a curator based in the North-East of England. I was familiar with routes of access in relation to public galleries. I had volunteered and worked with galleries and arts organisations that provided a knowledge of both the public and private arts sector. Prior to entering the field, I made use of the contact details available on web pages for individuals and organisations. This consisted of compiling a list of names, accessing contact information from webpages, and then distributing a press release style series of emails.

I also made use of prior acquaintances particularly in the North East of England where I was based to contact contemporary art curators. Additionally, I drew upon my experiences with galleries through internships and various freelance jobs as well as prior relationships established through my MA research. In terms of envisaging what this research could produce, my MA research also demonstrated just how much there was to still engage with and the number of questions there were still to be explored.

Being consciously aware of the 'public' dimensions of the curatorial profession (Charlesworth, 2007, p.98) I responded by overhauling my own online presence in the form of Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This was in order to utilise these platforms as a research tool through which to contact curators, as well as a means by which to project my own validity as a researcher. I trialled my approach for gaining access to the field by utilising the more transparent profiles of public institutions and the curators who worked within them, specifically those who had more of a professional and institutional obligation to connect and acknowledge queries due to their more public-orientated roles. Once I became more familiar with the various responses, I began to diversify by pursuing access to UK-based contemporary art curators in the private sector also. I was not after all a contemporary art curator and for this reason there were many limitations to my routes of access.

Most especially the view from curators that was continuously conveyed was that I was unlikely to gain access to anything behind the scenes with the inference of curators having a superior status and intense work pressures. This resonates with anthropologist Sherry Ortner's attempts to achieve

'participant observation' wherein she noted that one of her participants 'doubted that anyone else would let me do it either' (2010, p.218). In one case I was advised on email to limit myself to three questions if I wanted a response from curators. This was accompanied by expressions of surprise that the research had potential due to the impossibilities of access. What became apparent later in my fieldwork year was what Ortner describes as the influence of 'insider's *interest*', whether that be 'pragmatic' or based on a 'sense of curiosity, of intellectual or 'gut' engagement with the idea' (2010, pp.217-218). Examples include educational or public engagement imperatives, conceptual or theoretical interest on behalf of the curator or on occasion, ego.

An aspect that assisted with the construction of the fieldsite, relates to my own individual arsenal of knowledge regarding the cultural, social, political, and economic landscape in which contemporary art curators were operating in the UK and further afield. I attained this knowledge from arts publications, information about key organisations, and online resources. In addition, I have a BA in History of Art which has provided me with an awareness and point of connection with curatorial knowledge.

Ultimately however, in terms of constructing fieldwork with contemporary art curators working in the UK, the scale of this endeavour is aptly reflected in Marcus' statement that 'empirically following the thread of cultural process itself impels the move toward multi-sited ethnography' (1995, p.97). As such, this research has been undertaken with an awareness that access to the field needed to be negotiated in diverse and evolving settings.

ii) Interviews

Twenty-three semi-structured interviews were undertaken to attain detailed 'in-depth' information from curators, which in the case of this research included a 'life history approach' and 'present-centered' elements (Yow, 2005, pp.1-2). Interviews were especially helpful in terms of accessing and contextualising periods of participant observation. The opportunity for elongated and focused reflections were a valuable aspect of interviews. However, for those I interviewed with whom I did not undertake participant observation, these interviews provided the means of broadening my understanding of the profession and its various professional contexts and claims of expertise. Interview participants were targeted to provide a breadth of institutional, educational, and professional experiences. However, all participants identified in some way with the professional identity of contemporary art curator. There was only one exception in the form of Lord Dennis

Stevenson. This interview was included due to the value of insights that were garnered in relation to the curatorial profession, as well as Lord Dennis Stevenson representing the role of gatekeeper in relation to various curatorial contacts, which eventually led to the interview with Frances Morris, director of Tate Modern.

Interviews within this research had a 'semi-structured' approach with 'open-ended questions' that were navigated in the way that applied linguistics academic Steve Mann describes, with a well-researched approach but in a way that also responded to lines of questioning wherein the participant could be seen to lead in their responses whilst also re-visiting questions in various forms for more expanded insights (2016, p.102).

Within the interviews themselves, anthropologist Helena Wulff describes the potential for an exchange premised on 'creativity' which influences the interactions between anthropologist and participant which can provide productive and innovative cognisance (2012, p.163). Certainly, the influence of the curatorial profession heightened the level of interactions of this nature as they were already predisposed to thinking in the innovative and inquisitive way that Wulff describes (2012, p.163).

A particular consideration that emerged in relation to the interviews and participant observation was that the anthropological methods I enacted created the conditions for a questioning of the expertise of the participant, but also myself as the researcher (Boyer, 2008, pp.39-40). As an anthropological researcher you naturally become embroiled within such 'claims' of 'expertise' (Summerson Carr, 2010, p.22). It was not uncommon for curators to proffer questions relating to my familiarity with an artwork, artist, exhibition, art period or genre of art which is reflected to some degree in Ortner's observation regarding her participants when she refers to 'the unavoidable fact that film people want to talk primarily about film' (2010, pp. 225-226). This was also the case with contemporary art curators with regards to their focus on artists, artworks, art periods and genres. Therefore, my undergraduate study in history of art was of profound use alongside my general interest and work experiences in the UK cultural landscape. This also brings into relief Ortner's point about ''studying sideways'' and the possibility of traversing similar experiences and interests (2010, p.223). This can amplify the risk of being 'complicit' or of engaging in confrontation (2010, p.226). This might include types of intellectual 'challenge' made on behalf of the participant and on occasion perhaps an overzealous fascination with the purpose and focus of the research among other aspects (2010, p.224). Both aspects I experienced with curators in the field.

The anthropological methodology employed within this research also prompts a consideration of the implications of 'methodological hierarchy' (Hockey, 2002, p.210). I subscribe to sociologist Jenny Hockey's view as an academic in the social sciences, that the degree of focus on participant observation within anthropology can often compromise the value, dimension and role of other methods which are no less important to the discipline (2002, pp.214-215). Consequently, she poses an interesting question by asking 'does this distinction between the research interview and 'real life' actually hold up?' (2002, p.215). Certainly, the interview process with contemporary art curators resonated with Hockey's acknowledgement of the tendency to over-simplify the boundaries of the interview method as existing from the start until the end of an interview, but rather as a process which is far more complex (2002, p.220). This argument resonates with the interview experience in the field as when I left a gallery or an office space and shut the door behind me, there was always a sense of continuity and a blended process between the words of the participant in a more formal setting and a holistic sense of its role and relevance within the field.

iii) Participant observation

The method of 'participant observation' is generally aligned with 'anthropology' and operates as an approach that anthropologist Harvey Russell Bernard outlines as 'getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives' (2018, p.272). However, there is widespread acknowledgement by anthropologists working with professionals of the numerous challenges relating to attaining and undertaking 'participant observation' (Priyadharshini, 2003, p.426; Ortner, 2010, p.219; and Riles, 2010, a, p.xv). For example, anthropologist Dominic Boyer recognises that the typical methodological set up for anthropologists working with professionals consists of 'relatively short formal interviews and limited situational observation' (2008, p.43). In terms of engaging with contemporary art curators, it was certainly a challenge to acquire more elongated interactions and to move beyond the brief methodological engagements that Boyer describes (2008, p.43).

Nevertheless, around half-way through the year, participant observation became a more central part of my research. This was due in part to the extensive number of interviews I engaged in which created familiarity (Ortner, 2010, p.215) both on a professional and personal level. It was also due to capitalising on peak moments of activity. Academic and curator Helena Reckitt specifically refers (within a critique of 'environmental' impacts) to 'the art world's itinerant calendar' (2016, p.26).

There was a sense of a temporal framework that curators were aware of, which I came to experience as a vague series of expected annual fluctuations in activity. The knowledge derived from the methods I used in the field relied a lot on cumulative impressions and interactions with contemporary art curators in an increasingly rehearsed capacity. This appears to be reflected in anthropologists Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan's reference to 'person-centered interviewing and observation' as 'like learning how to perform a musical score' (2015, p.315).

One particular interview provided some curatorial currency by acting as a stamp of approval from the curatorial elite. This was almost like an award for achieving the correct degree of familiarity with curators to be allowed further access. This interview appeared to encourage and reassure curators who I contacted in the latter half of the year to take part in the research. Whilst I am grateful that access was made easier by these developments in the field, I still view them as only part of the evolution of fieldwork rather than as a single moment which secured the overall success of my fieldwork as anthropological presentations of fieldwork can often disguise the true complexity of applying a methodology in the field. This issue is reflected in reference to a 'magical informant or golden connection' that anthropologist Daniel Souleles mentions and critiques (2018, p.55). This perspective also resonates with anthropologist Annelise Riles' experiences as she reflected on her research and methodological approach in the field as having presented challenges that no degree of speculation could have accurately identified (2010, a, p.xv).

Anthropologist Laura Nader ascribes to the view that research should be dictated by what emerges as lines of enquiry as communicated by the participants and from within the field and not through our own implementation of restrictive directives for the research, but rather by responding organically through an evolving 'methodology' (1972, p.24). It is this methodological responsiveness that I hope can be seen to inform this research.

Even so, participant observation is undeniably a central part of the methodology of this research. An elongated engagement with contemporary art curators did become possible during the period of fieldwork in which I glimpsed the everyday reality of their professional life. This took place primarily at galleries and in office spaces. In addition, one aspect which arguably assisted with creating opportunities for participant observation was my attendance at various curatorial events and exhibitions openings. This is framed by Ortner who in her own words refers to 'what might be called 'interface ethnography', doing participant observation in the border areas where the closed community or organization or institution interfaces with the public' (2010, p. 213). In relation to

contemporary art curators working in the UK this consisted of exhibition previews, conferences, artist talks, 'in conversation' events with curators, workshops, lectures, networking events, art prizes, symposiums, reading groups and art fairs. These were aspects around which I constructed participant observation, and they constituted a substantial part of my fieldwork year by informing both the content of my research and methodology.

I made fieldnotes throughout the year in notebooks on individual pieces of paper and even on a napkin or receipt when nothing was to hand and an idea or observation took hold. Anthropologist Jean E. Jackson encapsulates the variety of offerings that 'anthropologists' have garnered from 'fieldnotes' (1990, p.10) much of which resonates with my own experiences. Jackson acknowledges that participants would respond to a researcher taking notes (1990, p.11 and pp.22-23). Curators in the field appeared very expectant that what they had to say would be written down, aside from any audio recording. Therefore, taking notes appeared to not only be a means of recording information but also became a visual exercise wherein I was making it clear by taking notes that I was actively engaging with what they had to say, even during participant observation. Note-taking in addition to audio recording is also useful as a combined approach. I experienced all the benefits of taking notes in the field that Jackson also acknowledges, wherein the notes themselves serve as a 'memory' resource for the researcher (1990, p.11) and that they are also a way of cataloguing emergent concepts based on reflections in the field (1990, p.11). In addition, these notes can be revisited again and again and like Jackson I also ascribe to the view that they 'change with each rereading' (1990, p.14). These notes helped to direct the rich insights that participant observation allowed.

iv) Visual anthropology

The decision to use 'visual images' to accompany the 'written' 'ethnographic' components of this thesis recognises their value as a powerful means to provide insight into the everyday lives of participants (Pink, 2021, p.14). The use of photography in the field was also made easier due to the creative and visually focused dimensions of curatorial work as it was expected by curators and gallery staff alike that I would document the artwork.

I have incorporated photographs which I have taken myself in the field with the understanding that the photographs are by no means 'an objective or truthful reality' and are rather as interdisciplinary academic Sarah Pink argues, constantly being received and 'redefined' alongside their role as another entry point for those reading the 'ethnography' (Pink, 2021, pp. 40-41). It is important to

acknowledge that ethnography can be 'supplemented' by photographs, for the purpose of assisting with 'anthropological conceptualization' as El Guindi argues (2004, p.218) and therefore I intend for the photographs within this thesis to illuminate the ethnographic vignettes.

An Ethical Approach

The nature of anthropological fieldwork requires certain ethical considerations. This research involves adherence to the permissions provided by the Anthropology Departmental Ethics Committee at Durham University prior to undertaking fieldwork. The ethical approach of this research is also informed by the latest guidance available at the time, which specifically includes the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth's 'Ethical Guidelines for good research practice' (ASA, 2011) and subsequently the developments regarding the '2019: ASA Ethical Guidelines Review Working Group (EGG)' (ASA, 2020). The most recent resource is the 'Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA) Ethical Guidelines 2021 for good research practice' (ASA, 2021). 'GDPR' was also introduced during my period of research (ICO, 2018) and consequently this must also be considered.

The approach to ethics that has shaped this research has been consistently reviewed and revised in accordance with what Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al*., refer to as 'both the formal and the "immeasurable" aspects of ethics' (2017, p.76). Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al*. also assert 'that ethics is part of research from the planning stage to the writing up and research-impact stages' (2017, p.76), which is especially relevant due to the high level of engagement with the research on behalf of many curators themselves. This arguably originates from their belief in their own expertise and the desire for control of their professional narrative.

An Ethical Reflection

Therefore, to engage in a reflective exercise it is necessary to detail the process and adherence to ethics in relation to the specific challenges that occurred within this research. For example, anonymity could not be pursued and as such resonates with anthropologists Danielle Braun and Jitske Kramer's statement about how it is imperative that we are clear about what degree of 'anonymity' can be provided for participants (2019, p.39). Firstly, the profile of the participants within this thesis would likely be deduced from conversations regarding artists, exhibitions, gallery frameworks and various projects. Consequently, anyone with a knowledge of the culture sector in

the UK and even further afield would be able to deduce the identity of the individuals, institution, or organisations. This would also be the case even if anonymity was given in the form of pseudonyms as there are often too few curators in any one institution and the specific exhibitions and institutional descriptions would dismantle any attempt as anonymity. In anthropologist Karen Ho's ethnographic study of Wall Street for example she decides to provide 'informants' with 'pseudonyms' and does so with the acknowledgement of the difficulties of this approach by describing the exercise as 'futile' due to the widely known 'corporate name statuses, and identities' (2009, a, p.21). It is also possible for some curators of contemporary art to be enveloped within the status of 'celebrity' (Charlesworth, 2007, p.91) which compounds this issue. Ho also acknowledges that the discernment of the individual anthropologist is needed in terms of how to navigate these challenges (2009, a, p.21).

Another challenge emerged regarding interviews. Requests for editing and clarity regarding final use of the research is an issue which anthropologist David Mosse attends to in his consideration of 'fieldwork relations' and 'writing' (2006, p.936). Ortner relatedly argues that there is a risk of the anthropologist and their work being affected by vested interests or pressure from participants of which the researcher must be aware (2010, p.226). In the case of contemporary art curators in the field, editing began even within the interviews themselves and during participant observation. The power of the curator was also being exercised within these editing attempts – "you can't use this but….", "This is off the record but….", "You mustn't include this but…". Curators also questioned me regarding the expected and intended research outputs and my career expectations. There was a perpetual focus on end-result with questions such as "when and where will it be published?" … "When will it be finished?" These enquiries made on behalf of curators were seemingly motivated by a concern for their own position. This is supported by Mosse's acknowledgement of the instinct amongst professionals to 'constantly organize attention away from the contradictions and contingencies of practice and the plurality of perspective' (2006, p.938). On the other hand, it also appeared as though these exercises in editing had the potential to conversely demonstrate their professional control and their belief in their burgeoning expertise to therefore allow a degree of control regarding the output of the research and the content of their interviews. There was friction between power and vulnerability within curatorial life.

So, what about the integrity of the anthropologist? The power and vulnerability of the anthropological position? Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al*. acknowledges the consequences of 'informed consent taking' and undertaking 'formal research ethics' in professional spheres which includes the

potential for increased vigilance about their professional role and participation in the research where arguably very little risk ever existed (2017, p.74) which arguably leaves the anthropologist vulnerable to increased resistance on behalf of professionals. Certainly, curators made their research consent requirements very clear. These requirements were often very detailed and suggested a degree of interference that at times seemed incompatible with the methodology of anthropology. Furthermore, the extent by which an anthropologist can be drawn into adversarial ethical debates with professionals is demonstrated by Mosse's narration of the negotiations surrounding his ethnographic account (2006, pp. 935-952). Souleles therefore makes the argument that further analytical attention and guidelines are needed within anthropology regarding the ethical processes that researchers employ when they are engaging with those who 'have more power than the anthropologist' (2021, p.211). For example, in some instances academics have experienced legal challenges in their anthropological and ethnographic accounts of fieldwork with professionals. This was discussed at the ASA 2019 conference '*Anthropological Perspectives On Global Challenges*' at the University of East Anglia within which I gave a paper titled 'Knowledge negotiations: Examples from field research with contemporary art curators in the UK' as part of the panel 'Ethics, Power, and Consent in Ethnographic Fieldwork' (ASA, 2019, pp.50-52). This was the first time I had come across examples of litigation that occurred in relation to the fieldwork anthropologists do with professionals. Nevertheless, the specific nature of this research has fostered my belief that there would not be an instance that led to the extreme situation of a relationship breakdown with curatorial participants, as I cannot foresee the relationships established in the field breaking down to that extent.

The consent summaries and editing requests were however often so complex that aside from the consent forms, I produced an ethics and consent spreadsheet. This provided an accessible summary and reminder to ensure I complied absolutely with the wishes of the participants. Even so, consent form requests for fieldnotes for example felt particularly intrusive on an individual level as it created a feeling of being exposed to judgement based upon the quality of the research output. The initial confirmation of consent is detailed as follows (although this was subject to change over time):

- I undertook interviews with 23 participants (a couple of times for some) lasting between 30 minutes to 2 hours each.
- 5 out of 23 requested interview transcripts for editing and checking. E.g., like a press release with sign off.
- 1 out of 23 requested fieldnotes from participant observation.

- 2 out of 23 requested any material intended for publishing to be sent ahead of publishing.
- 1 whole gallery team consent email/document distribution was required (instigated by me due to the nature of the field).

All research information and consent forms were formatted in the style of a press release and were distributed with a deadline provided for initial concerns and feedback. However, during the briefing with each curator, I acknowledged that I had to trust that my primary gatekeeper in instances when there was a curatorial team or institutional staff involved in the fieldsite, to inform me of any concerns team members might have. These would then be discussed and agreed in accordance with ethical guidelines. This type of ethical briefing helped to reduce risks for myself as an anthropologist and to help to mitigate research-compromising consequences due to the involvement of the curators. These risks have been considered by anthropologists in relation to various types of fieldsites with professionals (Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al*., 2017, pp.73-74; Mosse, 2006, p.952; Ortner, 2010, p.212 and p.226). By creating initial deadlines for ethics forms there was an opportunity for initial feedback, reassurance about any concerns, rapport building and assisting in raising awareness of the nature of the research and to create a memory and familiarity with my presence.

It is also important to acknowledge my responsibilities as a researcher and my conduct within professional spaces which was undertaken with appropriate professionalism and sensitivity to the work with which the participants were engaged and a responsibility to their continued employment and the integrity of their work. This approach is supported by anthropologist Muhammad Aurang Zeb Mughal who advises 'patience and being respectful of local norms and values' (2015, p.126). However, any aspiration to be 'invisible' is reductive and anthropologist Erve Chambers reference to 'former strangers' seems an apt description for the evolution of the varied relationships of a fieldsite in which there is active interaction between researcher and participant (2009, p.378). However, as Ortner warns you must always be mindful of being 'complicit' in terms of how lives are accounted for (2010, p.226) or by projecting as Chambers warns, 'our own needs and ambitions' (2009, p.374). With that in mind anthropologist Felix Ringel encourages what he refers to as 'an expanded facilitation of epistemic collaborations during fieldwork' (2013, p.36) with the purpose of encouraging the interactions of anthropologist and professional in the fieldwork process in productive directions.

Whilst my research endeavour is by no means focused on the direct 'intervention' that Ringel describes in relation to his 'fieldsite' experiences (2013, p.39), his encouragement in terms of what

he describes as how ‘we should try to account for changes in knowledge as they happen, which in itself is a methodological quest’ (2013, p.38) is relevant to the approach to ethics, fieldwork and the writing of this thesis as a whole. Therefore, in adherence to the ethical processes as stipulated by the university, I have also sought to participate in a more expansive engagement with ethics (Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al*., 2017, p. 76) by considering the particularities of this specific research.

Introduction

“The role that I have is multifaceted. I have to be all things to all people” – Alexander Caspari Curator, director, and founder of Encounter Contemporary, a private contemporary art organisation based in London.

Fig.1 Frieze Sculpture, Regent’s Park, London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Alexander (Alex) Caspari, founder, director, and curator of Encounter Contemporary, a private art organisation focused upon contemporary art, delivered his perspectives with an authority that reflected the various facets and contradictions inherent in the curatorial profession. “It is hugely varied. From writing about art, working closely and often very intensively with contemporary artists, talking to, and thinking about their studio practices and exhibitions, designing shows with them, physically curating shows and managing all of the operations and logistics to do with that. Generating PR and a political response to those shows, selling artwork and just organising everything! Lots of things under one roof. The roof being me.” Alex laughed when he said this, evidently amused by his description and seemingly happy with his concise delivery to describe a profession which resists parameters.

Whilst Alex's outlook emerged from the angle of the private art sphere (a type of categorisation, immersed as it is, in the art market and sales) he still managed to speak to how the curator comes to various conclusions about what it is they do, the scale of it but also its potential. It doesn't seem possible to identify what the building is that a contemporary art curator might be trying to cover or what it is they are building and trying to reflect. The complex and wide-ranging activities which are reflected in Alex's statement demonstrates the condition that curators find themselves in, within the process of attempting to convey their expertise.

The breadth of any profession presents a complex picture. In this instance, contemporary art curators demonstrate a considerable amount of professional variance from one curator to the next. The profession is plagued by attempts at certainty or the desire to annex contemporary art curators into types within curatorial discourse. Whilst these efforts to apply categorisations can provide interesting frameworks, it does not sit so well with the daily reality of understanding the lives of contemporary art curators. This thesis presents an alternative way of approaching the study of a profession that can be identified by its contradictions. Curators are all distinct from each other. The contradictory and subjective nature of the profession is therefore a prominent connective strand operating throughout this thesis.

The aforementioned ethnographic insight demonstrates that there is an opportunity to consider curatorial expertise in a different way, as opposed to considering curation in an analytical way, as curators themselves have done. Therefore, the key argument of this thesis is that we must think about curators as professionals, consider what kind of everyday practice is involved and finally, what kind of expertise this creates. The construction and claims of expertise made on behalf of UK-based contemporary art curators within their everyday lives is the explorative focus of this thesis. This is achieved by utilising an anthropological approach. As such, the key overall question that is the connecting thread throughout this thesis is: What are the implications of an anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curators' expertise? The aim of this thesis is to form an anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curators that illuminates their expertise within the context of their everyday lives. This undertaking has undoubted consequences for curatorial discourse, curators themselves and for the study of professionals in anthropology. The most integral contribution of this thesis however lays in the knowledge that there are no studies of UK-based contemporary art curators from within the anthropology of professionals.

The Parameters of the Field and Ethnography

To develop an ethnographic study of this kind, it was necessary to identify a breadth of curatorial perspectives that in some way identified with the profession of contemporary art curator. Consequently, I sought to ascertain institutional and organisational types from which professional contemporary art curators emerge, which included public and private art galleries, arts organisations, and other institutional types. All of the contemporary art curators within this thesis were based in the UK at the point of fieldwork. By considering those operating within the political, social, and economic structures of the UK, I was able to identify the influences of their immediate environment and the ideological and practical impacts of their immediate working location. That said, the international facets of their professional and personal lives were similarly dominant.

Theoretical Framework: Interrogating Curatorial Expertise

Anthropology as a discipline has contributed significant perspectives on contemporary art (Schneider and Wright, 2006; Canclini, 2014; Fillitz and Van Der Grijp, 2018). Even more recently there has been an increasing focus on anthropology and curation (Amundsen and Mørland, 2015, a; Sansi, 2020, a). However, the over-arching contribution of this thesis resides in the recognition that engagements with the profession of contemporary art curator, ethnographically or theoretically, using anthropological methods within the sub- 'field' of 'anthropology', 'experts and expertise' (Boyer, 2008, p.38) is entirely absent. Consequently, the study of the curatorial profession has an absence of more elongated, nuanced, and contradictory accounts of their everyday lives.

Therefore, in recognising the relevance and unique contributions of this research, it is necessary to outline and interrogate the particularities of the theoretical and discursive framework that demonstrate and support efforts to remedy this gap in knowledge. This research is couched within a six-part theoretical framework. This includes a consideration of the relevance of an anthropology of contemporary art curators in the current disciplinary context, a contextualisation of the ethnographic commitment being made within this thesis, an evaluation of the way in which professionals have been studied within anthropology, a wider evaluation of the study of professionals across disciplines, the impact and relevance of curatorial literature, and history of art as context. By interrogating these specific selections of literature, I will make an explicit case for the distinct nature of this research.

i) Anthropology of contemporary art curators: An emerging field

As it has been established, art curators lack extended anthropological study pertaining to their expertise. To remedy this absence, it is necessary to ask the question: What does an anthropological study of contemporary art curators look like? It is essential to be aware of the gap within the discursive landscape that focuses on anthropology and the extraordinarily limited scholarly landscape. This section will demonstrate the relevance and unique contribution of this thesis in response to this gap in anthropological and curatorial discourse.

The focus upon curation and contemporary art curators is continuing to gain traction within the discipline of anthropology. This was recently demonstrated by the text '*The Anthropologist As Curator'* (Sansi, 2020, a) wherein anthropologist Roger Sansi notes that the dialogue between the curator and the anthropologist was initially focused on the anthropologist in a curatorial role or curators using anthropological influences in their practice (2020, b, p.1). Consequently, Sansi announces the intention to consider the two professions in more extensive and manifold ways (2020, b, p.1). This endeavour is particularly pertinent to this thesis as Sansi asks: 'How does the practice of curation help anthropologists rethink their practice, their work and the concerns of contemporary anthropology' (2020, b, p.1). This usefully engages with the profession to a greater degree in terms of their knowledge, identity, and practice, using an anthropological lens.

However, Sansi retains a focus on aspects of the respective professions which have a more natural affiliation, for example the identity of 'ethnographer' (2020, b, pp.1-3), the 'participatory' (2020, b, pp.3-4), concepts of 'participation', 'experimentation' and 'collaboration' (2020, b, pp.4-5) and examples of when anthropologists have actively taken on the role of curator (2020, b, pp.5-6). This instigates a conversation about how the two professions have an internalised anxiety about their separate knowledge and identity (2020, b, pp.6-8). A preoccupation with the demarcation of expertise undoubtedly influences the accounts of curators within this thesis. However, the intention for '*The Anthropologist as Curator*' with its various contributors (Sansi, 2020, a) is focused primarily on what he terms 'the experience of anthropologists who have worked as curators' (2020, b, p.8).

Like Sansi (2020, b, p.8), I intend to similarly foreground the everyday components of curatorial lives. However, I partially depart from the particular purpose outlined by Sansi in terms of a focus purely on the knowledge and professional exchanges that take place between 'anthropologists' and 'curators' (2020, b, p.8). Instead, I seek to extend the anthropological consideration of contemporary

art curators by making a case for a specific and detailed consideration of the everyday lives of UK-based contemporary art curators.

Rather than focusing on the embedded role of the anthropologist as curator I explore how anthropology as a discipline provides a lens by which to engage with professional contemporary art curators, with the anthropologist engaging with another profession (the contemporary art curator) in the field. This approach remains largely un-attended to and there is certainly a need for the creation of a multitude of extensive ethnographic accounts of the profession of contemporary art curator based upon anthropological fieldwork, analysis, and approach. A consideration of UK-based contemporary art curators on the scale of a monographic efforts exhibited by anthropologists studying professionals (e.g., Boyer, 2013; Ho, 2009, a; Mosse, 2005; Murphy, 2015; Riles, 2010, a; Yarrow, 2019) in terms of UK-based contemporary art curators is currently non-existent. Moreover, the everyday lives of contemporary art curators in general remains relatively under-examined.

ii) Framing an ethnographic approach

The creation of an anthropological study of art curators requires a consideration of ethnographic styles and approach. In Carrither's article '*Is Anthropology Art or Science?*' (1990) he identifies the pressures placed on 'anthropological knowledge', which he argues is synonymous with 'ethnography' due to what he articulates as 'a view of ethnography as unreliable and ethnographers as writers of fiction' (1990, p.263). Carrither's argument is 'that ethnography begins in the study of the variety of human sociality by means of human sociality itself. We may ask of that study not certainty but reliability' (1990, p.272). Therefore, what does it mean for this thesis to ascribe to the creation of "descriptive ethnography"?

Anthropologist Thomas Yarrow presents his work titled *'Architects. Portraits of a Practice'* (2019) as a commitment to 'ethnographic description' premised on the distinctness of his endeavour (2019, p.9) and with a focus on the 'complexity' existent in 'actual lives' (2019, p.242). Previous considerations of the various offerings among literature regarding contemporary art curators has arguably already demonstrated a lack of exploration within the ethnographic approach that Yarrow describes (2019, pp.241-242). Moreover, Yarrow refers to 'how architects are not straightforwardly creatures of knowledge; how they live lives with all the complexities, contradictions, and dilemmas of people who have been the more traditional focus of ethnography' (2019, p.11). It is this acknowledgement (Yarrow, 2019, p.11) which resonates with the profession of contemporary art

curator and provides the basis upon which this thesis makes an ethnographic commitment, with an acknowledgement of a gap in anthropological and ethnographic attention in the study of UK-based contemporary art curators.

In terms of the ethnographic style of this thesis, the type of structural monographic effort and commitments of Boyer in his ethnographic work titled *'The Life Informatic. Newsmaking in the Digital Era'* (2013) demonstrates the style this thesis seeks to embrace. Boyer's 'ethnography of the practices and understandings of digital information in contemporary news journalism' (2013, p.xi) is predicated upon 'a modular' approach, consumable as separate sections and together (2013, p.xiv) which include various 'ethnographic studies' within (2013, p.xiv). The three parts of this thesis (curatorial contexts, the contemporary art curator in the UK and the art space, and finally, networking expertise) provide a structure where the parts can be separately consumed as in Boyer's approach (2013, p.xiv). Yarrow also acknowledges the need to recognise the audience, which he notes influenced his structural approach (2019, p.5). In addition, Yarrow reflects on the role of '*theory*' (2019, pp.5-6) which he incorporates into the work in ways that supplement but do not lead the writing, in favour of 'a richer and more evocative account' (2019, pp.6-7). It is on this basis that this thesis similarly orientates its ethnographic approach, alongside the aim of being accessible to academics, curators, and various professionals and industries alike. Accessibility is the cornerstone of this work.

iii) The study of professionals in anthropology

Within the discipline of anthropology there is precedent for a study that focuses on the lives of curatorial professionals. This precedent consists of several aspects including the chronological evolution of the study of professionals within the discipline of anthropology; the implications for professional exchange between the anthropologist and participant; discussions surrounding the integrity of anthropology as a discipline in the face of certain challenges including access, participant involvement, and power dynamics; and the various predictions and approaches being applied to the study of professional landscapes as they currently appear within anthropology.

In terms of the chronological evolution in the study of professionals within anthropology, it is necessary to acknowledge the seminal article by Laura Nader titled '*Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up*' (1972). Nader appeared prompted by an acute concern that 'never before have so few by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so

many members of the species' (1972, p.1). In many ways, the concern described by Nader (1972, p.1) resonates with what anthropologist Jonathan Mair identifies in recognition of the challenges that are present for professionals in the current landscape which includes effects on the anthropological endeavour through ''post-truth'' 'trends' and more specifically relating to political 'dishonesty' and a landscape punctuated by 'technological' advances and challenges including a penchant to accept rather than 'challenge' (2017, p.3). This demonstrates the continued relevance of Nader's concerns (1972, p.1). The most significant legacy of Nader's 1972 article is arguably the way in which she foregrounds the value of considering those in positions of 'power' (1972, p.7). Nader argued that anthropology should engage with '"studying up"' and to study those in influential and authoritative positions that she argued had been primarily ignored until that point (1972, p.5). Nader makes clear that such engagements with professionals is a way of expanding the parameters of the discipline, referring to the need to 'study up, down, or sideways' (1972, p.8).

However, Nader arguably represents a critically deconstructive approach[1] to the study of professionals. Even though Nader lays important groundwork for anthropology as a discipline to expand its research territory (1972, pp.5-8) this deconstructive approach has its limitations. For example, Esther Priyadharshini (academic in education) critiques her work in '*Coming Unstuck: Thinking Otherwise about "Studying Up"*' (2003) as she proposes 'an inquisitorial rather than adversarial stance to studying the workings of power' (2003, p.420). This relates to Nader's argument for '"studying up"' which is based on acquiring 'questions in reverse' of those which have been directed within other facets of anthropological research (1972, p.5). Whilst not invaluable lines of questioning (1972, pp.5-7) there is a suggestion of a rather limited research motivation and questionable use of language and points of reference, which suggest an already pre-existent way of thinking in approaching the study of those with 'power' and those considered as being without (Nader, 1972, p.7). Interestingly, the challenges that Nader identifies for 'studying up' (1972, cited in Priyadharshini, 2003, p.422) are, Priyadharshini argues, exacerbated by the anthropologist's anxiety regarding their professional identity in turn (2003, p.422). These observations have implications for this study due to the exchanges that inevitably take place between anthropological researcher and curator.

In Ortner's article '*Access: Reflections on studying up in Hollywood*' (2010) she discusses 'studying sideways' (2010, p.213) as an acknowledgement of experiencing 'more or less the same social space' (2010, p.224) and the consequences of points of connection between professionals (2010, pp.213

[1] For context, see philosopher Jacques Derrida's *De La Grammatologie* (1967).

and 224). In her view this 'also acknowledges our own elite status more fully' (2010, p.223). However, Ortner notes the implications of 'boundaries' and how in her words 'most of the construction of the inside/outside divide is at the level of materiality and space' (2020, p.214). Nevertheless, Ortner retains an overarchingly positive view of studying with professionals by stating, in support of Nader's view (1974, p.302, quoted in Ortner, 2010, p.221) that 'Nader's point is well taken: anthropologists seeking to do ethnography in relatively closed communities simply need to get more creative' (Ortner, 2010, p.221). This demonstrates how anthropologists acknowledge the challenges presented by a mirroring of professional concerns often negotiated at the level of claims of expertise. However, the value of anthropology in the study of professionals retains support within the discipline, demonstrating again the disciplinary contexts which support a study of this kind.

The study of professionals in anthropology is known to have many challenges. For example, anthropologist David Mosse in his article '*Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities**' (2006) articulates in detail some of the very serious challenges attached to navigating 'anthropological' research with 'professional communities' (2006, p.935). Mosse's 'account' of his research experiences and the obstacles that occurred, he re-frames as providing further insights into the workings of the professionals themselves (2006, p.942). For example, Mosse queries the extent by which professionals oversee and supervise how they are presented (2006, p.942). In addition, Mosse interrogates the 'emotive' response that the professionals he worked with had to his 'ethnography' and what that said about their expertise in turn (2006, p.942). By describing the consequences of 'writing' and 'relationships' from 'fieldwork' (2006, p.936) a question is raised by Mosse about the degree by which 'we' as anthropologists navigate 'the problem of access' whilst also being at risk of compromising the anthropological endeavour through 'membership of the communities we ended up studying' (2006, p.936). Mosse argues that a 'detachment' from those we are researching and engaging with is greater at the point of constructing ethnography (2006, p.937). Mosse also describes how connections between professionals often continue beyond the official periods of fieldwork (2006, p.937). What arises is both a necessary and pressing consideration of what Mosse describes as that which 'is not just ethical but epistemological' (2006, p.937). These types of observations provide a context for the modes of exchange that have inevitably formed part of this research with contemporary art curators.

There are many types of questions that have been raised about the implications of exchanges between the anthropologist and professional research participant that have informed the content of

this thesis. For instance, anthropologist Dominic Boyer notes the mirroring of 'expertise' between the 'anthropologist' and 'expert' which creates a questioning of the 'expertise' of each respectively (2008, pp.39-40). It is important to acknowledge what Boyer identifies, that 'to look at others' knowledges has invariably meant symmetrically turning anthropology inward on its own epistemic practices, forms, and relations' (2005, p.147) as a more democratic and open-minded exercise. It is therefore interesting to consider Boyer's perspectives within his article '*Thinking through the Anthropology of Experts*' (2008). Boyer initially makes note that what had been a more obscure focus within the discipline, 'experts and cultures of expertise' had evolved into becoming a central focus within anthropology (2008, p.38). Boyer, however, proffers a 'manifesto' (2008, pp.44-45) within which he attempts, not to critically undermine prior work within the discipline that focuses 'on experts and cultures of expertise', but rather, to build upon what he perceives as remaining unexplored or underdeveloped (2008, p.44).

The details of Boyer's 'manifesto' (2008, pp.44-45) includes firstly a recognition of the more expansive form 'expert lives' actually take, beyond delineated 'work practice', to consider professionals as being continuously within a 'process', to avoid fatalism and embrace a 'reflexive' approach to professional and disciplinary identities and knowledge, to ensure not to ignore or undervalue the emotive dimensions 'of rationality' and its role within 'expert knowledge-making', and finally, to be able to provide an insight into 'the expert' that in essence, appreciates what is altogether 'human' about them (2008, pp.44-45). Mosse similarly acknowledges that there is an instinct towards ordering but argues that this does not mean that there is order (2006, pp.937-938). Anthropologists such as Boyer (2008) demonstrate that rather than seeking to deconstruct assumptions about related professional discourses, 'ethnographic' accounts of professionals can illuminate the types of everyday 'practices' that are involved and the tensions that exist in the situated everyday lives of professionals (2008, p.39). For example, academic in history, theory, and architecture, Jennifer Mack highlights in reference 'to urban planners' how 'idealised' and unrealistic the interpretation of a profession can be and how anthropology can provide an alternative (2020, p.13).

Mack specifically notes that urban planners have their own 'official plans, documents, and histories' (2020, p.13) which 'the contemporary curator' also notably has (O'Neill, 2012, p.3). Mack argues that this allows for an obscuring of 'the complicated, emotional, cultural, social, and always human dimensions of their work' (2020, p.13). This is arguably a direct response to Boyer's 'manifesto' in terms of his overall argument that there needs to be a more expansive, responsive, and immersive

way of accounting for professional life (2008, pp.44-45). In addition, Mack highlights how 'ethnographic analyses' could produce insights which may even surprise those within the professional itself (2020, p.12). Consequently, this demonstrates how the impact of this thesis is both disciplinary but also has interest for the creative industries and for contemporary art curators themselves.

Finally, within the anthropology of professionals is also necessary to acknowledge which ethnographic approaches applied to the study of professional landscapes within anthropology have informed the approach of this thesis. Ethnographies of professionals have a variance in their overall focus and approach. Some ethnographies focus on specific professions which communicate a need for urgent attention due to the specific dimensions of a particular time-period. For example, Ho notes, in relation to her ethnography '*Liquidated. An Ethnography Of Wall Street*' (2009, a) that she perceived discrepancies evident in a particular time period in the US, initially acknowledging job losses contrasted with increasing 'stock prices of Wall Street investment' (2009, a, p.1) for example. These types of symptoms resulting from what she articulates as 'the sea change occurring in corporate America' led to Ho presenting her efforts in her words, 'to conduct fieldwork on Wall Street to investigate what role the stock market and investment banks played in these radical socioeconomic shifts' (2009, a, p.4).

Other ethnographies, however, focus on more delineated aspects of a profession. For example, anthropologist Anette Nyqvist focuses on producing anthropologically defined insights into the profession of 'the institutional investor' (2017, p.134) with the aim of foregrounding their perspectives in ways that shed light on the contradictory elements of the profession, or at least provide insight into changing emphasis' within the profession (2017, p.134). Nyqvist considers a specific kind of professional within the finance industry, with a particular professional focus (2017, p.136). Whilst I similarly seek to foreground the perspectives of professionals themselves, I depart from a delineated focus on a specific version or aspect of the curatorial profession. Instead, the ethnographic and anthropological approach of this thesis is informed by a statement made by anthropologist Thomas Yarrow which he refers to in his work relating to the architectural profession:

> 'In the face of the problems of a profession and the world as it is, there are indeterminacies, choices and possibilities – for buildings and worlds never entirely encompassed by any single systemic imperative' (2019, p.239).

As such, an anthropological engagement with expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators has revealed specific arenas of inquiry, only unveiled because of an anthropological approach. In Yarrow's study of an architectural practice, he acknowledges 'the everyday problems that architects face but also the opportunities that evolve there' (2019, p.240). That is why this research to produce ethnographic vignettes will contribute to understandings of what UK-based contemporary art curators are and what they do from their own perspective as they navigate complex and varied everyday professional conditions and contexts. I thus intend this thesis to provide a snapshot in time with the hope that it will eventually sit alongside many other such ethnographic endeavours with curators which aim to align with Yarrow's stated purpose of 'staying close to the moment' (2019, p.7). In terms of UK-based contemporary art curators, this thesis will explore how the profession is made and constructed within the situated, everyday practices of curatorial lives. This will include the tensions and contradictions that curators encounter in their everyday lives, and how the complexity of lives that are not reducible to their roles and responsibilities, but that they can offer a far more complex picture of expertise.

iv) Developments in the study of professionals

The theoretical and disciplinary discussions that surround the study of professionals within academic landscapes makes evident the varied perspectives on how professions and professionals should or could be studied. By providing a critical overview of how professionals have been considered, critiqued, analysed, and presented, it is possible to further highlight the unique offerings of an anthropological approach to the study of art curators and their expertise.

It is useful to draw upon the study of professions within the discipline of sociology to demonstrate a type of chronology in how professionals have been studied. In '*The System of Professions. An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*' (Abbott, 1988) sociologist Andrew Abbott claims that 'a common process of development, the idea of professionalization' (1988, p.1) has been prevalent within academic studies of professions. Abbott also usefully acknowledges the existences of a dominant discursive desire for an all-encompassing explanation for 'professional development' (1988, p.19). He argues that this has resulted in a chasm in the analysis of professionals and even more specifically, a lack of attention being given to the everyday contexts of professional life (1988, pp.1-2). Abbott chooses to focus his analytical efforts on the 'jurisdictional' aspects which widens the theoretical engagement with 'professions' (1988, p.2). The impact of this is arguably visible in '*Professionalism. The Third Logic*' (Freidson, 2001) in which sociologist Eliot Freidson argues that

work is constructed 'socially' with his interest residing in 'who or what controls it' (2001, p.59). Friedson also emphasises in '*Professional Powers. A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge*' (1986) the unfixed nature of 'the word *profession*' (1986, p.26). Friedson makes the additional point that the restrictiveness of enquiries into the subject of professions within the discipline of sociology has less to do with 'the content' but rather the style of interrogation itself which influences this, namely being primarily restricted to the 'metatheoretical' (1986, p.29). These types of arguments lay the groundwork for alternative approaches to the study of professionals and expertise, such as ethnographic studies of professionals in anthropology.

This supports a desire for an even more specific approach to the study of professionals, building on observations by those such as sociologist John Law in his text '*Organizing Modernity*' (1994). Law's three-part recognition (1994, pp.1-2) that 1) 'perhaps there is order*ing*, but there is certainly no order' (1994, p.1); 2) and that there is a 'plural and incomplete processes of social ordering' (1994, p.2); and, 3) that 'the social is *materially heterogenous*' (1994, p.2) are important observations about professions which also provide discursive foundations for alternative forms of study of professionals. By using an anthropological approach this thesis is arguably well-placed to respond to Law's view that we should move away from 'certainties' and acknowledge the 'decentered, distributed, but rigorous ways of knowing and being. Ways of knowing and being appropriate to a world that wants to live at peace with the knowledge of its incompleteness' (1994, p.195). Law (1994) takes a different approach to Abbott who focuses more on the structural components of professions (1988). Law's approach is key to this thesis as it is not aimed at the structuring of the curatorial profession.

In addition, the nature of the curatorial profession itself has influenced the way that this thesis engages with professional discourse. For example, art curators align with philosopher Donald Schon's description of those who are 'more inclined toward and adept at reflection-in-action' as opposed to those that are not, yet they experience a degree of anxiety residing in relaying their expertise and its contents (1983, p.69). In his work '*The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*' (1983) Schon focuses on 'reflection-in-action' as that which becomes identifiably part of expertise, thus validating professions (1983, p.69). To some extent this resonates with Freidson's argument that 'variation in the substance or content of knowledge and skill that affects the conditions of practice is an important contingency of the process by which the ideal-typical position of professionalism can be gained and maintained' (2001, p.153). Thus, both Schon (1983) and Freidson (2001) appear to suggest that the navigation of complexity within professions is the very thing that can keep professions alive. This thesis is not focused on trying to provide an insight

into any curatorial norm. Rather, the focus of this work is to emphasise the complexity of the lived experience of curators. Relatedly, Schon notes the complexity of presentations of professional life as he states that in 'everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way' which includes the particularities it incurs, the possibility for a dissolved status of pre-determined identities and its associations, alongside the need to recognise the 'knowing' that 'action' creates (1983, p.49). This provides a grounding for this study in terms of acknowledge the precarity of professional life and expertise, and what curators themselves seek to construct.

An ethnographic investigation of professionals is well-placed to respond to this call for nuanced considerations of the everyday lives of professionals and it remains a perspective on contemporary art curators that remains severely unattended to. These aforementioned approaches do not engage with the lived experience of the professionals themselves through the lens of the everyday, ethnographically, which is where anthropology makes a significant contribution to the study of professionals.

v) What constitutes curatorial literature?

In the context of this thesis, curatorial literature is approached ethnographically. This is opposed to critical engagements, as the literature exists instead as an extension of the field. The various ideas and perspectives that are communicated within curatorial literature act as an indicator of the professional culture of curation. There are significant theoretical and industry-orientated discourses which have created dominant conversations which surround the curatorial profession. Curatorial literature includes a range of works from various disciplines and non-academic contexts which focus upon both industry and the profession itself. There is also a significant analytical gap between these curatorial literatures which speaks to the potential of this thesis in terms of specific anthropological approaches taken in this study of curation.

Yet despite the gap in curatorial literature and the lack of ethnographic anthropological studies of contemporary art curators, it is nevertheless typified by a wide range of texts. The breadth of the category (curatorial literature) includes the provision of historical context for the development of curators and curation, instructive guides aimed at the profession, contributions from curatorial professionals themselves, thematically focused literature about curation/curators, consumable narratives pertaining to curation, theoretical contributions, and disciplinary exchanges. Curatorial literature is not limited to these categorisations, but rather includes contributions of this kind. For

instance, art writer, artist and curator Paul O'Neill attempts a historical chronology for curatorial development by recognising the contexts which have led to what we have come to see as 'contemporary' curation (2012, p.3). O'Neill claims the existence of 'curatorship's emergence as a distinct mode of discourse' (2012, p.2) before articulating his own theoretical efforts as being focused upon a particular time period, specifically 'texts from 1987 to 2011' (2012, p.3). Curatorial literature that focuses upon the historical development of the contemporary art curator to contextualise the influences that led to what we might recognise as a contemporary art curator today. These influences have however been widely discussed and variously attributed. For example, art writer David Balzer claims that the profession has a widely associated history (2015, pp.23-90). However, O'Neill describes 'curatorial knowledge with relatively unstable historical foundations' (2012, p.7). This is an important element in terms of recognising some of the confusion and even anxiety present within some of the narratives of curators within this thesis. Yet whether curatorial contexts of this nature are presented with confidence or conversely with anxiety, it is important to note the role that historical curatorial discourse must play in forming the perspectives of the curators themselves and whether they are variously embraced or rejected on a wider scale. As such, historical context is required to fully comprehend the way in which the curatorial contributions in this thesis might be seen to reflect or be distant from any dominant narratives.

Instructive guides provide another type of textual contribution that would be considered part of curatorial literature. This includes publications such as Adrian George's '*The Curator's Handbook*' which clearly navigates the practical tasks and activities associated with the profession and offering guidance without any theoretical aspirations (2015). These types of publications are often dedicated to advising the curator or directed towards those desiring to become a curator (Kuoni, 2001, a; George, 2015). Therefore, it is possible to mistake the confidence by which the curatorial narrative is often presented as being part of a universally agreed set of developments in history, education, and evolving ideologies. These types of instructive manuals provide an interesting barometer for attempts to streamline impressions of the curatorial profession. In terms of this thesis, these approaches assist in the contextualisation of the everyday lives of curators. This thesis makes it evident that curatorial lives variously deviate, contradict, and adhere to various types of prescriptive professional descriptions.

Curatorial literature also includes significant contributions from curators themselves. For example, the text '*Words of Wisdom. A Curators Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*' (Kuoni, 2001, a) acts as an assemblage of 'diverse' contributions (Kuoni, 2001, b, p.15) with the over-arching purpose of

bringing together the perspectives of 'sixty curators' (2001, b, p.17) to act as a 'handbook' with all the connotations of a 'vade mecum' albeit as Kuoni states, without 'rules' and with particular views on the role of 'exhibition' (2001, b, p.11). The narratives of curators themselves through publications that they themselves produce, often provide very detailed break downs of specific projects and work to which they relate. It is useful in so far as it also demonstrates the pursuit of individual narratives that seek to claim a curatorial voice, as well as the detailed projects with which they occupy their time. Yet, these are highly managed publications which do not reveal the everyday scope of what it is curators do, further demonstrating the need for ethnographic research of this kind.

However, given the existence of instructive manuals, Kuoni conveys the view that the collated contents of the perspectives of several curators in their book, act to negate the possibility of a 'handbook' due to the distancing from any corresponding 'professional standards', the tension of which Kuoni suggests is an inherent feature of the publication (2001, b, p.11). As such, the aim was to create a publication with more measured and arguably accurate aspirations with the proposal of creating 'not a chronology or a set of guidelines but inspiration to students and other professionals in the field' (2001, b, p.12). This perspective arguably demonstrates an awareness of the style of publications that exist to streamline the professional knowledge of curators, as it responds to this in kind. Instead Kuoni (2001) demonstrates the breadth of argument and approach within the profession. This demonstrates a desire, also from within curatorial literature, to deviate from any pursuit of conformity and clarity and to instead foreground detailed and disparate discursive contributions. It is vital to understand the breadth of approach within curatorial literature as it helps to contextualise the various tensions and complexities that are reflected in the everyday narratives of curators within this thesis.

As already acknowledged, there is a large collection of publications written from the perspective of curators themselves which also extends to collated interviews, analysis (Obrist, 2011), and publications or interviews focused on their perspectives as curators (Obrist, 2014; Obrist, 2018). The edited book '*The New Curator*' (Hoare *et al*. 2016) is described by art writer Coline Milliard, and builds upon the context of curatorial publications focusing on 'the curators' own words' by the inclusion of 'twenty-six interviews by curators' (2016, p.7). Yet Milliard claims to take the consideration of curation a step further by considering contextual 'material' that accompanies these 'first-person narratives' (2016, p.7). In some way this could be a response to criticism levied at curators by those such as art historian Terry Smith, who states that:

> 'For a profession driven by the desire to communicate with art's publics, its enabling dialogue is surprisingly inner-directed. Why is the substance of curatorial thinking so rarely articulated?' (2012, p.7).

However, literature written by curators themselves does not uniformly exist as authoritative statements and can also provide critical insights into the profession. Milliard for example, notes that the selection of contributions for the aforementioned publication were 'chosen' by a 'panel', not for the purpose of developing consensus but instead to recognise the curatorial as being within a 'multifarious field' and to foreground those who have 'particular significance in the current order of things' (2016, p.8). Such a publication (Hoare *et al*. 2016) demonstrates how over-arching narratives can be created, but also how these are not the only discursive options (Milliard, 2016, p.8). This demonstrates the value of making critical evaluations of the subjective way in which these selections are made. Even so, no matter how critical and disparate the textual contributions of curators might be, they are undoubtedly influenced by the generational and temporal landscapes in which they are situated. For instance, at the time of publication in 2016 Milliard identified these focuses to include how 'curating is envisaged as a force pointing towards a new, radical institution; as escaping the constructed space of the white cube; as challenging the prevalent biennial model; and as an agent for change, transcending boundaries, artistic and otherwise' (2016, p.8). It is therefore vital to acknowledge that the perspectives of curators within this thesis are never separable from the time in which they were situated and the dominant discussions that were present at that moment.

Another type of curatorial literature focuses upon thematic efforts which draw attention to specific aspects of the profession. An example of this is demonstrated by publications such as museum director Maura Reilly's '*Curatorial Activism. Towards An Ethics Of Curating*' (2018) in which her focus is placed upon 'group exhibitions that embody the various strategies associated with curatorial activism' (2018, p.15). Using 'landmark exhibitions' she puts forward examples which lead the way and contribute to what she calls for, 'a more inclusive (vs. exclusive) selection of artists' (2018, p.15). The analytical approach entails the communication of 'key images', 'theme and curatorial aim', as well as 'critical reception' (2018, p.15). This type of literature demonstrates how certain textual contributions within curatorial discourse focus on particular issues and frame the profession based on specific themes. Moreover, this type of publication demonstrates the often politically charged nature of the profession. For example, Reilly's publication (2018) is a call to arms (2018, pp.224-225) with the intention to create 'change' and as Reilly states 'a just art world' that takes on 'inequalities of gender, race, and sexuality' (2018, p.225). Reilly cements the curatorial in undeniable association

with and implication in, issues of social justice (2018). This demonstrates how the parameters of a curator's expertise should be explored more expansively (Boyer, 2008, p.45) with regards to the social and political concerns of the day.

The social and political landscape in the UK also includes discussions about the role of professionals and the validity of expert knowledge. Relatedly, discussions about professional curatorial identity are present within curatorial literature. For example, Balzer notes in his text '*Curationism. How Curating Took Over The Art World and Everything Else*' (2015) that there has been a 'proliferation of curators' (2015, p.38). Yet he ventures further by acknowledging the complexity inherent in the profession by using the term '*curationism*' as he states: 'Curationism is, then, the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being' (2015, p.2). Balzer also suggests that curation is more widely connected to how we as a society are trying currently to make sense of knowledge, 'experts' and 'identities' (2015, p.3). This is a judgement that demonstrates the way in which curation can be a springboard from which to make wider claims about the nature of expertise. Balzer does attempt to provide context for the development of curation historically and to look at how it exists within his argued 'hyper-professionalization' (2015, p.3). The concern dominating Balzer's discursive efforts, culminates in a consideration of the professions' 'proliferation' (2015, p.38) and whether there is a sense of impending doom (2015, p.5). This demonstrates how there is a preoccupation with identifying the way that the curatorial profession will develop. This is an aspect that curators themselves would be aware within this thesis because of the undeniable expansion of the scope of the profession.

By connecting the landscape of curation and the process of meaning-making to what is inherently 'human', Balzer seems concerned with the degree by which curation has garnered attention and how this may shift, he does eventually suggest that it won't result in the disappearance of the curatorial profession (2015, p.5). Balzer attempts to produce a diagnosis (2015, p.6) like a doctor of a curatorial patient who everyone wants to know about and understand. These are ambitious aims reflected in Balzer's statement: 'Dear reader, the biography of the curator, the curated, the curatorial and curation – a story for our times' (2015, p.6). This illustrates how origin myths about the curatorial profession are arguably created. That said, it is pertinent to be aware of the presence of discourses within curatorial literature that evaluate the very existence of the profession itself.

I would suggest however that authoritative statements debating the existence of professional curators can arguably be refuted or critically considered in the context of this thesis as they do not

reflect the complex everyday lives of contemporary art curators that this ethnography foregrounds. The diversity of curatorial roles is also very subjective and their impacts impossible to measure. Many examples of curatorial literature attempt to claim a definition for profession that cannot be defined. These types of statements are arguably written in a way directed towards curators to guide them into some normative sense of the profession or indeed by curators who seek to assert their perspectives from within the profession. For example, Balzer demonstrates the desire to create a normative sense of the profession, due to questions about the viability of 'curators' as a profession with an ever-increasing abundance of types, attention, and narration, and whether this is sustainable (2015, p.10). This thesis importantly does not share nor subscribe to this concern or approach, demonstrating how some curatorial literatures run counter to the understanding and value this thesis sees in the complexity of curatorial life.

Some textual contributions within curatorial literature venture even more fixed definitions but the confidence by which these are made deny the diverse reality of professional life. For example, writer and publisher Michael Bhaskar in his book '*Curation. The Power Of Selection In A World Of Excess*' (2016) ventures a definition for the activities the professional curator would arguably occupy themselves with, by stating:

> 'Curation: *using acts of selection and arrangement (but also refining, reducing, displaying, simplifying, presenting, and explaining) to add value*' (2016, no page number); which acts as a convenient premise for contextualising 'curation' in society in general (2016, p.5).

Bhaskar is attempting to protect ''curation'' from misuse however he is arguably not protecting the profession but rather its usage as a concept and resultant approaches (2016, p.6). In Bhaskhar's words 'curation is misunderstood because it's rarely looked at in its full context' which he assigns to an association with overt and intense degrees of consumption (2016, p.6). However, Bhaskhar views any 'complexity' as something to be remedied (2016, p.7) and furthermore, that 'curation' and 'excess' are uniform in character, wherein he makes the claim that: 'If value, pecuniary or otherwise, used to be about primary production, now, in a world no longer dominated by scarcity, it has shifted' (2016, p.7) exposing a very delineated world view. Again, this demonstrates the existence of curatorial literatures which run counter to the focus of this thesis with a focus on the diversity of everyday curatorial lives and the complexity therein. However, curators themselves would be aware of these forms of discourse existing as a backdrop to their profession.

Consequently, this thesis subscribes to the view of art historian Terry Smith, who acknowledges in his text '*Thinking Contemporary Curating*' (2012) when attempting to formulate his advice for future curatorial approaches (2012, p.256), that directives issued towards contemporary curators as a homogenous group are flawed as they negate the disparity of experiences, resources and privilege encountered by curators in various parts of the globe (2012, p.257). In contrast with Bhaskhar (2016) and as an art history authority, Terry Smith identifies what he perceives to be a gap in what he terms 'curatorial thought', typified by a lack of attention to how '*contemporary* curatorial thought' might be conceived (2012, p.17). In this sense Smith argues for further reflection on a curator's role in responding to the demands and transformations of 'contemporary life' (2012, p.55) and what this would include (2012, p.25 and p.256). Therefore, Smith proposes a directive that is as follows:

> 'Exhibit art's work. Renounce reticence. Curate reflexively. Build research capacity. Articulate curatorial thinking. Archive the achievements. Reinvent exhibition formats. Turn the exhibitionary complex. Proliferate alternative exhibitionary venues. Activate infrastructure. Embrace spectatorship. Curate contemporaneity in art and society –past, present, and to come – critically' (2012, p.256).

This statement demonstrates a more holistic sense of curatorial identity and purpose by emphasising tangible and non-tangible skills. There is a connection with philosopher Jean-Paul Martinon in terms of acknowledging the existence of more holistic perspectives as Martinon draws specific focus to the complexity of the profession using a philosophical approach and by contributing to an overview based upon the assertion that there is nothing to be 'fixed' about the 'curatorial' (2015, a, p.4). In an alluring descriptive style Martinon states:

> 'The curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one's own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, a conspiracy against policies, the act of keeping a question alive, the energy of retaining a sense of fun, the device that helps to revisit history, the measures to create affects, the work of revealing ghosts, a plan to remain out-of-joint with time, an evolving method of keeping bodies and objects together, a sharing of understanding, an invitation for reflexivity, a choreographic mode of operation, a way of fighting against corporate culture, etc' (2015, a, p.4).

Martinon describes a reality of professional expertise predicated on diverse potentialities (2015, a, p.4). A curator may identify with some, all, or none of these descriptors, but it is necessary to acknowledge a profession in a consistently evolving state. The existence of these types of contributions within curatorial discourse, I would argue provide a good foundation for the increasing scope of the connection between curation and anthropology which has begun to be explored even further. For example, in the edited text titled '*The Anthropologist As Curator*' (Sansi, 2020, a), Sansi ultimately recognises the diverse approaches to the study of the ''curator'', fuelled from his perspective, by a sensitive articulation of how in his words 'the curator is in the same puzzle as the contemporary artist, whose practice is always something more and something other than art' (2020, b, p.6). However, Sansi looks to 'the figure of the curator' for answers to anthropological identity and parameters (2020, b, p.13) rather than the mutual complexity of the professional identity of curators and anthropologists and to furthermore use this as a basis to ask and formulate questions. This demonstrates how there are discourses within curatorial literature which also support and emphasise the need for diverse, detailed, and elongated engagements with curatorial life. Again, if we treat these literatures ethnographically, we can see how curators would also be aware of curatorial literature that promotes an awareness of their professional variance, complexity, and contradictory nature.

Ultimately, these curatorial literatures do not provide the whole picture. They exist as specific representations of curators made by specific individuals, and they exist as examples of the array of different understandings of curation. The curatorial literature drawn upon within this thesis is broad, and not only provides a context for the profession, but it also demonstrates a significant blind spot within the literature relating to the anthropological and ethnographic study of the profession. Curatorial literature is for the large part dominated by explanations and justifications, with many generalisations and competing views regarding the profession's origins that create friction as they try to define a profession. This literature is largely directed by curators or created for curators. Therefore, in recognition of these competing forces and attempts to demarcate a profession the curatorial literature to which I do refer will be for the purpose of identifying the relevant professional contexts and key arguments relating to the profession's development and purpose that speak to the fractious and competing nature of the available literature. In addition, curatorial literature will be used to provide ethnographic context as the literature signifies the types of discussions through which curators themselves may communicate and articulate their own practice.

Overall, this thesis seeks to step beyond these curatorial literatures by subscribing to the approach taken by anthropologist Keith M. Murphy in his anthropological engagement with designers, wherein he seeks to describe 'form giving in action' with an acknowledgement of how 'a designer's skill is performed, calibrated, evaluated, and controlled' (2015, p.27). Curatorial literature severely lacks these types of insights, and the profession is therefore in need of further consideration. Therefore, curatorial literature, if treated ethnographically, offers specific, situated, and partial insights into the social practices of curators.

vi) History of art as context

Finally, the significance of history of art as a discipline for the purpose of assisting with the contextualisation of the everyday lives of contemporary art curators became increasingly evident. Art historian Christopher Wood considers the emergence of the discipline with a historically dense analysis, from 'philosophical' associations and the development of the discipline as a recognised educational field (2019, p.45). Within the discipline debates have emerged including the establishment of a contemporary art history. This has ramifications for how UK-based contemporary art curators would frame their work and their role historically. For example, Smith acknowledges the 'temporal' complexity of 'contemporary art' but he is assured of its status and role in art history as a discipline (2019, p.2). This type of view has ramifications for how curators would treat contemporary art. Another example '*Contemporary Art. 1989 to the Present*' (Dumbadze and Hudson, 2013, a) includes Dumbadze and Hudson's argument for an 'investigative, even speculative' approach to a contemporary art history opposed to a fixed view of a contemporary art 'history' despite their analytical commitment to a certain period of time ('since 1989') (2013, b, p.1). These types of disciplinary discussions represent is how the history of contemporary art itself is being consistently interpreted and renegotiates and that contemporary art 'curators' are surrounded by and participate in these debates (Smith, 2019, pp.1-2).

Secondly, the challenges that are now associated with art history as a discipline have also arguably brought art history and anthropology in even greater dialogue. This is certainly true if we are to consider Derek Allan's paper which he delivered at the Australian National University (2022, pp.1-15). Allan noted that what constitutes 'art' has been liberally applied and that there is still a lack of recognition that those within various cultures across the world do not necessarily create within an 'art' framework, yet still large portions of art historians continue to treat it as so (2022, p.14). As such, the dominance of euro-centric perspectives within art history is still arguably entrenched as

Allan highlights in his acknowledgement of the ignorance present within discussions of what constitutes art and how it applies to cultures in other parts of the world (2022, p.14). Ultimately, Allan states:

> 'The "history" in the history of art, in short, seems a decidedly superficial affair; and the "philosophy" in the philosophy of art appears equally determined to gloss over anything that challenges the traditional Enlightenment belief that art is a universal category, common to all cultures, past and present' (2022, p.14).

That said, whilst these arguments are vitally important and necessary as context for a discipline and the challenges it needs to turn its attention to, this thesis instead uses the discipline of art history for the most part within a non-analytical frame. Other than literature within the discipline of art history pertaining to curators specifically, all other art historical literature within this thesis are referred to in a way that does not approach it analytically. Rather, this thesis will draw upon art historical literature outside of that which refers specifically to the curatorial profession in order to provide professional context and to supplement the anthropological nature of this research. By exploring art historical literature with an ethnographic lens it is also an avenue which can reveal how contemporary art curators come to create their authority and professional identity and what role history of art had to play within it.

A Theoretical Framework for the Anthropological Study of UK-based Contemporary Art Curators

An anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curator's expertise requires a recognition of the gap within an anthropology of professionals and curatorial discourse. There is undoubtedly an absence of ethnographic accounts of the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators. Indeed, there is a relative absence of ethnographic accounts of everyday curatorial lives in general. To fully comprehend the methodological, professional, and disciplinary promise of this endeavour it is also pertinent to acknowledge both recent and prior developments in the study of professionals within anthropology and in wider disciplines. Furthermore, in terms of contextualising the actual lives of UK-based contemporary art curators it is necessary to draw upon curatorial literature to consider the professional landscape within which they are embedded and to assist in illuminating the contradictions that are present within their daily lives as they seek to claim and maintain their expertise. Similarly, art historical contexts are selectively drawn upon in ways that seek to

contextualise rather than analyse. It is this specific theoretical framework within which this thesis should be understood and embedded.

Chapter Content and Structure

The various chapters within this thesis trace professional narratives, institutional constructs and notions of value and connection within the everyday lives of UK-based contemporary art curators. This research attempts to remedy what is missing from existent narratives relating to the profession itself and to the study of professionals within anthropology. The three primary sections (Curatorial Contexts, The Contemporary Art Curator In The UK And The Art Space, and Networking Expertise) will bring to the foreground the day-to-day work and narratives of contemporary art curators in the UK in ways that shed light on what would otherwise remain in the shadows.

The first section 'CURATORIAL CONTEXTS' consists of two chapters which both respond to the question of whether UK-based contemporary art curators see themselves as experts and if so, what this might entail. The first, 'The Quest for Expertise' asks the following: How is the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators being performed through the biographies they tell? This chapter engages with first-hand accounts of a variety of curators in the UK who describe in detailed terms their own professional development and their perspectives on the necessary educational and professional requirements as they see it. This chapter explores the contradictory nature of the profession as there is an instinct among contemporary art curators in the UK to engage in predictable and recognisable curatorial discourses and yet also to appear outside of any conventional educational or professional progression. The performativity of their biographical reflections revealed becomes the central offering of this chapter. 'Chapter Two – Navigating Curatorial Identities' relatedly poses the question: How do UK-based contemporary art curators navigate curatorial identity to claim their expertise? This chapter is an inquiry into how contemporary art curators in the UK perceive and construct curatorial identity within their claims of expertise. This chapter demonstrates that such dominant narratives and professional reference points cannot be taken for granted. Instead, the narratives presented by art curators comes to represent the impossibility of ascertaining a fixed contemporary art curatorial identity with ramifications for perceptions of curatorial expertise.

The next section 'THE CONTEMPORARY ART CURATOR IN THE UK AND THE ART SPACE' consists of two chapters which are focused upon questioning how the expertise of UK-based contemporary art

curators reveals itself in relation to the art space. These chapters focus on ethnographic vignettes based on fieldwork at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. 'Chapter Three - Between the Individual and the Institution' focuses upon the complexity presented by questioning what is curatorial in the construction of the art space as presented by curators in their everyday lives. As such, the overall question of this chapter is: What do curators consider to be curatorial when working within an institutional context? This chapter will consider the impact of leadership in the first instance, the role of the wider team as they attempt to navigate their own identities, and the implied and variously understood hierarchies at play. This is followed by a summary regarding the iterative nature of curatorial and institutional identity as presented by curators within their claims of expertise. This is followed by 'Chapter Four - Curatorial Activity in the Art Space' which poses the question: What do the activities undertaken by contemporary art curators within the art space reveal about their claims of expertise? The chapter interrogates the process of receiving artwork, undertaking condition reports, and the placing and creation of artwork and the art space. By focusing on the more discreet practical knowledge of curators, this chapter will reflect on the complex, extensive, yet often-indeterminable nature of curatorial activity and its ramifications for curatorial expertise.

The following section titled 'NETWORKING EXPERTISE' consists of 'Chapter Five - Knowledge Networks.' This chapter importantly emphasises another key aspect of the expertise of contemporary art curators in the UK by considering the question: How do UK-based contemporary art curators, through knowledge networks, create and frame their expertise? This section focuses primarily on Encounter Contemporary and founder, curator and director Alexander Caspari who operates within the private art sector in the UK. This chapter also includes wider observations from UK-based contemporary art curators from within the field. The way that curators form and maintain knowledge networks as a part of their claims of curatorial expertise forms the focus of this chapter. Consequently, there will be a consideration of the role of professional networks, the influence of location and space, dress codes, industry knowledge, textual resources, and notions of an art world calendar. The chapter summarises with a questioning of the interests which propel curators to engage with various forms of knowledge networks for the purpose of establishing and maintaining their expertise. Consequently, there is an over-arching acknowledgement of the curatorial ability to ascertain value within their everyday lives in ways that reflect their expertise.

'Thesis Conclusion - Fielding the Professional' reflects upon the significance of an ethnographic and anthropological study of the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators. There is an

acknowledgement in this conclusion of the unique and timely nature of a study of this kind, as it helps to illuminate the variety that exists in the way that we receive and analyse professional expertise. The conclusive section of this thesis considers how an anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curators allows us to sit with professional diversity by situating curatorial claims of expertise within the context of their everyday lives. What emerges from a study of this kind is a consideration of curatorial propositions relating to their own expertise, the potentially destructive qualities of the curatorial profession, the role of curatorial ethics within claims of curatorial expertise, the purpose of this anthropological consideration of curatorial expertise, and ways ahead for the curatorial profession. This thesis goes beyond over-arching narratives and illuminates the scope of the profession beyond existing parameters. There is also an argument to say that the unique and timely nature of a study of this kind helps to illuminate the variety that exists in the way that we receive professional expertise.

This thesis uncovers expertise as communicated and claimed by art curators themselves in a way that is grounded within their detailed and complex daily lives, including aspects of their expertise which have often been obscured or hidden from view. This conclusion will also acknowledge that in the context of the contemporary world there are political, technological, and moral imperatives for foregrounding professional expertise in ways that reveal the complex and unpolished lives of professionals, the variety, struggles, success, and contradictions. This type of research therefore has impacts, across professions and disciplines. The discipline of anthropology with the particularities of its methodologies and approach is well-placed to answer this call, to both the critique of, and the necessity for, expertise. Overall, this thesis will conclude with an acknowledgement of the type of innovative understandings that have emerged regarding UK-based contemporary art curator's expertise. Curatorial expertise as communicated by curators themselves, emerges from the ethnographic vignettes and narratives that form the anthropological approach of this thesis.

CURATORIAL CONTEXTS

This section consists of two chapters: 'Chapter One The Quest For Expertise' and 'Chapter Two Navigating Curatorial Identity'. These two chapters will consider how contemporary art curators in the UK attempt to claim and establish their professional expertise through their biographical reflections. These chapters collectively provide a grounding in curatorial context based on curatorial history, education and professional experiences, use of terminology, associated identities, and purpose. These aspects are couched within the lived experience of contemporary art curators in the UK as they presented them within the field.

Chapter One poses the question: How is the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators being performed through the biographies they tell? Chapter One explores how contemporary art curators in the UK use their various educational and professional experiences and contexts to claim their expertise. This chapter argues that there is a performativity to curatorial claims of expertise, where curators communicate various contexts and discourses that should be viewed as consistently evolving. The professional authority as communicated by UK-based contemporary art curators pertains (but is not limited to) their educational and professional experiences, as the actual performance of their biographies are an expression of their expertise.

Chapter Two builds upon the previous chapter by again interrogating how contemporary art curators in the UK seek to claim their expertise. However, this chapter will instead consider how curators variously articulate their own perceptions of curatorial identity within their claims of expertise. Chapter Two asks the deceptively concise question: How do UK-based contemporary art curators navigate curatorial identity to claim their expertise? This chapter aims to firstly investigate how curators variously construct and relate to notions of curatorial terminology and associated curatorial identities. How curators communicate and engage with the concept of curatorial identity will then be explored through several themes that emerged from the field. These themes also include examples of caution exhibited by curators in the field, the role of certainty relating to curatorial identity within their claims of expertise, as well as the process of meaning-making and the assessment of their own professional influence. There is also a consideration of the comparative approach employed by some curators in the field as they contrast various perceptions of curatorial identity, and finally, the way that their own curatorial visions direct their engagement with their own perceptions and constructions of curatorial identity and those curatorial identities constructed within the wider discursive professional landscapes.

Both chapters demonstrate the significant challenges and complexity that contemporary art curators in the UK experience, as they pursue, navigate, and construct their professional knowledge, practice, and identity. The focus of both chapters is to establish the performative nature of curatorial expertise as revealed by curators themselves through their biographical and contextually framed reflection that shape their claims of expertise.

Chapter One
The Quest for Expertise

Professor Beryl Graham (new media curator and academic) ventured a tentative response to the resonances existing between curators and other types of professionals. "I do find that the educational side really helps because it is about communicating really complicated ideas to other people. To do that you need to know those ideas really well yourself." Beryl captured the way that curatorial claims of expertise appear as both tangible and yet conversely elusive. The performative nature of the biographical reflections that emerged from the field that were made on behalf of UK-based contemporary art curators relates to the over-arching question: How is the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators being performed through the biographies they tell?

This chapter will demonstrate how art curators use biographical narratives to construct their curatorial self and consequently their expertise. The specific issues that this chapter will explore include the effect of curatorial discourses and professional accreditations and attempts to establish professional norms. This chapter will then consider the themes that emerged from within the performative biographical narratives in the construction of the curatorial self. Specifically, this chapter will refer to the themes of creativity, perceptions of curatorial generations (divisions), institutional experience, and the influence of genres of art on constructions of the curatorial self. This chapter will then summarise with an emphasis on the significance of biographical narratives and how the performance of these narratives both support and contest the expertise and authority of individual curators.

Biographical narratives and performativity

The processes through which UK-based contemporary art curators can be seen to claim and navigate their curatorial identity, knowledge, and practice, forms part of a wider acknowledgement of how curators perform their expertise and how they claim the authority that is synonymous with expertise. How do contemporary art curators outline and approach educational and professional experiences for the purpose of claiming and indicating the presence of their expertise? And how do curators account for the instinctual facets of their profession that they feel cannot be taught or codified?

The notion of ‘performance’ is outlined by sociologist Erving Goffman who communicates his definition by stating:

> ‘I [use] the term “performance” to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (1959, p.120).

UK-based contemporary art curators appeared before me, discussing their life histories and reflecting upon their profession. Goffman argues that it is worth acknowledging the concept of ‘the self’ with the view that ‘it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited’ (1959, p.124). This ‘performance’ can be prepared for to a degree (1959, p.125) yet Goffman emphasised that ‘we all act better than we know how’ (1959, p.123).

The effect of normative structures and discourse

Anthropologist Carol Greenhouse discusses the concept of ‘norms’ (1982, p.61) which, when applied to accounts of professional development allow us to properly concede that any presentation of professional development must be considered ‘as a normative order that inheres in the play of sociocultural knowledge’ (1982, p.71). Greenhouse argues that ‘norms’ (1982, p.61) are the following:

> ‘(1) they are privately held, and (2) are unlikely to be unanimously known. They derive their systematic nature from shared social experience, not from promulgation by an authority. (3) They do not imply accountability. (4) Norms may be contradictory, and, indeed, must be applied consciously and selectively. (5) Any individual’s normative knowledge is inevitably incomplete, but some rosters are more adequate than others’ (1982, p.61).

Curators within the field were arguably mindful of what academic, curator and art writer Judith Winter refers to as ‘the professionalization of curating’ in reference to the development of the profession (2020, p.115). This relates to the questioning of a burgeoning focus on professionalisation which Winter argues is present ‘among academics and arts professionals’ (2020, p.116). For some ‘the professionalism of curating’ is connected to the emergence of ‘curating courses’ which have only continued to increase (Rugg, 2007, p.9 and Hylton, 2007, p.114). An alternative argument refers

to the emergence of 'the "professional curator"' specifically in relation to a particular type of curator (the 'freelance curator') and their pivotal role in 'the art world' (O'Neil, 2012, cited by Amundsen and Mørland, 2015, b, p.19) at the very least becoming what art historian Terry Smith asserts as 'a professional subfield under the title "independent curator"' (2012, p.18). This demonstrates the way that the profession is subject to forms of categorisation.

Relatedly, art writer, artist and curator Paul O'Neill refers to the development of an associated 'contemporary curatorial discourse' (2012, p.9) yet he argues that this has created the ideal conditions to allow for 'the formation of a culture of curating that continues to determine and reinvent itself' (2012, p.7). However, despite curatorial diversity and complexity, there is still a plethora of writing within curatorial discourse which seeks to produce forms of normative professional trajectories. This arguably includes texts such as 'The Curator's Handbook: Museums, Commercial Galleries, Independent Spaces' by Adrian George (2015), 'Commissioning Contemporary Art: A Handbook for Curators, Collectors and Artists' (Buck and McClean, 2013) and 'Ways of Curating' (Obrist, 2014) among others, which demonstrate the appetite from within a large portion of the creative sector and beyond for a consumable narrative, for instance, a how-to guide to curating. There was a discernible thirst for a key to unlock the secrets of how to develop professionally in a way that would allow someone to become a curator. For example, curator Adrian George's intended audience for his 'guide' are those interested in 'curatorial practice' (2015, p.26). However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the profession is saturated with 'contradictions' (Kuoni, 2001, b, p.17) which arguably renders any attempts to systematise and generalise about professional norms non-representative of curatorial life and their constantly evolving everyday claims of expertise.

On an infrastructural level there is an abundance of higher education curating courses (George, 2015, p.20) which arguably creates the illusion of a normative educational path for those who desire to become art curators. Yet expectations regarding educational and professional accreditation and experiences that shape contemporary art curation suffer from a top layer of normative associations. For example, curatorial education is often connected to 'art history' (Obrist, 2014, p.17; George, 2015, p.19; Winter, 2020, p.115) and it is assumed that curatorial education takes place at higher education level (George, 2015, p.18). The instinct for ascertaining structure and certainty in professional identity relates to observations by sociologist John Law when he states:

> 'In one way or another, we are attached to the idea that if our lives, our organizations, our social theories or our societies, were 'properly ordered' then all would be well. And we take it that such ordering is possible, at least some of the time. So, when we encounter complexity we tend to treat it as distraction. We treat it as a sign of the limits of order. Or we think of it as evidence of failure' (1994, pp.4-5).

Therefore, we necessarily need to acknowledge the actual complexity that surrounds any sense of a wider consensus, as it does not reflect the actual lived experiences of contemporary art curators.

Themes performed within the biographical narratives of art curators

Among the biographical narratives performed by specific curators, several themes emerged from narration of educational and professional experiences within the various constructions of the curatorial self. Firstly, claims of expertise included considerations of the role of creativity. Secondly, curators in the field noted the influence of institutional experiences and various publics by considering their own role within these contexts and its consequence for the development of expertise. There was also a dominant acknowledgement of the influence of contemporary art as a genre by which expertise might be claimed. Finally, the desire to appear as a professional anomaly within claims of expertise was also a dominant aspect which emerged from the field. These analytical considerations emerged from the biographical reflections of UK-based contemporary art curators. However, they represent only some of the possibilities for analysing the way that the curators sought to claim and maintain their expertise. Importantly these aspects of their biographical reflections supply the degree of scrutiny required for considering how the curators in question present their expertise, in ways that do not necessarily adhere to any dominant association with curatorial professionalisation. Ultimately, the biographical reflections within this research that feature claims of expertise resonate with anthropologist Roger Sansi's assertion that 'the new roles of the art curator are multiple' (2020, b, p.3). In the extreme, this may create a fear that curatorial expertise is at risk due to a lack of adherence to a clear process of professionalisation. However, the process of considering a profession in anthropological terms within this thesis is to communicate the meaning of the participant through the ethnographic endeavour (Gay y Blasco and Wardle, 2019. p.3) which in this case recognises the necessity to go beyond that which is presented within any fixed sense of work and 'expertise' (Boyer, 2008, p.45). Ultimately, the central tenet of this chapter centres around the understanding that biography is a personal journey, but moreover, it is also being performed.

i) First impressions: Creativity at the core?

Entering the working entrance of Tate Modern, '*How to Work Better, 1991*' – a work by artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss was situated on the wall behind the welcome desk. These artists had profound connections to a curatorial elite demonstrated by their link to curator Hans Ulrich Obrist (Obrist, 2018, p.135); recognising Obrist as a frontman of curation (Balzer, 2015, p.8; George, 2015, p.5; and Bhaskar, 2016, p.65). Art writer David Balzer makes the claim that: 'As the world's most famous contemporary-art curator, Obrist sets a remarkable precedent, acting as the archetype for the professionalization and domination of his field' (2015, p.11). Obrist's relationship to the artists is referred to extensively when he himself states:

> 'Fischli and Weiss, masters of questioning, were also the first to ask me what else I had seen, and what I thought of what I had seen, and so I began to develop a critical consciousness, a drive to explain and justify my reactions to art – to enter into a dialogue' (2014, p.5).

This demonstrates a curatorial focus on individual creative expression, interpretation, and voice akin with creative capabilities. Throughout the formulation of opinion and art-related assertions in the field, creativity was arguably exhibited by contemporary art curators as they were creating an analytical approach. Displayed within Tate Modern, the artwork considered the subject of work and had a curatorial context based upon the relationship between the artists and Obrist in his position of curatorial prominence and fame. The artwork acted as a signpost for identifying the location of the offices that housed curatorial minds.

Awaiting a meeting with Frances Morris (at he time, director and curator at Tate Modern), I sat on the bench on the far side of the reception desk. The tall and thin windows looked down into Turbine Hall and provided a visual example of the scale and popularity of the institution, all the while reminding me of the usual view from the opposite end… the view of the visitor and audience. It wasn't long before I was collected by a member of staff and shown the way up the flights of stairs to an upper floor. Frances Morris (director of Tate Modern) was included in an article titled 'The Vogue 25: Meet the Women Shaping 2019' focused on celebrating leading women in the UK (Vogue, 2019). This implied a degree of creativity due to the way in which Frances appeared to be a leading presence of the time. Convening around a table in her office in the far corner of one of the top floors of Tate Modern with the London skyline concealed by the dark sky, the office beyond revealed many Tate workers busy working on their computers. Frances was warm and welcoming. It wasn't long

before the interview began, and Frances described her educational experiences and beginnings. The communication of her curatorial expertise evidently required an overview of her educational beginnings, and these were cemented in the distinction between disciplines and a certain type of creativity that she felt resided in artistic practice. Frances was evidently comfortable with the nostalgia she was exhibiting when discussing her school years. “As part of my Art A-Level, a group of friends and I persuaded our art teacher to let us do History of Art. I think you could have done drawing or history of art. Our art teacher had never done history of art before, but she agreed that it would be fun to do it - we must have been a nice year! A bunch of us did it with Miss Judge and I fell in love with the subject. I realised that I was much more interested in the study of other arts practice than really pursuing my own so when I applied to Cambridge (University) I did so very specifically to read History of Art.” Frances noted an interest in the inherent creativity of art as a practice, however this quickly revealed itself as an interest in other people’s creativity. Frances appeared to draw a curatorial line between the creativity of fine art practice and the analytical promise of history of art as she perceived it.

Frances was not alone in her consideration of fine art practice as this was an aspect frequently referred to by other curators. However, it was variously pursued to different levels and degrees. This provides evidence of curatorial expertise being connected to creativity akin with arts practice. For instance, George Vasey (curator at the Wellcome Collection at the time of interview) had undertaken a BA in Fine Art at Newcastle University and in his own words emphasised his “fine art background, not art history”. This demonstrated Vasey’s recognition of a retrospective association with curation and history of art (Winter, 2020, p.115) that he did not deem to be a necessity within his claims of curatorial expertise. He was confident in his association with fine arts practice at an educational level despite his curatorial identity.

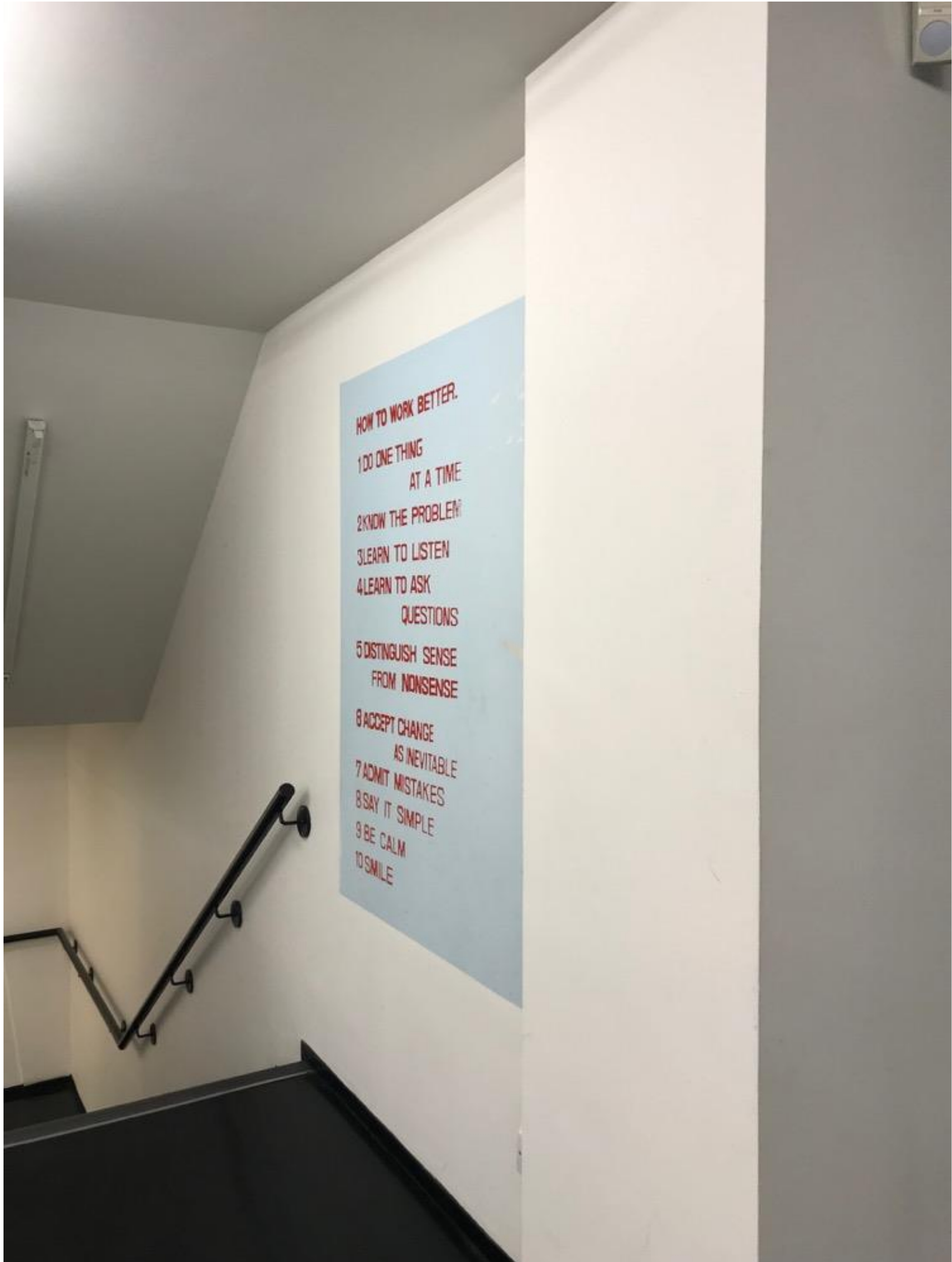

Fig.2 The reception wall in the Tate Modern staff entrance – *'How to Work Better', 1991* by Peter Fischli & David Weiss. Tate Modern, London. Photograph by the author.

Fig.3 View from the window into Turbine Hall from the staff entrance at Tate Modern.

Photograph by the author.

However, like Frances, George offered reasons why he was disinclined to pursue the career of an artist. George was directed by practicalities specifically relating to his experience of unstable economic conditions. That said, George also rationalised his inclination towards curation as being born out of the search for opportunities to control his own professional narrative. This resonates with curator Harald Szeemann's strength of curatorial approach where, in the view of curator Florence Derieux, he was 'able to reconcile personal desires with professional constraints' (2007, p.10). Rather than seeing the creativity of fine art practice as a sacrifice, George appeared to be led by his desire to facilitate his creative vision which required a recognition of the economic impacts that could compromise his aspirations. Ultimately George did not appear to have sacrificed any sense of creativity as he evidently perceived it to be part of curatorial expertise. He did not view curatorial expertise as needing to be completely separated from arts practice-based learning.

George led us out of the Wellcome Collection entrance and next door into the Wellcome Trust building. With his staff card we were granted entry to a wider space where many Wellcome Trust staff were sitting at various tables in a social space. Unsurprisingly, there was very little about this space other than the architecture that spoke to creative expression. This was mainly due to the Wellcome Trust's purpose being to resolve health challenges and as such operated as a scientific hub (Wellcome, no date). It was a building entirely separate from the Wellcome Collection, which operated as a museum focused on health and art (Wellcome Collection, no date, a). George's personal narrative, with the strand of creativity that ran throughout it, seemed at odds with the clinical and corporate nature of the Wellcome Trust space. Nevertheless, George demonstrated the way in which he valued what he described as "having come from an art background where I was an artist and then for a number of years I identified as an artist curator, doing shows in my front room and disused spaces." George expressed a resonance with a curatorial approach widely discussed by Hans Ulrich Obrist with the former years of his curatorial career which was described in a magazine interview which stated that 'the first exhibition that Obrist curated was in the kitchen of his student apartment in St Gallen' (Obrist, 2018, p.135).

George's professional endeavours appeared to stem from a desire to affiliate with a canon of high-ranking curatorial professionals whilst perhaps somewhat contradictorily to associate himself with a self-starter narrative (Bonami, 2001, p.30) outside of the chronological educational accreditations. "I curated shows when I was a student. I didn't understand what curating was, I had no idea", George stated, placing his curatorial foundations at the feet of creative expression despite certain restraints. The creativity that was present within curatorial expertise arguably lay not only in the creativity

inherent within the ideas themselves, but also in the creativity exhibited by the approach to facilitating the consumption and interrogation of these ideas. George continued in a way that supported this view as he stated, "I guess it was wanting to be part of the conversation and it took me a long time to understand, or to even make sense of the art world." Curatorial expertise from George's perspective evidently included the facilitation of creative vision. There was a strong belief that creativity was not just the domain of those creating artwork. George was sitting opposite across the table and was visibly animated. The enthusiasm for communicating his curatorial origins was evident and it was perhaps even more conspicuous as we sat in an otherwise restrained corporate space. He was a creative being and he had something to say. The belief in the creativity of the individual forming part of a curator's expertise is arguably contextualised within curatorial discourse by O'Neill's argument 'that the curatorial act is equivalent to artistic practice' (2012, p.87).

However, Frances offered an alternative view of the role of the individual curator and the development of expertise. Having become a curator at Tate in the late 1980s, Frances' professional role preceded the establishment of curatorial courses in the UK and her perspectives were formed by a history of art degree from Cambridge University and an MA in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute in London (TATE, no date, b). Frances also referred to her later teaching on the Royal College MA, which she described as "one of the first ones" in terms of curating courses which she was involved with for ten years. Frances sought to contextualise a defining moment within the development of curatorial expertise. "It was sort of founded on the Harry Szeemann notion of a curator as someone with agency in the world and working principally within the contemporary field. But the one bit they did that was much more about history and the museum, they did as a collaboration with Tate" […] "I am pretty critical of that programme or as it was then. What my criticism I think is; I still feel like the history that they were taught began in the 1960s. However contemporary you are, your practice could usefully be grounded in a much longer temporality in relation to history of art. But I never saw myself as pursuing that… the independent curator role, which I think really was what those early courses were encouraging. There was a sense of entrepreneurial personal practice and I have met many of the graduates of RCA and other schools who talk about their practice, whereas I think that my generation of curators within institutions feel we are part of institutional practice."

Frances' statement highlights the historical legacy of Harald Szeemann, best known for having emphasised and developed 'curatorial practice' as a practice in its own right (Derieux, 2007, p.10). His ethos included consistently challenging his approach (Derieux, 2007, p.10 and Ninety, 2007,

p.183). This developed a narrative for future curators within the realms of professional expertise predicated on individual 'creativity' (Ventzislavov, 2014, p.83) and as O'Neill asserts 'away from the primary critique of the artwork as an autonomous object of study and toward a mode of curatorial criticism in which the curator becomes a central subject of critique' in reference to the increased analytical focus on the curatorial profession both in industry and academia outside of just purely the curator/artist dynamic (2012, p.26-27). Anthropologist Lily Chumley emphasises the driver of creativity that contributes to a contextualisation of the general desire to pursue an identifiably individual creativity by stating:

> 'other skills and forms of knowledge learned in art school – such as painting, carving, or printmaking – index belonging in a tradition and community, but creativity sets a person apart. In order for art students to be regarded as creative by others they must represent themselves as unique individuals with a "unique" but recognizable style' (2016, p.9).

Frances' observation regarding her curatorial students and their instinct to create an individual practice indicated their desire to pursue the creative facets of the profession, developing what they hoped might be a unique curatorial expertise (despite its impossibility due to uniqueness being a non-entity). If we consider the curatorial training in higher education to which Frances is referring, we see that she is alluding to the focus on independent identity and 'self-styling' (Chumley, 2016, p.11). However, what Frances is lamenting is perhaps not creative expression, but rather that the context and community of curatorial development is being lost among an overt effort to produce 'a recognizable self in and through a *style*' (Chumley, 2016, p.9).

There is however an argument centred around the notion of curatorial creativity residing in the ability to not only select what goes into exhibitions but also in articulating why these objects should be included. This is arguably achieved through the creation of narratives and by assigning value to the work and acknowledging its status as contemporary art. This relates to O'Neill's statement that:

> 'The ascendancy of the curatorial gesture in the 1990s also began to establish curating as a potential nexus for discussion, critique and debate, where the evacuated role of the critic in parallel cultural discourse was usurped by the neo-critical space of curating' (2007, p.13).

O'Neill's statement (2007, p.13) demonstrates how the contemporary art curator evolved in recent history into an all-encompassing role where they were tasked with the creation of the dominant

narratives surrounding artwork and exhibitions, thinking critically in a way that replaced the separate role of critics in terms of their power to provide opinion and debate. This is an inherently creative process.

However, Frances' argued that there was a persistent interest demonstrated by curatorial students in developing their own individual practice related to the notion of attaining power. Therefore, Frances suggested that curatorial expertise should be entrenched in art theory and that a theoretical grounding in the arts should be a requirement as an acknowledged basis for educational routes for a would-be curator (George, 2015, p.19). Nevertheless, the question of what detailed form of theoretical grounding remains less clear. This would still allow for the creativity inherent in the creation of exhibition narratives and the value a curator can attribute to artworks, but without a persistent focus on individual curatorial identity.

O'Neill provides a possible context for the reason for the focus on this time period in curatorial education when he states: 'Ever since the 1960s, there has been a growing understanding and acceptance of curators as having a more proactive, creative, and political part to play in the production, mediation, and dissemination of art itself' (2012, p.9). Knowledge of exhibitions, art, and history of art provide professional authority. Therefore, the way in which the curators perform their biographies includes an awareness of their role as an interpreter of art, with direct consequences for the establishment of their expertise. However, despite well-known historical trajectories surrounding art and the curator, what is evident is the creativity that curators bring to the role. The subjectivity inherent in the presentation of their educational and professional biographies speak to the ability to choose amongst particular contexts, and to apply a degree of creativity in the actual performance of their claims, based on their own individual sense of their expertise.

Creativity was undoubtedly present within the biographical reflections of art curators and their claims of curatorial expertise that emerged from the field. It appears that a focus on the distinctions between the curatorial profession and the expertise inherent in fine art practice is a feature within the professional and educational narratives of curators. This prompts a consideration of the basis upon which the distinctions between artists and curators are made. The curatorial professional and their relationship with fine art practice has shown itself to be variable. The proximity to the idea of a distinct professional curatorial practice is also variable. However, by looking beyond artistic practice and the differing degrees of focus on individual self-expression, there remains many examples of creativity within curatorial expertise. However, the role of creativity within the performance of their

biographies as they sought to claim their expertise was the most evident. Creativity can be variously understood, contextualised, framed, and claimed by curators within their performance of expertise.

ii) Curatorial generations - (divisions?)

Another way in which curatorial expertise was claimed on behalf of art curators was through educational and professional narratives relating to curatorial perceptions of a specific generational lens. There was a clear dialogue between professional and educational experiences and the authority by which their expertise was often explained by placing their claims within the context of a specific period of time with reference to a cohort of curatorial peers and time-specific social and cultural ecologies. For instance, the current educational landscape in the UK reveals a widespread existence of curatorial studies in higher education, part of the existent higher educational landscape for curators described by anthropologists Jonas Tinius and Sharon Macdonald who state:

> 'The number of workshops and graduate programmes for 'up-and-coming' curators, at which new, or those described as such, theories about art and curating are distributed, is itself both a cause and result of this discursive formation that began arguably, some three decades ago' (2020, p.35).

Historically in the UK these originated first at the Royal College of Art then other courses in the UK, as noted by curator Adrian George, the Courtauld Institute of Art, and Goldsmiths in London (2015, pp.19-20). Prior and co-existing with these courses is the aforementioned association of 'studies in art history or the history of visual culture' among a few other courses to a lesser degree, in relation to the curatorial profession (George, 2015, p.19). The generationally framed perspectives of contemporary art curators can be seen to affect the construction of various qualifications, educational and professional experiences. Frances' assertions certainly spoke to her belief in the influence of generational stages in curatorial training and extended educational trends. For instance, Frances sought to distance herself from notions of "entrepreneurial personal practice." Instead, she noted a desire to be understood as a professional whose curatorial expertise resided in interactions with various forms of community with other professionals and otherwise.

Differences in generations of curators were claimed by George Vasey as he described his experiences gaining an MA in Curating at one of those flagship institutions, graduating from Goldsmiths in London. "When I was at university in 2000-2004, the big curators were (Okwui)

Enwezor[2] and Hans Ulrich Obrist, the big documenta curators and they were travelling around the world. They were of a time when there was, certainly in the West and Europe, a flush of public funding, new institutions and new biennials popping up constantly. The independent curator is riding that wave, and it feels like a very neoliberal, entrepreneurial model, right? It creates the illusion that you have autonomy from the market, which is not true at all. I think that language doesn't feel right anymore, because for people of my generation, the precarity is part of the structure, e.g. fixed term contracts. There are very few permanent contracts anymore. We are all having to constantly hustle between different institutions and that feels quite different from say fifteen/twenty years ago where it was choice. People would say, do you want to go and work in an institution? Now it is not really open to people." George rapidly meshed several observations about the landscape of the profession and the various factors that he claimed had influenced his generation of curatorial peers. These factors included the influence of key well-known curators, a focus on travel, specific financial models and conditions, institutional structures, and art world events (most especially biennials).

The 'famous personalities' (Esche, 2015, p.241) by whose example George argued many attempted to follow, he suggested also continued to this day. High-profile 'platforms' (Balzer, 2015, p.71 and O'Neill, 2012, p.83), 'global' identity (O'Neill, 2012, p.78) and economic freedom (Balzer, 2015, pp.107-108); these are the conditions in which the curatorial highflyers enacted their expertise. Anthropologist Thomas Fillitz, in relation to 'the Biennale of Dakar' (2017, p.107) offers a degree of context for George's statement as he observes:

> 'Nowadays, one may speak of a world culture of art biennials – the notion of biennial referring to a specific type of temporary art event, whether its temporary cycles are biennial, triennial, or longer' (2017, p.108).

Furthermore, George demonstrated a discomfort with a lack of effective criticality of certain curatorial contexts, related to his own educational and professional experiences. George suggested that he was part of a generation that emerged from this context. A generation that he suggested were enlightened through the acknowledgement of the contradictions that exist between the neoliberal and the entrepreneurial associations with the curator and the contradictory notion of

[2] O'Neill notes the professional context of Okwui Enwezor, a curator with prominence within the biennial structure (2012, pp. 78-79).

curators having a separation from the market. George situated his biographical narrative within claims that he belonged to a generation that identified with the art world in specific ways.

In George's biographical narrative, he also reflected on the particular social, economic, and political factors that he submitted were a challenge for a generation of curators (those who were not part of the minority curatorial elite). The precarity that George associated with a generation of curators (which he claimed he was part of) he contextualised within some tangible time-specific contexts regarding financial challenges, for example changes to work contracts. George argued that some narratives surrounding the curatorial profession were misleading as curators were viewed as being unaffected by the market. George acknowledged the discrepancy between trying to appear aware and responsive to financial landscapes and structures, whilst also pursuing an expertise that appears to work independently of any financial concerns. Both conflicting associations pervade curatorial narratives.

George progressed rapidly in his statement to issues such as the impacts of differing institutional contexts for various generations of curators by referring to the distinct differences in his educational and professional experiences wherein 'in the 1990s, the curator moved from eccentric, enterprising amateur to professional necessity' (Balzer, 2015, p.53) and 'the mouthpiece for institutions, artists and their ideas' (2015, p.54). However, these institutional roles are affected by fluctuating institutional structures with academic Rhiannon Mason, researcher and curator Alistair Robinson, and academic Emma Coffield noting that 'the UK' is currently embroiled in a professional landscape where 'the proportion of all public funding spent on museums and galleries remains extremely small' and further arguing that 'the crises of funding cuts from 2010 to 2013 have not been completely played out' (2018, p.131). They also noted that 'in the UK, where state subsidies are the norm' (2018, p.132) that 'the rapid decrease in state funding has led to a shortfall in finances for many museums, who must now put together a patchwork of varying funders, or cut back' (2018, p.137). This describes the financial and cultural landscape and hardships to which George referred.

Other curators were similarly intent on presenting their expertise as representative of a particular generation of curators, claimed through narratives relating to institutions and educational experiences. Senior curator at the Hayward Gallery (at the time of fieldwork) Cliff Lauson spoke with a rehearsed ease in the way he contextualised his education within the educational structures of a specific time period. "For myself, I came into curating at a time when that was just beginning. When I decided to do an MA in History of Art it was at a time when you could do an MA in curating but that

was only available at Goldsmiths, RCA and De Appel or Bard, to be English language about it, because I'm not fluent in any other languages. So that is where you could think about going."[3] Cliff made additional specific international references to 'the De Appel Curatorial Programme' in Amsterdam and 'The Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies' in the US (George, 2015, p.19). Cliff's reference to his lack of language skills appeared to be a subtle attempt at correcting assumptions of the curator as being able to decipher all things, to critique any sense of assimilation with notions of the curator as a voice for all global culture (Balzer, 2015, p.21). Cliff did appear to allude to his explicit familiarity with the curatorial, in a sense translating the prominent curatorial courses for a lay persons understanding and attempting to communicate a unique and extensive knowledge of the types of training associated with the profession. This suggests that he was aware of the changes to the educational opportunities as they were happening, rather than just retrospectively. Therefore, this could place Cliff within perceptions of a generation of curators who were the first to be part of 'the professionalization of contemporary curating' (O'Neill, 2012, p.43).

On the other hand, Cliff was arguably exhibiting a desire to appear distinct from other curators by claiming he existed as a precursor to this professional transition of the curator. The desire to create an impression within his biographical reflections of being within a particular time-period but also outside of it, arguably emerged as a type of prophetic distancing. Cliff wanted to appear as being both within and without a generation of curators. "I decided that for myself, coming from my first degree which was English literature, that I would go and get a more art historical knowledge first, and then work on the application of curating as a practice rather than as a study. So I did that and then I did a PhD as well. Part of the decision around doing a PhD was speaking to a number of colleagues. A particular colleague in the States thought a PhD was far more valuable in the long term than a degree in curating. I am very aware that was a very narrow window of time when you would think one way or the other. Of course, now the majority of people I know of the younger generation, or people thinking of getting into the business (of curating) go and do a curating degree or a museums administrations degree or a politics/public representation degree or any of those sorts of combinations that nearly every university it seems offers."

Relatedly, art critic David Balzer communicated the 'advice' he had received from 'many curators', such as 'don't take a curatorial-studies degree, at least not right away. And if you do take one, use it

[3] Cliff was referring to the time period of his educational experiences which included a BA Hons in English Literature at The University of British Columbia from 1996 to 2011, an MA in History of Art at UCL from 2003 to 2004, followed by a PhD in History of Art at UCL from 2005 to 2009.

as a professional-development tool rather than a vocational one' (2015, p.109). In terms of curatorial courses, an academic specialising in contemporary art Rafal Niemojewski also highlights some of the sustained weaknesses of these curatorial courses, namely their development of a meaningful professional 'vocabulary', as well as inadequate discourse between contemporary art curating in connection with heritage and history (2016, p.9). This was reflected in Frances' earlier criticism of the Royal College of Art course. Niemojewski suggests that in the first instance the courses were aimed at establishing 'practical skills' then concentrated on 'critical apparatus' (2016, p.6). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that with the growth of curatorial courses, no one institution is offering the same education as the other, as demonstrated by curator and art writer Adrian George's articulation of specific curatorial course offerings (2015, pp.19-21).

Cliff did however place his experiences within his own sense of a generation of curators defined by a desire for educational redefinition for the profession. Yet there was a suggestion that he was within, but also without a defining professional generation and that he was something other. These were conflicting narratives present within his biographical reflections. Cliff also subtly hinted at his partial belief in some types of curatorial courses as being less intellectually demanding than non-curatorial courses. Cliff noted an added benefit of what he perceived to be a particular moment in curatorial education. By describing how the curatorial courses had evolved and diversified (Tinius and Macdonald, 2020, p.35) he alluded to how such courses have become a dominant way of seeing a route to becoming a curator, which Tinius and Macdonald relate to the prior groundwork of 'curatorial discourse and practice' (2020, p.35). He argued he was caught up in a specific transition period within his own perceptions of a generation of curators by stating: "For me I was lucky that in Vancouver at the time the university was just launching its own curatorial studies programme. The curatorial courses were burgeoning and so I was able to audit some of the courses and understand a bit better curating and contemporary art. Then I just decided to try and get that curatorial experience by working rather than just by studying it."

In this statement, Cliff deviated from his earlier distaste for curatorial courses, demonstrated by his participation in auditing curatorial and contemporary art courses and recognising its inherent usefulness. This demonstrates the conflicting narratives present within his educational and professional reflections. Conversely, the more dominant inference was that Cliff was bolstering his professional scope by drawing upon these courses as additions to what he believed were more useful academic courses. Cliff's biographical reflections demonstrate that there are variable

presentations of supposed generations of curators even within the claims of expertise of a single curator.

Cliff's reflections also suggested that his specific set of professional experiences constituted the ideal combination of circumstances that led to the acquisition of curatorial expertise. Within the biographical reflections of curators that I was presented with in the field, higher education was an assumed stage of qualification associated with the contemporary art curator. There was very little evidence of any negotiation in that regard. However, in terms of the curatorial relationship with higher education, Niemojewski suggests that curatorial courses underwent a transition from being 'initially focusing on practical skills' towards a greater emphasis on 'critical apparatus' and attempts to form 'collective knowledge' (2016, p.9). This demonstrates yet again how Cliff's opinions may be formed by his participation in a landscape which he perceived as generation of curators amongst a relatively short overall time period of argued 'professionalization' (O'Neill, 2012, p.43). However, to annex education and training to a series of generational and chronological identities can be problematic as it dissolves the more detailed educational and professional experiences of art curators. This is demonstrated by Cliff as he tentatively and complexly identified his own perceptions of this process of 'professionalization' (O'Neill, 2012, p.43) and furthermore trying to place himself in a unique position as being both within and outside of this transition in higher education.

Anthropologist Karen Ho's ethnography of the financial sector in the US and the recruiting process' to 'Wall Street' (2009, a, p.43) brings attention to how 'the personal biographies of investment bankers play into, and converge with, job status and workplace experiences to shape a "common-sense" understanding of the righteous-ness of Wall Street analyses and recommendations' (2009, a, p.11). Ho refers to the immersive nature of educational and professional experiences as she highlights the 'hierarchical' aspects presentations of expertise (2009, a, p.45) which she details in the case of Wall Street investment bankers to be affected by:

> 'a web of situated practices and ideologies, coproduced through the interactions of multiple institutions, processes, and American culture at large, which confer authority and legitimacy on high finance and contribute to the sector's vast influence' (2009, a, p.40).

Certainly, in the case of this research, UK-based contemporary art curators are no different in terms of the way that they would be influenced by these aspects, which can amount to some assimilated version of what Ho describes as a 'kin network' (2009, a, p.62). The way in which UK-based

contemporary art curators sought to situate their knowledge in particular time frames and in relation to points along the historic canon of the profession's development appeared to be led by a need to establish a hierarchy of expertise. This was conveyed by curators in the field in terms of how their expertise was informed by the belonging that emerged as a result of perceptions of a community of professionals that they connected to the idea of a generation of contemporary art curators.

Overall, perceptions of generational perspectives made on behalf of UK-based contemporary art curators were a significant feature within their biographical reflections. There is the undoubted influence of specific social, economic, and cultural contexts associated with particular time periods. This is demonstrated by narratives relating to the development of higher education courses, institutions, perceptions of ideological imperatives and discursive landscapes present within the curator's biographical reflections. Yet despite their belief in the influence of generational contexts, these biographical reflections have demonstrated that this does not create a fixed definition of curatorial expertise. What these biographical reflections have demonstrated is that whilst their expertise can be framed by dominant generational dialogues, it does not indicate the existence of delineated generations of curators. Furthermore, any generation-focused dialogues are moulded and perceived individually and therefore subject to interpretation. There is nothing fixed about the curatorial relationship to any dominant narratives surrounding the curatorial profession within their claims of expertise. In addition, these biographical reflections have demonstrated an instinct among curators to place themselves outside of what they perceive to be dominant discourses of expertise. Consequently, the contradictions within the performance of expertise of the curatorial profession were further evident. The notion of a generation of curators and claims of expertise was performative in nature.

iii) Institutional experience

The role of institutions within the performance of curatorial biographical narratives was also a key feature. The prominence of institutions was demonstrated within the narratives presented by Cliff, as he identified his specific interest in museums/galleries motivated by a focus on public representation which he developed primarily within the museum of anthropology in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. We sat in the café of Tate Britain (a public institution) and not the Hayward Gallery where Cliff was curator at the time. We met at Tate Britain due to another meeting Cliff had arranged there. With the sounds of cutlery, cups and saucers and the rhythm of many

voices, we proceeded to move ourselves to the fringes of the space to avoid noise and echoes dominating conversation, and thus we became onlookers, observing the activity in the space. Cliff stated: “For me the work at MOA (Museum of Anthropology) as it is called, gave me a sort of grounding in the politics involved in representation. The applied use of otherwise academic knowledge which you could then extrapolate and draw comparison to, within history of art, contemporary art and curating. I wasn't an anthropology major or anything like that, but it certainly piqued my interest in how these things happen, how they come together. At the same time, academically I was exploring history of art and so I became interested in the more practical application of art historical knowledge, as opposed to the academic, more professorial career path.”

Beginning his professional life in public programmes, Cliff gained experience working on exhibitions due to the medium sized nature of the institution where for a “big show - everyone gets involved.” More specifically, Cliff described that he “worked with the curator of education and public programmes. Lectures, discussions, performances, ceremonies. On the education side both adult and school groups.” He also added that “the museum of anthropology was the largest museum of northwest coast first nations artwork and objects. There were active relationships with a number of those communities.” Cliff later curated exhibitions at the Hayward Gallery including ‘Bridget Riley (2019)’, ‘Emmanuelle Laine (2018)’, an exhibition titled ‘Contemporary Nordic Film and Video Screenings (2017)’, ‘Dineo Seshee Bopape: slow -co- ruption (2015)’, ‘History Is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain (2015)’, ‘Martin Creed: What’s the point of it? (2014)’, David Shrigley: Brain Activity’, ‘Ernesto Neto: Edges of the World (2010)’, and co-curated ‘Tracey Emin: Love is What You Want (2011)’, among many others (Cliff Lauson, 2020). Cliff’s curatorial journey and sense of his own expertise appear to have manifested in what O’Neill terms ‘the “extraterritorialization” of the curatorial space’ (2012, p.81) which for Cliff emerged out of his specific experiences. Cliff sought to align his expertise with a biographical narrative that reflected an expanded sense of what the curator is.

Cliff’s discussion about the relationships formed by his institutional experiences, resonates with Winter‘s description of how ‘contemporary approaches to ‘the curatorial’ emerged out of questions concerning the politics of representation and mediation of lived experience’ which Winter argues is akin with the ’anthropologist’ among others (2020, pp.115-116). Cliff certainly wanted to clearly align his professional experiences with an expertise moulded by an educational focus. However, he did not want to limit himself to the museum alone, but rather use institutions to enable connections with various types of communities and audiences.

Cliff also appeared to be confirming in some ways, Winter's argument about the distinctions created by particularised professional narratives (2020, p.116). The suggestion Cliff appeared to be making was that the alternative career path of a curator was to be an academic, a choice made at the point of art institutional experience. The performativity of his expertise appeared to suggest an underlying desire to be relevant, risking the possibility of sounding dismissive of alternative career paths. Most interestingly however, was the instinct to comment upon two types of institutional routes within curatorial narratives. There was a distinct preoccupation with the art institution versus the academic institution.

Fig.4 External view of Tate Britain. Photograph by the author
during a separate visit to the Turner Prize.

For example, Frances also highlighted a step away from academia in her career progression. However, despite making a commitment to the art institution rather than the academic institution within their career trajectories, Frances, and Cliff both demonstrated that the expertise of the curator does nevertheless mirror the academic in some regards. This was certainly reinforced as I sat in Frances' office and she indicated to the selection of books she was currently, or at least intending (due to her busy schedule) to work her way through. They were placed artfully on the side next to an

image of the Turbine Hall. There was also a plant, staged with its life source – a glass bottle of water. The reading included – '*Avant-Garde Museology*' edited by artist Arseny Zhilyaev (2015), '*The Private Museum of the Future*' edited by art writer and collector Cristina Bechtler and art historian Dora Imhof (2018), '*The Market*' edited by academic and art writer Natasha Degen (2013), '*Duty Free Art*' by artist Hito Steyerl (2017), '*Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste'* by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979) published widely in various editions, and finally, '*The Colour of My Dreams. The Surrealist Revolution in Art'*, an exhibition catalogue edited by art historian Dawn Ades (2011) - acting as a mixture of artistic, art historical, institutional, sociological, and financial reflections – arguably representative of the 'definitive discursive formation' relating to 'curatorship' to which O'Neill refers (2012, p.7).

Fig.5 Books in Tate Modern director, Frances Morris' office. Tate Modern, London. Photograph by the author.

However, the value of higher education in comparison with the value of institutional experience was also in some cases pulled apart, with a hierarchy of importance being applied even at the cost of the pursuit of the curatorial. This was demonstrated by Rachael Harlow (projects curator at the South

London Gallery) as she expressed her expertise in ways that were both similarly and differentially motivated in comparison to Cliff. Developing a relationship with institutions was the primary focus of Rachael's professional development. Having graduated with a blended BA in fine art and art history at degree level, Rachael was initially galvanized by curatorial aspirations, but she felt that these were complicated by her educational experiences. The curatorial identity became of secondary concern, as she became focused upon garnering institutional expertise. In an interview in a side room at the South London Gallery, she stated: "I haven't done an MA in curating. I studied a BA in Fine Art and History of Art at Goldsmiths and then I joined the organisation as an intern in marketing nearly nine years ago. That was because, though I originally had aspirations to be a curator, during my time at art school I began to question what that even was and how vastly different it is in different organisations and across the world. I guess this was just me figuring out what the most interesting aspect for me was."

Essentially what Rachael distilled from her educational experience was that the professional route to becoming a curator was not as clear as she had initially thought. The variety (Balzer, 2015, p.10; Sansi, 2020, b, p.3) was overwhelming. As such, Rachael decided that she needed to consider the conditions in which she could envisage curating in, and what her professional motivation was. By stripping away the educational excess, she arrived at a pursuit of expertise predicated on immersive working within an institution. This was an exercise in personal preference through a self-directed pursuit of expertise, informed by her professional and educational experiences. Rachael described her transition towards a focus on working structure, ethos, and the purpose of a single institution, prioritising a career progression based on the workplace and pursuing intimate knowledge of a working environment.

However, for some contemporary art curators in institutional settings, they felt that they were being presented with barriers to their expertise. For example, George described the difficulties created by spatial associations and the profession when he described his daily movements when he worked as part of a county council. "Unless you were at your desk, people thought that you were having a jolly. But I really don't think curating happens at your desk." George Vasey was emphatic as he delivered his perspective, keen to foreground the curatorial as practical and hands-on and not purely based on academic or desk-based activity.

Fig.6 Rachael Harlow, Projects Curator at South London Gallery,
in a side room at the South London Gallery in the interview.
Photograph by the author.

However, on the other hand, the notion of art curators as office workers barely featured in conversations with the contemporary art curators with whom I spoke. This might appear to support George's observations, however there were those curators who felt otherwise. In which case, the curatorial profession resonates with the condition similarly noted by anthropologist Dominic Boyer in relation to flawed perceptions of 'news journalism' (2013, p.3). Boyer observes regarding 'news journalism' that 'office-based screenwork has quietly emerged as the norm of professional practice' (2013, p.3). Office work is part of the curatorial reality as demonstrated in a conversation with Rachael and from observations in the field. The longevity and focus on the specific workings and proximity to the workings of a site-specific team was a feature of her professional experiences. Rachael relayed her thoughts in a narrative form that appeared as a stream of consciousness. She was relaxed enough to not be concerned with any fixed chronology of her professional or educational development.

“I thought maybe it was more important to see the inside of an institution that I really liked, and the South London Gallery was one of my favourite spaces whilst I was studying. I also knew I wanted to work for a not-for-profit or public space and that was my key interest. When I started working for not-for-profit organisations, it made me realise that though it was important what I did there, to a degree as long as I was working towards something that was valuable, that the role didn't matter so much. So, I had a few years of working across marketing, operations, event management and different aspects. I was here in lots of different temporary roles and during one of those, which was assisting the director, there was a lot of research-based work in it. An opportunity arose to become part of the programme team and they offered me that position. Originally, I was a programme assistant, and then an assistant curator, and then a projects curator, and then that’s developed over the last six and a half years.” To compare George and Rachael’s perspectives, there was a difference in how they related to physical spaces and the institutions through which they expressed, learnt, and claimed their expertise.

Rachael’s approach appeared to be representative of a desire to subscribe herself and her expertise as being rooted within a specific art institution. Rachael described her search for a professional role that she valued, based around social purpose which is a narrative also variably associated with the curatorial profession (Amundsen and Mørland, 2015, c, p.4). This eventually led Rachael to a curatorial role, a profession she had initially doubted could provide her with career satisfaction, as well as being a profession that she could not properly perceive having been overwhelmed by its variety (Rogoff, 2015, p.48 and Sansi, 2020, b, p.3). The way that Rachel performed her expertise in relation to an art institution appeared to be at odds with the more frequently discussed concept of professional drive derived from what Niemojewski describes as ‘the new model of the curator’ […] ‘exemplified by the constantly travelling exhibition-makers working on temporary contracts’ (2016, p.9). However, Niemojewski does argue that practically there is a need for monetary security and that the ideal scenario would be the attainment of ‘permanent positions within institutions whilst pursuing freelance assignments in parallel’ (2016, p.11). As such, Rachael’s desire to work within an institution despite having to work in a variety of non-curatorial roles, did not necessarily mean that she would not have been aware of what this could offer in the longer term if she were to attain a curatorial position.

Rachael viewed the profession of contemporary art curator in the UK within a longer temporality, demonstrating how this aspect can differ person to person within the profession – in her case valuing extended engagements. This type of approach described by Rachael contrasts with the

‘culture of mobility’ referred to by Niemojewski (2016, p.10). However, Rachael’s claims of expertise based around elongated engagements through the institution have a resonance with the views of anthropologist Roger Sansi who stated that:

> ‘Durational approaches start from acknowledging the significance of engaging audiences and encouraging research-based outcomes that are responsive to their specific contexts, audiences and locations over time. This emphasis on long duration, site-specificity and research brings curatorial practice very close to what anthropologists call fieldwork’ (2020, b, p.4).

Rachael seemed to be assimilating her expertise with the longevity of her institutional commitments within her biographical narrative. By distancing herself from a curatorial culture of mobility, Rachael performed her expertise in a way that is not dissimilar to the anthropological desire to connect and foreground the outlook of participants. In Rachael’s case, these participants were those for whom she expressed care.

Another aspect of institutional experience that featured within the UK-based contemporary art curator’s narration of expertise, was focused upon the acquisition of social purpose and impact. This was also demonstrated in Rachael’s biographical narration when she foregrounded her interest in the social purpose of the South London Gallery and that she was led by a social purpose that the institution reflected. However, it is vital to acknowledge that institutions are not necessarily emancipatory vehicles for the contemporary art curator either. As art historian Janet Marstine, and critical theorist and director of programs at the National Coalition Against Censorship, Svetlana Mintcheva note that there is always a need to consider ‘curatorial autonomy’ (2021, p.xix) and it is necessary to acknowledge ‘self-censorship as the suppression of ideas or artistic expression by an individual during the creative process or by an institution during the curatorial process’ (2021, p.xix). The purpose of their textual and analytical endeavour includes what they articulate as ‘conceptual and practical tools for curators to work, both individually and collaboratively, to negotiate institutional self-censorship through deliberative decision-making’ (2021, p.xxiv).

As evidenced in curatorial biographical reflections in the field, curatorial narratives still speak strongly to institutions, academia, galleries, and arts organisations, even if the curator experiences complex shifts, economically, socially, politically, or technologically. Not enough of a seminal shift from the influence of institutions arguably, to lay claim to a curator’s complete escape from

professionalising processes or narratives associated with institutions. This relates to art critic, JJ Charlesworth's argument, wherein he states:

> 'More significant, however, is the attention paid to the character of the curatorial endeavour itself, as something not innocent or neutral, but loaded ideologically, epistemologically and institutionally, and in which a consideration of such implications are explicitly rehearsed by curators themselves' (2007, p.92).

The performative nature of the narration of professional experiences on behalf of curators themselves has been shown to be a process by which expertise is variously claimed in certain ways, to create impressions of a particular type of person. Institutions play a part within curatorial claims of expertise however they are variously engaged within the performance of their expertise. Far from producing clear narrative frames, the institutional experiences described by contemporary art curators can be seen to be profoundly affected by the complexities produced by the individual performativity of the curators themselves. Within these biographical narratives, authority has been claimed by UK-based contemporary art curator for the purpose of establishing their expertise in several ways in connection with institutional experiences.

Overall, curatorial authority has been claimed in relation to institutions through narratives based on the influence of the size and type of institution, types of exhibition programming, proximity to academic thought, the degree of professional commitment to an institution, the type of work they engage in, and temporal commitments to an institution or social purpose. The structuring capabilities of institutions in terms of elucidating a streamlined expertise within the biographical trajectories of the curators have been dispelled as curators within this chapter have variously performed their expertise. Certainly, the influence of dominant arts institutions and the value of institutional experiences were brought to the fore, nevertheless the critical nature of curatorial expertise again centered the contradictions that were present within an evaluation of their expertise and their individual biographical trajectories. Ultimately, the biographical reflections of curators have demonstrated how curators engage with these ideas in distinctive ways to describe their careers and the specific qualities they bring to curatorial expertise.

iv) Aligning the curatorial self with contemporary art

UK-based contemporary art curators also sought to emphasise their expertise in the field by aligning their educational and professional experiences with contemporary art. Amira Gad, who at the time of interview was art and architecture curator at the Serpentine Galleries and a colleague of Hans Ulrich Obrist in his role as director of the Serpentine Galleries, preferred to emphasise the artwork within her career progression. Amira noted that her professional beginnings had a heritage focus, as she referred to her deep connection with the heritage work of 'collecting, conservation and museology', 'art history' and curation (Winter, 2020, p.115). However, her career and pursuit of professional expertise, progressed with acknowledgement of the professional flexibility provided by working with contemporary art as her medium of professional focus.

Meeting at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, this was not the first time I had met Amira face-to-face. I had undertaken a brief conversation with her following a session titled 'Exhibition Programming: Risk Taking in Curation' where she was part of the panel at the Aesthetica Future Now Symposium in York in 2018 (Aesthetica, 2019). Greeting Amira once more, we convened around a small table, and she ordered and then sipped an espresso, referring to an already long day. It had only just reached 10.30am and as such she appeared to be referring to there being a curatorial time. Amira began to describe the role the artwork itself had on her career development, stating that: "I decided to make the switch to contemporary art during my master's programme. It was after having gained some experience in museums and cultural heritage and working with city collections that I became more and more interested in contemporary art. I liked the contemporaneity of it and how it opened up the possibility to work and refer across disciplines, so I was very much interested in this potential for interdisciplinarity in contemporary art." Amira has long been associated with being at the forefront of the contemporary art scene in the UK and internationally. For example, her career moves are reported in arts publications, such as when she moved to Lehmann Maupin[4] in the role of 'artistic director' which was reported in prominent arts publication Art Forum (Artforum, no date). Amira has since made many job moves.

In a Frieze Academy masterclass led by Amira at Carousel in Marylebone, London, many weeks after the interview I undertook with her, Amira orchestrated a space with elite associations with Frieze

[4] The Lehmann website states 'Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996' which now includes a number of spaces focusing on 'a diverse range of contemporary artists and estates from around the world' where Amira worked from London (Lehmann Maupin, no date).

(2020) which provided a backdrop for her teaching. The session focused on how to be a contemporary art curator and brought together new perspectives and ideas in the form of a group discussion focused on the creation of an exhibition proposal. It became like a think tank in which everyone brought something new and timely to the table, pooling together our experiences no matter what they were. This linked with Amira's view, wherein she noted the diverse experiences and potentialities that arose from working with contemporary art. Amira appeared to subscribe to the notion of contemporary art as being an emancipatory vehicle for professional expertise. The type of self that Amira presented was dominated by a performative focus on the genre of contemporary art within her claims of professional expertise based upon the freedom and influence of the individual and the idea of directing your own professional development with contemporary art at the centre.

Within some of the curatorial biographical narratives in the field, there were those who were focused on the artwork and contemporary art as a central directing factor in the shaping of their biographical narratives. The influence of contemporary art within the biographical reflections of art curators in some cases also formed claims of curatorial expertise where their educational and professional experiences were seen as incidental in favour of contemporary art as a central focus within their pursuit of curatorial expertise.

In summary: Claims of curatorial expertise

In a consideration of the way in which UK-based contemporary art curators in the field were seen to claim expertise through their biographical narratives, what was revealed was a complex narration of a performative nature. Therefore, to return to the structuring question of this chapter: How is the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators therefore being performed through the biographies they have told? Within the biographical narratives of contemporary art curators in the UK these claims of expertise have been made in various ways. The biographical reflections presented within this chapter have been structured around four primary themes. These include a consideration of the role of creativity, the influence of the curator's perceptions of generational perspectives, the particularities of their institutional experiences, and finally the influence of contemporary art. These themes were variously used by UK-based contemporary art curators as a structuring device for their biographical trajectories.

There is no clear educational path or set of professional experiences to which professional contemporary art curators must conform. They are subject to changing professional contexts and the influences of specific time periods, as well as the influence of various dominant educational and professional discourses. There is also a variable focus on contemporary art within their biographical reflections as part of claiming their expertise. Therefore, in terms of how this chapter may consider a curator's expertise as presented by curator's themselves, the complexity of their biographical reflections might be productively considered as representative of the features which Nod Miller and David Morgan, in a sociological commentary allude to in relation to a 'CVs' intended audience (1993, p.135 and p.141). This includes an acknowledgement of what narratives do not feature (1993, p.142) and that the processes through which curator's present themselves are ones which we can (as non-curatorial professionals) recognise within Miller and Morgan's statement that: 'biography is not a specialized undertaking but something in which we are all engaged. It is through such practices that selves are presented and constructed' (1993, p.143). The curatorial self that is being constructed through the performance of their expertise has been variously driven by their individual relationship with evolving contexts and discourses. However, most importantly the notion of curatorial expertise needs to be based upon reflexivity and self-questioning. The performance of expertise should be viewed as responsive and endlessly emergent. Moreover, a curator's expertise is sustained by its contradictions. This is a task that is ultimately well suited to anthropological study.

Chapter Two

Navigating Curatorial Identities

A specific question emerged from the field: How do UK-based contemporary art curators navigate curatorial identity to claim their expertise? As the previous chapter acknowledged, there was a performativity within the biographical reflections that speaks to the complex and diverse claims of curatorial expertise in relation to educational and professional experiences. This chapter relatedly explores how art curators variously utilise, engage, and conjure curatorial identities amidst their everyday lives for the purpose of performing their expertise. The diversity within attempts to define contemporary art curation within the field opens-up questions about how curators navigate this diversity in everyday contexts. Through ethnographic vignettes and interview material it is possible to explore curatorial engagements with various forms of curatorial identity associated with the profession based on Tinius and Macdonald's commitment to 'not rehearse and inscribe a genealogy of curatorial 'types' but rather to elucidate various approaches to, understandings of and reflections upon curating by curators' (2020, p.37). The overall aim of this chapter is to explore the different ways that curators themselves invoke and engage with various identities associated with the curator in their everyday lives for the purpose of claiming their expertise.

Curatorial terminology and associated curatorial identities

Fieldwork with curators revealed a complex landscape of professional terminology that includes "contemporary art curator" as a term of negotiation in the process of claiming their expertise. The development of a professional terminology can be considered a central factor in establishing and maintaining expertise. This is reflected in sociologists Harry Collins and Robert Evans' view as they state: 'As with language, so with the expertises analogous to language – coming to "know what you are talking about" implies *successful* embedding within the social group that embodies the expertise' (2007, p.7). This statement is useful in an application to curators in so far as it acknowledges the instinct amongst curators to appear secure in their professional expertise and how professional terminology has a part to play within it. However, as forensic linguistics has shown in terms of the individual variety that can be identified within the application of a language, expertise has these individualistic nuances that are variously evident.

The ability effectively communicate curatorial identity is an inexact science. It is necessarily subject to interpretation. As such, the more detailed view of the lived experiences of curators and how they

navigate professional terminology to claim their expertise in their daily life, the greater the sense of the variety and depth of their expertise in ways that dominant professional discourses cannot convey. In terms of UK-based contemporary art curators, what became evident was the degree of hyper-vigilance regarding the use of words they used within their everyday lives. This is somewhat reflected in art writer, artist and curator Paul O'Neill acknowledgement that the profession is so communication and text focused (2007, p.26). [5]

The specific importance of professional curatorial terminology arguably resides in the way it often reflects the various forms of categorisation that surround the profession in the form of associated curatorial identities. However, the decoding potential of curatorial professional terminology and the curatorial identities that are communicated arguably resides in the specific way that it is used. The various interpretations of professional terminology can be viewed as a signifier of an expertise that is consistently being negotiated. Therefore, whilst dominant associations with curatorial language do exist, it is necessary to acknowledge the inherent and continuous sociality that produces meaning (Collins and Evans, 2007, p.7). As Balzer describes in relation to the curatorial profession, the associated terminology forms part of an effort to communicate the expertise of the profession, but any efforts at defining such terminologies and associated curatorial identities doesn't create clarity but rather the opposite (2015, p.114). Yet it is possible to celebrate expertise without seeking surety about it holding any professionally unifying substance. Instead, curatorial expertise can arguably be seen to reside in the exchanges that surround the navigation of a range of curatorial identities.

There are manifold and disputed histories that are attached to the profession (O'Neill, 2012, p.7) which are undoubtedly present within curatorial accounts from the field. Moreover, these disputes even extend to the variable diagnoses of the profession. For example, the desire to replicate surface level expressions of curatorial expertise appears to be driving a climate wherein there has been a proliferation of certain curatorial terminology and particularly dominant perceptions of curatorial identity within mainstream society. The recent 'buzzword' associations with 'curating', Tinius and Macdonald aptly acknowledge, has created differing responses such as 'awe, annoyance or anxiety'

[5] In terms of professions in general, Abbott discusses how for many professionals there are types of 'jurisdictional claims' which he states can 'include formal control of certain kinds of language, not only language that describes the tasks at issue and the groups attempting to perform them, but also even the language used to conduct the work' (1988, p.62). However, whilst contemporary art curators seem very focused on professional terminologies, they experience no such degree of certitude within their associated professional terminologies.

(2020, p.35). Curators in one-to-one conversation often appeared to feign exasperation at the supposed simplicity of the question “what is a contemporary art curator?” when in fact the answer proved to be anything but straightforward and moreover an impossibility. Curators in the field were largely unimpressed by the various uses of curatorial terminology in mainstream society. The effect was reductive to their lived reality and often incurred a degree of visible irritation. This had the ability to create a degree of discomfort as the questioner, which had the potential to deter a questioning of these professional terminologies. Yet on occasion it also led to an acknowledgement on behalf of curators in the field, of the need for there to be a more widespread acceptance of the variety and subjective nature of their profession. Ultimately curators in the field variously invoked and interrogated a range of curatorial identities within specific contexts and for the specific purpose of communicating their own expertise.

Projecting curatorial identities

Attempts have been made to delineate these curatorial identities into categories within curatorial discourse. For example, curator Adrian George provides categorisations of ‘types’ which he breaks down in to ‘subject specialist curators’, ‘independent curators’, ‘artist-curator’ and ‘head of department within a cultural organization’ (2015, pp.6-12). In addition, however Adrian George does state that: ‘Our definition of a curator is more broad-ranging than ever before’ but accompanies this by trying to assert the most dominant association, ‘as the selector and interpreter of works of art for an exhibition’ (2015, p.2) suggesting that ‘the curator’s core role is often seen as that of an expert with regard to visual culture and taste’ (2015, p.4). In contrast and for the purpose of reflecting the efforts of this thesis, O’Neill productively describes how such attempts are continuously made and have significant and often contradictory consequences (2012, p.3). What became apparent within the field was that for UK-based contemporary art curators, professional descriptors, terminology, definitions, and purposes, often interlocked or crossed over. Thus, within these many pairings, what might be considered curatorial? What is a curator? How might professional terminology and purpose be navigated in the everyday? It becomes a question of how and why curators variously engage with perceived notions of curatorial identity within their daily lives.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the collective focus of the edited text ‘*The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*’ (Martinon, 2015, b), as communicated by Martinon who states, ‘that the curatorial is an embattled term that cannot be singularized or totalized and that it is perfectly OK to live and work with such a warring term’ (Martinon, 2015, a, p.4). In this vein, I will illustrate the way

in which contemporary art curators in the UK seek to affix a professional identity to themselves through various descriptors and communicated purposes. The various associations and rationales presented in the following second half of this chapter are not intended as a purposeful exercise in claiming a hierarchy of one terminology, or analogy, or of one professional vision over another. Rather in the case of this chapter, the descriptors and explanations presented themselves organically within interactions in the field, and each professional making these observations without consultation with the other for the purpose of claiming their expertise.

i) The cautious curator

One of the ways in which curatorial identities were navigated on behalf of curators was with hesitancy and caution. The tentative way that some curators approached various curatorial identities had a direct impact upon the way in which they tentatively sought to claim their expertise. We sat in Frances Morris' office at what felt like the very top of Tate Modern and although a cold and wet January meant that darkness had already descended beyond the office windows. Frances Morris was director of Tate Modern and I ventured to enquire about how she would define "contemporary art curator". Even the space itself appeared, at a great height within the building, in a way that could arguably be symbolic of her power. I awaited the authority of Frances' answer, and she took a notably deep breath: "It's a very broad question. Well, I could sit here in silence and frame an answer, or I could just say a few things. I think one of the most significant changes has been in relation to the visibility of the curator as a personality and their presence as a voice. In the early days of being a curator, not so much at Arnolfini[6], but when I came to Tate, the role of the curator was principally anonymous and principally servicing the needs of the work of art and as an interface between the work of art and the visitor. Framing the understanding of the work of art, cataloguing the work, working on provenance - the caring for role was prominent. Curators cared for the work of art intellectually, and as a historical object. Conservators cared for the physical nature. The practice was very focused on objects. The work of art. Now I think that curator's practice is much more focused on the construction of a professional identity and voice, and which is not always framed through their engagement with objects. Theory has become much, much more important, both in relation to critical theory, but also in relation to the structural nature of the world in which we operate. So, the curator has travelled a long distance from the physicality of the artwork as an object which I think is fascinating."

[6] The Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, UK.

Yet, whilst Frances appeared to be disinclined to pursue certainty, she did note a predisposition towards an act of unassuming contemplation, through an acknowledgment that this new curatorial landscape did not have to result in a prominence of the curatorial ego. Even in the interview, Frances seemed to suggest that she would offer a helping hand in the process of finding my own sense of meaning by offering me some of the building blocks and notably providing context but not certainty. For instance, Frances invoked a frequently discussed connection with the curatorial based upon the 'Latin' origin, focusing upon 'care' (Balzer, 2015, p.24; George, 2015, p.2; Niemojewski, 2016, p.9; Obrist, 2014, p.27, etc). This is often discussed in relation to curation and heritage (Obrist, 2014, p.27; Campbell and Baars, 2019, p.xvi). However, curatorial identities associated with 'the museum' are also undergoing a transformation (Hansen, Henningsen and Gregersen, 2019, pp.2-3).

Even so, many leading curators of contemporary art still align themselves with definitions of care. Curator Ralph Rugoff, who is currently lead curator and director at the Hayward Gallery (Marincola, 2006, p.172) stated: 'I tend to conceive of the curator's role as a care-taker' (Rugoff, 2006, p.51). Frances argued that the individual curator brought to bear their own purpose and professional identity to their everyday lives, interrogating ideas and not accepting curatorial histories or focusing purely on a work of art. Instead, Frances described a profession recognised for its variety and identity premised upon a type of continuous questioning. However, in a rare act of reconciliation with past curatorial contexts and the modern curatorial condition Frances was arguably predisposed to perspectives such as curator Hans Ulrich Obrist who argues that 'the work of the contemporary curator remains surprisingly close to the sense in *curare* of cultivating, growing, pruning and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive' (2014, p.27).

The relationship with art did arguably become changed for some curators due to this transition from a 'critique of artwork' as a key focus, as it was placed within wider contexts, including its relationship with the 'curatorial' (O'Neill, 2012, p.14). These changed conditions for the curator seem reflected in Frances' cautious engagement with what she perceived as the curatorial identity. Anthropologist Roger Sansi, whose consideration of 'curatorial practice' in relation to anthropology makes note of the preoccupation with 'specific contexts, audiences and locations over time' (2020, b, p.4) which arguably reflects a more detail-orientated and cautious approach to the formulation of curatorial identity and claims of expertise. Furthermore, it is worth acknowledging the mutual construction of object and curator, most especially if the 'art object' is conceived of as anthropologist Alfred Gell outlined that:

> … ‘anything whatsoever could, conceivably, be an art object from the anthropological point of view, including living persons, because the anthropological theory of art (which we can roughly define as the ‘social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency’) merges seamlessly with the social anthropology of persons and their bodies’ (1998, p.7).

I responded to Frances, attempting to extend her train of thought even further regarding the identity of the contemporary art curator by stating: “I was talking to another curator, and we discussed this idea of the curatorial as a definition, forming some sort of currency; that it is better understood now externally, so in order to have those collaborations outside of the gallery, it works very well. But in terms of a self-ascribed identity, words like facilitators…” I paused for a response. “Editor…”, Frances mused; a related identity acknowledged already by art historian and curator Adrian George (2015, pp.15-18). O’Neill argues that:

> ‘Exhibitions are a coproductive, spatial medium, resulting from varying forms of negotiation, relationality, adaptation, and collaboration between subjects and objects, across space and time’ (2012, p.129).

It is with this understanding that I stated: “Exactly, yes. A producer of exhibitions…. Seemed to fit more nicely in terms of the work that they saw themselves doing.” Frances agreed and continued: “Yes. When I was appointed at Tate, my job title was Assistant Keeper, and I think that period had strong resonance with the museum sector” … “the language we have for curatorial practice now is particularly weak for museum curators, because there still is a strong sense of custodianship of a collection and I think we’ve lost that sense of identity and a sense of the importance of the collection and the importance of history.” Frances referred to the professional identity of “keeper” which curator Adrian George contextualised in his statement that:

> ‘Those who were responsible for looking after works of art, collections of objects or antiquities became known as ‘Keepers’ (for obvious reasons) – a term that continues in use today in some European museums and sometimes refers to a senior curatorial position, or a curatorial role that has more responsibility, including additional research, writing and connoisseurship’ (2015, pp.2 and 4).

This speaks to some nostalgia for an association of curation with the ‘preservation of art’ that Robert Storr (art critic, writer, academic, artist and curator) for example still desires to promote (2006,

p.14). Yet, whilst being nostalgic for this aspect, Frances also simultaneously demonstrates how the curatorial is now so much more than that. Frances notably commented upon a transformation in curation within the heritage sector as well as concerns about curatorial identity in relation to a collection. This is arguably because of a shift from the curator having a subsidiary status to objects, towards the curator having the agency to curate the object and to define it. The identity of the curator is precarious as their role is questioned in relation to the status given to the object. The contemporary art curator is arguably more at ease with the idea that art is what they define it to be. Yet, Frances acknowledges the tension that exists regarding the status of the curator and the status of the art object because of the shift in status and role of the curator.

When I gave a talk as part of *Visual Intersections 4*, a summer school organised by The Centre for Visual Arts and Culture (CVAC) at Durham University in July 2019), I experienced a definitive and palpable undercurrent of adversarial responses from heritage sector curators in the Q&A section following my talk. Interestingly, this included, not a question, but rather a statement – "I do not recognise the versions of curators that you are describing." This complex tension to which Frances alludes appeared to arise from the complexity surround the identity of the curator in relation to the development of a collection and various heritage contexts. There was a sense of historical superiority due the focus on a historic collection. As Frances' statement reveals, the increasingly expansive notion of contemporary art curation (Sansi, 2020, b, p.3) could be seen as a potential erosion or complication of heritage curation, and vice versa. Relatedly, Kavanagh *et al*. relayed a view of the 'curatorial' within 'museums' as having increasing 'range', but that this can also cause tension (1994, p.122).

Frances' comments reflect the wide-ranging manifestations of the profession today. What was not evidenced within her comments however were any attempts to articulate a fixed curatorial identity. It is therefore vital to acknowledge how these types of definitions of the heritage curator and contemporary art curator respectively deny the subjectivity of their expertise. Yet, the use of professional terminology and the communication of their expertise was shown to produce fractious interactions. Frances' comments speak to the subjectivity of curatorial expertise. The curator cannot be held to a particular standard if they are consistently negotiating and reworking the various curatorial identities that they navigate in their everyday lives. It is therefore possible to suggest that the hesitancy that Frances Morris exhibited as she discussed various types of curatorial identities was not a hesitancy that was representative of her confidence in her own curatorial expertise. Rather, she communicated her curatorial expertise as being reflected in her ability to approach the

multitude of curatorial identities associated with the contemporary art curator with caution; caution that emerged from care for what arises from within specific contexts.

ii) Making peace

There were those curators in the field however, who appeared able to make peace with certain curatorial identities (or at least as they perceived them). Whilst those such as art writer David Balzer expressed concern that in the current age the ‘‘curator’’ no longer associates with the notion of ‘*care*’ (2015, p.130). However, curators in the field were seemingly able to make peace with a curatorial identity premised on a rearticulated version of care for example. This demonstrates how it is possible to reformulate various curatorial identities and for the curator to consequently reconcile with them within their claims of expertise.

A transformed notion of care was conveyed in an interview with Rachael Harlow, projects curator at South London Gallery, who stated: “I found it quite difficult to call myself a curator for a while and I think that is because there are these different presentations of what it is, particularly within this sector. I had this fraudulent feeling and that you have to be super academic or you have to be travelling globally, you have to be….” Rachael’s statement trailed off. “But then there was a conversation I had about the term coming from the care of the object and thinking about what that meant for me coming from this space and from within this organisation. It was a case of thinking that it is more about the care of people and the care of the engagement with the work. Whether that is the artist or you know… you have to think of everyone! Even our funders and our stakeholders, the local residents and the children that come to see the work…. They all have a stake in the things that you are presenting, so the care has to be for all of them, like being hosted in a space. But it also about the quality of the work that they are seeing and so I guess that is where I position myself now. I'm interested in the care of people in culture more broadly.”

Interestingly, whilst highlighting her awareness of the various professional curatorial identities, Rachael referred to the sense of confusion this creates and proposed that there should be an association of care with the care of people. This transported the associations with the curator and the concept of care and turned them into a different proposition of professional identity in her role focused upon contemporary art. This perspective was also shared by George Vasey (then Wellcome Collection curator) who stated: “I actually really like the term curator because its etymologically linked to the notion of care and how we think of care not just of objects but of people.” Yet the

question remains, if curators are focused on caring for objects and people, what are they caring for/against? Perhaps it is rather about forging a professional expertise focused on widening responsibility?

Fig.7 Street view of South London Gallery. Photograph by the author.

A transformed notion of care as a curatorial identity was evidently a notion that Rachel and George were comfortable within their claims of expertise. What they were caring "against" arguably remained largely elusive although it was at times reflected in some of their comments. For example, Rachael's perspectives bring forth the complexity of the associations with the curator wherein they are conceived of as central 'in the art world' (Sansi, 2020, b, p.1) with 'value and power' (Balzer, 2015, p.27). Rachael's statement resonates with George who stated in interview: "I think that curating is about a cultural identity that has a cultural cache and a currency in the art world. It all

sounds kind of impressive – curator. It can however create certain hierarchies that are unpleasant." This demonstrates how some curators outlined their perception of curatorial identity based on guarding against negative associations with the profession within their claims of expertise.

Another example of attempts to remedy against particular perceptions of curatorial identity as a key feature within their claims of expertise reside in the reflections of north-east based curator of new media and academic, Professor Beryl Graham. Meeting in an art deco café in an independent cinema in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, she stated: "Everything is curated these days. Curating music festivals and all of that kind of thing and people just mean picking things and putting them together." Beryl communicated her interpretation of the misuse of associated professional identities in wider society. The societal landscape in the UK did appear to reflect the widespread use of curatorial associations, as I observed on one visit to Richmond Upon Thames with notices for clothes shops named 'Curated Man' and 'Curated Woman' visible in the street, due to open in the spring of 2019. On another occasion in central London, I observed a make-up brand with a series titled 'The Curator'. Another example was a high-profile fashion group's introduction of a 'loyalty programme' titled 'The Curator' which was the subject of an Instagram post shared by a professional curator where they described it as 'maximal absurdity'.[7]

In terms of curatorial discourse, such instances have been widely observed by curators themselves including by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist (2014, pp.25-26). Yet, like any stereotype this is incredibly limiting, as argued by Obrist in his identification of what he terms 'a kind of bubble in the value attached to the idea of curating, and has to be resisted' (2014, p.26). In a somewhat contradictory statement, Beryl did seem to embrace a more expanded notion of curatorial identity by stating: "And lots of people can do that online now and that is an interesting new media thing, that people are curating" … "That is the traditional art historical idea of you know, you are organising things, you are selecting them and putting them together. But then curating I think also has these additional roles of being that interface with the audience. You see it all the way through from selecting and then presenting it, then exhibiting it, and then you know visible spaces or online or both… Yeah. And then following it all through to that actual contact with the audience." Beryl showed some appreciation for a more widespread use of associated curatorial identities in society, however she also articulated how she perceived the professional curator to advance beyond these associations. In doing so, Beryl also demonstrated her support for the expanded application of professional

[7] This was a public Instagram account; however, the post is no longer available, and a source cannot be assigned.

curatorial identity also, as part of the process of a continuous rearticulation of the curatorial. She appeared at ease with claiming her expertise amongst expanded notions of professional curatorial identity. However, Beryl's peace with the expansion of curatorial identity arguably had its limits as she argued that the mass-interpretation and use of curatorial terminology and its associations was an over-simplification.

Beryl appeared to argue that the curatorial identity has been inverted and arguably misused due to the conditions we live in, with an overwhelming amount 'of information' and 'material goods' (Obrist, 2014, p.26). In this sense, Beryl communicated her expertise in a way that guarded against suggestions by those such as writer and publisher Michael Bhaskar who uses these notions of the curatorial in terms of its use in wider society for the purpose of attempting to claim a fixed professional identity by stating:

> 'Curation is where acts of selecting and arranging add value. Put together, such acts are an extraordinary store of value for an overloaded world. Many curators, especially from the art world, are reluctant to define curation in such bald terms. This allows them nuance. But it means curation gets lost – as another dismissible theoretical construct, an intellectual luxury, a passing fad, not an engaged or practical activity. If we are to take curation seriously, as I believe we should, it needs something more concrete reflecting its widespread use – something to go beyond the much-parodied and obscurantist clichés' (2016, p.85).

Whilst perhaps Bhaskar is attempting to rescue the activity of 'curation' from being misunderstood and in sensing some societal need for its presence he calls for 'managing abundance' (2016, p.85). However, Bhasker's 'concrete' assertions (2016, p.85) deny the curator's ability to be at peace with an expanded notion of curatorial identity as that which is invoked within the specific contexts in which they claim their expertise. Whilst there is no doubt that curatorial terminology is 'everywhere' in our present day (Milliard, 2016, p.7), perhaps it is not the excess of professional terminology that poses a complex issue for the curator but the way in which it is framed? Perhaps the success of curatorial expertise resides in how much the person arranging and selecting the 'knowledge' (2001, b, p.16) is deemed to be a professional? Either way, the expansion of curatorial identity does bring into question whether the contemporary art curator can make peace with such a volatile and defensive professional position? Can peace be found in the battleground of curatorial expertise? In an everyday context, curatorial identities have been shown to be subject to fluctuations and curators variously make peace with these identities within their claims of expertise. This arguably

reduces the power of any fatalistic diagnosis for the professional contemporary art curator. Even within this complex climate of multitudinous and widely disputed curatorial identities, curators in the field demonstrated that there is arguably a degree of peace that can be found in curator's daily lives as they variously invoke their own nuanced and at times contradictory perceptions of curatorial identity for the purpose of expressing and claiming their diverse expertise.

iii) Courting certainty

In contrast however, curators sometimes grasped at specific curatorial identities around which they sought to claim their expertise. For example, even amongst attempts at vague estimations of where professional terminology might lead in the future, Lisson Gallery's curatorial director Greg Hilty still attempted to provide a degree of certainty as he referred specifically to "facilitating artists." Relatedly, Liz Wells, writer, curator, and academic highlights the limitations of conceiving of curators purely within this remit whilst also acknowledging the existence of a dominant associated identity for 'curators in terms of the facilitation for artists' (2007, p.29). Nevertheless, Fiona Bradley, director, and curator of the Fruitmarket Gallery utilises this associated curatorial identity in a way that speaks to an even wider comprehension of the curator as "facilitator" by stating: "Do I have a practice? It was always - you're the midwife, you're not having the baby. We are facilitators." Fiona inferred that curators should be a 'secondary' entity but not in the way that art writer and curator Charles Esche describes (with the curator always compromised by forces outside of themselves) (2015, p.241). Rather Fiona appears to foreground the curator in relation to others, an aspect that art writer David Balzer emphasises (although he levies a generalised criticism towards curators as being remiss in acknowledging this in a reference to 'the autonomous curator') (2015, p.27). Bradley's statement reflects a collaborative focus within her claims of curatorial expertise, which does eventually lead her to communicate a greater preference for the associated curatorial identity of "producer." This demonstrates the ongoing negotiations curators have with themselves as they variously draw upon their perceived curatorial identities within their claims of expertise.
Relatedly, Jane Scarth (public programmes curator at Whitechapel Gallery) also connected with the identity of "producer", utilising the associated curatorial identity for her own purposes. Jane sought to claim her expertise and she used the term to describe how she curates, rather than to explain what a curator is. Sociologist Sophia Krzya Acord draws parallels with the contemporary art curator and 'a stage producer or orchestra conductor' with similarities based on 'their wide personal networks, effective social abilities, expertise on a particular subject, and powerful visions' (2010, pp. 448-449). This resonated with the identity Jane described in relation to the intricacies of her

professional activities as she communicated: “We don’t have a regular performance programme but sometimes there are opportunities to do that and again it is a very different relationship with art when you are working with performances. But I do also do other sorts of events where essentially, they do take on a sort of more performative feeling, so it is not necessarily a performance, like a big billed performance, but it is actually just a group of people in a room, with an artist kind of doing a reading or something else that is going to bring people together in a slightly unusual way, or it is about the encounter being non-linear somehow. I am quite openminded when it comes to what an event is and what that means for me and my job. I do everything from the really straightforward panel discussions on a theme or in relation to an exhibition that we might have or in the longer-term research projects, to working with artists, working towards an exhibition, to performances.” Jane intimated that there is something inherently ‘performative’ about the curatorial profession in its ‘creative’ potentialities, penchant for explanation and ‘coproduction’ (O’Neill, 2012, p.127). Nevertheless, these aspects could surely be said of other professions. So, again, what is a contemporary art curator? And what does their expertise consist of? Overall, there is a tension between the desire for certainty regarding curatorial identity and the way that curators seek out specific terms and related contexts, compared to the reality of their diverse expertise which does not reconcile with any fixed curatorial identity. These curators have demonstrated the complex ways that the same descriptive term and associated curatorial identity can be invoked in a variety of ways for the purpose of communicating and claiming their expertise.

Fig.8 External view of Whitechapel Gallery in London. Photograph by the author.

iv) Assessing their influence: Finding meaning

As has been established already, curatorial identities are drawn upon on behalf of art curators within their daily lives to fit their needs. The process of claiming their expertise by variously connecting with a range of associated identities in many different forms is also a part of the process of building and maintaining their professional influence. Jane demonstrated the way that curators themselves come to provide examples of the 'control' they might have in the 'work' that they do in a way that relates to wider commentary on professions (Friedson, 2001, p.12). Jane was keen to qualify how her own role within the education department at the Whitechapel Gallery was indeed curatorial. "My job is curator of public programmes and that is interesting in itself; that the gallery takes this approach" … "I'm in the education department and my colleagues in the education department also have the same types of job titles. We have a curator for community programmes, a curator for youth programmes, a curator for schools and teachers and a curator for families and all of those people… Their job title is curator with that sub-title as it were, which is really great" … "I mean these things are a bit silly and most of the time aren't worth talking about, but if you are thinking about the relationship of being a curator and my job title being curator, some people would dispute whether or not what I do is curating and this actually happens. You get conversations with people where they are like… are you not just an event organiser?" … "I definitely think that what I do is curatorial practice, because I have come through a curatorial programme, and that was what I wanted to get, by doing that, and I have sort of ended up in this job." There was evidence of frustration within Jane's description in terms of the way that certain identities were being projected onto her within her everyday life. Jane's observations resonate with art writer David Balzer's conveyance of an exchange with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev who he describes as 'artistic director of Documenta 13, the 2012 version of the contemporary art event' who rejected '*curators*' in favour of '*agents*' as she expressed a certain exhaustion in being asked to comment upon the way in which the associated terminologies have garnered widespread popularity including 'outside the artworld' (2015, p.1). Ultimately however, Jane held up her higher education experience to act as what Mirko Noordegraaf (academic in public management) refers to as 'protective shields' in trying to assert her professional identity as a named curator (2020, pp.206-207) as part of her claims of expertise.

Jane then embarked on a qualification of how her role aligns with the identity of a curator by detailing what her job entailed and the influence of programming within her claims of expertise. "On a day-to-day basis I am organising events but what those events are really vary", she stated. "There are kind of two things that really structure the way I work. One is the expectations for delivery

(which is to have something (an event) on every Thursday evening which is really a lot). If you compare the programming at Whitechapel with other organisations, we do a lot. That is because Thursday night is our late-night opening and because we are a small gallery the idea from Iwona[8] (who is the director) is that we have a very active programme and that people know that they can come in on a Thursday and there will be something happening. The majority of what I programme are talks, and those all vary." Jane then began to delve into the way she created meaning for herself within the curatorial profession. "This kind of thing is very simple for me to organise, I don't really have to worry about it, there is going to be an audience, and it kind of sits in the programme and it kind of does its job and people enjoy it. But it is not the things that I get most job satisfaction from, so there are other aspects of the programme and the programming that I developed and some of the programming that I inherited, that I have continued since coming here, that are a lot more engaged in terms of programmes."

However, Jane suggested that perceptions of her role might disguise the impact and the details of her curatorial programme-focused role. "My role, while on the surface is very straightforward, kind of organising events, however there are places within the programme where I am having much longer-term engagements with artists. Developing those relationships and then creating programming, that is for me more interesting and ultimately more interesting for audiences, because what they are getting if they come to one of those events is a really carefully curated, a really carefully thought through longer term programming."

Jane foregrounded the depth and longevity of project that were part of her professional contribution. She further claimed that her identity as a contemporary art curator was aligned with maintaining 'research' associations with the profession (George, 2015, p.33). Jane referred to a programme that she had introduced called *The Rural*, which she stated included five external collaborative "partners" which included the University of Aberystwyth, the Artists Collective: Myvillages, the Istanbul Biennale, Manchester School of Art and the Wysing Arts Centre, the majority of which Jane later referred to in the context of '*The Rural Assembly: Contemporary Art and Spaces of Connection*' as a couple of days in June 2019 dedicated to what was described as 'a special series of events and conference' bringing together the aforementioned partners in various ways (Whitechapel Gallery, 2021, a). There were also separate events, such as the 'exhibition', '*Myvillages Setting the Table: Village Politics*' (Whitechapel Gallery, 2021, b). Jane additionally described the range of professional activities with which she was engaged to include travelling to various locations

[8] Iwona Blazwick, director of Whitechapel Gallery in London.

for meetings, an academic-style conference as well as other events and potential publications, all predicated on addressing what Jane described as “themes” within the identity of the programme. Jane stated: “For me I have made sure that there is a research element to my work. It feels like I am in ownership of that. So, they are really key parts of my job. And then there is also performance.” Thus, Jane resultant but not always absolute distance from the physical exhibition space and the creation of exhibitions sees an alignment with art historian Terry Smith’s definition of ‘curator’ whereby he states:

> ‘The title of curator is assumed by anyone who has a more than minimal role in bringing about a situation in which something creative might be done, who manages the possibility of invention, or even organizes opportunities for the consumption of created objects or orchestrates art-like occasions’ (2012, pp.17-18).

The existence of Smith’s attempted definition (2012, pp.17-18) demonstrates how Jane’s claims of expertise might be defended and contextualised by curatorial discourse beyond her own claims of expertise and is certainly not without precedence. Smith also notes that ‘curating now encompasses not only exhibition making but also programming at many kinds of alternative venues and is often adjunct to even the most experimental art space’ (2012, p.19). However, arguably this extension of the curatorial role and programme-focused identity has now expanded even further than what Smith describes (2012, p.19). Jane was subsumed within one of the substantial mainstays of public art galleries in the UK, ‘the Whitechapel Art Gallery’ in London, having first emerged ‘in 1901’ (Blazwick, 2006, pp.118-119). This demonstrates how her curatorial expertise was being claimed from a position within a very established public contemporary art institution.

To further explore how the role of curator might be self-assigned and the curatorial identity rationalised based on the identification of professional needs it is useful to consider the artist/curator duo Baker & Borowski. I was aware of their work ‘SKIP Gallery’; art installations by various artists ‘housed in skips’, which their online presence summarises as having ‘re-conceived the idea of the exhibition space’ (Baker Borowski, no date, a). I arrived at the edge of Soho Square Gardens outside of the door to the House of St Barnabas, a charitable private members club and an artistic hub (The House of St Barnabas London, no date). Lee Baker and Catherine Borowski were self-described ‘artist/curators’ (Baker Borowski, no date, b) known collectively as Baker & Borowski based in Brighton. They were on one of their frequent trips into central London. Meeting at the doorway Lee arrived and indicated that Catherine was already inside. We went through into one of

the café rooms and Catherine got up to greet us having been working remotely on her laptop. The ease and generosity with which Baker & Borowski engaged in these conversations was slightly unfamiliar as I realised that it was a characteristic I had become distinctly unused to, having met many curators by this point. Could I venture so far as to say it was the artist in them? They were not preoccupied by asserting their influence professionally, socially, culturally, or otherwise.

Fig.9 External view of the House of St Barnabas in Soho, London. Photograph by the author.

Catherine described her background as including a fine art degree at Nottingham Trent University, where she specialised in installation, working primarily with construction materials to create sculpture. She had supplemented this with part-time work on a picture desk at a newspaper in London and noted that she observed public environments when travelling between the two locations as a student. Catherine became fascinated with the idea of 'non-place' as relayed by anthropologist Marc Augé who identifies them as 'a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' (1995, p.63). She communicated an awareness of a need to meet people who would assist with the realisation of her installations, so she began working at an experiential agency in London to help with that goal. These experiences evolved into the establishment of her business 'Produce UK' described as 'award-winning artists and curators,

placemakers and event-making specialists who create jaw dropping experiences for world class organisations and brands' (Produce UK, 2021). Lee on the other hand had studied Fine and Studio Arts at Newcastle University. He had not connected with drawing or painting, or with the approach to art education that was present within the university at the time. Instead, he had been drawn to 'interventionist art' referred to by Jack Richardson, an academic in the arts, who states:

> 'Interventionist art begins among its viewers and is constituted as a social collaborative event that occurs as a kind of open public exchange producing dialogue that connects producers with the social environments that compose their lives and provides both the opportunity for reflection and the potential for active social participation' (2010, p.19).

Like Catherine, Lee had a fascination with space and place and more specifically they were both interested in what Lee described as "a relationship with the city." This was presented by them both as an antidote to 'non-place' (Augé, 1995, p.63). They had similar aspirations as those outlined by Dipti Desai, an academic in the arts and art education and artist David Darts who refer to 'how urban art interventions can function as a form of critical public pedagogy' with the potential to question 'the increased corporatisation of the public sphere in these neoliberal times' (2016, p.184).

Lee would go to scrap yards and customise cars having them stacked by those running the scrap metal yards and painting them like "murals". Without many art-related work opportunities in the north of England he would create what he described as "weird interventions in the community." Eventually, Lee started working as a prop maker at the National Theatre and became a commercial artist rather than a community artist. He noted the scale of "deprivation" and a sense of futility at the lack of impact and change he could create. However, Lee also noted that he retained an over-arching belief that he would return to making his art at some point. Lee then proceeded to develop a career in music, becoming a music writer for television which then gave him the money to make his art and by doing so he retained an interest in the urban environment with an appreciation of street and pop art. Nevertheless, Lee still felt that these art forms were limited in what they said and he instead desired "layers" of meaning to an artwork. Lee referred to artist Joseph Beuys, which I later identified was an invocation of Beuys argument of 'art as the science of freedom' viewed as 'an anthropological concept' recognising 'past', present and 'future' (1986, pp.10-11). Their curatorial identity was enmeshed within a desire for an expertise born from claims of creative freedom. Desai and Darts encapsulate the type of focus and art that interested Lee and Catherine.

Even more specifically, Lee and Catherine's interests were focused on art which contributed to 'cultural politics in a democratic society' (2016, p.184). By extension both Catherine and Lee represented what art critic Lee Weng-Choy has come to identify in his statement, that:

> 'Artists, curators, critics, and such are prolific consumers of media and culture as well as intensely preoccupied with re-imagining and re-inventing languages and value systems so as to articulate positions of identity, authenticity, distinctiveness, resistance, or some other purpose' (2020, p.310).

This demonstrated the way in which Catherine and Lee's endeavours were not limited to, but neither a rejection of either the profession of artist or curator. Both professional designations of artist and curator respectively were invoked in ways that provided an identity which they believed could provide the descriptive means to claim an expertise that emerged from their obsessional focus on the projects with which they were occupied and more specifically in achieving innovation. Catherine and Lee were enthusiastic about their most recent project which has only just been concluded. It was titled '*Like it or Lump it'* and was a series of art installations in Selfridges on Oxford Street which journalist Mark Westall at FAD magazine described as the following:

> 'By breaking out of its expected gallery context and implanting it in unexpected environments, Baker & Borowski encourage – perhaps even coerce – the public to confront each artwork head on and consider how its meaning might be influenced by its setting in a receptacle for rubbish' (Westall, 2019).

The 'experimental' spatial vision so described could be viewed as distinctly curatorial (Sansi, 2020, b, p.5). Consequently, I pressed Baker & Borowski about their relationship with the identity of curator and Lee offered his perspective. "I think part of it just comes from going - we say we are curators therefore we are curators; you know? a) Because there is an ingrained knowledge that comes with our experience anyway, and b) because at the same time we are like, we can be what the hell we say we are, and people can accept it! Professions have been diluted for millennia. Like music producer, what the hell is a music producer? Once upon a time it was scientist, then it became working at Abbey Road with gear that no one could ever touch, and now every kid in his bedroom is a music producer" … "I think from our perspective, and you (Catherine) may argue differently, but I think we use the term curator just as a signifier really, its semantics. It directs people towards understanding a little, within a word or two of what we do." Lee's assertions speak to Balzer's argument that

‘artists still committed to relational or installation-based work want autonomy, no longer needing curators to advocate for them the way they did in the 1990s – although they do need curators to fill the unglamorous role of project management, facilitation and advocacy’ (2015, p.121). Lee and Catherine recognised their position as artists with increased agency, whilst also demonstrating a commitment to do whatever needed to be done. The view that they had of themselves as curators partly resided in their commitment to undertaking work associated with every aspect of their creative endeavours which would include anything that might be considered curatorial as they perceived it. The professional designation of curator formed part of their professional needs.

Lee and Catherine assumed whichever professional identity that was required, and this was certainly evidenced in their responses when I enquired about a performance piece undertaken in Greece with artist David Shrigley titled ‘*Laughter House*’ (Baker Borowski, no date, c). Lee to reflected on their relationship with Shrigley, stating: “I got a friend of mine a job as an assistant with David (Shrigley). He told David that I did music and David asked me about my music and he was like “Oh I’ve got this performance poet coming down from Glasgow. Can you record it for me and do some music for me?” It was afterwards that he loved it and revealed to me that it was an audition…” He relayed Shrigley’s words stating: “It was an audition and I have to write this mini rock opera for the Brighton festival, and will you write it for me?” Lee continued. “I said I will write it, on the proviso that Catherine is in the band.” Catherine interjected: “I had never played an instrument in my life.” Lee reiterated “she had never played an instrument.” Catherine then jokingly listed her musical prowess to include the recorder and the triangle. “But that is the nature of our journey. There is nothing prescriptive about it,” Lee asserted. He then detailed how Shrigley had agreed but on the basis that Catherine would need to practice. Catherine continued: “So conceptually he (Shrigley) liked the idea of a non-instrument playing musician. He really got it.” Lee momentarily caught onto Catherine’s words, so they were almost in unison. “He wanted to make sure that it was professional. So, you can be useless, but you’ve got to own (it)”, Catherine summarised. Neither Catherine or Lee commented on what they felt their professional identity was in the context of the project.

In essence, Catherine and Lee were exploring their practice and identity, whether that be through a physical space and its associations or through a person and their profession. You could argue that their expertise partially resided in subverting identities and moulding them into whatever they wanted. However, in some ways Lee’s statement regarding their rationale for their use of the term curator did demonstrate the possible risk of being interpreted on a superficial level. This superficiality is somewhat reflected in art writer David Balzer’s statement:

> 'Gathering things, connecting them, sharing them with others in a way that positions one as a taste-making host: sounds fun, doesn't it? This is precisely why everyone is now doing it. Yet it is still not okay to call yourself a curator if you haven't somehow acquired that professional designation' (2015, p.114).

However, Balzer is cautious about identifying who or 'what a curator is' and how this would be assessed (2015, p.114). In the case of Catherine and Lee, their rationale regarding the designation of curator arguably has a context within curatorial discourse based upon the discussions that surround the artist/curator dichotomy. For example, the 'Salon des Refusé' originating in the year 'eighteen sixty-three' in Paris was an exhibition created by artists who had not been successful in their bid to take part in 'the juried show in the Palais de l'Industrie' which led to what Balzer communicates as the start of 'artist-initiated exhibitions' wherein 'artists themselves curate' (2015, pp.31-32). Nevertheless, Catherine and Lee appeared to provide a more compelling argument for their curatorial expertise based on the identification of professional needs, where the curatorial can be reflected in the way it is invoked in everyday contexts. It does not matter in so far as how the curatorial identity is invoked or rationalised. It is the desire for authority and creative freedom which arguably influences how they identify and engage with various curatorial identities within their claims of expertise.

v) A process of comparison

In terms of how curators articulate their perceptions of curatorial identity as part of their claims of expertise, it is possible to demonstrate that this was also performed through a process of comparing identities associated with the profession. A specific example is interrogation of curator and artist identities as part of a comparative exercise. For context, the movement between the two designations of artist and curator appears to only be accepted if the designation of artist precedes curator. For example, curator Lynne Cooke argues that 'the curator should no more flirt with the notion of becoming an artist than fancy herself in the shoes of the patron. Instead, through such a collaboration, she may gain a partner who, like herself, also wishes to play by other rules – and to devise other paradigms' (2006, p.43). Cooke's assertion appears to be a warning about the dominance of a curator over a separate figure; the 'artist' (2006, p.43). The attempt to forge a separation of the two identities (artist and curator) was reflected in the comments of Sam Woods (exhibition curator at the Fruitmarket Gallery) who stated in reference to Fiona Bradley (curator and

director) that she was "trying to say yes as much as possible, to enable as much as possible" in reference to her relationship with artists. This demonstrates a belief in curatorial authority. Sam continued by saying "Fiona rarely ever says no." This demonstrates the potential for tension between the two identities, which is reflected in art critic JJ Charlesworth's questioning:

> 'Where does the distinction lie between artist and curator? Can we still distinguish artwork and curatorial production in a meaningful way? How do powerful art institutions police and control what gets seen? And how do artists and curators (independent, 'co-dependent' or otherwise) negotiate the hierarchies and divisions of power implicit in these distinctions or, as some would argue, their elimination?' (2007, p.91).

In an apparent awareness of having communicated an identity of the curator as being placed above the artist, Sam hurried a following statement: "You work with an artist who you respect. You have interesting conversations. It is a collaboration. You try to say yes as much as possible." Relatedly, O'Neill refers to the 'clear shift away from an artist-centered cultural hierarchy' wherein curators now experience greater authority which has the potential to put the artist and the curator on a similar footing (2012, p.103). The comparative discourse produced by curators within their claims of expertise explored identities associated with the two professions arguably as a way to try and apply some boundaries to what a curator is and is not. For example, in discussion with Greg Hilty (curatorial director at Lisson Gallery) stated: "It's all about the quality of what you do because artists are often very frustrated by curators who try to channel them too narrowly into their vision of things. But at the same time, most artists don't want to be told just come and do whatever you want because they can come and do what they want anywhere anyway, in some respects. So, you know, depending on what kind of artist you are… you need something to push up against, something to shape the way you present. At least the people we deal with, the better discussions are where the curators say, this is a context that I can offer you in terms of a place, in terms of a time frame, in terms of a budget, in terms of a scale of ambition. Are you making new work or are you showing existing work… and then the artist looks for a high degree of freedom to address that context. I think that artists deal with it, but they aren't that keen with someone coming and saying I want this now give it to me; they want… "why not this?" or "have you really thought about…?" And sometimes, but again it is to do with the quality of the art - if a curator comes in and says this, for a very precise reason, and it is a good reason, then that is very good, but sometimes curators can be lazy or busy or uninformed and they look to do things that are rather obvious and second-hand. So that is quite a big part of our discussion."

Greg appeared to also draw a parallel with the curatorial identity in association with the role 'of a manager' which is also discussed by anthropologist Roger Sansi (2020, b, p.7). This demonstrates how a questioning of the curatorial identity within claims of expertise also has the potential to invoke other associated identities. Relatedly, Balzer notes how the diverse associations with curators have the potential to also render the curator invisible, wherein he describes how:

> 'Increasingly, institutions are working without curators, yet still promulgating curatorial agendas. That is, their exhibitions look curated, but in fact no professional curators have been involved in the selection and arrangement of works' (2015, p.83).

However, O'Neill makes a more conciliatory argument wherein he refers to as 'an oversimplified antagonism' between 'artist and curator' as well as the relationship with 'audience', preferring instead to emphasise the 'spectrum of potential interrelationships' (2012, p.129).

vi) Curatorial vision

George Vasey (then curator at Wellcome Collection) stated: "I think of myself as a curator. I don't think of myself as a facilitator." There was a hesitation. "It's a facilitating role but curating is about authoring and I have something to say and I want to say it. That is a position and I think curating sums that up" … "I curated shows when I was a student. I didn't understand what curating was. I had no idea. I didn't come from an artistic background." George added "I guess it was wanting to be part of the conversation and it took me a long time to understand or to even make sense of the art world." George's statement resonates with the 'discursive formation' O'Neill describes, predicated on 'authorized statements' (2012, p.7). George's emphasis on authoring also relates to O'Neill's assertion that:

> 'Curators are involved not only in the selection, consignment, and installation of artworks but also in the expanded administrative role of determining a conceptual framework and working with collaborators from other specialist fields. Thus, the curator assumes a formal position of authorship in terms of a curatorial presentation' (2012, p.100).

George's claims of expertise were being performed based on an articulation of his curatorial vision. George arguably draws upon the idea of 'authorship' which is well-documented within curatorial

discourse, as demonstrated by O'Neill who acknowledges the lasting and dominant acceptance 'of authorship, self-positioning, and the creative value of the curator' (2012, p.34). In addition, curator Adrian George acknowledges the association with the profession of 'author' in the literal sense as curators 'provide articulate and clear texts that explore the history, provenance and meaning of work' which he argues is an aspect of curation which has seen significant growth (2015, p.15).

Amira Gad (previously art and architecture curator at Serpentine Galleries at the time of interview) relatedly expressed a view of the curatorial identity as being assimilated with the identity of 'editor' (George, 2015, p.15 and pp.17-18). This is further evidenced by curator Adrian George who acknowledges that the curator often deals with both the written word and publications but also navigates the circulation of information, articulating a purpose, making judgements and invoking the identity of 'critic' but also by communicating through writing or making judgements in the presentation of the art or 'exhibition' or in communicating with people, all under the rubric of the 'editing' identity's association with 'detail and diplomacy' (2015, pp.17-18). Amira articulates her expertise within her perception of this form of curatorial identity, stating: "I think that being a curator is also being an editor. There are different definitions of being a curator, but I mean traditionally speaking if we look at the history of what curating means, to look after or to care for, this whole idea has changed over time. I think especially within the context of contemporary art when it is not necessarily about looking after a collection in a museum, its caring for in a different way. We are caring for artists, we are caring for an artistic practice, we are looking after a discourse that is being disseminated and it is about how do we do that and sometimes the format of an exhibition is one channel, one platform, another time editing, or editorial is also that. So, for instance I think that there is a certain responsibility that comes with being a curator. As an editor thinking about my work with IBRAAZ, it is very much about what responsibility or role can I play when it comes to the dissemination or understanding of contemporary art and culture from the middle east and north Africa in different continents. In that sense curator is being an editor and it is again working with artists to facilitate that access and that understanding. At the end of the day, the curator is multiform and has many definitions - it can be anything! It really needs to be defined and revised according to each scenario and to each artist even." Amira sought to claim her expertise by considering curatorial identity and the responsibility that resides with the curator in their use of voice in whatever form that may take. Moreover, Amira appeared to communicate the over-arching view that professional identity should be whatever the context, person, and self, require.

However, George outlined a specific curatorial vision premised on adhering to a curatorial identity based upon responsibility and an awareness of curatorial positionality. In conversation he sought to claim his expertise in relation to the notion of “inter-dependence” as he stated: “I've been thinking a lot about the notion of the independent curator and it’s a term that has in a way ceased to make sense. I have been thinking more about the term inter-dependence. The inter-dependant curator. We rely on others, right? There is no such thing as autonomy.” In an online talk given months later in November 2020 hosted by the Freelands Foundation titled ‘On Interdependent Curating’, George expanded on these ideas by stating: “Let’s say there is two issues. One which is existential and the other one which is logistical. Both have been exacerbated by the pandemic.” George continued: “The idea of independence feels to me like a mirage” further stating that “in terms of curatorial practice, words like care, community, and locality, have replaced buzzwords such as globalism. Things have become much more pragmatic, with a welcome shift to a focus just as much on ethics as experimentation. And I guess what I am proposing here is that all forms of creative practice are inter-dependent. My own practice is grown out of necessity, serendipity, and strategy. It is reliant on the support of many other people” (Freelands Foundation, 2020). Vasey makes an argument for a new moment of contemporary art curation defined by connecting with others within which he desires to situate his claims of expertise.

In summary however, art curators have demonstrated how the communication of a professional purpose or vision implicates many associated curatorial identities. Curatorial identities are variously communicated within attempts to outline a professional purpose or curatorial vision and is therefore a feature of their claims of expertise.

In summary: Prospects of expertise

Returning to the investigative premise of this chapter: How do UK-based contemporary art curators navigate curatorial identity to claim their expertise? This chapter has demonstrated that associated curatorial identities navigated by UK-based contemporary art curators in the UK are variously applied, rationalised, and responsive in nature, demonstrating both contradictions and consensus. It appears that within the various narratives presented within this chapter there is a general acceptance of the existence of an expertise, however what this expertise consists of, is rather more complex to ascertain. Consequently, the negotiations that curators have demonstrated within their descriptions and engagements with their perceived sense of curatorial identities further demonstrates the performativity of their expertise.

This chapter has demonstrated some of the ways that curators sought to acknowledge the conflicting narratives within the profession and the various ways that they themselves perceived curatorial identity as part of their claims of expertise. In addition, the complexity and multitude of associated identities with the curatorial profession was variously contextualised within curatorial discourse, further demonstrating the challenge for curators to ground their expertise in comprehensive and communicable forms. The caution exhibited by some curators in the navigation of curatorial identity was not representative of any hesitancy regarding their expertise, but rather an example of their expertise existing in their ability to apply caution to various associated curatorial identities. Other curators demonstrated an instinct to "make peace" with perceptions of curatorial identity, however it is necessary to acknowledge that this is always within a consistent process of reformulation. Any curator could also seek to "make peace" with numerous forms of associated identities within any one claim of expertise. Multitude of curatorial identities could exist within their claims and only a nuanced approach to their expertise would reflect this diversity.

Some curators did express a more definitive instinct to identify with specific interpretations of curatorial identity within wider curatorial discourse and sought to align themselves with these understandings. However, due to the subjective nature of their professional life, the performance of these associated curatorial identities were not faithful to any specific definition, and consequently only further reinforce the performativity inherent in a curator's claims of expertise. These various attempts to attain and communicate fixed notions of curatorial identity, conversely act as representations of the subjectivity that arises within presentations of their own expertise due to the impossibility created by their inherent subjectivity. This is despite any attempt to adhere to any fixed discursive definition of curatorial identity.

Other curators communicated their own perceptions of curatorial identity in ways that were used and shaped by an instinct to further professional interests or to defend their own work from the risk of misinterpretation – more specifically to claim and maintain professional influence as part of their claims of expertise. Other curators found meaning within their own perceptions of curatorial identity that they felt reflected the actual work they were doing in their daily lives. The way that some curators referred to and influenced the notion of curatorial identity within their claims of expertise were therefore led by their perception of the influence of their work. In the worst case, it would be hypothetically possible to levy a criticism at an individual curator in specific terms if they were to be analysed for the perpetuation of curatorial identities that may seem unproductive, unethical, or

lacking complexity. However, any objection to a claim of expertise made on behalf of a curator would still be subject to the acknowledgement of the performativity of these claims and the complexity of the subjectivity that entails.

Some curators demonstrated an instinct to compare certain perceptions of curatorial identity to try and describe their own expertise. In a professional landscape of indeterminacy, the process of comparison was an approach that was shown to be useful to curators within their professional narratives and performance of expertise. There were also curators who demonstrated a desire to apply a specific curatorial outlook and vision to who they are and what they do. It is this curatorial vision and purpose that then directed their interpretations of curatorial identity. Therefore, arguably their curatorial vision became the structuring vehicle for their claims of expertise.

What is evident is that whether verbally acknowledged by the curator themselves or not, their relationship with their own perception of curatorial identities were variously performed, in a constant state of transformation, and subject to complex and individual notions of their own expertise. Performativity is therefore yet again central to curatorial expertise. It is only arguably with this acknowledgment that we can uncover the everyday variance and complexity of the profession, but also its productive, dynamic, and impactful components.

THE CONTEMPORARY ART CURATOR IN THE UK AND THE ART SPACE

Within the following chapter, 'Chapter Three - Between the Individual and the Institution' there will be an over-arching emphasis on how the expertise of the contemporary art curator in the UK is shaped, impacted upon, and vice versa, with respect to the way that curators relate to notions of curatorial identity and institutional identity. Chapter Three considers views of institutional identity and queries what about the art institution is curatorial, in order to further explore curatorial claims of expertise. The chapter identifies the impact of assumed curatorial and institutional identities and will provide an analytical tool by which to engage with the actual everyday lives of curators by asking the question: What do curators consider to be curatorial when working within an institutional context? This chapter foregrounds the role of ethnographic descriptions in terms of analysing the interdependence of the institutional and the curatorial in ways which have ramifications for comprehending their expertise. The relationship between the curatorial and the institutional will ultimately be revealed as iterative within curatorial claims of expertise. Chapter Four 'Curatorial Activity In The Art Space' further interrogates the relationship between the contemporary art curator and the art space by considering the question: What do the activities undertaken by contemporary art curators within the art space reveal about their claims of expertise? This chapter will reveal how ethnographic approaches provide insights into the less visible aspects of curatorial expertise.

Chapter Three

Between the Individual and the Institution

“I think that almost everyone in this organisation is a curator of sorts…” - Elizabeth McClean (Deputy Director, Fruitmarket Gallery). From an interview on Thursday 1st November 2018.

In considering the construction of the art space and in attempting to ascertain what is distinctly curatorial in its construction, a particular framework is worth unpacking: the curator and the art space. This chapter focuses on the complex interplay of the curator and the art space by asking the question: What do contemporary art curators consider to be curatorial when working within an institutional context? This creates an opportunity to consider curatorial expertise by approaching it from a specific analytical angle, context, and field site.

Fig.10 External view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Perceptions of curatorial identity and institutional identity as respective categories will be explored and put into dialogue with each other within this chapter to question the content and nature of curatorial expertise. For example, the ‘institutional’ consists of certain perceptions of which curators would be aware, not just through that which is based upon participating in ‘social interactions’ but also as part of the expectations staff would have relating to what Mary Jo Hatch (academic in

banking and commerce) and Ann L. Cunliffe (academic in organisational studies) describe as ‘institutional fields’ (2013, p.73). There would be a recognition of the expectations that come with what Hatch and Cunliffe describe as how ‘institutional fields organize actions and activities within an environment’ (2013, p.73). In terms of curatorial identity, Chapters One and Two have established that the curator has neither a fixed definition, set of educational or professional experiences through which they must progress, or a delineated expertise as a professional group. Therefore, by acknowledging curatorial expertise on these terms, it makes it even more challenging to ascertain what curatorial identity is, in the context of the institutional space and externally in terms of other physical locations and in the conceptual or virtual space for example.

Overall, this chapter will argue that the notion of curatorial identity and institutional identity as being separable from each other is an impossibility. The relationship between the curatorial and the institutional emerged from the field as prompted by the lives of the curators and became was a tool to question what curators often take for granted and to give insight into the beliefs that underpin their daily existence. This chapter acknowledges the impact of false dichotomies in terms of the construction of the curator’s expertise. Therefore, this chapter will demonstrate, through ethnographic insights, the ways in which the curator and the institution have an iterative relationship and what this reveals in terms of curatorial expertise.

This chapter demonstrates within ethnographic description, how curator’s themselves understand their expertise within the breadth and complexity of their everyday lives and how this can be revealed by utilising the identity of the curator and the institution for analytical purposes. However, the ethnographic descriptions within this chapter emerged from the field and speak to the complexity of the pre-supposed and misleading categories of distinct institutional or curatorial identity.

This chapter will provide ethnographic vignettes that emerged from a period of extended fieldwork at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, which has a self-stated commitment to ‘contemporary art’ (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2021) and acts as a public space with charitable status (The Fruitmarket, 2020, a). The Fruitmarket gallery operates as a multifaceted organisation with a noted focus on curation, audiences, and access, with their own publications (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2020, b). It has a central location within the city and operates in proximity to other primary museums and galleries in Edinburgh such as the National Galleries of Scotland, the City Art Centre and smaller gallery Stills, placing it within one of the most prominent arts and tourist locations in the city.

Fig.11 Street view. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Ethnographic Case Study No.1: Expertise in an institutional context

Leadership: A Sea of Intentions

As I sat in the office of the director, the only space slightly separated from the communal office that the rest of the staff shared, the door remained wide open whilst I waited. The far wall, in what was a relatively compact room, was taken over with Fruitmarket exhibition posters that were displayed chronologically. The display coordinated with the café space downstairs which had a wall similarly dedicated to the gallery's exhibition programme. It was a visual homage to each of its exhibitions,

acting as a visual archive, catalogue, and showcase. In this sense, the exhibition posters were arguably acting as a motivator, an example of legacy and visual form of validation for those inside the institution. For those outside of the institution, it arguably demonstrated consistency and was a showcase of the work of the institution and those responsible.

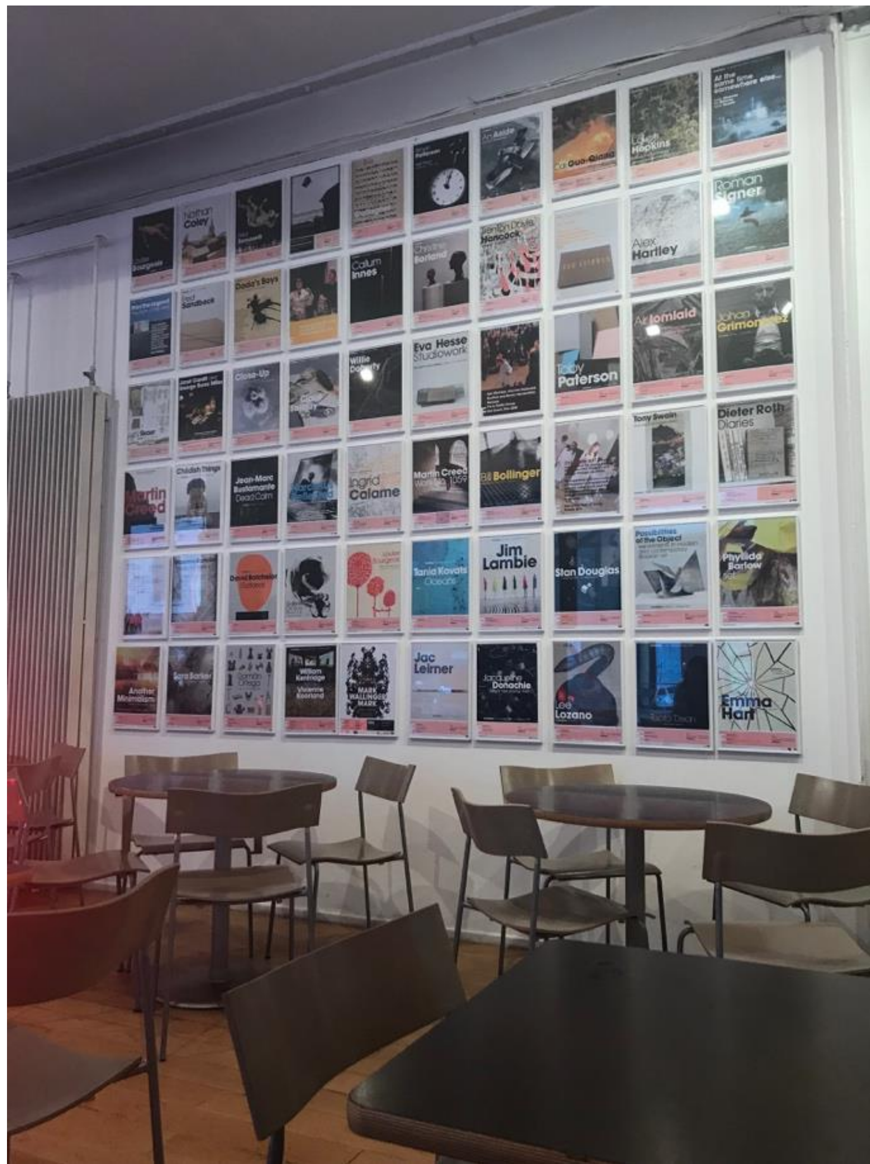

Fig.12 Exhibition posters in the Fruitmarket Gallery Café, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

Upon director and curator Fiona Bradley's arrival in her office and subsequent greeting, the wall made for an immediate icebreaker. It was very clear she was nearly running out of space. It was also evident how many women had featured in the gallery's programming. This was an aspect that likely stood out to me, both as a woman and aware as I was that Fiona was still a minority. For example, Dr

Kate McMillan's report from research in 2018 stated that 'in UK organisations receiving more than £500K in funding, only 23% of the directors are women' (2019, p.5). Fiona and the Fruitmarket Gallery appeared to be implicated in this statistic as the gallery's 'Report And Financial Statements For The Year Ended 31 March 2019' detailed a turnover of £1.79 million (Companies House, no date, p.25), with just over £1.2 million consisting of 'donations and grants' (no date, p.40).

During the week of international artist Senga Nengudi's exhibition[9] installation from Monday 11th March to Friday 15th March 2019, Fiona discussed the exhibition posters with curator and head of the Henry Moore Institute Programmes, Laurence Sillars, as they stood in her office with the door open to the wider office space. Fiona communicated that they had stopped doing the posters downstairs (perhaps due to spatial issues?) before commenting on the 60/40 gender division as a distinct achievement, of which she was evidently proud. The shortcomings of 'organizations' have long been noted with regards to equality of opportunity which Wright connects to a dominant resistance to 'change' (1994, p.1), meaning that Fiona's delight may have been personal as a woman, but also as the head of an institution breaking the mould. It was an aspect that had certainly occupied my own thoughts as an undergraduate student in History of Art, having been aware for many years of the Guerrilla Girls whose work titled 'The Advantages Of Being A Woman Artist' (1988) which I had printed off on acetate and pinned to the wall of my bedroom during my formative years at university. Interactions with Fiona in the first instance, appeared to be focused upon institutional identity as she drew upon the positive impacts of the institution as she saw them but also as a reaction to the visual prompts within the art space itself.

For all this was not my first interaction with the gallery since the start of my fieldwork period, I draw attention to the head of the institution Fiona Bradley, the figurehead of the gallery, but perhaps

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[9] The exhibition was by artist Senga Nengudi and the Fruitmarket Gallery communicated the exhibition's focus to audiences in the form of the physical exhibitions and events guide as being specifically premised on 'experimentation with material and form', 'spiritual rituals and performance across cultures' and an engagement with 'the possibilities of sculpture and representations of race and gender while drawing upon a tradition of abstraction' (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2019, a). The exhibition had originally been put together at The Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, with the artist herself working with 'Laurence Sillars, Head of Henry Moore Institute Programmes and curator of the exhibition' (Henry Moore Foundation, 2020) before travelling to the Fruitmarket Gallery with the continued presence of Laurence Sillars.

more accurately described as an individual with a generous vision. Fiona's vision appeared to be entirely disengaged from the curatorial narrative predicated on self-interest associated with the profession from 'the 1990s' onwards and that O'Neill claims was focused upon 'individual practice, the first-person narrative and curator self-positioning' (2007, p.14). It is these types of summations from within curatorial discourse that create an illusion of surety in terms of curatorial expertise. Leadership roles also imply a clear identity, focus and a leading expertise. However, how does the everyday life of Fiona Bradley as a curator and director provide a comprehension of curatorial expertise within an institutional context?

As I sat opposite Fiona at the circular table crammed tightly into her office, I enquired into what contemporary art meant to her. "It's a very good question. I mean, obviously I am trained… surrealism is my art historian….", Fiona briefly in soundbite form referred to her PhD in art history, yet quickly she changed her biographical trajectory and decided to answer in terms of an over-arching ethos and approach to contemporary art. "I'm not necessarily interested in art of our times but in ideas of our times. I am interested in what people are thinking and how people are thinking now." This statement could be interpretated as speaking to either institutional or curatorial identity, and yet neither were discernible from each other. This demonstrates how Fiona's approach was not without resistance. "What I always want to do with the programme at the Fruitmarket (and working within an organisation this small allows me to do that); I look at art that has been made in the recent past that has to do with thinking now. Sometimes that is showing someone like Emma Hart, who is making work now, and the most recent work in that show was made two weeks ago. Sometimes that's very important."

Fiona was referring to the exhibition 'BANGER' by Emma Hart, which was exhibited to the public from 27th October 2018 to 3rd February 2019 (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2020, c). The works in the upstairs gallery constituted the artworks created purposely for the exhibition, named 'Green Light, Wipe Out, Wind Down', respectively (Bradley, 2018, p.44). For the sake of setting the 'visual' scene (2018, p.44), Fiona described Emma's work in a publication (2018) as: 'Art that appeals to you as a thing rather than an object' (2018, p.43). This again re-affirmed the intentions she expressed in the interview I undertook, as she narrated the work in the sense of it responding, 'in the present' (2018, p.43). In addition, Fiona's observations demonstrated how various institutional models could be appealing, based upon the structuring that a curatorial vision would allow.

Fig.13 Emma Hart. *BANGER*. Upstairs gallery view.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.14 Emma Hart. *BANGER*. Upstairs gallery view.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

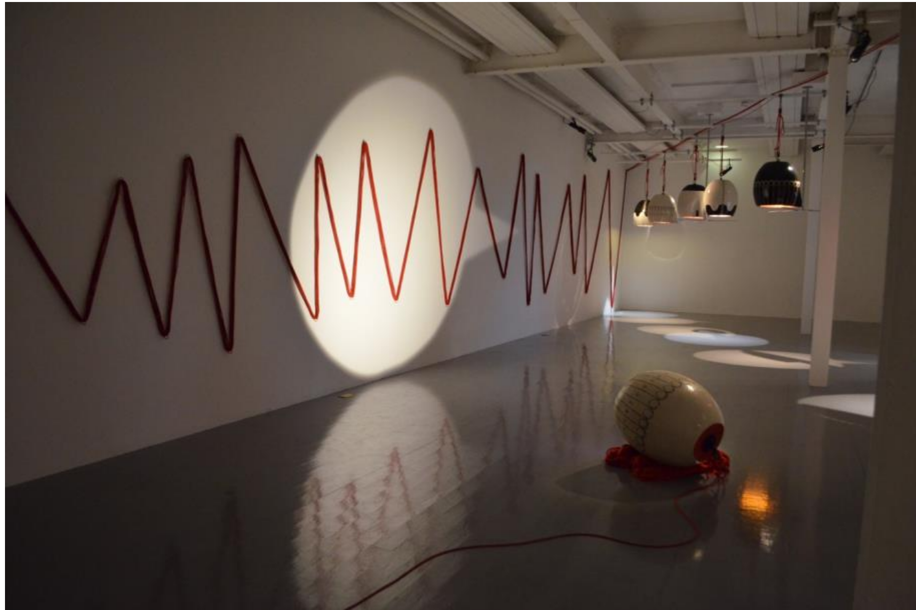


Fig.15 Emma Hart. *BANGER*. *Mamma Mia! 2017*. Downstairs gallery view.
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

The downstairs gallery showed the previously created work 'Mamma Mia! (2017)', a part of Emma Hart's 'Max Mara Art Prize Residency' (Bradley, 2018, p.45), which she acquired through her success in 'the Max Mara Art Prize for Women', for which Bradley was a judge, and this being the initial point of introduction in terms of Fiona's familiarity with Emma's work (2018, p.43). The artworks in 'Mamma Mia!' had themes and contexts such as 'the Milan Systems approach to family psychotherapy; family relationships and structures in ancient Rome' and 'maiolica ceramics', resulting in 'eleven large maiolica heads/jugs/lamps made in collaboration with master ceramicists in Faenza' (2018, p.45). Fiona also described the 'speech bubble' shadows (2018, p.45) and Emma's focus upon 'family china', 'pattern' and 'generations' (2018, p.46). Fiona's individual familiarity with Emma's work seemed led by her relationship with the artwork and seemingly curatorial preoccupations. Fiona was also keen to emphasise, in the context of the artists and artworks exhibited at the Fruitmarket Gallery, that: "It's also very important that we show someone like Lee Lozano, although she was making work in the 60s and 70s, was making very feminist work; work that I think speaks to how people are thinking now around the MeToo movement, around the notion of…", Fiona paused. The Fruitmarket Gallery had previously held an exhibition of the late artist's work, titled *'Slip, Slide, Splice'* and exhibited to the public from 10th March to 3rd June 2018, wherein the exhibition's intention was to engage with select examples of the artist's work as a type of retrospective, amongst a wider effort towards a 'reassessment' of an artist previously discounted from artistic narratives (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2020, d). In this sense, Fiona's approach again

appeared to be about predominantly connecting with a curatorial identity based upon a connection to artistic narratives through the theory and contexts surrounding the artists and artworks. This is an acknowledged curatorial preoccupation, even to the point that those such as Acord give it precedence regarding a hierarchy of curatorial focuses (2010, p.447). In the case of Emma Hart, her artistic narratives exist in the aforementioned themes and contexts.

Fiona arguably sought to further emphasise her curatorial identity, as she asserted: "Very many of our audience won't have heard of Emma Hart. I am very fortunate that I encountered her in the course of my professional life, so I want to share those ideas and that way of making work with our audience. And then our show, you know, Tacita Dean[10], people might have heard of more, but lots of people won't have done." Fiona's recognition that she had been privileged to be exposed to an artist's work and creativity in general, appeared to acknowledge a distinctly curatorial identity. This is true if viewed in relation to the argument made by Acord regarding 'the curator', wherein she discusses the curatorial role in relation to artwork and the artist, aligning the curator with the role of 'examining how particular properties become salient in the hands of agents in certain moments of circumstances' (2010, p.462). Furthermore, Fiona appeared to be emphasising the notion of developing a partnership with audiences, rather than hosting audiences within the art space.

However, by referring to the social movement of MeToo[11], Fiona also demonstrated that her curatorial identity did partly reside within Ken Arnold's observation (even though it was in reference to 'curators' in a 'museum' context), 'that curators have increasingly emerged as some of our most significant cultural leaders: impresarios with an acute ability to make relevant the dizzying world of stuff around us' (2015, p.317). Nonetheless, I would argue that these two aspects respectively (of artwork context and prominent global discourses) appeared intertwined, and you would be forgiven for making assumptions about which was her prevalent focus. Even so, Fiona asserted, as we sat in interview, crammed into her smaller office at the back of the communal office space: "Recuperating lost voices is not something I'm necessarily interested in, but just looking at ideas that are prevalent now and thinking, what of the recent past can help people think through things that are happening now." From what I could discern, Fiona had a clear intention to focus on dealing in-depth with

[10] *Artdaily* described the exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery, and 'the context' surrounding the artist and her career, as well as detailing the various 'works' included 'in the exhibition', and the general note that 'the exhibition' focused upon 'performance as its theme' (no date).

[11] Academics Giti Chandra and Irma Erlingsdóttir provide an important context for the development of the 'movement' that should be widely known (2021, pp.1-17).

dominant ideological issues within contemporary life. Fiona asserted: “It’s not any kind of art, but its more - does it have an appeal in the context of now?” This statement was open to interrogation through a consideration of the role of hindsight and whether we have the level of context and clarity in the present to accurately assess what is relevant to “now.” “So contemporary ideas….?” I enquired. “Yeah, but more how people think, rather than how the art world thinks” Fiona responded, similarly distancing herself from this aspect (Smith, 2012, p.146). This type of statement demonstrates why anthropologist Roger Sansi asks the question: ‘what distinguishes curatorial work from ethnographic work?’ (2020, b, p.6). Fiona did seem to be trying to evoke a specifically curatorial identity by positioning herself as a leader with a curatorial vision, with the intention of bringing people together in what is now viewed as a more traditional view of the curator with the team functioning to support her individual curatorial ‘ideas or values’ (O’Neill, 2012, p.88).

Nevertheless, aside from Fiona’s curatorial aspirations, the institutional parameters of the Fruitmarket Gallery appeared to also inform a curatorial approach directly and by extension, her leadership. Fiona stated: “I came from much bigger organisations, but I arrived here and there is a lot less money in Scotland than there is down South[12], so on average your public funding for Scottish institutions is much less and there is definitely a culture of making do and getting by, and what can you do for not very much.” Fiona had by this point, already provided details of her professional progression. She had undertaken a BA in French and Art History at Cambridge University, graduating in 1989, then completing an MA and PhD at ‘The Courtauld Institute of Art, London’, which is also noted as a leading institution by Adrian George within the parameters of the curatorial (2015, p.20). “During the time I was doing my PhD I was working in the slide library of the Tate in London. I was also teaching at the Courtauld, and I was teaching a course at the Architectural Association. I thought of all the organisations I was involved with, and the Tate, was probably more kind of working with the actual objects, or working with contemporary art, which was more what I wanted to do. Although even in the early 90s, which it was by this stage, again it is odd to say, but there wasn’t very much contemporary art being shown at the Tate. There was still a sense that you needed to be in your fifties or sixties before you had a show at the Tate. So, I started working more in the education department of the Tate. From the slide library, I then started doing talks and tours and lectures and working on a freelance basis in the education department. Tim Marlow[13], who was the head of adult education programming at the Tate at that point, he then went off to launch the

[12] A reference to southern England, most especially London.

[13] Tim Marlow is currently director of the Design Museum in London.

magazine[14] and I did the education programming for Paris Post-War (exhibition)[15] which was in the research area of my PhD. I did that, and I worked very closely with the curator of Paris post-war exhibition, Frances Morris, who is now on our board, and realised that there was this thing called a curator that I would quite like to be. There was a job at Tate Liverpool, so I applied for that. I got that – finished my PhD while I was doing that job, then I went to Hayward Gallery, then I came here." The impact of institutional structures and the opportunity to create a sense of continuity within relationships, was evident in Fiona's statement. For context, Frances Morris, (director of Tate Modern at the time) occupied a position on the board of directors at the Fruitmarket Gallery, symbolised to some degree by the Fruitmarket Gallery tote bag that was hanging in her office during my interview with her at Tate Modern in January 2018. Frances had similarly acknowledged the Paris Post-War exhibition within interview, demonstrating a resonance with Fiona's outlook and an example of exchange between individuals within a public art space, a particular type of institution. This could be interpreted as either curatorial or institutional endorsement. However, based on the iterative relationship between the two, it was likely validation of both.

Fiona continued to discuss the unique institutional components of the Fruitmarket Gallery as directly impacting upon curators by stating: "Unusually, with an organisation of our impact, nationally and internationally, we don't have a big curatorial staff, so I've always been the chief curator as well as the director and that saves us money… you know, because we don't have a lot of money to pay people's salaries. You also can't have a big curatorial team and not a big research budget. You can't have a curator that doesn't go anywhere or look at anything, so I suppose there is a sort of financial implication in that. But more than that, I think there is an ideological implication. When I arrived, I took lots of advice on how we were going to run this. I talked to staff, like you always do when you arrive somewhere, and the advice I took was kind of…, people said two things really – think about what you like and what you are good at, and look at your staff team and where they are, the people in your staff team that think the same way as you do about the organisation."

Fiona's initial approach to her directorship, by turning to other arts institutional heads for advice, demonstrates her respect for curators in similar institutional roles and therefore arguably the

[14] In a recent article by Dezeen in response to Marlow becoming 'director and first chief executive of the Design Museum in London', Marlow was also described as 'the founding editor of Tate magazine' (Hahn, 2019) to which Fiona is referring.

[15] There is a catalogue largely written and edited by Francis Morris for the exhibition that is titled '*Paris Post War. Art And Existentialism 1945-1955*' (1993).

prominence of institutional identity within her claims of expertise. Furthermore, in more general terms, by seeking advice regarding the identification of staff strengths, appears to be part of a more generic managerial strategy, evident in anthropologist David Marsden's acknowledgment that: 'If allegiance and motivation are to be ensured, then the legitimacy of the organizational cement must be recognized by members' (1994, p.37). Fiona was evidently calling on individuals within other institutions, to provide guidance on institutional models of working. Nevertheless, Fiona then outlined her aspirations for a curatorial outlook to shape the institution, stating: "I always wanted the Fruitmarket to be artist driven, to have art and ideas at its core, so I thought, well it needs its primary decision-maker to be someone who is running the programme. This was partly because, for me, I didn't want to just spend my time writing funding applications, although I do spend a lot of my time writing funding applications – a lot more of my time writing funding applications than I used to! But the gallery is going to be run by someone who is running the main exhibition programme. And our deputy director very, very unusually in an organisation of any scale really, is a graphic designer... Elizabeth."

Fiona detailed her professional progression, which was directed by her acknowledgement of types of art institution that enabled curatorial aspirations, stating: "I guess it was about coming closer to the object. In my career I have been at ever smaller organisations to get closer to the object and the artist I suppose." Fiona's statement did resonate with Frances' observation in our interview, as she noted that she often wished she could spend more time with artists, connecting with academic, artist, art writer, and gallerist Alex Gawronski's reference to 'institutionalized "auteurist" curating', rife with 'neoliberal demands and corporate expectations' (2020, p.233). Both Frances and Fiona's statements demonstrate how institutional structures can both limit, and enable, certain curatorial desires and aspirations.

Fiona acknowledged the financial strains of an institution and its impacts upon the curatorial role. As Andrew Hunt (academic, curator and art writer) argues, the financial aspects and constraints for institutions in the UK in this regard, has meant that 'curators' are often being directly replaced by 'business managers and chief executives' (2018, p.7). This arguably demonstrates a possible preference for institutionally and financially defined skills, over other aspects of the curatorial profession, or indeed a preference for institutions to dispose of curators completely. On the other hand, Fiona's statement could be representative of what curator and art writer Richard Hylton refers to, as how 'the professionalization of curating has prepared vast numbers of curators to deal with the particular requirements of arts-related public funding' (2007, p.114), even if she did resent what

she perceived to be the increasingly dominant focus on funding. This arguably encapsulates the tension that is demonstrated on behalf of curators, existing in the paradoxical qualities of their lived experience, between a pursuit of a professional ideal, in opposition to anti-professional sentiments. For example, I would argue that the instinct of curators within institutions (to enable artists, creativity, and individuality) is set amongst a context of anti-professional perspectives regarding institutional structures, the idea of a standard ideal institution, and the routines that institutions create.

Fiona however, demonstrated her interest in leading a team with the skills that met the needs of the Fruitmarket Gallery specifically. For example, a graphic designer would usually be viewed as a separate profession to those linked to the activity of galleries. However, having an in-house, senior member of staff with this core skill, further strengthens the identity and position of the gallery, by ensuring a clear and consistent institutional voice is maintained, and therefore the various strengths of the staff could be argued to reflect the needs of the institution. Elizabeth's long tenure at the gallery provided useful institutional insights, from which Fiona appeared to draw upon in her management approach, akin with what Stephen A. Linstead (academic in management humanities) recognises as the 'critical capacity in managers' (1997, p.88). Fiona arguably embraced the aspects which Linstead foregrounds in 'that management itself is multi-disciplinary, a fluid entity constantly in process' (1997, p.95), and thus arguably sought to support that condition, with staff that deliver a higher degree of specialism.

In an interview with Elizabeth McLean, deputy director of the Fruitmarket Gallery on Thursday 1st November 2018, she summarised the professional experiences that had led to her position. At the Fruitmarket Gallery, this began in 2000 as bookshop manager (with the previous director Graeme Murray). Elizabeth then moved into publishing within the gallery and "design in-house." The gallery produced books based on the artwork and exhibitions of artists whose work they showed in the gallery space. It was when Fiona arrived in 2003, that Elizabeth was given the role of deputy director in 2004. Elizabeth detailed the facets of her role, stating: "My role as deputy director means that I am the key decision maker after Fiona Bradley the director, which means that I have oversight of all areas of what we do; from budgeting, to fundraising, to installation and the curatorial aspect of what we do. So, I am involved in all those decisions and have strategic responsibility for all of those decisions. Specifically, within my role, I manage teams. I manage the engagement team, so that is a four-strong team, so I have responsibility for managing them and helping keep them focused on the objectives of the organisation. I manage the commercial income team, so I look after the events,

café, bookshop; so any earned income that we do, I manage that team, so that is Ian and Ally.[16] I also manage the communications and design aspects of what we do. I work with Louise our communications manager to oversee and have overall responsibility for that. Also within that is the publishing programme that we do. I manage that and I design the books that we do, and I production manage them as well. So, it's quite a wide role!" Elizabeth revealed a very unusual career progression, about which there wasn't anything largely curatorial, and then detailing her role at Fruitmarket in relation to widespread responsibility and various specialisms, both creative and logistical. It was evident that Elizabeth had invested time in the organisation and had almost become an expert in its inner institutional workings, alongside her creative facets. Both Fiona and Elizabeth submitted the idea that you could become the expert in a specific institution. This arguably suggested that articulations of institutional identity were at the forefront of their minds.

However, within the vein of collaboration and drawing upon the unique combination of staff and their various professional strengths, Fiona continued in interview, by detailing how she came to decisions, not just about what would be within her remit, but also what would not. Fiona emphasised how she valued combining various types 'of workers' in anticipation of the individual skills they would bring to the organisation. In essence, this demonstrated how Fiona stepped away from the intention to portray a homogenised collection of staff that aimed to communicate the curatorial identity. Instead, Fiona was focused on attempting to harness the effects of various forms of 'specialization' (2001, pp.22-24), even within the same individual. In essence, Fiona distanced herself from wider curatorial discourses and instead put forward her own specific curatorial view and practice. By ensuring that the staff responded to the various needs of the institution, Fiona arguably paved her way to focus on her own curatorial concerns.

However, Fiona's consideration of the Fruitmarket's activity of producing publications, encapsulates how she believed that she had managed to combine both her curatorial identity and strengths, alongside her aspirations for institutional purpose, location, and identity. Fiona seemed to pursue autonomy regarding the continuity of identity, of both the curator and the institution. This again reaffirms the view of curatorial and institutional identity as being interdependent. Furthermore, Fiona's awareness of the demands regarding their specific institution, but also the curatorial and institutional concern regarding the purpose of what they are doing in the process of showing art (Israel, 2020, p.179) arguably acted as a defence of both the curator and institution. Fiona was emphatic about the need for "cultural organisations and certainly art galleries" in creating in her

[16] Iain Morrison, Enterprise Engagement Curator and Allison Everett, Buying and Retail Manager.

opinion “a healthier and happier society, and a more thoughtful and humane, and compassionate society” as she further stated, “that is what we are for. And that is why we should be funded.” This was the first time in conversation with Fiona where there had been no room left for nuance. Fiona made the statement in a way that was very matter of fact with the view that they were deserving of public and private financing, but also that they fulfilled an obligation to the public and that was central to their approach, whether curatorial or institutional.

Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern submits ‘audit culture’, as a concept which refers to ‘practising, or performing, ’accountability’’, by acknowledging that it exists beyond practical assessments and static forms and is rather constructed as ‘a distinct cultural artefact’ (2000, p. 2). Fiona laid the groundwork for a focus on public responsibility, on behalf of both the curator and the institution in the public sector. Fiona chose to emphasise the need for the institution and the curator to pursue social change in response to public need. For context, the ‘pressure to justify their purpose’, as art dealer Karsten Schubert argues, has previously been considered ‘distasteful’ by ‘curators’ but that has become futile on their part (2000, p.71). This was a view evidently shared by Fiona in her calm frankness. However, in addition, academic, curator and art writer Kate Fowle also acknowledges the shifts experienced by curators wherein they became ‘open to reinterpretation, the role became more flexible and therefore also more vulnerable’ (2007, p.13). This arguably, at least in part, contextualises the presence of any defensiveness exhibited by Fiona. As such, I enquired into the concept of curatorial expertise and professional identity, leading from the idea of public responsibility. Fiona responded: “Yes, that is a big, enormous topic, and very timely. Obviously, there are people who set out their stall in a very particular way. If you look at what Alistair Hudson did at MIMA, and will I’m sure do at Manchester.[17] The notion of looking at where the power is and looking at where the expertise is, and I think, it shifts all of the time.”

However, despite aligning her curatorial and institutional focus with public responsibility, Fiona acknowledged that her professional intention was not to completely focus on public responsibility as a defining mutual identity. At the time of his directorship at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Alistair Hudson was making his purpose clear, stating:

[17] Alistair Hudson has since left the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester following the suggestion that he was ‘asked to leave', due to the exhibition ‘Cloud Studies’ by Forensic Architecture and the ‘pro-Palestinian’ views present in the exhibition (The Art Newspaper, no date, a).

> 'you create an institution that is created by and through its usership, so that the content and the function is increasingly less determined by those in power, but rather you redistribute authorship, you redistribute power, to make the institution the true manifestation of its community' (Hudson, 2017); which in essence, was Hudson's curatorial <u>and</u> institutional mission.

This sentiment continued as Hudson became director of the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, continuing to reinforce a vision of an art gallery as an enmeshed part of a 'social project' (Hudson, 2020, p.20) focused on the 'public', democracy and 'power' (2020, p.18). Fiona did not seemingly want to completely align herself with such fixed institutional or curatorial intentions. However, Fiona continued with a reflection on her curatorial beginnings, feeling an apparent need to contextualise her opinion on Hudson's approach, in ways that did sympathise with his enmeshed curatorial and institutional outlook (Hudson, 2017 and 2020, pp. 1-2). "In my time, when I started, everyone who was a curator was pretty much an academic art historian. Most people had come through the academic route. So very, very focused on ideas and culture in a broader sense maybe. And then there was the rise of the curator and the curatorial courses and the Euro-Curo and it became a little about who you know, the network, the professionalisation and the networks of it – we are curators and the guardians of the knowledge, and we are top down. We are dispersing our knowledge, and the whole biennale thing, we all gather everyone together and we will tell you what the ideas are at the moment. I suppose we are now getting a backlash from that. It is now more distributed curatorship, and you are not in any way the guardian of all this knowledge which you are disseminating and a sort of opening out of the institution, which I think is a really good thing; the opening out of the curator."

Institutions and the curator, Fiona appeared to suggest, were experiencing mutual and entangled growth. Fiona's comment on the curatorial imperative and identity as she perceived it now, was shaped by the idea that curation and art institutions were moving in tandem, transforming into something more akin with access to culture, process, and ideas. However, some of Fiona's reflections appeared more focused upon communicating a specifically curatorial identity. Fiona elaborated regarding the notion of curatorial expertise, stating: "It's not taste, but it is expertise, or just a concentration maybe. People who spend their time thinking about this and looking at things and obviously there is knowledge that comes from that. It is a professional expertise in some ways, but you are not saying, well my ideas are better than your ideas. I mean possibly. Maybe. I have a lot of them. I'm paid to have them, here I am. I have learnt how to do this." Fiona's statement lends

itself to what Jade French (academic in inclusive arts practice and museum studies) describes as 'the potential for curating as an experimental activity' (2019, p.162).

Fiona did appear to want to claim a curatorial expertise, even though she communicated it in abstract terms. Additionally, Fiona emphasised the role that '*practical* knowledge and skill, both conscious and tacit' (Friedson, 2001, p.33) played within her claims of curatorial identity. Furthermore, Fiona did appear to suggest that there were commonalities among curatorial identity, irrespective of the institution, stating: "I mean obviously some people do move a lot – and some people are very mobile between organisations and institutions, and there is the non-institutional curator of course and people work differently when they don't have the weight of the institution around them. But I think the concerns are actually very similar. I don't really know a curator, reallllly, if you really come down to it, that isn't interested in presenting art to an audience in a context. Which is all we do, really. It isn't rocket science, to be very cliché. I think we are all motivated by that. Otherwise, we would have stayed in academia or gone back to academia." However, Brenson demonstrates how this professional curatorial emphasis can be seen to be supported by impressions of an institutional identity, as he states that 'the increasing institutional awareness of the importance of the audience has made curators more visible as mediators between art and its publics' (1998, p.18). Now some time has passed since this statement, and arguably the focus on the connective potential and facets of the curatorial and institutional identity can be seen, certainly in the case of the Fruitmarket Gallery and its curatorial team, to be fully cemented within both entities. Ultimately, Fiona did communicate that her curatorial drivers meshed with an institutional vision. "There is something in the opening out of everything which I really like. A lot of our engagement work for example is peer led" … "turning the institution from, we've got this over here and we are going to welcome you in to enjoy it, but we've got this over here so how can we open it so that you want to come in to enjoy it. The shift of that really interests me and you can see that in everything."

However, Fiona's reflections then appeared to respond to the question of what constitutes an effective institution, starting with its functional offerings, before taking a holistic view. This was based on her own sense of how the institution functions, in such a way, that also implicates the curator, enmeshed again through a consideration of purpose. "I remember early on when we were talking about the gallery and rebranding the gallery there was this whole discussion, that maybe a visitor to the café was a failed visitor if they didn't come into the gallery. Now you would think well no, if you want to use us as a café then on you go, you've made a decision to come to the Fruitmarket café and not to Starbucks, so there is a reason for that. If you want to come to the toilet

you know, we're a publicly funded organisation, use our loo, please! I would much rather you used our loo than pissed on the street. Those kinds of things I think have shifted – that we are an undercover public space, and you can use us however you would like! I'm not going to tell you what you have to do. I would love it if you would like to spend some time in the gallery section of the gallery and think alongside some of the art we show. I would love that! But I don't consider you a failed visitor if you don't want to do that. So that's all kind of interesting! But I suppose the thing that I struggle with is the kind of… some of the Alistair Hudson approach… ask people what they want... give people what they want… because I think we are in the business of giving people what they don't know they can have. If you ask somebody what they want, and you show them what they want, they can only ever have what they want, and how are they going to know what they want?!"

Once more, in a collective, jointly curatorial, and institutional voice, based around identifying a purpose, Fiona continued: "What we try and do is run a programme, a kind of variety of things, accepting it won't be the same for everyone. But trying to be also, responsive. Thinking, all of the time, what worked, what didn't work, but trying not to be as audience-led as others. Trying to be open and democratic and transparent, whilst also saying we are in a fortunate position where we get to see a lot of art and that we can maybe bring you things you don't know. But whilst I do want us to be open, I think we have to be allowed to say, we have chosen something that we believe to be excellent, and we believe you will enjoy it. You might not enjoy it, but we hope you will acknowledge it is excellent. Whilst we could be so open that we ask someone from an amateur art group to come and exhibit with us and sometimes that would be interesting in the context of an engagement programme, actually I think it is okay for us to show very, very high-quality work because we have the expertise to do so. I think that making very, very high-quality work easily accessible to people, intellectually, financially, and physically, that's important. That is what we are for."

Overall, there is indisputable expertise present in Fiona's identity but the clarity an institutional leadership role would initially appear to provide, does not reflect any sense of a fixed curatorial or institutional identity. The reference points with which the institution and curators surround themselves can at times seem unclear, as demonstrated by Fiona's statement*:* "I suppose my definition of the contemporary, is not concept..." Fiona stopped mid-sentence, appearing to make sure to not commit herself to something she didn't mean, censoring herself as she spoke. This resonates with Mosse's prompting question, posed in relation to conducting anthropological fieldwork with professionals, 'that managers and experts are involved in the organization of interpretations as much as planned outcomes?' (2006, p.942).

Ultimately, Fiona Bradley, as director and curator, epitomises the institutional and curatorial identity within her role. It is not possible to ever separate her institutional and curatorial knowledge, identity, and practice. Fiona demonstrated a series of focuses such as her vision for exhibition programming, specific artwork and artist contexts, institutional models and contexts, a connection with contemporary ideas and debates, personal relationships with artists, curators and art world figures, staff models, skills, and hierarchies. These focuses which I have outlined as a sea of intentions synonymous with her leadership, have demonstrated the complexity and iterative nature of curatorial and institutional identities. Furthermore, the implications for the identification of curatorial expertise is reflected in the complex interplay of curatorial and institutional identities, that create an expertise which must necessarily be set within specific contexts, so as to appreciate the specific ways in which the curatorial and institutional identity are interchangeable.

As such, how curators within the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh navigate the construction of curatorial and institutional identity, might be most productively perceived with regards to the trials, contradictions, empowerment, and complexities inherent in their daily lives. It is therefore unnecessary to make any effort to create a binary framing of curatorial and institutional identity, respectively. Instead, it is important to consider how curators experience these identities, and how aspects of their everyday lives reveal the way that these identities connect, separate, and implicate the other. Fiona's position as spokesperson for the intertwined institutional and curatorial identities, connects with what anthropologist Thomas Yarrow refers to in his ethnographic study of an architecture practice, wherein he highlights the responsibility and authority residing in the 'strategic direction' provided by 'directors' (2019, p.29). What Fiona was describing was her own vision, but informed by collaboration, which resonates with Yarrow's acknowledgement in the context of an architecture practice, of what he describes as 'a commitment to holistic design, the ideal of this as a joined-up creative process in which there is individual "ownership," informs practice in a range of ways' (2019, p.29). However, Fiona's curatorial expertise is as much a product of the iterative and highly complex relationship between curatorial and institutional identity. Fiona's leadership role was therefore arguably to instigate and question rather than to provide clarity.

The Team: Navigating Identities and Hierarchies

A consideration of what is curatorial within an institutional context, can also be interrogated through an examination of the wider team, and the navigation of hierarchies and identities that arose from within the team. Taking a seat in the busy downstairs café space of the Fruitmarket Gallery, I sat

opposite Ruth Bretherick, research, and public engagement curator. I enquired into her role, to elucidate her view in the most concise way. Instead of an individualised narrative, Ruth, as was the case with Fiona, emphasised the cohesiveness of the team, acting as a unifying force. This evokes the notion of 'organizational culture' representing 'something held in common among group members' and thus Hatch and Cunliffe's perspective, speaks to how this instinct both Fiona and Ruth had to emphasise the wider team as a whole, might function as a part 'of shared meanings, beliefs, assumptions, understandings, norms, values, and knowledge' (2013, p.159). Therefore, what role did the curatorial have in terms of consensus amongst the staff? As Hatch and Cunliffe importantly note, there is a challenge for the whole team due to the way that 'they need to accommodate disagreement without making it impossible to maintain collective identity' (2013, p.159). In this sense, Ruth, and Fiona's emphasis on the work of the wider team could be a way of creating a sense of unity in terms of the purpose of the institution, but that also includes an acceptance of their independent curatorial identities.

i) Staff structure

Acknowledging the curatorial facets within the organisation, Ruth focused initially on describing how individual staff members operated in relation to the wider organisational whole. However, the emphasis on the individual still seemed to align with the idea of the gallery operating within the remit of a faultless microcosm of fixed identity, which relates to academic in organisational studies, Gareth Morgan's discussion of 'organization as machine' (1986, cited by Wright, 1994, p.18) and attempts to communicate institutional and curatorial clarity. Relatedly, Wright articulates that:

> 'Organizations in this sense are thought of as closed systems, with a segmental structure dividing up the overall goal of the organization into smaller and smaller tasks in a hierarchy of departments. The departments have clearly defined relationships, with every part functioning in the smooth running of the whole. All are held together by managers' central control with workers expected to behave like parts or adjuncts of the machine' (1994, p.18).

In the first instance, based upon Ruth's focus, you would assume that this was the image she was attempting to portray. "I am part of the engagement team which also includes the creative learning curator, the community engagement manager and enterprise engagement curator. In some ways our roles are defined by the audiences that we are programming for. My role you could think about in terms of core specialist audiences such as students and people who are already engaging with

contemporary art. The creative learning curator looks at schools and families. The community engagement manager connects with communities in Edinburgh and people who might not normally engage with contemporary art and those for whom engagement with the gallery might help them in terms of their prospects in life and in terms of alleviating social isolation. Then there is Ian Morrison who is the enterprise engagement curator. His role is partly to do with enterprise and making money because we are a publicly funded gallery. We are always looking for ways to bring in extra income. His role is also about audience development in terms of bringing in other audiences who are interested in other art forms but who might not be interested in visual art initially. They might come in through a gig or a dance event that we put on or through another art form. They might be a music audience but through engaging with a music event that we have they might begin a relationship with art."

Organisational Structure

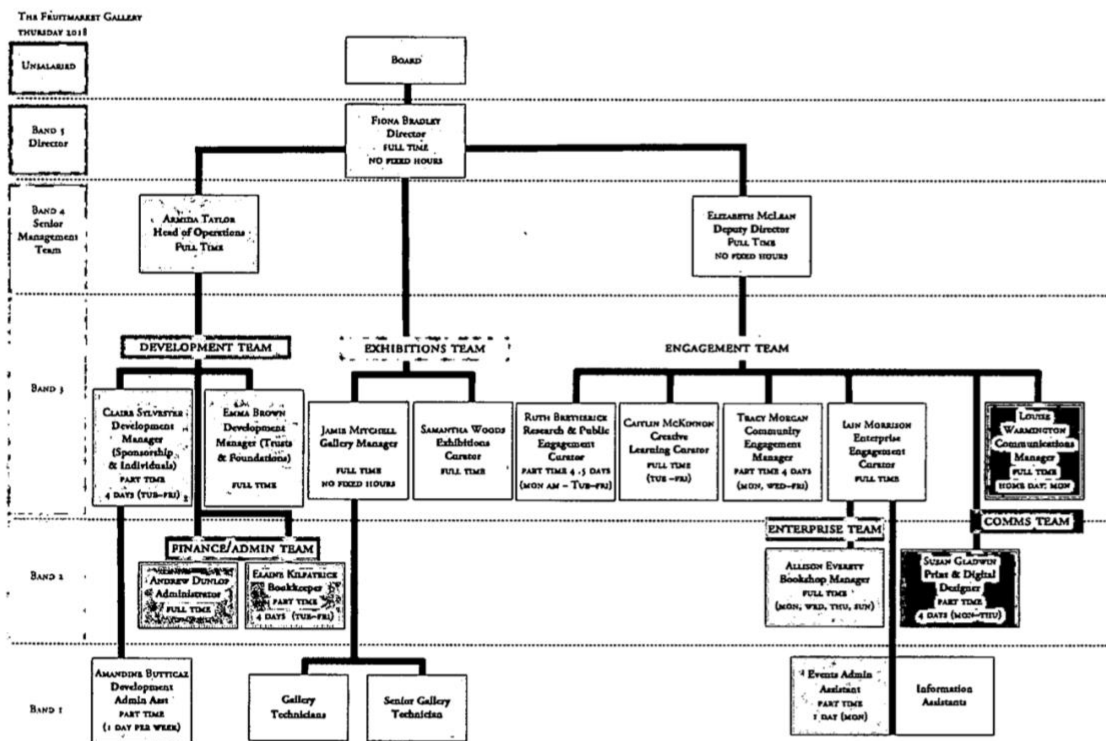


Fig.16 Organisational Structure, Report And Financial Statements For The Year Ended 31 March 2019, Fruitmarket Gallery (Companies House, no date, p.3).

The way in which the Fruitmarket Gallery as an institution tries to explicitly align itself with notions of curatorial identity is evident through the naming of staff within the institution. Consequently, the staff structure provides an interesting basis for exploring what curators consider to be curatorial within an institution that so clearly engages with the curatorial within an institutional context and as a structuring feature of the institution. Therefore, what do contemporary art curators in the Fruitmarket Gallery consider to be curatorial, when working within an institutional context that so clearly embraces the professional designation of curator?

The staff structure is arguably representative of the desire to achieve 'order' (Law, 1994, p.9) which cannot ever be fully achieved, due to what Law refers to as how 'the social world, is complex and messy' (1994, pp.4-5). There was a sense amongst the curatorial staff within the Fruitmarket Gallery of wanting to communicate absolute clarity in what they were each tasked with, which had to do with working effectively with their various delineated tasks to efficiently run a wider whole and to understand how their roles related to the roles of others within the organisation (1994, pp. 4-5). Perhaps however, this was driven by an acknowledgement of what Collins and Evans describe, as the unifying nature of elongated periods of 'social interaction' that formulates a collective 'knowledge' and identity (2007, p.7). Ruth appeared inclined to make this presentation of the team, with a degree of protectiveness surrounding the 'range' of curatorial professional identities and expertise (Israel, 2020, p.178). The clarity provided by the conveyance of the gallery team structure appeared to be appealing as a description of the profession of curator, as an example of streamlining the profession's diverse manifestations (2020, pp.178-179).

Ruth acknowledged that the various roles within the staff were part of a widespread embrace of the curatorial as a professional designation in relation to named roles, as she stated: "I used to be the research and interpretation curator and I'm now research and public engagement curator, but the curator is still there, and I was the only curator on the staff, but we have recently re-named everyone." Ruth's description of the roles and responsibilities held within the team, could therefore potentially be read as a defence and assertion of curatorial identity. Certainly, the Fruitmarket Gallery had decided to rename staff roles, to align the majority of staff with a curatorial identity. Ruth expanded on the details regarding this change in professional designation within the team, and what it meant in terms of individual roles, by stating: "Sam Woods is now the exhibitions curator, rather than the exhibitions organiser. Caitlyn is now the creative learning curator. She was the learning programme manager before that. Iain is now the enterprise engagement curator, and he was the enterprise manager." An institutional decision had been made to collectively identify with

the professional designation of curator, and again, in an institutional voice Ruth stated: “The reason we wanted to change our titles was so that we could more accurately reflect what we do to the outside world, in as few words as possible, without them having to read a job description.” In this sense, Ruth appeared to suggest that they needed to rely on a widespread comprehension of the curatorial profession, and that in some ways, a widespread institutional agreement to commit to curatorial identity, gave them the optimum opportunity for clarity, by collectively aligning themselves with curatorial designations. Alternatively, the diverse staff roles possibly only appeared as testimony to the convolutions of the curatorial profession, as we understand it now (Milliard, 2016, p.8). However, an interrogation of the staff structure revealed how the lived experience of contemporary at curators within the institution, complicated any fixed curatorial or institutional identity, and further demonstrated how the curatorial is made complex within institutional settings, despite evidence of a desire to provide clarity through vehicles such as staff structures.

ii) Diverse responsibilities: A curatorial hierarchy

Ruth emphasised a collaborative process of decision-making that intimated a homogenous institutional identity, however she acknowledged how various professional designations (whilst curatorial in name) had varying purposes, demonstrating the inequalities within perceptions of curatorial expertise within the gallery. This was certainly demonstrated in the way Ruth assigned a curatorial hierarchy to the team, based on which some members of the team would be more accepted as the embodiment of curatorial identity. Ruth identified that Fiona (as the director) took precedence. Ruth stated: “I suppose another thing to say is that the person who does the curating in the most traditional sense of the word is the director. But she is not called a curator, she is the director as she is a creative director. That’s what you would call her in management terms. She is the one who is curating the programme, talking to artists, deciding the focus of the exhibitions in conversation with artists, and then the rest of the exhibitions team, deliver those practically.” Ruth in essence, by describing Fiona’s role, noted that the hierarchies that she was describing were for those staff who were on-the-ground. Ruth argued that Fiona, as director, had the most curatorial identity, and yet her role within the institution demanded that she was known first and foremost, as the leading figure of the institution, seemingly with the institutional framework taking precedence. This demonstrated the disjuncture between curatorial designations and the everyday realities of their roles. Named curatorial roles did not indicate what was specifically curatorial about their expertise.

Relatedly, some of the staff could arguably be viewed as curatorial facilitators, helping Fiona to focus her efforts, with the leading curatorial identity and mission that she was tasked with. This suggested that there was a hierarchy based upon how curatorial a staff member was on the impossible to define, scale of the curatorial. Even so, Charlesworth's assertion that 'a curator 'facilitates' *as well* as 'produces'' (2007, p.92) could arguably provide the staff with an over-arching curatorial identity, due to the way in which they try to implement Fiona's curatorial approach. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the profession of curator as assigned to various members of staff at the Fruitmarket Gallery, can be seen to turn inward and to enable their curatorial identity based on an acknowledgement of a curatorial hierarchy. This construction of a curatorial hierarchy was arguably a part of institutional framework. Yet again, the curatorial and the institutional identity was ever-complexly interwoven.

Even so, the institutional responsibilities for Fiona were profound. As director of the institution, she had a separate office space. This arguably represented her distinction among the team. Fiona was the only staff member within the office space to have a door, with the option to close herself off. She had the ultimate level of institutional responsibility, that went beyond the immediate team. However, Fiona had an even higher level of accountability, as detailed in the financial review, which consisted of the 'Chair', 'Vice Chair' and 'Directors' who existed separately from on-site staff, who were attributed the title of 'Key Management Personnel' which consisting of Fiona Bradley, Elizabeth McLean and Armida Taylor who worked within the institution itself (Companies House, no date, p.1). In this sense, it could be argued that Fiona was the intermediary between the senior figures associated with the institution, and the team within the Fruitmarket Gallery itself. Consequently, Fiona arguably represented the bridge between concerns regarding curatorial identity and institutional identity, respectively.

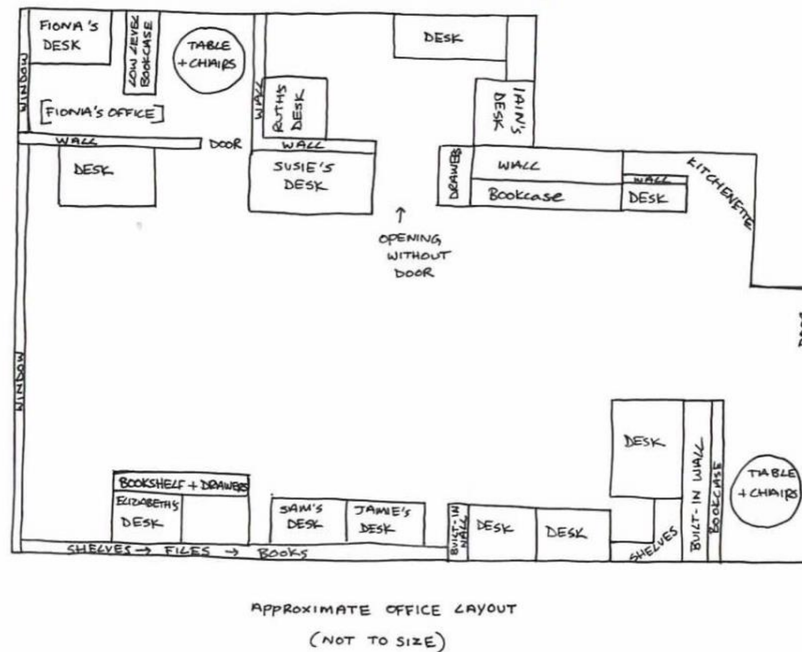


Fig.17 Sketch of office layout. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Drawing by the author.

However, those working within the gallery had the responsibility of providing all the relevant information for the board of directors' AGM, which was an instance when the gallery staff structure had to uniformly present their collective workings. Therefore, the curatorial identity could be said to reside with those working in the gallery in the everyday sense, and that the institutional identity was the over-arching concern of those of whom were the ultimate point of responsibility e.g. Fiona's boss' - the board of directors. Nevertheless, the overall impression of what the wider staff considered to be curatorial in the context of the institution was shown to be flexible, contradictory, and consistently being renegotiated by staff within the daily lives. Nevertheless, the manifestations of what is curatorial is indelibly linked to the workings of the institution.

iii) The office space

The physical office space did a lot to reinforce the collective curatorial identity of those within the Fruitmarket Team. Much in the same vein as anthropologist Thomas Yarrow in his ethnography of an architectural practice (2019) there was visual evidence of the focus of the profession in the form of books, used in much the same ways as the architect's practice, with a similar visual to what Yarrow

describes as namely 'a long, open bookshelf partially divides the space and houses books on a range of more or less pragmatic perspectives on the building process' (2019, p.16). In the case of curators at the Fruitmarket Gallery, books focused upon art, artists, and exhibitions, with many of the gallery's own publications lined up in a dividing bookcase, in an otherwise primarily open plan space. This conveyed an instinct to create a setting for a profession with objects furnishing the space in a way that arguably sought to emphasise the precense of expertise.

Yet, the office also had the hallmarks of many business-settings, with space being made for group meetings (Yarrow, 2019, p.16), akin with many institutions. In the case of the Fruitmarket Gallery, this consisted of a large white table in front of the bookshelf, where I observed internal meetings taking place. Furthermore, external visitors were primarily observed being ushered towards Fiona's door-separated office at the far side of the space. It could, therefore, again be argued that Fiona represented the bridge between concerns regarding curatorial identity and institutional identity, respectively.

Fig.18 Bookshelf in the office. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Nevertheless, the staff still reflected a distinct sense of institutional and curatorial identity being entangled. An example was the way in which the primarily open-plan office space provided an undoubted sense of the 'ideology' that Yarrow outlines, wherein, as he describes, the availability of each member of staff to the other, was in the case of the Fruitmarket Gallery, reinforced by the 'communal' space of the kitchen, and 'conversational' style exhibited on behalf of staff (2019, p.28), akin with working towards an institutional identity. As anthropologist Anette Nyqvist notes as part of her 'ethnographic' work (2017, p.136), 'the diverse practice of talk is at the core of any organization and salient in the very construction of the organization' (2017, p.135). However, whilst noting that this is part of the activity and identity of an institution, there is also a need to recognise that what it consists of would be unique to the Fruitmarket gallery. Due to the prevalence of the curatorial among their staff, the curatorial identity was subsumed into its institutional identity and thus shaped many of these daily interactions.

Fig.19 The kitchenette, within the office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

Ruth outlined her own role in four parts, with the first section of the interview dedicated to describing these four aspects in depth. "I like how it is split into sections!" Ruth responded: "It's because I have been doing this recently (reflecting), just to keep myself on track. When I started it was more interpretation and events, and a little bit of university but none of the library and archives. So I have ended up having to….", Ruth tailed off in thought. This demonstrated how Ruth allowed herself the time to consider the unfixed, changing, and evolving curatorial identity that was specific to her as an individual, which also appears to highlight the importance of re-articulation, and the need for a review process (Law, 1994, p.75). This creates an argument for 'adaptability' being required by individuals within the team (Law, 1994, p.75). The 'individual' contributions to the team were very present (Yarrow, 2019, p.29) but in ways that made the curatorial <u>and</u> institutional identity often indeterminable in their manifestation. The consequence was to create an impression of the curatorial within an institutional context which is somewhat present and yet also elusive.

However, what could be viewed as synonymous with curatorial identity was arguably reflected in the everyday verbal communications within the office, which further revealed the curatorial dimensions of staff's roles. For example, Elizabeth, the deputy director, came over to the desk I was working at to borrow a text, in order to read an essay in it which would be "useful." This reminded me of the observation made by Professor Beryl Graham, curator of new media, who noted in my interview with her, that there is a need as a curator to immerse yourself and to be well-versed in the content of an exhibition or project, as she stated, "it is about communicating, sometimes quite complicated ideas." It made me realise that this information gathering was not just based on specific tasks or named roles, as in Elizabeth's role as deputy director, with predominantly publishing and design facets to her named identity. It was also based upon a wider belief and subscription to certain approaches which might be deemed curatorial, such as focusing upon research about artists and exhibitions. For instance, Ruth also came over to look through books as she needed to identify an image for the textual information she was writing for the exhibition. This was a task we undertook together, jointly searching for the image. For the next few hours, the reading took over, but the office activity continued. An office discussion that was raised by a gallery staff member related to a query from the artist Senga Nengudi, as a photographed performance piece was dated 1978, but needed to be changed to 1979. The office activity, in this sense, resonates with Acord's acknowledgement of the 'curatorial' focus on enabling 'the construction of artistic meaning through the exhibition' (2010, p.447).

Fig.20 Temporary allocated desk space with reading provided by curator Ruth Bretherick regarding the Senga Nengudi exhibition. Photograph by the author.

However, these exchanges in a studious office rhythm, were also punctuated by non-art related discussion, synonymous with widespread institutional landscapes. This included a debate about riding boots going in and out of fashion. This item of clothing under discussion was relevant to the time of year, given that it was March in Edinburgh, and the weather was not very forgiving. This debate was spearheaded by director Fiona as she passed through the communal office space on the way into her office, stating: “I’m just going into a meeting, but can you let me know when Laurence

arrives (at the office/gallery)", in reference to Laurence Sillars, curator at the Henry Moore Institute. Conversations flowed in and out of the personal and the professional. However, the prominence of conversation is acknowledged by Nyqvist, wherein she states, 'the diverse practice of talk is at the core of any organization and salient in the very construction of the organization' (2017, p.135). The types of conversations could be a way of asserting a particular type of institutional identity, as that which connects with Wright's description of a 'flexible' organisational type wherein staff are also resourceful and have value based on their individual contributions to the wider team (1994, p.2) and representative of what Collins and Evans refer to as 'contributory expertise' in the way that they then learn from each other (2007, p.35).

The heating in the gallery was broken and staff were waiting for it to be fixed, which it was estimated, would take at least a few days. In the interim, remote heaters were plugged in around the space. There were two large red heaters in the communal office space. Staff were sitting at their desks in layers of scarves and winter clothes. There was a definitive sense of pushing ahead against the odds, and a joking comradery among staff as they struggled to keep warm, as they went about their activities. If anything, it appeared to break up the normal cycle of the day with more conversation due to this idea of widespread "suffering", emphasising to a greater extent, a comradery which they established as part of team-based working. This type of discursive exchange amongst staff could be viewed as a form of institutional identity as demonstrated by anthropologist Dominic Boyer in his description of journalists and their working space (2013, pp.14-15). The Fruitmarket Gallery had a friendly but professional atmosphere that was illuminated within informal conversation, taking place in the office space. It had a positivity which appeared integral to the institution and their bonds between staff. However, these conversations could just as easily be seen to reflect a curatorial identity and therefore curatorial claims of expertise. As such, it is again impossible to distinguish any notion of curatorial or institutional identity as being separable from the other. The activity within the office space revealed how the expertise of individuals is crucial to the functionality of the Fruitmarket Gallery. Yet perceptions of curatorial expertise within an institutional context are variously blended into daily rhythms within the physical space, wherein curatorial identity and institutional identity are again shown to be iterative.

Fig.21 Desk view whilst submitting book records for new library resource, with temporary heater.

Round table in the communal office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.

Photograph by the author.

iv) A flexibility of curatorial "types" and the consequences

Relatedly, within the team there were examples of flexibility in the supposed enactment of curatorial identity. Ruth had an affinity with a smaller faction of team members within the wider institutional whole, based upon a focus on interpretation, events, university, and library/archives, which set her team grouping apart from other parts of the gallery's staff structure in a more obvious way. This was further reflected by the desk layout, as Ruth sat behind Iain Morrison who had an enterprise engagement role for example, which had some similarities in terms of engaging with people outside of the physical gallery space. That said, the Fruitmarket Gallery embraced the curatorial designation, but appeared to want to create specific curatorial "types". However, whilst this may appear as though this reflects a specific focus on curatorial identity, it again demonstrates how curatorial identity and institutional identity are iterative. By re-affirming a view that there are many versions of 'curators', even within the same organisation (Israel, 2020, pp.178-179), the Fruitmarket Gallery appeared to imply an institutional structure and specific institutional identity, led by their commitment to a structure of curatorial types and focuses.

Fig.22 Ruth's desk within the communal office space.
Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Nevertheless, despite a commitment to a structure of curatorial types and smaller groupings of curators within the wider team, curatorial identity and institutional identity were still shown to be flexible in everyday terms. This was illustrated in the case of office activity during installation week of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, wherein on Tuesday 12th March 2019, a curator had arrived to visit Fiona, as Ruth had forecast. Fiona proceeded to introduce the team as they walked through the communal office space, towards her private office. Fiona introduced Ruth and her colleagues within the office space as "our engagement team" before introducing Sam as "our curator". The way that the curatorial was attributed, indicated a degree of flexibility regarding how staff identities were manipulated on a day-to-day basis within the team. Moreover, Sam Woods, in her role as exhibitions curator, appeared to be given a curatorial identity by Fiona, and Ruth's curatorial professional identity became subsumed into a team, due to their focus primarily being on the educational. Fiona's summary suggested that a curatorial hierarchy could be flexibly applied beyond the existence of being professionally named a curator. I couldn't help but be reminded of a discussion I had undertaken with Rebecca Gee, who was at the time of interview the exhibitions officer at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle (and now curator of fine art at York Art Gallery) and Professor Beryl Graham (new media curator) who were interviewed on separate occasions, both of whom referred to the hierarchies present within galleries which Beryl noted often resulted in the status of education-focused roles being perceived as hierarchically lower than other roles. Certainly, this appeared to provide an explanation for the reference points within Fiona's staff introductions. Yet it is necessary to acknowledge that these curatorial hierarchies were variously and flexibly applied to fit the needs of the curator and institution in ways that were enmeshed.

v) An institutional identity outside of the curatorial?

Nevertheless, there were instances in relation to the wider team which appeared to reveal a desire to communicate an institutional identity, irrespective and separable from curatorial identity. For instance, there was a resonance with Hatch and Cunliffe's description of a 'multi-divisional (M-form) organization' structure, which is described as 'a set of separate functionally structured units that report to a headquarters staff' (2013, p.273). This is arguably applicable to the structuring of the various curatorial staff within the wider team (see figure 16), and therefore has the potential to represent a subscription to expectations associated with the workings of an institution. For example, Fiona called together several staff members to the round table by the office door for a finance meeting, akin with the responsibilities of working within an institution of any kind.

Fig.23 Communal office space. Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Similarly, there was a studious atmosphere that ran throughout the whole organisation, a confident informality. On the one hand there was a wider sense of communication present, particularly within the office space itself, as demonstrated by certain structuring activities and prompts, for example the visual prominence of the office door itineraries. In this sense, the staff were overtly aware of participating in the practical and necessary workings of an institution.

Ruth also emphasised the ethos of collaborative team-based working in emails prior to our first meeting, and in discussions regarding research arrangements with me, in which Ruth stated in an institutional voice: “Once I have talked to the appropriate staff here, I’ll be able to get back to you with a firmer idea of what we might be able to offer” and “I’ll have a proper chat with the team about what they think is appropriate.” Ruth demonstrated individual judgement but with an impenetrable collective authority associated with an institution. Her response prompted by a request for interviewing members of the team. Later her response to a participant observation request during the Emma Hart installation, came along similar collective lines, as she stated again in an institutional voice: “a few select days rather than the whole time would suit us, and Emma, best.”

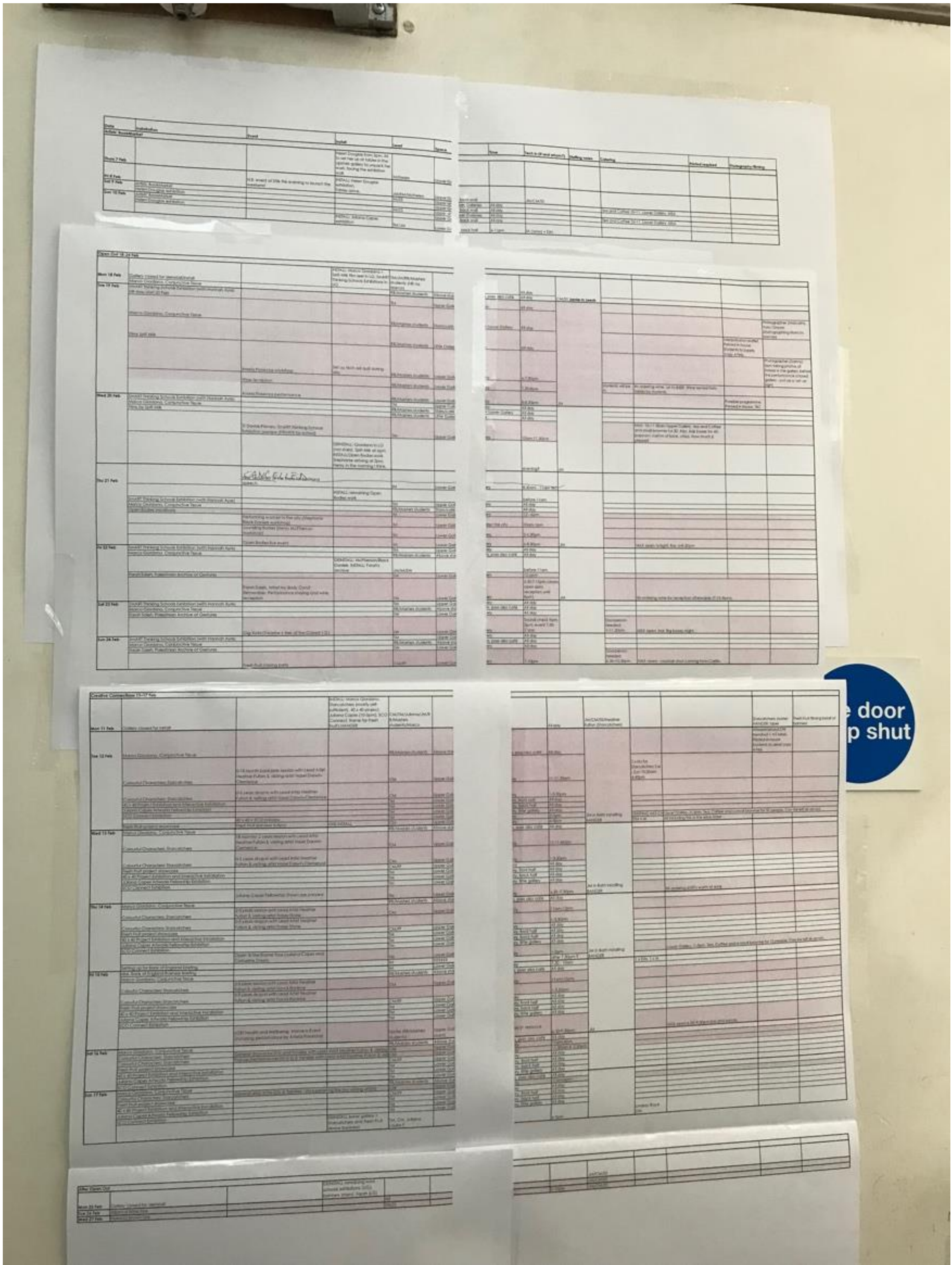


Fig.24 Itinerary for the period 7th February – 27th February 2019 including Marco Guidano's *Conjunctive Tissue* exhibition and various community focused exhibits and events, taped to the inside of the office door for the whole team to see. Photograph by the author.

Nevertheless, considering what Hatch and Cunliffe refer to in relation to 'group identity' (2013, p.213) they note that 'shared workspaces define territories that become physically and symbolically associated with the people and processes that inhabit them' (2013, p.213). This includes a general need to establish what Hatch and Cunliffe describe as 'organizational territories' that speak to the construction of 'boundaries' (2013, p.213). Yet, both curatorial and institutional identity are implicated within any instinct towards the construction and presentation of supposed clarity. This is due to the curatorial and institutional identity being interwoven and inseparable features of the daily lives of curators. Ultimately, the role of the curatorial team and the navigation of hierarchies, speak to the complexity of curatorial expertise in an institutional context, where the curatorial is not separable from institutional identity as they blend at various points and to varying degrees. The following section therefore further explores this summation, within the specific context of a team meeting.

vi) The team meeting: Internal communication

'Meetings' constitute a formal and regular manifestation of wider team communication, a delineated activity, widely enacted within varying types of institutions (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Rogelberg, 2015, p.3). It wasn't until near the end of the installation week of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, that I sat in on the weekly staff meeting at the Fruitmarket Gallery. With the exhibition opening looming on the Friday night, for the first time that week the wider team was brought together on the morning of Thursday 14th March 2019 for a team meeting. Staff gathered around in the small space near the door, away from desks, but crammed together in an impractical way; the office being the only separate working space in the gallery, and evidently was not large enough for meetings of this kind, and yet it was accepted as a regular feature of the workings of the gallery.

Fig.25 Round table for group meetings in the communal office.
Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Those attending the meeting included the curatorial team and several members of staff with other roles. Fiona Bradley as director, defined the context within which the meeting was taking place, by announcing – "It is Thursday 14th March and we're installing a show." There were brief light-hearted references to Catholicism and Protestantism and the Easter calendar in terms of how it impacted on the projected schedule before the meeting began, which was signalled by Fiona as the gallery's figurehead, taking the lead. "Tomorrow, we will join together for a 10am walk around (*the gallery) with Laurence (Sillars)", Fiona announced. Laurence was curator and head of programmes at the Henry Moore Institute and he had curated Senga Nengudi's exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, alongside the artist herself, which was being re-structured and implemented into the exhibition space of the Fruitmarket Gallery.

For the sake of context about the artist and her work, a report by *The New York Times Style Magazine* regarding Senga Nengudi's life and career, noted that prominent events and themes

pervaded her work, and how she had come to be an artist, an acknowledgement of a 1970's penchant for the explainable, but how Nengudi's work deviated from this as her work was not so clearly communicable and therefore fell outside perceptions of the artistic norm of that time (Gyarkye, 2020). As Gyarkye states:

> 'Nengudi's pieces were difficult to categorize. She was a sculptor, but one who used cheaper or found materials. She was a dancer, but at the heart of her performances were these strange creations. Her work was too conceptual to be embraced by the mainstream art world as "Black art," which expected a strictly figurative and sociological view of Black life in America, but it was also too distinctly personal to be celebrated alongside the mostly white men who defined the conceptual art of the era. She was uncategorizable in an age that, for all its experimentation, still treasure systems of organization' (2020).

At the Fruitmarket, Laurence was standing-in due to Senga residing back in the United States. As such, Laurence was present throughout the installation week, to articulate and curate the exhibition alongside Fiona. It was, nevertheless, not a replication of the exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, as emphasised vehemently by Ruth Bretherick, research and public engagement curator. As Ruth had described, in the context 'of the exhibition' 'film', it had the Fruitmarket stamp, revealing the wider aim of providing a re-interpretation, extension and further interrogation of the work (George, 2015, pp.208 and 210).

This meeting was restricted to members of Fruitmarket Gallery staff, with me as the only exception. However, the gallery certainly did not operate to exclude, but the meeting was undertaken as a familiar part of the gallery's workings: the wider team meeting. It did appear that this was where decisions were made that allowed for the gallery team to operate as a unified organism; to create a more seamless institutional identity. The team meeting provided context for the varied activities in the art space and by being informed of these contexts and any decisions being made, this arguably allowed the gallery team to appear unified for all external purposes and audiences. This observation is supported by academics Jared Hansen and Joseph A. Allen for example, who recognise how 'a meeting' has the 'potential' to create 'enhanced employee engagement, knowledge transfer, or dynamic capabilities' (2015, p.205).

Staff Meeting **Thursday 14 March**	
1	Diary
2	Office Business
3	Finance
4	FOH
5	Environment and Equalities Green Team
6	Current exhibition: Install
7	Forward Programme: Exhibitions & Events

2019-20			
1 Spring	Fri 15th Mar 2019 – Sun 26th May 2019	**Senga Nengudi**	
	1st & 2nd June	*Design Market*	
	16th June	*Katie Paterson*	
	19 June – 14 July	**Ryan Gander**	
	24 June	*Ai Wei Wei Flag*	
2 Summer	25th July – 25th August 2019	**Cardiff/Miller**	

8	Building
9	Staffing
10	Deadlines
11	AOB

Fig.26 Meeting itinerary for Thursday 14th March.
Location: Fruitmarket Gallery office, Edinburgh.

Nevertheless, the content of the meeting did initially appear to focus on the curatorial aspects, even though familiarity with the exhibition's content differed from person to person within the staff. For some more than others, this briefing was a repetition. Fiona continued: "He is the only person who knows these works. He saw the 35mm slide for 'Bulemia' when he was having a coffee with Senga in her studio." Fiona was emphasising Laurence's curatorial identity, which is supported by what is referred to by Reckitt, in the way he acknowledges how 'curators' seek to bring attention to the rapport established between themselves and the artist, and by noting the 'emotional investments', which also outlines the difference in 'status and power' inherent in the 'relationships' (2016, pp.9-10). Fiona was thus foregrounding the curatorial profession and identity in the context of what she

perceived as her professional group. Fiona then articulated her opinion of Laurence's character, to provide context on their working relationship, stating: "He is quite modest in an immodest sort of way." Yet in this sense, Fiona was confiding in her team and placing her trust in their collective institutional identity as a confidential bonding structure outside of any curatorial concerns. However, Ruth then interjected to assist in the conveyance of Laurence's curatorial skill and contribution, stating: "He said a lot of the writing is wrong (*writings out in the world about Senga)", bringing the conversation gently back to the curatorial identity. In this sense, the institutional and curatorial commentary were woven within the conversation.

The meeting then proceeded in a way that recognised its 'time-intensive' nature (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock and Rogelberg, 2015, p.3). Iain Morrison, enterprise engagement curator was next to contribute and respond chronologically with reference to the meeting structure (fig.17); entirely subscribing to the institutional structure of meetings concurrent with anthropologist Helen B. Schwartsman's assertion that those partaking in 'meetings' are often led by their instinct 'to change them, control them, order them and make them predictable', however difficult Schwartsman argues, that may ultimately be (2015, p.735). The team were seemingly enacting their perception of the demands and responsibilities akin with institutional identity. "At 11am there will be an events chat" (by which Iain was referring to the programming team), due to follow the full team briefing in the gallery with Laurence). "The Café and bookshop will be open 11am to 3pm tomorrow and then we will be cleaning the bookshop and café away. Open doors will be at 5.45pm (in reference to the exhibition preview night, taking place on the Friday evening). Iain then posed a question, which he felt required an answer in the group setting. "Do we/don't we, have a queue?"

This appeared to be presented to the entire group, but Fiona was the definitive authority. The time pressures kept things going, allowing decisions to be made without consultation but within the collective gaze. "Don't we want a queue?" Fiona considered out-loud. "Not if it's raining. 6pm…" Fiona posed the question and answered, referring to the time at which the doors should be opened. *"It will be quite quiet",* Fiona mused, as she identified a popular exhibition in the vicinity, in the centre of Edinburgh. Fiona then transitioned into discussing how 'the opening of an exhibition' should take place, with the opening speech associated with curators, alongside other 'senior' people associated with the gallery (George, 2015, pp.287-289), stating: "We could set up a PA. Do the national/international talk, the aren't we great…", Fiona paraphrased, but appeared to be discussing what would be in her speech, in the context of "we", emphasising the wider institutional identity that the whole team could be viewed as representing.

In some ways, the authority indicated by the prominence of Fiona's voice within the team meeting, resonates with Nyqvist's anthropological observations of an 'AGM' and communication among 'shareholders', wherein those with a higher amount of 'shares' appeared to be representative of a higher stake in a successful outcome, with regards to the workings of 'an institution', and thus they act in such a way as to reflect this belief, that is a recognised undercurrent of these face-to-face communications (2017, p.141). Fiona's role as a buffer between the board of directors and the wider team, appeared to be the basis of her role as spokesperson. However, unlike at the team meeting at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Nyqvist notes that there was a very tangible stake in the attribution of a 'voice' as 'each share represents a vote at the AGM' (2017 p.141). No such tangible hierarchy was at play at the Fruitmarket team meeting. Instead, the team meeting seemed to reflect what Wright describes as how:

> 'Relations and processes of domination are central to an explanation of how people – differently positioned – contest the meaning of a situation, use economic and institutional resources available to them at that historical moment to try and make their definition of the situation 'stick', and try to garner the material outcome' (1994, p.27).

Curatorial expertise is therefore caught up within the complexity of the relationships between members of the team within the institution. Fiona continued: "Laurence would like to come to the Linda event but can't", in reference to the Linda Goode-Bryant programmed event[18], which was a key feature of the exhibition programme. Fiona then articulated the post-opening plans and non-public activity. "Dinner. Booked for 5pm. Laurence, Godfrey, Andrew. I'm doing an incredibly low key… Sam's got the …" Fiona indicated with brevity and with fragmented comments to Sam Woods, exhibitions curator, and her role in managing the details of the dinner, having noted that the dinner would be provided to senior attendees from the artworld with specific connections to the exhibition, including Laurence Sillars and Godfrey Worsdale[19]. The consequence of all these questions, concerns, and resolutions, that Fiona was monologuing to the whole team like a stream of

[18] 'Linda Goode-Bryant' hosted Senga Nengudi's 'first solo show, "RSVP," in 1977', at her 'Just Above Midtown gallery' (Odita, 1997, p.25). The Fruitmarket Gallery subsequently held, as part of the recent Senga Nengudi exhibition-related activity, a 'Linda Goode Bryant in conversation' event which they live streamed, and then subsequently made available online (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2019, b).

[19] Godfrey Worsdale is the 'Director of the Henry Moore Foundation', with over-arching authority over two institutions, one of which is 'the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds' (Stone, 2019).

consciousness. It created a sense of organisational democracy as part of institutional identity, and arguably represents the idea of ‘order*ing* attempts, not orders’, as Law describes (1994, p.95), which also provides an interesting premise for curatorial expertise.

This appeared to unofficially conclude the diary section of the meeting, but the meeting had inadvertently covered another aspect focused on the ‘Current exhibition: Install’ stage of the agenda. The meeting transitioned, unacknowledged, into the territory of ‘Office Business’, whilst still centred around the exhibition. Accordingly, Fiona stated: “It might be Simon’s last install. He likes (*the idea of) a 5.30 cake/crisps event.” Fiona was referring to a staff member not in attendance, who was a gallery technician. “Let’s do it at 5pm. We don’t need to tell Laurence we’re doing it.” This sense of institutional identity and there being a distinctly personal aspect to this was present in Fiona’s statement. Marsden’s assertion that ‘the cement that binds different members of the organization together will vary according to the different motivations of members’, and thus, arguably personability assists in creating some of ‘the cement’ (1994, p.37) had the potential to frame the way that the curatorial or institutional identity is perceived. What bound the staff together at the Fruitmarket Gallery could be argued to be personability, and the human connections that were established, and that continue to be established and sustained.

The meeting was at times disorientating, as I struggled to follow the knowledge pre-requisites. This difficulty is contextualised by Linstead, who refers to ‘symbols and rhetoric often with layers of meaning accessible only to ‘insiders’’ (1997, p.88)), which relates well to the challenges experienced. Deciphering various statements and behaviours, made on behalf of staff within the meeting, were difficult to ascertain. In addition, the time limitations also meant there was a degree of individual concern about voicing and demonstrating, their independent skills within the team, and even the existence of what Law refers to as the possibility for a ‘celebration of workaholism in the matter of ranking agents *within* the organisation’ (1994, p.121). As such, the desire of those within the team, to assert themselves within their perception of an institutional whole, did not leave space for those with less familiarity, to slow the tempo of the meeting, or indeed, to create a pause to request clarification. The role of the curator was arguably set alongside exclusionary discourses. For example, there was mention of the technician who had been part of the installation of the exhibition, having come from the Henry Moore Institute with Laurence, who consequently had a familiarity with the artwork and benefitted from this prior knowledge, which he exhibited within the art space of the Fruitmarket Gallery, for the installation of Senga Nengudi’s exhibition. Fiona provided an observation, stating: “I liked the fact that he did is own mop-page.” This assertion

suggested a comparative assessment of the work of another gallery team in contrast with their own, wherein he was being compared with a general institutional approach and identity. Fiona's comparative observations were undoubtedly useful, as she demonstrated what Schwartzman describes as 'how the meeting itself unfolds as a communicative event within specific work/organizational contexts' that would ultimately engage notions of curatorial and institutional identity specific' to that particular moment in time and related contexts (2015, p.736).

There was an effort to summarise with the inclusion of 'Any Other Business, or AOB', that anthropologists Brown, Reed and Yarrow note have a free-form identity, but also conversely a restricted one, in the sense of still being aimed at conforming to the imperatives 'of time' and that in essence, where staff might work at cross-purposes (2017, p.21). Fiona discussed exhibition-related dinner arrangements and social obligations, that indicated that their working responsibilities traversed into their personal time, with an awareness of artists and art world figures' travel and social arrangements. Fiona's conversational focus became more orientated around the social and more informal aspects of the exhibition. This was perhaps reflective of the erosion of the general institutional expectations of the meetings, but also possibly promoting a more curatorial identity that transcends the personal and the professional, wherein they are responsible for these more social and informal aspects. Fiona announced the final part of the meeting by stating: "Other things...", before referencing a Monday morning meeting and a "12pm production meeting", with "nothing planned for the evening of Monday." Fiona continued: "After Linda's talk (Tuesday) have we got anywhere booked? It is decided that it is not to be a Milk[20] event in the café." Fiona then made a more personal aside, stating: "If I just got off a flight from Canada with a 12-year-old, I probably wouldn't want to go for dinner with Barry Rosen[21]." A specific restaurant was mentioned, and Fiona continued by stating, "I'm sending Frances Morris there on Monday night." In contrast, and without any apparent tangible outcome for his statement, Iain Morrison, partnerships curator, then contributed, by referring to "space for that connection to happen."

What became apparent, in relation to the meeting, were the views expressed by Brown, Reed and Yarrow, in their consideration of meetings, with the assertion that expectations regarding the structure of meetings are arguably misleading in apparent attempts at clarity, 'assumptions' which they argue, have resulted in 'meetings' having not been considered in ways that fully explore or reflect the potentialities of what 'ethnographic description' might offer and reveal (2017, p.12). In

[20] The café operating within the Fruitmarket Gallery.

[21] Barry Rosen is a curator, and advisor for artists and artist estates.

this sense, the team meeting again served to confirm the complex interplay of curatorial and institutional identity. It might be assumed that a meeting would be the source of clarification regarding tasks and activities which might reveal something distinctly curatorial within their everyday lives. However, in the actual rhythms of everyday life, the curatorial is again enmeshed in complexity, as part of an iterative relationship with the institution.

In summary: The Curator and the Institution

The ethnographic descriptions present within this chapter have shown institutional and curatorial identity to be interwoven to such a degree as to make themselves non-discernible from each other. Curatorial and institutional identity have shown themselves to be interdependent and to shape each other. The curatorial staff within the Fruitmarket Gallery appeared at ease with their flexible professional identities as they evolved and manifested day-to-day within the institution. However, this chapter has demonstrated that two supposed categories of the curatorial identity and the institutional identity which may at times appear self-evident, should in fact be explored through what Linstead communicates as 'a tradition of social anthropological analysis' wherein 'rather than taking the strange and applying it to the familiar, it treats the familiar as though it were strange' (1997, p.85). If we relate this to notions of curatorial and institutional identity, then it urges us to enter an analytical space where any fixed definition is rejected and instead, we enter a productive analytical space that reflects the lived experiences and perspectives of curators themselves which will inevitably prompt a process of questioning. This chapter has revealed a far more complex picture of curatorial knowledge, identity, and practice, with ebbs, flows, and transformations, that relates to the curator's sense of their own expertise, whether strategic, negotiated or even subconscious.

This chapter has contributed to the wider project of this thesis by revealing the everyday lives of contemporary art curators working in the UK and embarking on an trajectory not dissimilar to other anthropologists such as Ho, who analysed 'Wall Street's everyday institutional culture' noting the often ignored aspects of experience on behalf of those participating in such a 'culture', to the detriment of recognising and giving due consideration to the 'individual' (2009, b, p.178). As such, O'Neill's description of how 'the new curatorial rhetoric is in no way unified but rather marked by its diversity and only connected by a set of family resemblances' (2012, p.127). On occasion, one may be clearer in the articulation of an overt institutional or curatorial purpose, however, it must be agreed that the more interesting conversations about the formulation of curatorial expertise have

arisen from considering what curators deem to be curatorial, when working within an institutional context, and not in any actual attempt at attributing fixed ideas of curatorial expertise. The daily lives of the curators reveal many assumptions about curatorial expertise. However, by considering what is curatorial within an institutional context, these beliefs were challenged and instead what emerged was the iterative relationship between curator and the institution. Therefore, to answer the question of what curators consider to be curatorial within an institutional context, it is necessary to acknowledge how curators themselves in their everyday lives, variously claim their expertise within the iterative relationship of the curatorial and institutional.

Chapter Four
Curatorial Activity in the Art Space

Analysis of curatorial expertise in relation to everyday accounts of their practical knowledge, has often been left under-analysed in preference for foregrounding the intellectual components of their expertise. Therefore, this chapter will argue that through ethnographic analysis it is possible to explore curatorial expertise as it related to intellectual, aesthetic, practical and managerial activity. More specifically, these forms of activity will reveal curatorial engagements with the artworks and the art space, and work relating to their relationships with people and time. This chapter will outline the various activities undertaken by contemporary art curators, primarily based upon a period of fieldwork at The Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, as a case study, alongside references to other institutional examples and additional curatorial perspectives that emerged from the field. As such, the structuring question of this chapter is: What do the activities undertaken by contemporary art curators within the art space reveal about their claims of expertise? This ethnographic analysis will focus upon the less visible aspects that take place in the creation of the art space. This chapter will demonstrate how the activities with which contemporary art curators engage in their everyday lives are not pre-determined but reflect a malleable and complex landscape of expertise.

Fig.27 View of the lower gallery and curator Laurence Sillars, during installation week. Senga Nengudi Exhibition. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

This chapter focuses on three primary aspects: receiving artwork, conditions reports, placing artwork and creating the art space. All of these were activities that involved curators in the art space within the field. What this chapter will reveal is a professional landscape with similar descriptions as those present within Murphy's 'ethnographic study of Swedish design' (2015, p.1). Murphy refers to how 'design shares many qualities with "art," and is often mistaken for "technology," but in most instances overlaps with both and neither of these things at the same time' (2015, pp.2-3). There are activities and processes that are associated with contemporary art curators within curatorial discourse, however this chapter will demonstrate how such associations are misleading in the sense that they do not reflect the complexity of how these activities are navigated on behalf of contemporary art curators within their everyday lives. This contributes to the over-arching content of this thesis, by further highlighting the complex and often contradictory lives they live.

Ethnographic Case Study No.2: Expertise within curatorial activity

At a briefing meeting which took place on Monday 11th March 2019, on the morning of the first day of the exhibition installation of Senga Nengudi's show[22], Ruth Bretherick, research and public engagement curator at the Fruitmarket Gallery, provided me with a 1:1 outline of the week ahead. The artist Senga Nengudi (as described within chapter three) had returned to the United States following the Henry Moore Institute exhibition and therefore the artist/curator relationship in the physical space was absent.

I sat down at a round table just inside the office door with Ruth. The upstairs office was concealed behind a white painted door, the camouflaged entrance to behind-the-scenes activity. By this stage, I had already been involved with activity at the Fruitmarket Gallery, as well as having undertaken 1:1 interviews with the curatorial staff. In this instance, I had been invited to attend the gallery for the full week of installation, most likely due to the frequency of activity in the gallery that Ruth perceived would be useful to me. In essence, as the installation week unfolded, I became Ruth's curatorial shadow, more so than any of my other visits to the art space.

Ruth had outlined an itinerary of sorts for the week. Installation week, as it was referred to by the curators and other gallery staff, appeared to condense a lot of professional activity into a short period of time. This resonated with examples provided by curator and scholar Adrian George, whose chapter on 'installation' included sections on 'art handling', 'installation schedule and looking at

[22] See chapter three for artist and exhibition context.

works *in situ*', 'signing off the layout', 'fixing the works to the wall', 'lighting', 'education, event spaces and resource areas', 'live art events' and 'public liability insurance' (2015, pp.236-263). This demonstrates how curatorial discourse can create a degree of expectation about the activities associated with the curator within the installation process, but in ways that don't reflect the detailed and varied lives of curators.

The intention for the first day was to focus on the installation of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, although I was unsure what physical proximity to the artwork this would entail at that point, and in creating 'condition' reports (George, 2015, p.195, p.205 and p.238) and photographing the artworks (2015, p.195). Condition reports kept track of the condition of artwork as it travelled, as the artworks became the responsibility of various institutions, organisations, and individuals. The reports are created for the purpose of ensuring that the artwork is maintained, and any discrepancies in their condition, noted. The reports accompany the artwork wherever it goes, almost acting as a diary of the artwork's life. Ruth specifically noted that the work '*Bulemia*' would require the most thorough condition report due to the nature of materiality and its presentation. Ruth then outlined her proposed itinerary for the week, noted that the condition reports would be an activity which we would either jointly or separately undertake, alongside other gallery staff.

On Tuesday there would be a continuation of the installation, as well as a maintained focus on the condition reports. As a side note, Ruth mentioned that a curator would be in visiting Fiona Bradley (Fruitmarket Gallery director and curator) at some point during that day, the purpose of which was to discuss thoughts for the future (non-specific at that stage). In this sense, Ruth provided a context for other activity outside of the installation week and outside of her own remit of activity. However, Wednesday was due to have more variety. There would be the same installation activity and condition reports initially, however Ruth and Allison Everett (Buying and Retail Manager at the Fruitmarket Gallery bookshop) would then make their way to the University of Edinburgh for a careers event, within which Allie was due to give a talk. We would then return to the gallery to continue with exhibition installation activity.

Thursday was described as out of the ordinary for Ruth, as she would usually be at the university teaching on Thursday afternoons. However, as it was an exhibition installation week this would not be happening. Similarly, there was no yoga which was a weekly staff activity at the gallery. Seemingly, staff and the decision-makers within the gallery had arguably recognised the benefits of what academics in business, workplace and organisation-focused research, Sooyeol Kim, YoungAh

Park and Qikun Niu refer to (in relation to analysis of organisations) as ‘micro-break activities’ and their value in terms of providing staff with ‘short respites to remain less strained in a given workday’ (2017, p.41). However, this recognition was arguably at odds with the cancellation of yoga at a time when stress was arguably increased. That said, the installation period was arguably set aside as a unifying time for staff as it brought them together into the same physical space and in communication with each other for more delineated and frequent periods.

The intention for that Thursday would also be to undertake a gallery staff meeting would take place at 10am, lasting for 40 minutes to 2 hours, for which I would be a fly on the wall. Due to the decision to supplement footage of Senga’s work provided already by the Henry Moore Institute, Brian (the videographer) would be in filming the installation for the ‘exhibition’ ‘film’ on the Friday, which is an activity that curators are associated within curatorial discourse (George, 2015, pp.206-210). There would also be an exhibition walk-around on Friday with the staff as part of an acknowledgement of the need for ‘staff briefings’ (2015, pp.266-267). Then the exhibition opening night, ‘the private view’ would take place at the end of the week, which is also included within the curator’s remit and influence (2015, pp.285-289).

Other tasks that would punctuate the week were enmeshed within Ruth’s expectations regarding her own individual responsibilities, alongside a series of plans for what I would also assist with. Ruth’s individual activities included writing fresh interpretation (exhibition text in the form of printed exhibition description material), to give the exhibition the “Fruitmarket voice”. I was tasked with survey data inputting for another Fruitmarket staff member when collaboration with Ruth was not possible. The survey data inputting took place in the formative part of the week (likely Tuesday), as I was warned that the week would get busier towards the exhibition opening. Ruth summarised with general notes such as the purpose of doing condition reports together, with the reasoning that it would create the benefit of two sets of eyes. This was often a shared task within the team. What was also evident within this briefing, were the components I had partly seen evidenced in other exhibitions at the Fruitmarket Gallery. There was arguably a “Fruitmarket” formula with regards to the installation, the visual aesthetic and components of the gallery branding and exhibition material, the mainstays of the exhibition programming such as a curator’s talk, and the exhibition preview night. However, what was arguably more notable was the way in which these activities, in their range and complexity, demonstrated how the curator engaged in activities in a nuanced and highly varied capacity within their everyday lives.

In addition, the activities which contemporary art curators undertake often for the large part go unseen on behalf of the public. This is supported by Acord who emphasises the lack of knowledge regarding 'curators' and 'the physical process of exhibition installation' for example (2010, p.447). Anthropologist Annalise Riles makes her investigation of professionals working in finance, as being somewhat similarly focused upon dispelling assumptions of 'a discrete world whose activities are protoscientific' into a more intricate and perhaps unexpected picture (2010, b, p.795). That which is not immediately apparent in terms of the activity and skills of the contemporary art curator within the art space are also arguably further obscured by an overt focus on what Winter refers to as the instinct 'to define new territory, or defend our 'professionalized world'', which she notes in relation to professions operating within the artistic community (curators included) as well as within higher education (2020, p.116). At the Fruitmarket Gallery there were attempts to intimate mainstream notions of curatorial activities being organised into a practical, delineated, and focused schedule. Nevertheless, there was a definitive sense of various staff members reaffirming that whatever activity I observed was in some way unusual, and yet this tendency conversely united them within the art space. It is these contradictions that we see as an inherent part of the expertise of contemporary art curators. As such, this demonstrates the need to consider curatorial activity led by the everyday lives of contemporary art curators, as they themselves conceive of it.

i) Receiving artwork

Receiving artwork at the art space may appear to be a clearly defined activity undertaken on behalf of contemporary art curators. The physical arrival of the artwork at the Fruitmarket Gallery had initially been managed by technicians and was placed on the floor and against the walls of the gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery. When I arrived on the first day of the Senga Nengudi exhibition installation, Ruth invited me to join her for a walk-through of Senga's exhibition. We moved into the gallery space to survey ongoing activity as part of the installation process, Ruth provided a visual overview. Ruth became more relaxed, and conversation became less formal than the exhibition briefing. Greater proximity to physical and visual activity gave her a greater sense of security in assimilating her knowledge, identity, and practice with the stimulus of the art space and the arrival of the artworks. Ruth was focused on actively engaging with the contexts of the artwork whilst also responding to the immediate space. This type of engagement in interpretation and explanation created a sense of exchange within the space. This had individuated and subjective components as Ruth took on the role of providing a verbal context for the artwork as it arrived in the art space.

Nevertheless, when I pointed towards blocks on the floor made of hard foam, Ruth explained that they were for artwork to be balanced on and she proceeded to express her surprise that I hadn't seen them before. This demonstrated how there was curatorial knowledge of practical components that were associated with the arrival of artwork that did not feature so heavily in literature. Ruth's response demonstrated that there was a core knowledge and a series of activities which curators undertook about which only practical experience would provide. My own lack of curatorial training was for the first time, very evident. Another example was that, as Ruth described, the blankets were laid out on the floor under some of the artworks making them easier to move around.

Even so, what embodied curatorial knowledge consisted of, and the way it emerged was unpredictable. For example, in interview with Amira Gad, who was at the time Art and Architecture curator at the Serpentine Galleries, she argued that educational structures surrounding and developing contemporary art curators often ignored the need for practical experience. Amira communicated to her frustration as someone tutoring on curatorial courses, in addition to her primary job as a curator. She stated, "it is essentially a practical job." The role of practical knowledge and experience did feature in a talk given to Edinburgh University students on behalf of exhibitions and commissions curator Sam Woods, within the Fruitmarket Gallery space, in which she stated that they (the Fruitmarket) "don't take any risks" by using "fine art transport." Alongside the instructive comment, Sam was outlining the specific approach of the Fruitmarket Galley, communicating the gallery's ethos through references to these practical elements. Yet general comments on the practical dimensions of the profession were made by Sam in an advisory capacity to budding would-be curators: "best practice – the way to do it if you can"; "being realistic about budgeting and borrowing – thinking about where things are coming from, for example from London rather than Brazil, but, if necessary, we will bring over from Brazil." Sam made references to environmental and financial costs, incurred by the transportation of artwork. Nevertheless, the type of information that Sam conveyed was delivered informally and entirely subject to the curator's own desire to impart certain information about the practical aspects of the role. This knowledge was haphazard in its acquisition and communication on behalf of contemporary art curators. This revealed how the practical knowledge of a contemporary art curator, around the process of receiving an artwork for example is highly variable and cannot be assumed.

That said, there were some resonances with the receiving of artwork at the Fruitmarket Gallery, which I later observed upon partaking in the installation of the 'Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition 2019'

at ‘York Art Gallery’ (Aesthetica, 2020, a), alongside curator of fine art, Rebecca Gee. This included some of the practical tools of exhibition installation and the arrival and unpacking of artworks, such as the use of blankets to move artwork (see figure 28). Despite not being privy to or partaking in the process of the actual unboxing artworks at the Fruitmarket Gallery, this was an aspect that I was able to observe at ‘*Aesthetica 2019*’.

Fig.28 *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition Installation. Gallery view.
York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Rebecca and I stood beside the artworks and observed as the gallery technicians undertook the unboxing. In this sense, the curator was tasked with observing practical activity, which resonated with the observation and somewhat instructional role that Ruth had undertaken upon the initial arrival of artwork at the Fruitmarket Gallery. The way in which both Rebecca and Ruth navigated this as an activity in the art space, resonates with anthropologist Paula Gray’s description of a management role, with the view that it ‘must also coordinate the output of others without wielding power over them’, which results in very specific ‘skills’ (2010, p.13). This arguably connects with the curatorial profession, as I observed Rebecca *artfully* manage staff as a coordinator of activity, conversation, and creator of an exhibition in a way that was diplomatic, gently authoritative, and full of directive and creative ideas that formed simultaneously, alongside the unboxing of artwork. Rebecca was aware that her role in this process also required specialist insights from other staff members, such as the technician. It was her role to manage this activity. Furthermore, her managing

style did not enforce a separation between the different professions within the team and those involved in the artwork unboxing. Her desire was to be integrated into a team. However, it was also evident that to some degree, the lack of overt authority within this activity did not mean that it wasn't there.

Fig.29 A technician unpacking *'Oh My ( )'* by Noriyuki Suzuki. *Aesthetica 2019* Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

I observed Rebecca holding authority due to her overarching responsibility and directing of the artwork unboxing process. However, she did what she was able to conceal or negate the existence of a separation between other professions based upon power. Drawing these parallels with other professions, means that it is possible to acknowledge that the curator's professional skills and activities are not always limited to the curatorial profession, and that they will engage with professional knowledge in a way that has the potential to connect with various professions. Yet, the skills and activities are formed in a way that is entirely unique to the curator in its application, but also on an individual basis, from one curator to the next.

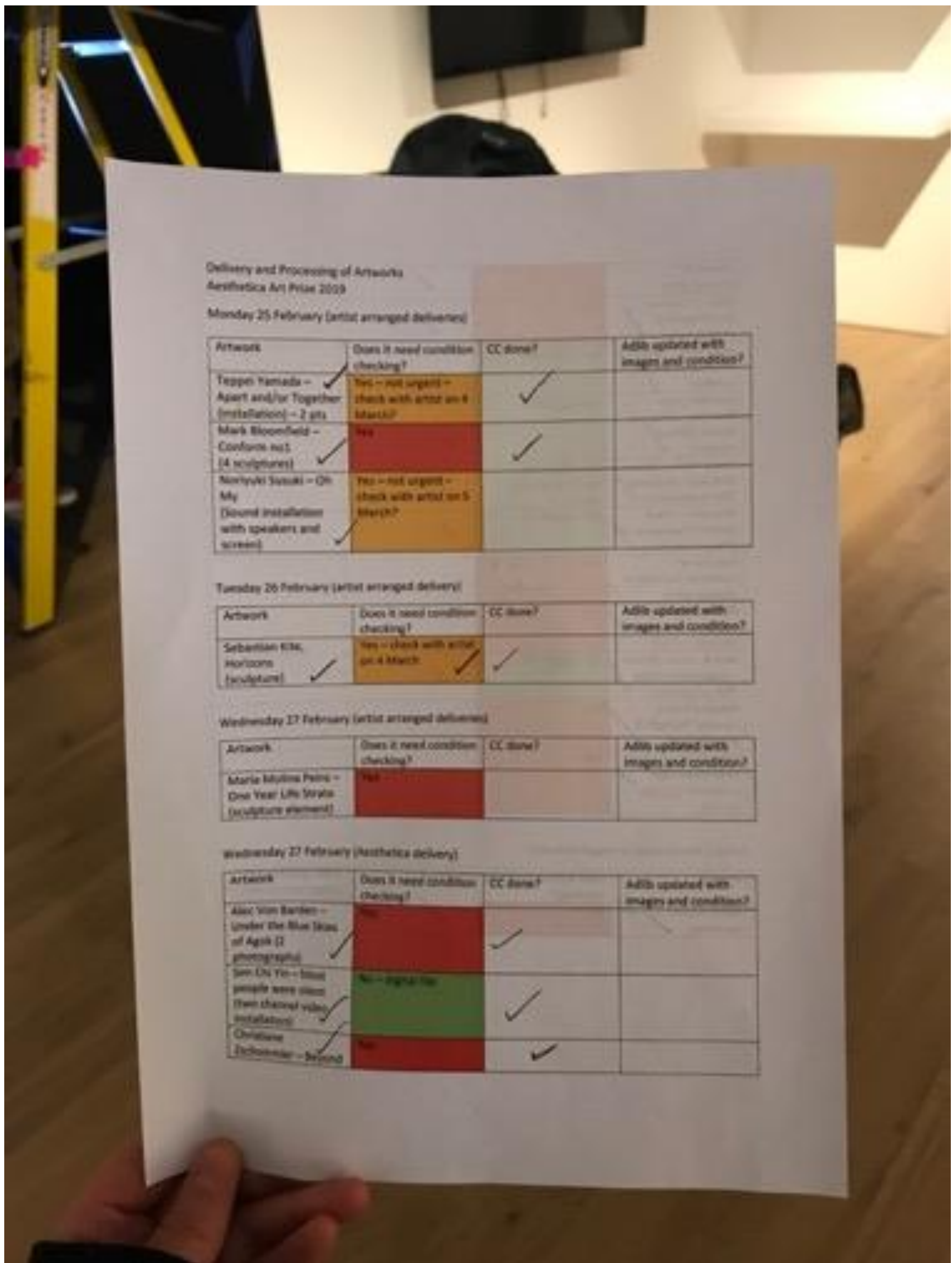
In addition to the contextualising and managing components observed in the art space in the process of receiving artwork, there was also evidence of the curator being tasked with problem solving. For example, for the Aesthetica exhibition, Rebecca engaged with the unboxing of the artwork. Each of the artworks were by a different artist, due to the nature of it being a group exhibition, and were arriving with differing requirements and instructions, from numerous locations and in various packaging. For example, the work by artist Noriyuki Suzuki titled 'Oh My ( )' had technological requirements due to the continuous monitoring of the textual communication of '"god" in 48 languages using a Twitter database' which then triggered an audio response in the relevant 'language' (Aesthetica, 2020, b). The varying technical demands for each of the artworks, it appeared, was Rebecca's responsibility. This was also in part demonstrated by the authority by which Rebecca directed the process. It was also signified by Rebecca's summary sheet titled 'Delivery and Processing of Artworks' (see figures 33 and 34) which included detailed timelines for artwork delivery, condition report requirements and completion, whether any images were required of the artwork to act as evidence of its condition, and evidence of dialogue with the artist about these arrangements. However, the enactment of this activity on behalf of Rebecca was necessarily specific to her curatorial role within that specific institution, space, exhibition and with respect to specific artworks and artists.

Fig.30 Stages of unpacking of the artwork *'Oh My ( )'* by Noriyuki Suzuki.

Aesthetica 2019 Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 31 Stages of unpacking of the artwork *‘Oh My ( )’* by Noriyuki Suzuki.
Aesthetica 2019 Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Fig.32 Image of the crate label for the artwork *‘Horizons, 2018’* by Sebastian Kite.
Aesthetica 2019 Exhibition. York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.


Delivery and Processing of Artworks
Aesthetica Art Prize 2019

Monday 25 February (artist arranged deliveries)

Artwork	Does it need condition checking?	CC done?	Adlib updated with images and condition?
Teppei Yamada – Apart and/or Together (installation) – 2 pts ✓	Yes – not urgent – check with artist on 4 March?	✓	
Mark Bloomfield – Conform no1 (4 sculptures) ✓	Yes	✓	
Noriyuki Suzuki – Oh My (Sound installation with speakers and screen) ✓	Yes – not urgent – check with artist on 5 March?		

Tuesday 26 February (artist arranged delivery)

Artwork	Does it need condition checking?	CC done?	Adlib updated with images and condition?
Sebastian Kite, Horizons (sculpture) ✓	Yes – check with artist on 4 March ✓	✓	

Wednesday 27 February (artist arranged deliveries)

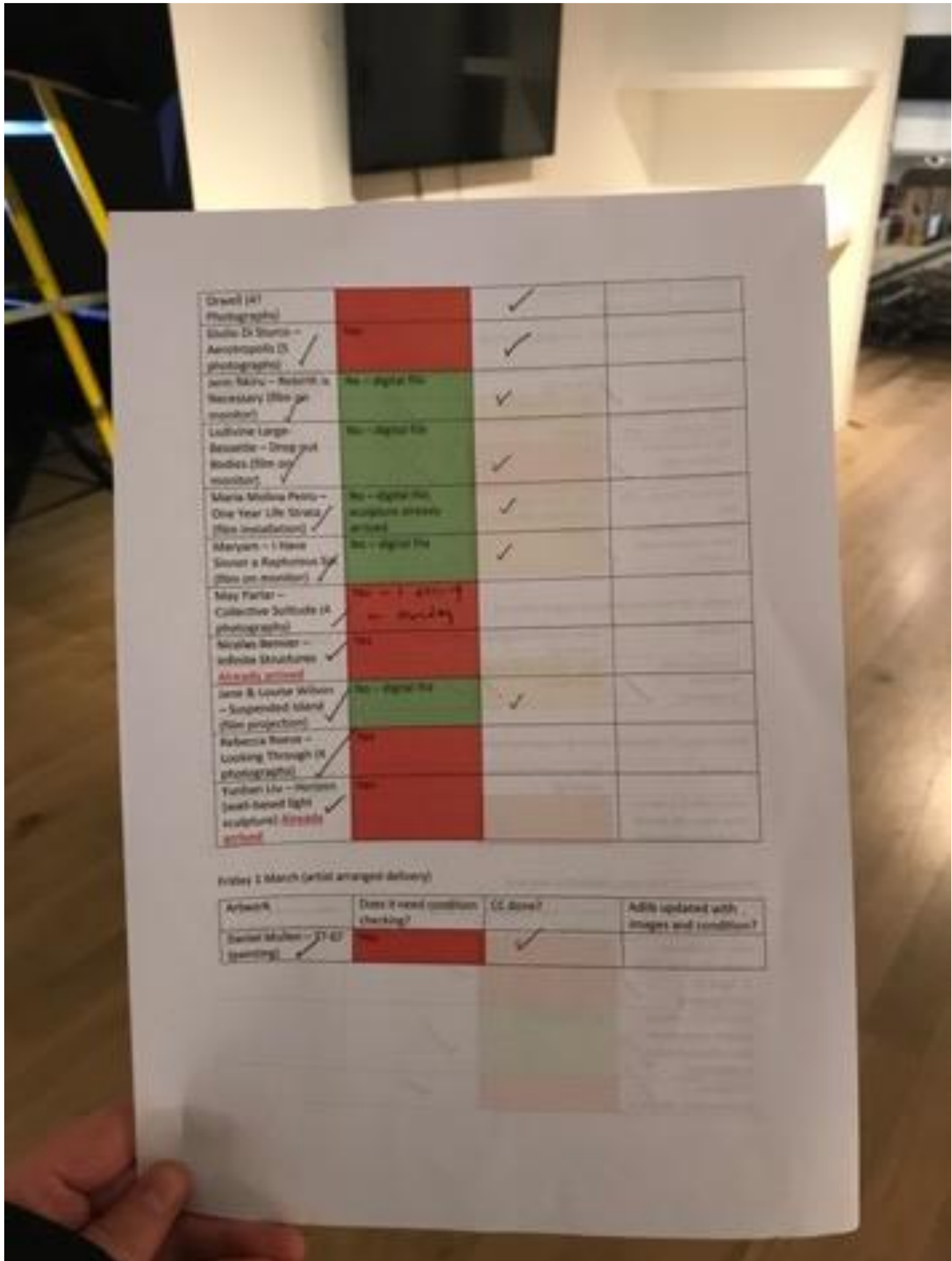
Artwork	Does it need condition checking?	CC done?	Adlib updated with images and condition?
Maria Molina Peiro – One Year Life Strata (sculpture element)	Yes		

Wednesday 27 February (Aesthetica delivery)

Artwork	Does it need condition checking?	CC done?	Adlib updated with images and condition?
Alec Von Barden – Under the Blue Skies of Agok (2 photographs) ✓	Yes	✓	
Sen Chi Yin – [illegible] people were [illegible] (two channel video installation) ✓	No – digital file	✓	
Christiane Zschommler – Beyond ✓	Yes	✓	

Fig.33 Delivery and Processing of Artworks. The front page of the A4 document.

York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.



Orwell (47 Photographs)		✓	
Studio Di Stanio – Aerotropolis (5 photographs) ✓	Yes	✓	
Jenn Nkiru – Rebirth is Necessary (film on monitor) ✓	No – digital file	✓	
Ludivine Large-Bessette – Drop out Bodies (film on monitor) ✓	No – digital file	✓	
Maria Molina Peiro – One Year Life Strata (film installation) ✓	No – digital file, sculpture already arrived	✓	
Maryam – I Have Sinned a Rapturous Sin (film on monitor) ✓	No – digital file	✓	
May Parlar – Collective Solitude (4 photographs) ✓	Yes [illegible]		
Nicolas Bernier – Infinite Structures ✓ Already arrived	Yes		
Jane & Louise Wilson – Suspended Island (film projection) ✓	No – digital file	✓	
Rebecca Reeve – Looking Through (4 photographs) ✓	Yes		
Yunhan Liu – Horizon (wall-based light sculpture) ✓ Already arrived	Yes		

Friday 1 March (artist arranged delivery)

Artwork	Does it need condition checking?	CC done?	Adlib updated with images and condition?
Daniel Mullen – [illegible] (painting) ✓	Yes	✓	

Fig.34 Delivery and Processing of Artworks. The back page of the A4 document.

York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

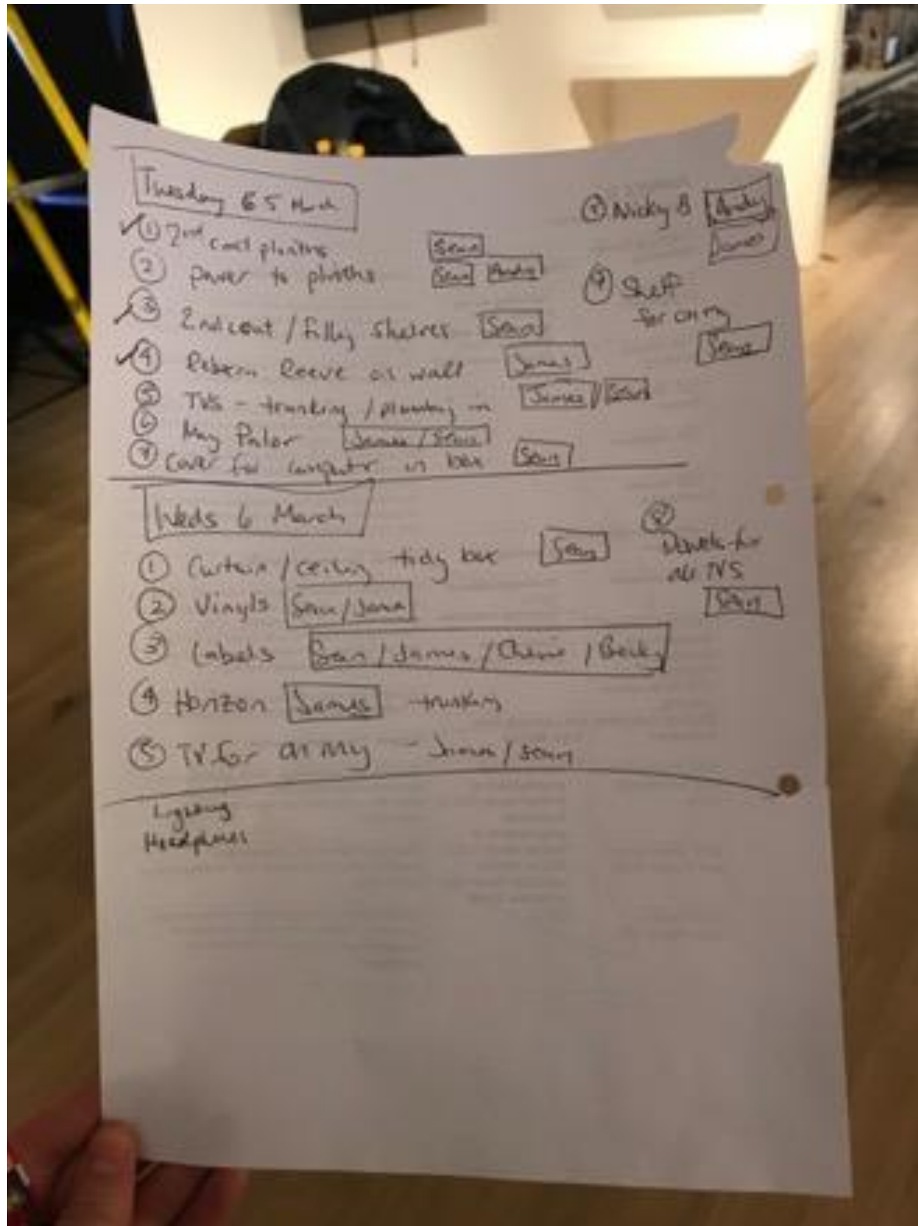


Fig.35 Installation notes by Rebecca Gee, Fine Art Curator.
York Art Gallery, York. Photograph by the author.

Rebecca had sketched out her own informal plan for the requirements of the artwork for unboxing, the spatial preparation requirements, installation, with the noted additions of technicians available and who was responsible for each task, on each day of the installation (see figure 35). To a degree, Rebecca was demonstrating how she undertook and incorporated practical tasks, into her own individualised way of working, being creative with the practical requirements to fit in with what she perceived was the most effective approach.

Ultimately, receiving artwork as an activity requires curators to have an over-arching view of the entire exhibition process. This includes oversight of the unpacking, insurance, travel, time frames, and written material relating to the artwork. Curatorial expertise appeared to be in the ability to receive the artwork with a holistic approach. However, their expertise was variably expressed as this approach is undertaken within daily life. Different curators have different approaches that reflect the specific contexts within which the artwork is received.

ii) Condition reports

The activity of creating and utilising condition reports also provides an ideal example of the complexity regarding what kinds of activity can be considered as being within the remit of the curator, and how these activities are navigated in an everyday context. The first mention of condition reports had been made during the Emma Hart exhibition 'Banger' at The Fruitmarket Gallery[23] wherein Ruth and I had undertaken some post-installation and pre-exhibition opening condition reports. After showing me the type of descriptions and words used to express the condition of the artwork on the paperwork, Ruth and I undertook this task around the gallery, taking time to peer closely at every section of the artwork. Ruth advised throughout the process on the use of language, suggesting commonly used terms for condition reports. For instance, Ruth suggested that there was a certain vocabulary that was used with some degree of consistency in these reports, which arguably connects with Acord's claim that 'curators' achieve planned and conventional action by mobilizing objects and discursive concepts in the installation space' (2010, p.460). For instance, Ruth communicated that all that needed to be said about the *'Sandmining'* installation (see figures 57-65) was that it was okay, with the inclusion of the "proper terms," despite these not being explicitly provided.

Curatorial impressions made upon the entire art space, relied upon curators becoming increasingly familiar with an activity, which they then brought to bear on the art space. This resonated with anthropologist Setha Low's observation that 'embodied space is the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form' (2003, p.10). That said, the process by which these artwork's conditions were described was also highly subjective and demanded a degree of creative acumen in describing the aesthetic appearance of the work.

[23] See Chapter 3 for information and context about Emma Hart's exhibition 'Banger'.

The implications of these reports were not described by Ruth, but her diligence implied there was a responsibility attached to the creation of these reports. The condition reports documented any changes to the artwork and their condition, post and pre–transportation. In addition, there was no doubt that the person responsible for undertaking the assessment was given the opportunity to attain intimate knowledge of the construction of the artworks. In this sense the relevant person, in this case Ruth and I, were provided with a detailed understanding of the physical components of the artwork and its construction. This experience of the artwork was certainly incredibly relevant to the curatorial role, as demonstrated by Acord's observation that 'nowhere in the exhibition-making process is the physical editing of the artwork (or exhibition as artwork) more visible than in the installation' (2014, p.153). It became apparent within the gallery space, that viewing the artwork in this way, during installation week, was the privilege of only several people working close to the artwork. Those such as the curator gained often unattainable proximity to artwork not extended to the public, and which I also temporarily enjoyed by accompanying Ruth and engaging in similar activity in the space.

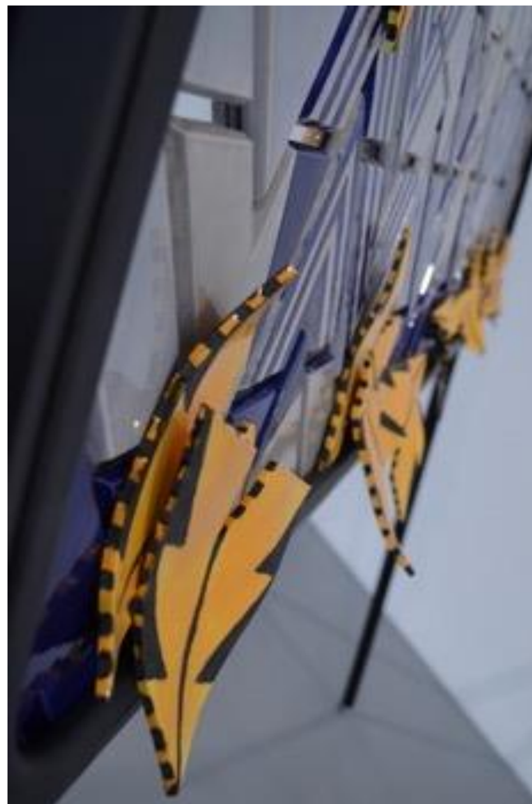


Fig.36 Detailed view of an artwork within the exhibition *BANGER*, by Emma Hart.
Upstairs gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

It was after the unboxing, on the second day of the installation week of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, Tuesday 12th March 2019, when Ruth and I were again in the gallery completing condition reports for Senga's exhibition. It was the primary task outlined for that day and the intention was clearly defined as providing a description of the artwork's qualities and status.[24] The complexity of professional roles in the way it has the potential to influence and subvert activity within any particular space was reflected in conversations regarding the progress being made with the condition reports within the Fruitmarket Gallery. It was evident that both curatorial and wider non-curatorial staff had on occasion, partaken in writing these reports. However, it appeared that the preferable option within the Fruitmarket Gallery was the curator. This demonstrated how the particularities of specific art spaces impacted upon and helped to guide the parameters of professional activity. With regards to completing condition reports as an activity within the Fruitmarket Gallery, this activity was not exclusive to the curator, even if that was the preference in this case. That said, this was an activity which Ruth was both adept and knowledgeable. It was also an activity with which Ruth spent a sizeable amount of time within that week, which supports the notion that it was an activity not to be undervalued or ignored by the curator, or indeed undermined as an activity associated with the curator.

The process of writing the condition reports began with the photographic works by Senga Nengudi in the upstairs gallery space. Most of these were in black and white, with a few small photographs in colour. The photographs were primarily to be checked against the Henry Moore condition report photographs supplied with the work as evidence of their condition, as expected with conditions reports (George, 2015, p.195). Their condition was compared to the Henry Moore reports and photographs as the most recent documentation for the condition of the works. The condition reports that travelled with the artworks also preceded the Henry Moore Institute exhibition, all of which is considered standard practice (2015, p.195 and p.205). However, in this case Ruth argued that neither the photos or the written descriptions were as detailed as she would have desired or indeed expected. Ruth communicated that she felt the very limited descriptions were restricting in

[24] Art historian and curator Adrian George assigns this activity primarily to 'registrars and / or conservators' (2015, p.195). However, George does communicate that there are curatorial associations with this activity, indicated by the way that he briefs the curator in the detail of this activity, even though he assigns the activity to another profession (2015, p.195 and p.205). George's instructive descriptions suggest that it is an aspect about which the curator, at the very least, should be intimately aware, if not directly involved (2015, p.195 and p.205).

terms of checking the artwork, as it lacked more creative, elaborate, or descriptive terminology that would have provided more of a sense of the work. This type of information would also inform the re-creation of the installation artworks.

Ruth emphasised the importance of the condition reports and proceeded, later that day, to log the condition reports, downloading and filing the photographs onto her computer. Ruth's involvement in every stage of the process brings into question the distinction made by Adrian George in relation to 'the condition report', as he states that:

> 'the curator looks for intellectual and / or innovative ways through exhibition projects, the registrar's focus is always on the management of processes and related documentation needed to work safely with works of art from a collection or from private lenders' (2015, p.195).

This deviation from curatorial discourse demonstrated how even activities associated with the curator, as previously established, can be variously disputed. Ruth's engagement with the condition report in every regard also demonstrates how curators may have varying degrees of involvement and expectation, even with activities which they are associated with. In addition, the curator could be simultaneously managing other types of activity. For example, Ruth was uploading the photographs to her computer for the condition reports, which she punctuated with undertaking more of the exhibition writing material. This demonstrates how even the practical components of the condition reports such as uploading photographs were surrounded by activity undertaken by Ruth that included generating textual and analytical material about the artwork and exhibition that was inherently creative and entirely subjective. This was an example of the degree of interchangeable skills exhibited by the curator that is synonymous with expressions of their expertise.

During the period of time spent undertaking condition reports alongside Ruth within the gallery itself, it became clear that George's attempt to assign the more managerial and administrative activity of creating a 'condition report' to a 'registrar' (2015, p.195) did not corresponded from the everyday engagement with the activity, as undertaking condition reports revealed itself as practical but also creative.

Later that afternoon, after the visit with Ruth and Allison to a University of Edinburgh careers event (an educational event), Ruth and I continued the condition reports including '*Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St', 1981/2013* (see figure 37). Fiona passed by Ruth and I whilst we were making notes and observing the detail of the piece. After she had passed, Ruth noted: "I feel like we got approval from Fiona there for our approach." Ruth was able to make an estimation, based on her familiarity with Fiona's working style in the gallery space, of whether Fiona approved of how we were undertaking the condition reports, purely based upon her body language. The specifics of this approval remained elusive. Was it an appreciation for our handling of the artwork? Or the thoroughness of the condition analysis we were discussing? What was curatorial about her approval, either on our behalf, or hers? Fiona's presence in the gallery space was certainly a dominant aspect of the installation period of the exhibition. It was not discernible whether her unofficial supervisory-style presence was due to overseeing what might be considered either practical or subjective; no distinction was made. The interactions between Ruth, myself, and Fiona, could possibly be a sign of her trust in the team, but it could also be construed as elusive and intimidating, although this was not the implication with regards to Fiona and her staff. The various dynamics between staff members had ramifications for the activity of undertaking condition reports. The relative success or failure could be based upon consensus within the art space, even though it was impossible to evaluate.

This was evidenced by observations in the Fruitmarket Gallery. Laurence, Jamie, Ruth, and another colleague were in the gallery space at various times, discussing artwork positioning and wall text positioning. On one occasion, Fiona noticed me crawling underneath the artwork, greeting me as she passed, as I lay underneath the artwork, flat on the floor. I was slightly entertained by having been greeted in this way, however, Fiona did not seem to find it in the least bit unusual. It appeared there was degree of trust regarding the physical treatment of artworks, made on behalf of Fiona as the curator. This appeared to be extended to those who has already been accepted into the space. The novelty of my experience indicated how activity of this kind, demonstrated how the art space represented the ability to reinforce professional separations, of who does and doesn't enter their world. This evoked the assertion made by anthropologist Sherry Ortner, in her consideration of the separations that can occur for the purpose of creating a professional knowledge, identity and practice, that is often negotiated, with various inclusions and separations in relation to 'materiality and space' (2010, p.214). The curator was certainly embroiled in these distinctions which arguably offered them opportunities to try and assert themselves within the art space. Yet it was evident that

curators also conversely tried to open their expertise up to re-negotiation within the space. To 'reinforce' (Ortner, 2010, p. 214), but also to rearticulate and transform.

Fig.37 Senga Nengudi. *Nuki Nuki: Across 118th St,* 1981/2013.
Nylon mesh, wooden slats. Upstairs gallery at the Fruitmarket Gallery.
Photograph by the author.

The artworks were still being unpacked and arranged in the gallery space, therefore once we had completed the reports for those that we were able, we returned to the office. Ruth noted that prior reporting on the artworks was quite minimal as far as the writing was concerned, so extensive photographs were good in this case. The condition report photographs, she mentioned, wouldn't ordinarily be this detailed, expressing an opinion on the technical norm. All photographs were labelled by Ruth at her computer. It appeared that she had set a standard for the condition report, independent of any formal structure, but also that she was responding to the requirements of prior condition reports lacking more comprehensive written descriptions, by compensating with a greater degree of visual proof. There were also certain requirements in terms of the approach to the report. In the case of '*Untitled R.S.V.P., 2013*' for example, the feet were given numbers 1 to 5, left or right,

front, back or side (see figure 38). Ruth gave these technical aspects great focus and demonstrated a very diligent sense of responsibility for these requirements, in relation to the creation of the art space. In essence, the types of documentation that accompanies the artworks, authenticates, and protects its existence as it moves through its life, is similarly considered by art historian Michael Zell in a consideration of 'Actor-Network-Theory' and 'art', and 'the interdependencies' that can be created (2011, p.1).

The complex focuses and purposes surrounding the activity of completing condition reports, further demonstrated the way that curators have a degree of malleability in terms of their professional knowledge, identity, and practice, due to the needs and particularities of the art space. Notably, the activity of undertaking condition reports revealed a curatorial expertise shaped by exposure to the artwork in close proximity in a privileged way, the mesh of practical and creative skills, non-prescriptive and subjective interactions with the artwork, and a flexibility of approach. By undertaking condition reports, curators also demonstrated how activity undertaken by curators often goes largely unseen by those outside of the gallery staff. Consequently, curatorial expertise is made somewhat illusory, especially by the time the artwork is installed and exhibited. Yet regardless of the visibility of the activity, the curator is tasked with the constant re-configuration of the artwork, within which their curatorial expertise undoubtedly resides.

iii) Placing and creating

The activity of placing and creating artwork also took place within the installation period at the Fruitmarket Gallery. It was the responsibility of more than one curator; however, it was constantly reinforced by the wider curatorial staff that the placement of artwork was the decision of Fiona Bradley, director, and curator of the Fruitmarket Gallery, and Jamie, the gallery manager. Nevertheless, in the case of Senga Nengudi's exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Laurence was also centrally present, if not the primary authority. Fiona interacted with gallery staff in response to the specifics of the space. This relates to Acord's view that 'the installation of an exhibition of contemporary art is often referred to by curators as an "organic situation."' (2014, p.154). It is on these terms, that the expertise of the contemporary art curators should be understood, within the context of the placement and creation of artwork and the art space.

In the first instance it is necessary to acknowledge how the various activities undertaken on behalf of contemporary art curators within the art space have the ability to affect each other. For example, the condition reports did not just provide a comment upon the physical wellbeing of the artwork,

but it also connected with the process of the placement and creation of the artwork. As previously noted, any discrepancies in the installation of the artwork were a by-product of the condition reports.

On Wednesday 13th March 2019, Ruth had already completed some more of the condition reports by the time I arrived (at the time instructed). Her day started much earlier and she had work to progress which she appeared to try and fit in before my arrival. She evidently viewed her role as also hosting and educating me in the space. This added an additional component to the activity of undertaking condition reports as she was actively engaged in an educational process. Some of the reports had been completed by the time of my arrival at the gallery that morning, which arguably demonstrated how Ruth wanted to dedicate time to educate me within the space. She consequently needed to complete certain activities in order to make space in her day. As such, she had sought to complete more condition reports outside of the time that we shared together, which also indicated that her familiarity with this activity provided her with the knowledge to reduce the time spent on this task with the aim of increasing productivity. Ruth had also demonstrated that she was required to engage in many different activities, often with others simultaneously in mind. This makes a case for understanding activity in the art space as fluid, and without delineated time periods, with a need for being responsive to other demands at any one time. This highlighted how any activity she had previously engaged in was also subject to a hierarchy, with activities constantly shifting as she variously prioritised them.[25]

The first piece we focused together that day was '*Untitled R.S.V.P., 2013'* (see figure 38), which was the point at which shadowing, evolved into Ruth taking a supervisory role. The process included taking photographs of the artwork as previously noted. Encouraged by Ruth to observe the detail, I carefully made my way around the piece. This required the removal of my shoes as I limbered underneath the piece to check the underside, consulting with Ruth on its status as I did so, showing her the photographs that I was taking from underneath as I went. In this sense, my practical awareness was at the forefront of both our minds, as I navigated the artwork in such a way as to avoid any disturbance or damage. Ruth was calm in her manner, as she appeared reflective and

[25] Anthropologist Nancy D. Munn describes 'cultural notions', 'of time-telling' (1992, p.105) which in the case of the contemporary art curator, demonstrates how on-the-ground activities in the art space are never separate from an engagement with other temporalities simultaneously. These conditions are described by Munn who refers to how 'stereotypically opposed space and time are aspects of each other within the lived world' (1992, p.101).

quietly engaged with the process around her. I noted that the way that one of the legs that had been recreated was not in the right direction and was facing the opposite way as evidenced by the snags in the tights material, showing on the opposite side in comparison to the photographs provided to us. Making Ruth aware of this, she agreed this was the case and stated that she might notify one of the techs, but she did not appear too perturbed by the news. She evidently had the ability to make a judgement about what constituted an issue in terms of creating a faithful representation of the artwork. The technical mistake in the artwork's recreation did not appear to affect her. If anything, it became acknowledged information that could be used creatively at any moment at her discretion for the purpose of achieving further engagement with the work.

Fig.38 Senga Nengudi. *Untitled R.S.V.P.,* 2013. Nylon, sand, mixed media. Upstairs gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Certainly, in the case of the installation mistake regarding the direction of one of the legs, you would only likely notice this about the artwork as a consequence of having combed the artwork to that level of detail. I estimated these were the types of quirks in the installation process that constituted the intimate knowledge of the exhibition that the curator would be privy to in ways that no

untrained attendee would be able to gain insight, creating a private selection of knowledge. The curator would have garnered select knowledge from their detailed engagements with the artwork and could distribute it at their discretion. The disparate knowledge that this would create is an integral part of the expertise of the curator.

During the time in the gallery, Ruth reflected on the work she had done before my arrival. She mentioned that there wasn't much to say about the '*Sandmining'* piece, which was an installation (see figures 58 to 66) – adding that they had brought the sand in themselves. It was not the same sand that was used at the Henry Moore Institute. This reinforced the view that an exhibition, although it had to include the same artist and artwork, the artwork did not have to be a faithful technical recreation of the first showing. The only aspect of the '*Sandmining'* work that Ruth said was important to note was rusty (in reference to the metal piping). However, the instinctual qualities of the curator in the art space, were on occasion tested. This was evidenced in relation to the artwork '*Bulemia'*, which presented a particularly complex technical challenge (see figures 39-47, 53 and 54). As artist and curator Donald Odita usefully described, the artwork had partial genesis in collaboration before emerging in its current form (1997, p.26). Senga Nengudi utilised 'vintage newspapers' and as Odita describes:

> 'Gold spray paint was used to delete certain words, and to redirect patterns of thought. *Bulemia* situates itself as a great library of life where one enters to freely collect information from the newspaper covered walls', as well as the 'paper' creating a 'intense heat', connecting with how 'homeless people often use paper to hold in body heat', which Odita notes was mentioned by Senga Nengudi herself, as the work was being constructed for a prior exhibition (1997, p.26).

Both Fiona and Laurence, during a staff walking tour of the exhibition, briefed and informed Fruitmarket Gallery staff prior to the exhibition opening. They noted that in one previous show, some of the gallery staff had thrown away the newspapers after the exhibition. This led Fiona and Laurence to detail Senga's personal distress, regarding the role of these newspapers as a record of her own life. Therefore, Fiona and Laurence used the story as cautionary tale for staff at the gallery, emphasising their technical responsibilities to the artwork within the art space.

Fig.39 Unique aspect of the artwork (pencil markings) circled in red for condition report and installation purposes. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

Fig.40 Comparative image without the red circle denoting the unique feature of the artwork. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

Fig.41 Wall A (image 1) for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.42 Wall A (image 2) photograph from a different angle for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.43 Wall B (image 1) for installation reference and condition report. Previous photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.44 One of several photographs supplied without notes to assist with the installation and condition report. Previous condition report photographs supplied to the gallery for comparison, for the artwork *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.
Photograph by the author.

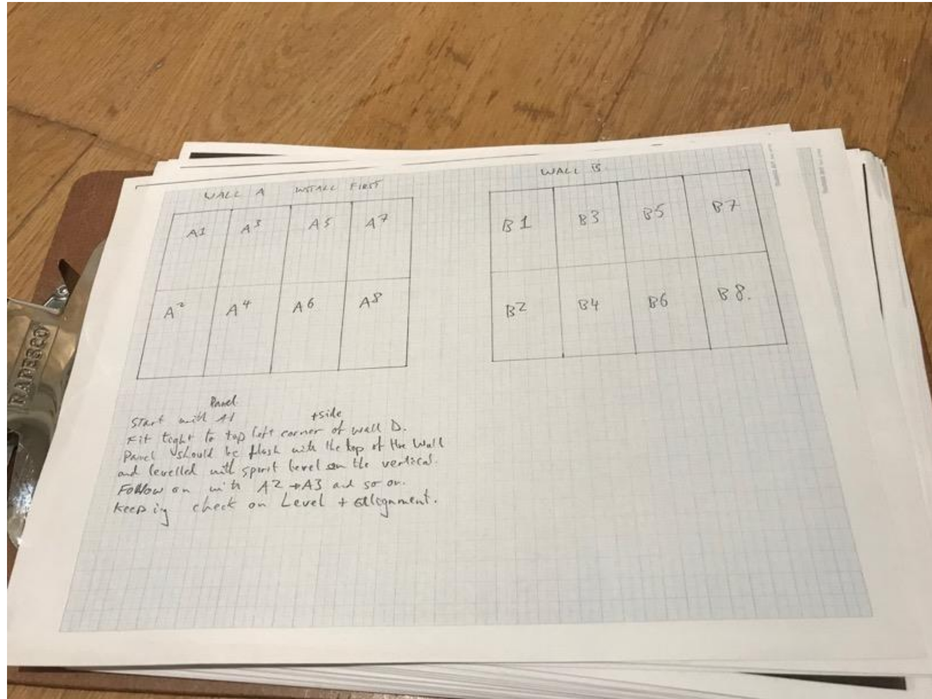


Fig.45 Wall A and Wall B installation guide on grid paper for *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

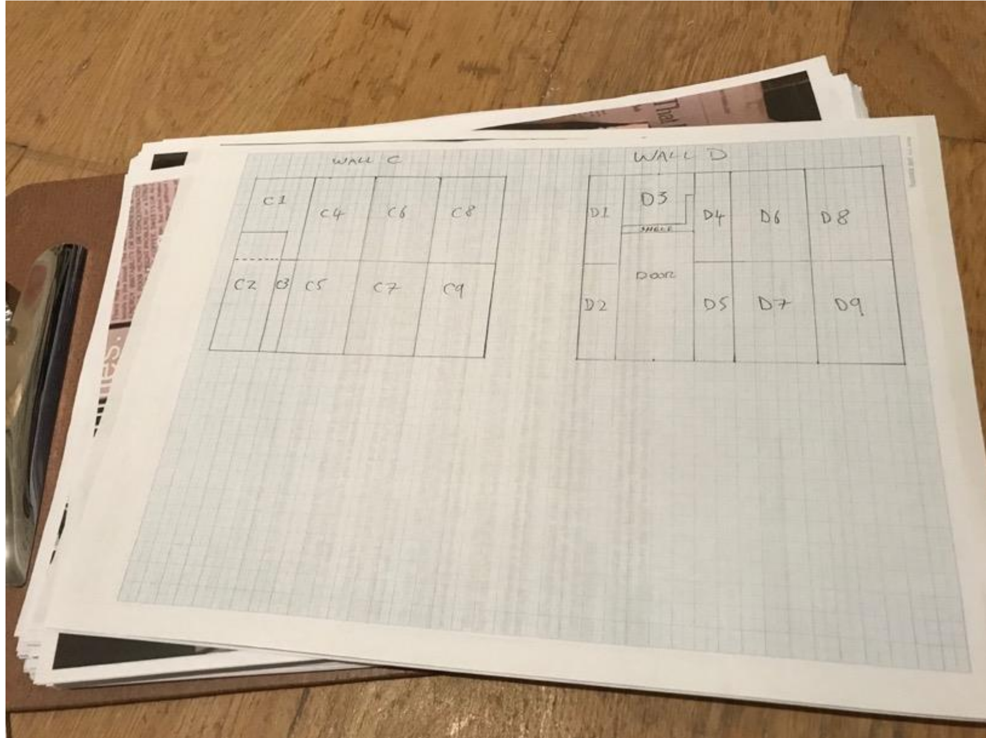


Fig.46 Wall C and Wall D installation guide on grid paper for *'Bulemia'*, by Senga Nengudi.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.47 Research and public engagement curator, Ruth Bretherick, photographing the artwork *'Bulemia,'* by Senga Nengudi, for the condition report.

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

There was a large degree of difficulty regarding its re-creation, and as such, Ruth had supplied installation sketches depicting the panels of the artwork (newspapers) on grid paper to be able to specify which of the four walls of the installation she was referring (see figures 45 and 46). This demonstrated how there were variable approaches to artworks in terms of how faithfully they were technically recreated, as this installation caused Ruth to exhibit a high degree of focus, concern, and hyper-vigilance about its technical recreation that I had not observed as much with the other installation pieces. The grid drawings Ruth had made, could be checked against the condition report images supplied by the Henry Moore Institute to identify any disparities. If any were evident, they could be accurately photographed and marked. The role of the condition report in terms of the placement of the artwork could provide the artwork with its status, both in terms of the artwork's physical re-creation and health, but also by ensuring optimum proximity to the original artistic intention, as a protective measure against the curator's possible creative license. As such, this process of producing exhibition could be argued to provide the quality, safety, and installation of the artworks through careful checks, that consequently would provide the artworks with a status that would support the attention which they were being given.

Ruth stated her intention to keep popping out into the gallery to check on the artwork's unboxing status, in anticipation of the point at which the placement of the artwork would begin. Therefore, Ruth took me along on an informal gallery tour instead, walking around and surveying the beginnings of the installation activity, which included artwork placement and the creation of the exhibition in the more publicly recognisable sense. Ruth took time to contextualise the work, mentioning how a photographer Senga worked with was "one of her collaborators", and stating "Senga often calls her the 'activator' of her work." Ruth then connected the aesthetic in the photographs *'Performance Piece, 1978'* (Fig.23) wherein the photograph on the far left in particular, depicted a floor which was also visibly grey, to a similarity with the gallery floor of the Fruitmarket. It was due to be re-laid Ruth said, but not before the Senga exhibition. This was a creative decision, but it also practically meant one less job in the preparation of the space. It was difficult to know if the decision had been made in creative response to the artwork, or if a reason had been created to fit the purpose of this practical, time-saving decision. Ruth did not specify and quickly moved on.

Ruth also pointed out other key works which included the '*R.S.V.P.'* works (see figures 37 and 49-52), whose well-known status among the other artworks was later signified by Jonathan Jones' brief online coverage in *The Guardian* of the Fruitmarket Gallery's exhibition, with mention only to those works specifically among the exhibition's themes (Pulver *et al.*, 2019). This demonstrated within the

exhibition itself that there were hierarchies placed on works based upon their relative fame, that would potentially influence where they were placed within the gallery space. This connects with O'Neill's statement that: 'Exhibitions (in whatever form they take) are always ideological; as hierarchical structures they produced particular and general forms of communication' (2007, p.14). It demonstrated how, as curators, they were able to draw upon dominant dialogues within the profession, through which to frame their activity in the construction of the art space.

Fig.48 Senga Nengudi. *Performance Piece*, 1978. Silver gelatin prints, triptych. Photograph of the artwork in the upstairs gallery of the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.49 Senga Nengudi. *R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D''*, 2014. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.50 Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.51 Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.52 Detail of *'R.S.V.P. Reverie 'D'*, 2014, by Senga Nengudi. Nylon mesh, sand, and copper. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munchen, KiCo Collection. Upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

As Ruth walked around the gallery, she also again reinforced that there was one particularly challenging work in terms of the installation; '*Bulemia'*, which had no text for installation from the Henry Moore Institute, by which she was referring to written installation instructions. Rather, there was just a condition report (see figures 53 and 54).

The Henry Moore Foundation

Condition report

Exhibition: Senga Nengudi

Lender: Senga Nengudi

Artist: Senga Nengudi
Title: Bulemia
Date: 1990/2018
Material: Mixed

Accession / Inventory Number

Name transport company: NA (created on site)

Was packing suitable?
(If not, state why and suggest additional packing required?)
NA for start of exhibition

Delivery date: NA

List any special packing / transport requirements

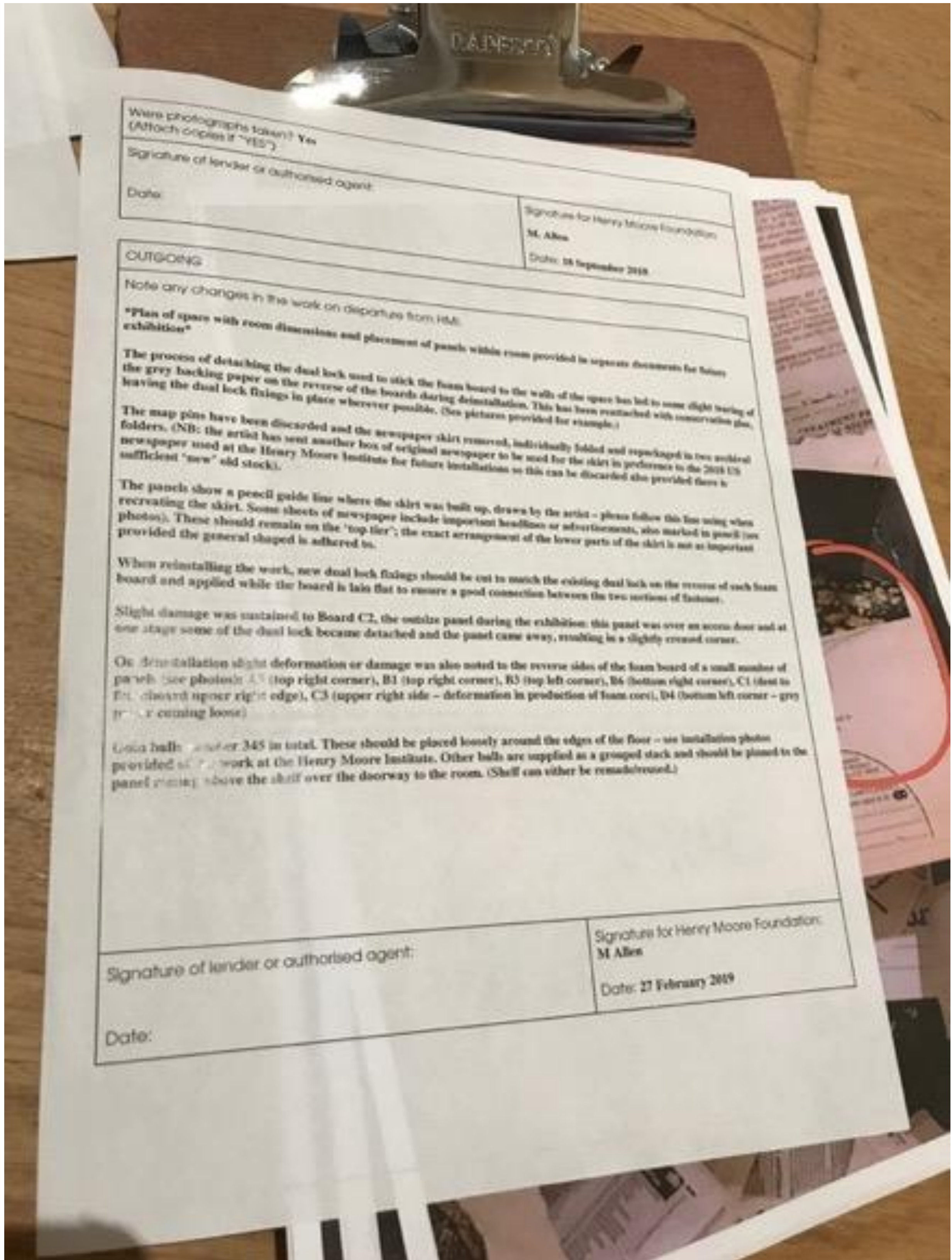
For departure foamboard panels to be tissue wrapped and layered between card dividers in lined museum crates. Outside panel to be wrapped in spider tissue, poly and thick card for transit. Newspaper skirts to be removed from panels, folded and packed in two archival boxes (one for 2018 papers – may not be required in future, and one for older newspapers). Gold newspaper balls and and ball 'tower' to be softwrapped in cartons. Shelf to be softwrapped (but may be remade at each future venue).

INCOMING

Describe condition of the work at unpacking:

Work as 'new'. Newspapers are aged and in varying states (creases/tears) but have been deacidified prior to inclusion in work. All securely adhered adhered to the foam board at installation. Foam board in good, new condition.

Fig.53 Front page of condition report for artwork *'Bulimia, 1990/2018'* by Senga Nengudi, supplied by The Henry Moore Institute Leeds. A4 paper.
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.



Were photographs taken? Yes
(Attach copies if "YES")

Signature of lender or authorised agent:

Date:

Signature for Henry Moore Foundation:
M. Allen
Date: 18 September 2018

OUTGOING

Note any changes in the work on departure from HMI:

Plan of space with room dimensions and placement of panels within room provided in separate documents for future exhibition

The process of detaching the dual lock used to stick the foam board to the walls of the space has led to some slight tearing of the grey backing paper on the reverse of the boards during deinstallation. This has been reattached with conservation glue, leaving the dual lock fixings in place wherever possible. (See pictures provided for example.)

The map pins have been discarded and the newspaper skirt removed, individually folded and repackaged in two archival folders. (NB: the artist has sent another box of original newspaper to be used for the skirt in preference to the 2018 US newspaper used at the Henry Moore Institute for future installations so this can be discarded also provided there is sufficient "new" old stock).

The panels show a pencil guide line where the skirt was built up, drawn by the artist – please follow this line using when recreating the skirt. Some sheets of newspaper include important headlines or advertisements, also marked in pencil (see photos). These should remain on the 'top tier'; the exact arrangement of the lower parts of the skirt is not as important provided the general shaped is adhered to.

When reinstalling the work, new dual lock fixings should be cut to match the existing dual lock on the reverse of each foam board and applied while the board is lain flat to ensure a good connection between the two sections of fastener.

Slight damage was sustained to Board C2, the outsize panel during the exhibition: this panel was over an access door and at one stage some of the dual lock became detached and the panel came away, resulting in a slightly creased corner.

On deinstallation slight deformation or damage was also noted to the reverse sides of the foam board of a small number of panels (see photos): [illegible] (top right corner), B1 (top right corner), B3 (top left corner), B6 (bottom right corner), C1 (close to [illegible] upper right edge), C3 (upper right side – deformation in production of foam core), D4 (bottom left corner – grey [illegible] coming loose)

Gaia balls [illegible] 345 in total. These should be placed loosely around the edges of the floor – see installation photos provided [illegible] work at the Henry Moore Institute. Other balls are supplied as a grouped stack and should be placed to the panel [illegible] above the shelf over the doorway to the room. (Shelf can either be remade/reused.)

Signature of lender or authorised agent:

Date:

Signature for Henry Moore Foundation:
M Allen
Date: 27 February 2019

Fig.54 Reverse page of the condition report for *artwork 'Bulimia, 1990/2018'* by Senga Nengudi, supplied by The Henry Moore Institute Leeds. A4 paper.
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Laurence Sillars as the director of the Henry Moore Institute was the honorary artist-representative for the exhibition's showing at the Fruitmarket Gallery, as the exhibition was moving from its showing at the Henry Moore Institute to the Fruitmarket Gallery. He had worked directly with Senga Nengudi to create the show at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. He would therefore be the respondent to any installation uncertainty. However, in the early period of the installation, the staff at the Fruitmarket Gallery were on their own, without the presence of Fiona or Laurence as the institutional figureheads, as stand-in artists or curators. Phrases of encouragement flew about the gallery as the technicians, and other gallery staff undertook specific tasks within the space. A discussion erupted about the arrangement of an artwork. "Let's put that one on there", someone suggested, in a very casual way, without much acknowledgement of the curatorial role of creative decision-making regarding artwork placement. Professional curator Jeffrey Kipnis for example, writes, among his other observations about curatorial activity, that 'you arrange and rearrange the works in your head and in model till your eyes bleed, all to get the concept and the experience to mesh in a stubborn set of spaces' (2006, p.100). With this as a strong context for the profession, the ease by which this activity was being casually assumed by other members of staff, was surprising.

Even so, evidently there was a prior sense of what the curatorial preference was, even if it was in a less direct sense, as Ruth referred to the fact that they were more certain about the layout of the artworks in the downstairs gallery space. "The liquid filled sculptures are being fabricated again for us," she stated. The work to which she was referring was *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'* (see figure 55) in the lower gallery, however there was also an artwork of the same kind on a plinth in the upper gallery (see figure 56). The Henry Moore Institute had sent their own technician to take on responsibility for constructing this piece due to a familiarity with the materiality. In this sense, there was a separation in skills and activities of the curator, in terms that anthropologist Roger Sansi outlines, as premised on them being 'a manager of relations, discourses and aesthetic value, but a manager nonetheless' (2020, b, p.7). In this sense, the curator was tasked with being an overseer and visionary of the bigger picture, but not just limited to what Acord terms 'the life of the exhibition as a whole' (2014, p.157), or the guidance they create through 'the exhibition concept' (2014, p.162), although there are certainly significant aspects upon which they base their activity. Instead, the guiding presence of the curator can be viewed more holistically, as a curatorial approach to any activity with which they engage.[26] This assimilation was supported later that day, as

[26] These 'managerial' and 'multiple roles' that the curator engages in (Sansi, 2020, b, p.7), demonstrates the potential for parallels across professions in terms of skills and activities. Yet Niemojewski suggests that what

I accompanied Ruth to view the installation progress in the gallery. We descended the stairs into the downstairs gallery space, where Laurence was engaging with some of the work. As the *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'* artwork in the lower gallery was being installed by the technician from the Henry Moore Institute, Laurence crouched down beside him, at the level of the artwork, overseeing the delicate process.

As the technician from the Henry Moore Institute was busy filling the pieces with the coloured liquid, Laurence then described how for the '*Untitled Water Composition*' artwork, Senga first tried to remember the colour from 1969 (see figure 55). Even with Ruth and I as the only audience to Laurence's description, he continued to enthusiastically provide context for the piece. What might appear to be a curator preoccupied with a technically delicate installation activity, was supplemented with a desire to contextualise. The way in which Laurence acted as the interpreter of the piece, whilst the technician stayed silent and focused on the practical activity at hand, brough into relief how the curator differed from those who were also in close proximity, wherein you might be tempted to perceive them as engaging in the same task.

Laurence's instinct to contextualise and inform us about the artwork, connects with art critic, Boris Groys alignment of the curator with this desire to communicate the 'artwork', 'to the public' (2009, p.2). However, this contrasts with what he also describes, as how 'the installation operates by means of a symbolic privatization of the public space of an exhibition' (2009, p.3), due to what emerged from the field. Laurence had an instinct to communicate, regardless of the status of the art space. Therefore, the delineated periods of activity associated with curator and the art space, can sometimes be at odds with associated discourse.

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could be considered distinctly curatorial, is the ability to so easily morph into the identities and activities associated with other 'professions' (2016, p.11). Curators are not alone in their professional instinct to be seen to have wide ranging impacts, engage in a wide range of activities and the ability to create wide-ranging knowledge, which allows them to view this as a professional identity. This is supported by the curatorial resonance with anthropologist Sherry Ortner's observations in the field with regards to professionals in the 'film' sector, stating that: 'these are all people whose job it is to maintain an overview of the larger system, who pride themselves on having the kind of broad knowledge of the scene and its trends that the anthropologist is also seeking' (2010, p.224).

Fig.55 Laurence Sillars, director and curator, and technician from The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, installing *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'* by Senga Nengudi.
Lower Gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

The way in which Laurence (curator) and the technician engaged in activity within the art space in the aforementioned way, resonated with an observation made by anthropologist Annelise Riles as she noted the way two roles working in physical proximity with the other 'inhabited different universes' (2010, b, p.798). In this sense it would also be remiss to not acknowledge the way in which one profession was given prominence over another, in this case, with the curator appearing central to the activity through the prominence of the verbal description, alongside the silently working technician. Again, this resonates with Riles' observation about how, even when working alongside, it is worth acknowledging the potential for one profession to fade into obscurity alongside another (2010, b, p.798). In this sense, it demonstrated how the curator's authority and status was not only representative by the breadth of disseminated knowledge, but also in intimate contexts.

That said, practical concerns regarding timescales were mentioned. For example, the plinths and the painting of the floor around the artworks needed 24 hours to dry and were among the aspects that

the curatorial staff were aware of and acknowledge in discussion, in the preparation of the space. These were specifically referred to in conversation between the curator(s) (Laurence and Fiona in this case), however the gallery technicians would be undertaking this labour. This again enforced a sense of professional separation within the art space, with regards to the lack of physical engagement with technical activity surrounding artworks, on behalf of curators.

Fig.56 Upstairs gallery view of Senga Nengudi's exhibition, prior to the exhibition opening. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

That said, physical engagement with the artwork and its placement and creation was undertaken by the curator. For example, I overheard Fiona discuss the previous positioning of an artwork in the gallery as having been problematic (now corrected in her view). The previous placement of the artwork had, in her words "felt a bit like they were chasing each other across the walls." This statement epitomised the analysis conveyed by Acord, who noted her interactions regarding 'installation' that, as she stated, 'curators described this as a "magical" process involving "intuition" and "surprise"', yet this, as Acord interrogates, does risk a reduced perception of the impact of the practical and technical particularities that the 'process' also demands (2010, p.454). However, Fiona also made a reference in a team meeting, regarding her working relationship with Laurence, wherein she stated: "He hangs at the same height as I do, because of Tate Liverpool"; "6 inches." Fiona's statement suggested that there was technical knowledge and connections between curators, dictated by shared institutional approaches and experiences. George communicates that artwork hanging is subject to negotiation, and whilst there are styles and approaches, there exists, a lack of consensus across the profession (2015, pp. 245-248). Therefore, the shared approach to artwork

hanging on behalf of Fiona and Laurence, was based upon knowledge as dictated by their similar institutional experiences with Tate, which demonstrated a shared technical knowledge that was, as indicated by Fiona's observation, unexpected.

However, the specific contexts within which the curator engaged with the artwork had the potential to affect the degree by which they had a proximity to the artwork, and their degree of influence on the artwork. On Thursday 14th March 2019, in the lower gallery space, Laurence was on the phone, making calls and texting with the artist. As Senga had returned to the United States, Laurence was the stand-in artist for the exhibition. The artwork *'Sandmining'* (see figures 57-65) was being created in these conditions. However, this was not necessarily a source of difficulty for the curator. In the exhibition guide, written by Ruth, she noted the artwork's focus on 'ritual and ceremony', with an emphasis on its materiality; 'of found objects and coloured powder pigment', (the 'pigment' referencing 'Abstract Expressionism') as well as 'sand' (with regards to its role, 'used ceremonially across cultures') (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2019, c). This connects with Odita's wider observations about Nengudi's work, noting the artist's intention to embrace 'a temporal plane' (1997, p.24) and the influence of 'discarded materials which have a history of their own' (1997, p.25). In some sense you might argue that gallery staff were thus engaged in a type of ceremonial process, in re-creating the artwork, which relates to what Groys notes, that 'a copy is never really a copy, but rather a new original, in a new context' (2009, p.6).

Fig.57 Detailed view of the artwork installation plan, for '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.58 Installation tools next to the artwork '*Sandmining*', 2019, by Senga Nengudi, which was under construction. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.59 Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) and Jamie (Fruitmarket Gallery Manager) assisting with the recreation of the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

The image of the artwork that was being recreated was laid at the edge of the section of sand on the floor for reference. Eventually Laurence acquired the assistance of those in the room, initially in the form of Jamie the gallery manager, to walk in the sand, to make footprints. Ruth was then engaged in the same activity, encouraged by Fiona who stood at the side-lines. Ruth was tentative, her head flicking up to watch Laurence as he joined them walking across the sand. Fiona stood alongside me at the edge of the sand, watching and making jovial comments. They were visibly happy about each of their unique contributions to the work, yet also slightly unsure that they were doing as Laurence (in his role of recreating the artist's vision) required them, but also perhaps due to the recognition and responsibility created by an innate sense of what Groys outlines, as how 'reproduction is as much infected by originality as originality is infected by reproduction' (2009, p.6).

The footprints were consciously made, weighted in an effort, to return a print, and with time taken over each step, and an awareness of the overall distribution of footprints. Ruth in particular, demonstrated a nervousness within this process. There was an over-arching sense of her feeling extreme levels of responsibility, with which she felt unfamiliar, as she verbally sought reassurance, placing her feet in the sand, slowly. This demonstrates that no matter what degree of familiarity is assumed, in this case, in the installation and recreation of an artwork, it is often subject to new challenges for a curator. This is supported in the comments made by Acord, who acknowledges how 'unexpected orientations to artworks during the installation may alter curators' plans for their presentation', and that she was seeking what Acord refers to as 'a working consensus', which lay within curatorial perspectives, as Acord outlines (2014, p.163). However, the process of re-construction and re-producing the artwork revealed a relational process with collaboration between staff. A dialogical effort was demonstrated, instead of an individual creative act. Even with an artist present or leading the creation of artwork in the art space, this dialogic process would arguably still pervade the art space.

Once the footprints, frequency and distribution were deemed satisfactory, Ruth and Jamie left the section of sand. There was already some of the powdered colour evident in the sand, but returning to the edge of the installation, Laurence took hold of the powdered colours and brush, that were placed beside the sand area of the floor, placed there, ready to be used. Laurence proceeded without the image of the installation in front of him for reference, to use the brush on the sand as if it were a canvas, with considered and thoughtful brushstrokes, that also had a degree of instinct, coupled with his prior familiarity with the finished work, an aesthetic familiarity with the piece, and the intentions of the artist.

Fig.60 Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) assisting with the recreation of the artwork ‘*Sandmining’,* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.61 Laurence Sillars (Curator and head of the Henry Moore Institute), Ruth Bretherick (Fruitmarket Gallery curator) and Jamie (Fruitmarket Gallery Manager), recreating the artwork ‘*Sandmining’,* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.62 Installation photographs, materials, and tools for the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi, alongside general installation equipment. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.63 Installation photographs, used as a guide for recreating the artwork '*Sandmining',* 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.64 Laurence Sillars (Curator and head of the Henry Moore Institute) brushing colour into the sand with his own individual movements, for the purpose of recreating the artwork '*Sandmining'*, 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Fig.65 The brush used to apply the coloured powder to the sand, temporarily discarded during installation of the artwork '*Sandmining'*, 2019, by Senga Nengudi. Lower gallery. The Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Laurence was displaying evidence of his elongated exposure to the artwork and the artist, in relation to its physical construction of the work, as recognised by Acord, in terms of how:

> 'the physical, material, technological, and aesthetic surroundings of individual artworks in the installation are also very much involved in curators' work of building and maintaining curatorial knowledge' (2014, p.164).

That said, these practical facets of the role are not often discussed by curators themselves, and therefore this ethnography demonstrates the detailed form that these aspects assume within curatorial life. Curators go beyond the acquisition of knowledge about the artwork and the artist from secondary sources. Curators also have a knowledge that can only be shaped by physical proximity to the artwork. This type of knowledge arises from an immersive engagement with the work. Nevertheless, Laurence demonstrated how it was also possible for curators to go a step further in terms of their proximity to the artwork. Laurence assumed a creative role due to this free-form use of the powdered colours with the brush, that spoke to creativity of the profession (2014, p.158), as part of a wider acknowledgement of what Acord recognises, as she communicates, 'artworks and even the exhibition itself are said to take on new physical presences and emergent lives in the gallery space' (2014, p.155). This might also indicate that the lack of the physical presence of the artist in this case, further encouraged the creative license of the curator, as it could be argued that Laurence was assuming both the creativity in the curatorial, but also some of the creativity handed over by the artist, which arguably resides in a relationship of trust. This is acknowledged by artist Erika DeFreitas, who speaks, specifically, to 'how trust is built' between the respective professions (De Ocampo *et al.*, 2018). DeFreitas summarised this interplay of the professions:

> 'We develop a relationship where we are mutually invested in the other's practice. We become collaborators and co-conspirators who share ideas, resources and an excitement for a process of learning. We can respectfully disagree. We participate in all of this while knowing that what we are doing requires time and trust' (De Ocampo *et al.*, 2018).

By also acknowledging stand-out curatorial figures with whom she has engaged, DeFreitas demonstrates the variability within professional interactions, as well as also recognising how the 'relationship', also has ramifications and consequences that move 'beyond' the physical art space (De Ocampo *et al.*, 2018). Through Laurence's action, how the curator may be seen to direct the

artist's work, in the sense of not just recreating work, but also inputting something of themselves into the work was evident. Laurence was inhabiting the role of the artist Senga Nengudi within the physical gallery space. Whilst this didn't create an impression of the intimacy of the artist and curator in a physical space during the installation of an exhibition, it did however have the potential to speak to a close and consistently negotiated relationship between curator and artist, one that is plagued by debate within curatorial discourse, as represented by Charlesworth presented in his question, 'where does the distinction lie between artist and curator?' (2007, p.91). Groys similarly acknowledges these types of queries, providing context by stating that:

> 'the traditional division of labor within the art system was clear. Artworks were to be produced by artists and then selected and exhibited by curators' but as Groys also states, this is no longer understood to be the case (2009, p.1).

Groys asks whether, in his words, 'is it possible, and, if so, *how* is it possible to differentiate between the role of the artist and that of the curator when there is no difference between art's production and exhibition?' (2009, p.1). Groys is intent on his ability to differentiate between the two professions, on the basis, of separating 'the standard exhibition and the artistic installation' (2009, p.1). The field however, arguably revealed a much more complex picture which would render any distinguishing professional features within activities for constructing the art space, as barely discernible, if at all, for the most part. These types of complexities are demonstrated within the example of activity within the Fruitmarket Gallery, wherein Laurence's physical supplementation of the artist's own presence in the gallery spoke, for example, to the questioning of what Charlesworth refers to as the assumed distinctions between 'custodianship', 'presentation', the navigation of the implications of 'power' and where it resides at any one time, as well as 'authorial' implications (2007, p.92).

Laurence's activity within the art space suggests that Senga was handing over some of her artistic creativity to Laurence in the context of the installation. Certainly, within Laurence's curator's talk at the Fruitmarket Gallery[27], he referred to exchanges with Senga regarding the formulation of artwork for the exhibition, within which he spoke to his belief in how the curator can participate in the construction of artwork. Or perhaps conversely, Senga's influence via the phone calls with Laurence and her original vision and previous exhibition, were instead perhaps indicative of how 'producers (artists) might control the institutional context of presentation' (Charlesworth, 2007, p.96) and this

[27] The talk was held in the upstairs gallery space at the Fruitmarket Gallery on the evening of 15th May 2019.

contact between Laurence and Senga was proof of this professional separation being maintained? Or were the interactions between Senga and Laurence regarding the Fruitmarket Gallery exhibit of the work, simply an evolution of their relationship and professional roles established in relation to the Henry Moore Institute exhibit? The curator has an undeniable 'institutional' responsibility that can influence the activities they undertake (Brenson, 1998, p.25, and Campolmi, 2016, p.69). Yet focusing upon the 'distinction' between the artist and curator in the general sense, as in the case of Groys for example (2009, p.1), is arguably not as productive a route of enquiry, as the detail of how individual relationships play out, as they come to form their everyday lives and construct the specific art spaces with wide-reaching effects, which in turn, allows for more accurate impressions of curator's lives.

The rest of the gallery had the artworks all in place by that stage in the installation week. The tools of installation littered the floor, with hand drills, ladders, and a mop and bucket. The remaining tasks were to remove everything except the artwork and to prepare the space, clean the floors and tidy. However, this would be undertaken by the gallery technicians, and ultimately demonstrated the delegation that took place within the exhibition. These types of practical activity surrounding the artwork, but not specifically focus upon the artwork, appeared to sever the connection to the curator. Ultimately, these examples have demonstrated the complex way in which the curator has an expertise which can be interpretated as separate but conversely enmeshed and evolving.

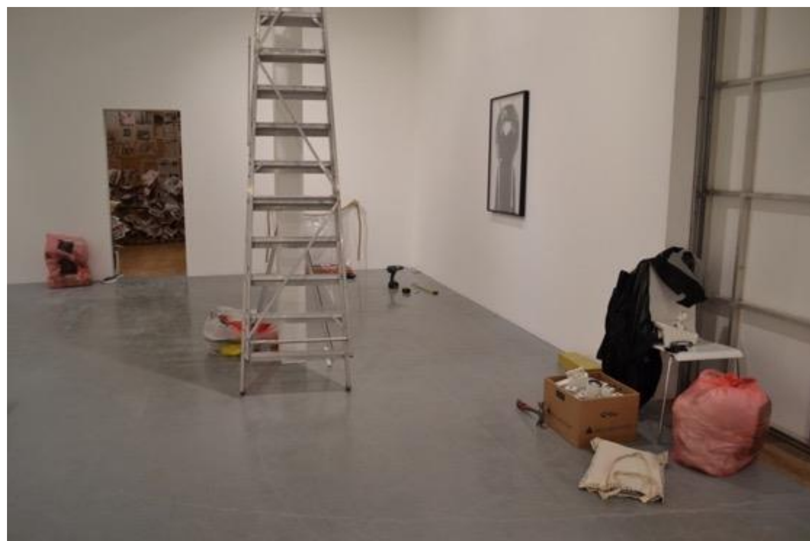

Fig.66 Lower gallery view with installation equipment.
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

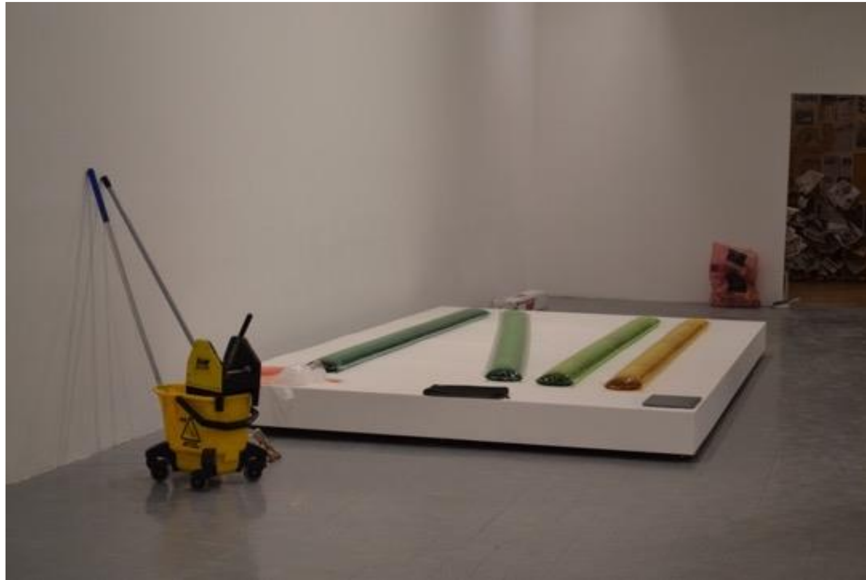

Fig.67 Mop and bucket for the final cleaning of the floors post-installation, ready to be used, propped up against the wall beside *'Untitled Water Composition, 1969-70/2019'*, by Senga Nengudi. Lower Gallery. The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. Photograph by the author.

Overall, the placement of artwork and creation of the art space revealed a range of curatorial activity. Firstly, curators within the Fruitmarket Gallery demonstrated how activities in the art space blend and influence each other, for example the influence of condition reports on the installation process. Secondly, curators had to navigate the integrity of the artwork. For example, safeguarding the artwork, the artist's intention, artwork contexts, the challenges of installation. Curators in the Fruitmarket Gallery also demonstrated through the placing of artwork and creation of the art space, their need to navigate shifting hierarchies of authority. Moreover, curatorial activity of the placement of artwork and creation of the art space revealed how the curator assumes a holistic approach and over-arching responsibility. For example, in terms of timescales, managing people in the art space, the status of the artwork, and the relationship with the artist.

It was also made evident that curators engaged in various activities often simultaneously. For example, this was evidenced by Laurence as he assisted with the creation of physical artwork, whilst simultaneously providing verbal context for the work. It was also made clear that the placing of artwork and creation of the art space relied on the specific nature of the relationships that curators established with other individuals in the space, and how these evolved. It also appeared that during the placement of the artwork and the creation of the art space, that curatorial activity in this regard began and ended with the artwork. For example, the tidying of the art space around the artwork was

not undertaken by the curator, only the artwork itself was their object of focus. Finally, it was demonstrated by the curators at the Fruitmarket Gallery that the specific contexts in which the placement of the artwork and the creation of the art space took place, had the potential to dictate the degree of physical proximity to the artwork on behalf of the curator, as well as the degree of creativity afforded to the curator. Both aspects had to the potential to vary significantly based upon the specific contexts in which the placement of the artwork and creation of the art space was taking place. This further demonstrates the need to consider curatorial expertise within the context of their everyday lives, to consider their varied, evolving, and responsive expertise.

In summary: Curatorial activity in the art space and their expertise

Therefore, to return to the over-arching question of this chapter: What do the activities undertaken by contemporary art curators within the art space reveal with regards to their claims of expertise? This chapter has further demonstrated that the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators exists in a complex form in their everyday lives. Each of the activities associated with UK-contemporary art curators that were revealed in the field, initially appeared to be delineated with a clear purpose. These activities included receiving artwork, undertaking condition reports, and finally, the placing and creating of artwork and the art space. Curators often considered these activities to be self-evident, employed for the purpose of creating the art space. However, this chapter has revealed that these activities are highly complex and difficult to articulate in terms of elucidating curatorial expertise. The activities which contemporary art curators undertake in the art space are necessarily reinvented and transformed in ways which are often unforeseen within their everyday lives. These practical aspects have often been ignored within narratives surrounding the professions in favour of an intellectual focus. Furthermore, any analysis of the practical aspects of curatorial expertise often fails to reflect the complexity and richness of curatorial expertise, which this chapter has demonstrated can really only be delivered ethnographically.

By looking at the role of the curator with respect to the activities which construct the art space, I have brought attention to what anthropologist Paul Basu refers to: 'reflect on the arbitrariness of seemingly self-evident categories; valuing ambiguity over false certainty' (2017, p.8). The activities in the field that were undertaken by contemporary art curators in the art space relate to the complex status of their expertise. For example, the care and maintenance of the artwork is not always attainable or easy to ascertain. The artworks have a complexity and a need to be re-configured depending on the context and art space in which they are shown. It is the curator who is tasked with

managing these re-configurations. The installation process also revealed various curator's points of reference that included forms of documentation, photographs of previous exhibitions, descriptions from the artist or previous curators and institutions, and yet they were variously engaged with on behalf of curators. It was also evident that there is creativity that unifies many of these aspects and that is included within a curator's expertise. However, yet again, the form that this creativity takes is highly varied.

In the process of receiving artwork, it became clear that curators assumed responsibility for the over-arching process of receiving artwork. Taking a holistic view of the way in which receiving the artwork took place and how it was navigated was a feature of curatorial expertise. This still allows us to recognise that the detailed everyday navigation of this activity needs to be situated in specific curatorial lives, due to the various needs of the artwork in the art space. The activity of undertaking condition reports in everyday life for the curator was also not prescriptive. For instance, between Ruth and I, there was notable differences in the narrative style of the reports. The activity of completing condition reports provided an example of the degree of responsibility that curators assume within their activity in the gallery, with consequences outside of the art space. However, it also demonstrated how their expertise resided in the balancing of their responsibility for the artwork and art space respectively, along with an ability to delegate. Curators were necessarily therefore in a position where they were making assessments of other individuals in the art space and managing them accordingly, with the artwork at the centre of these relationships. Again, placing the artwork and creating the art space within the curator's everyday life was shown to be highly subjective and malleable.

Yet again, this chapter contributes to the over-arching argument that the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators should be placed within the context of their everyday lives. The expertise of contemporary art curators has been shown to reside in their holism, points of reference, complexity, and constant re-configuration of the artwork and in their creativity. That is not to say that the un-fixed nature of activities with which contemporary art curators engage are unsubstantial due to the 'spectrum' by which they operate (Winter, 2020, p.115). There is certainly substance in their everyday, with a professional and personal knowledge, identity, and practice, which is undertaken with pride and purpose under the professional designation of contemporary art curator, that is evident in their everyday lives. As such, it is right to say that the Fruitmarket Gallery art space would not exist without the contemporary art curators of the Fruitmarket Gallery. This is due to the way in which the curators engage in their everyday lives, as it is their rationale, their approach to the

activities in relation to the construction of the art space, which has revealed how they make sense of what they do, on the ground level, with dynamic and far-reaching effects. The spoken and unspoken, the evident and intimated, sit alongside each other within the curatorial way of being.

Perhaps Acord provides us with a foundational and concluding concept by stating: 'As a result, the distributed approach to artistic knowing may be an important way for sociology to learn from contemporary artistic practice, in all of its provocations and transformations' (2014, p.165). As such, perhaps an anthropological study of contemporary art curators, and more specifically in the case of this chapter which focuses upon contemporary art curators constructing the art space, allows for an analytical proposition to emerge, as revealed by the curators themselves, of a profession which is shaped by substance amongst a rejection of clarity. Therefore, it is possible to consider the activities and skills of contemporary art curators as an example of 'distributed knowledge' communicated by anthropologist George Marcus (2011, p.23). Marcus communicates how 'distributed knowledge systems encompass but replace the dominating conceptual role of culture' (2011, p.23). This is reflected in Marcus' 'exchange with Kim Fortun' (2011, p.24) (another anthropologist) in which she states:

> 'So ethnographic subjects need to be accounted for as nodes in distributed knowledge systems. Each has her own specificity; each subject is a tangle of a particular set of forces. So there is 'culture' in the trans-individual sense, but it settles into different subjects in different ways. And these are particular kinds of subjects – very subject to change because they operate in always moving currents of information, political economy, etc. The need for active sense making, often without known to be reliable criteria, is incessant. There is a lot of figuring out as these subjects go. So it is about knowledge making, rather than knowledge holding. So what these subjects DON'T know, and often know they don't know, is critical – and different than the simply conceived 'enlightenment subject.' So to understand 'the subject' in ethnographic projects, one must map the distributed knowledge systems that constitute and continue to iterate them. The object of ethnographic inquiry is thus a moving object' (2011, p.25).

Contemporary art curators have shown themselves, through their activities, skills, and construction of the art space, to qualify for this description and treatment as a diagnosis for their knowledge, identity, and practice. Contemporary art curators have revealed through the fieldwork evidenced within this chapter that they cannot be annexed into delineated activities in the general sense.

Activities associated with curators in the construction of the art space are much more open to being interpretated, transformed, to have unlikely outcomes, or to be open to dispute or renegotiation, than what might be assumed. Curatorial activity in the art space has also been revealed as much more complex than their professional narratives, over-arching identities, assumed knowledge and associated practices, would suggest. As such, it can only be productive to continue to open these physical spaces that surround the curator, so we can glimpse more of these complex curatorial worlds.

Curator and academic, Stéphanie Bertrand argues that approaches to 'contemporary exhibition practices' have been focused upon 'two values: inclusion and transparency', and she equated this, to transitions of 'social discourse' which emerged around the same period, as the professional contemporary art curator (2022, p.3). However, it is one approach to address these 'values' within 'practice' (2022, p.3), but the nature of the activities of curators as part of constructing the art space, that have been discussed within this chapter, reveal the nuanced and detailed everyday lives they live. This means the everyday lives of contemporary art curators need to be considered, beyond sweeping statements, trends, and approaches, or indeed the acknowledgement of an intention of transparency across the profession (2022, p.21). The need for pellucidity is the task of academics, theorists, and contemporary art curators, but also of anthropological methodologies and ethnography. The ethnographic descriptions within this chapter have shown that the activities and skills of art curators go beyond an intellectual focus. The diverse landscape of curatorial expertise includes practical activities which have a complexity which can only be revealed within the everyday lives and perspectives of individual curators as they seek to claim their expertise.

NETWORKING EXPERTISE

This section will focus upon the way that UK-based contemporary art curators construct and engage with knowledge networks for the purpose of claiming their expertise. Therefore, 'Chapter Five – Knowledge Networks' will present the over-arching question: How do UK-based contemporary art curators, through knowledge networks, create and frame their expertise? How UK-based contemporary art curators connect, communicate, and produce knowledge networks in their everyday lives speaks directly to how they form and make sense of their expertise.

This chapter will demonstrate the centrality of knowledge networks within curator's everyday lives, enacted as part of curatorial claims of expertise. Knowledge networks (as framed and engaged with on behalf of art curators) form part of both professional activity and a social practice with manifold dimensions. Curatorial knowledge networks form part of their expertise and are a disparate and detailed undertaking made on behalf of curators. This chapter will primarily refer to a case study from the field by considering the company Encounter Contemporary in London with director, founder, and curator Alexander Caspari, whilst also drawing upon reflections from other curators that emerged during fieldwork.

Knowledge networks within this chapter will be summarised in relation to six key areas that emerged from the field. In the first instance this chapter includes a consideration of the role of professional networks in relation to UK-based contemporary art curators. Secondly, this chapter will consider the influence of location-orientated knowledge networks, which help assess the influence of a curator's immediate environment in terms of producing value pertaining to their work and expertise. There will be a consideration of dress codes as knowledge networks, closely followed by an examination of the networks of industry knowledge, knowledge networks of textual resources, and finally, knowledge networks based upon notions of a shared professional curatorial calendar. The chapter will therefore consider these forms of knowledge networks in relation to a questioning of what is directing the interests of UK-based contemporary art curators. Consequently, this chapter summarises with the understanding that curators are consistently being re-formulated, ad that curators create and draw upon various forms of knowledge networks as they view them, in order to create value for the purpose of establishing and maintaining their expertise.

Chapter Five
Knowledge Networks

This chapter will demonstrate how UK-based contemporary art curators formulate knowledge networks for the purpose of claiming and maintaining their expertise. Building upon the focus of chapter four which considered types of curatorial activity from within the art space, this chapter will consider way that curatorial expertise is formed on behalf of curators through the construction and framing of knowledge networks. Therefore, the primary question of this chapter is: How do UK-based contemporary art curators, through knowledge networks, create and frame their expertise?

Networks of knowledge relate to Bourdieu's analysis of 'capital' wherein he states: 'the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world' (1983, p.15). The networks of knowledge that curators therefore exhibit in their claims of expertise exist in the specific conditions in which they reveal themselves, further demonstrating the anthropological ability to draw out strands of meaning from everyday lives. The forms of 'capital' Bourdieu acknowledges as 'economic', 'cultural' and 'social' (1983, p.16) aspects which curators arguably pursue for the purpose of claiming their expertise. The communication of these forms of capital on behalf of curators within their claims of expertise will constitute the analytical concept of the chapter – knowledge networks.

This chapter will focus on a specific case study with curator, director, and founder of Encounter Contemporary, Alexander Caspari. The knowledge networks that will be referred to consist of financial, social, and art-related knowledge such as professional networks, real estate, the art market, dress codes, artist and artwork knowledge, communication styles, profile-raising activities, and shared art world activities. These aspects were shown to have a role to play in the construction of curatorial expertise. Consequently, the overall argument of this chapter is that the communication of knowledge networks has a centrality within the lives of UK-based contemporary art curators and consequently within their claims of expertise.

Ethnographic Case Study No.3: Expertise and value in everyday life

Alexander Caspari spoke in a clear and authoritative manner as we sat on the window ledge of the temporary gallery space of Encounter Contemporary. In talking about the curatorial profession, Alex stated: "It is very network based. And if I have to build or find that network, it is quite an organic

network. I have to take the time to build that network …. But the more you tap into it, the more they occur I guess." Alex's statement represented the way that he considered professional networking to feature in curatorial life, and yet the networking that he described was not a tangible or delineated professional network. The lack of tangibility within his statement prompts a question about what the notion of a network represents within curatorial life. It appeared that there was value in networking, however the forms and nature of this networking within Alex's statement remained elusive. It appeared that if treated ethnographically, the forms of networking that might emerge within daily life would reveal a series of knowledges that are used in the construction of expertise within specific curatorial lives.

Alexander Caspari had been my housemate during our undergraduate studies, which had provided a front row seat to the development of Encounter Contemporary in our student red-brick terrace rental in the centre of York. We were far away from that now. It had been quite some time since I had seen Alex as the geography of the UK, the respective regions we inhabited, and our work schedules had not allowed for frequent visits. Alex and another housemate (the other founder of Encounter (2019, a)) had started the company. They assigned hours of the day to developing the company, which consisted of meetings in each of their rooms at the house. On rare occasions Alex shared his intentions to create a new model for participating in contemporary art spheres, one that he argued would be based on liberating an artist's work that is in storage or that is not already on show in order to create opportunities for artists whether with dealers, galleries, or exhibitions. The present day revealed a company with an ethos and approach not dissimilar from this. His vision had not wavered, only adapted. Encounter Contemporary's online description demonstrated how they viewed themselves, 'as a sustainable alternative to the traditional gallery model' with a reference to 'building dynamic relationships' (2019, a). This provides an interesting example of how his expertise in part resided in identifying what was valuable for artists, which would then consequently be valuable to him.

Alex had described on the phone in the formative stages of this research, the peaks and troughs in the frequency of activity and prior to our meeting had demonstrated concern about whether I would have the opportunity to witness optimum activity levels. This was likely in part due to his assessment of what would be valuable to me as a researcher but also arguably in terms of the social and professional currency that written accounts of his daily life might produce. The periods in which Encounter Contemporary were associated with a physical space took place in short bursts. Alex worked flexibly, travelling around London for meetings and working with a 'pop-up' model of

exhibition-making which Ella Harris, a cross-disciplinary academic in geography and sociology, usefully outlined as being typified by 'flexibility, interstitiality and immersion as three of pop-up's key spatiotemporal imaginaries' as well as a context for the 'urban processes' which appear to be at the forefront of Alex's reality (2015, p.592). Alex's approach to claiming his expertise as a contemporary art curator in the private art sector was reflected in the way he operated professionally. He was responsive, fast-paced, and open to change. What Alex considered to have value in his everyday life for the purpose of establishing and maintaining his expertise, provides a compelling case study as he demonstrated a steroidal approach to his everyday life. Alex's ability to utilise and engage with various networks of knowledge for the purpose of creating and shaping the art space and to direct his everyday life, holds up a mirror to his expertise.

i) A professional network?

The first mention of networking by Alexander Caspari, founder, director, and curator of Encounter Contemporary (2019, a) he described as being extremely elusive. This resonated with a conversation that had taken place with Jane Scarth (curator of public programmes at Whitechapel Gallery in London) as we sat in an office space in the upper rooms of the gallery. "Networking is a huge part of the job. Not only out of interest for what other people are doing, but for me, it's like a need to be aware of what conversations are happening and I consider that a part of what I do." Jane also appeared to avoid the notion of any homogenous professional curatorial network. Furthermore, the lack of a need for the curator to have physical presence in order to engage in networking was a notable aspect of her observation as it indicated a flexibility in terms of how networking was conceived of in relation to the curatorial profession. Like Alex, Jane evidently viewed networking as a prominent feature of curatorial life. Jane emphasised how networking for her, meant an ability to facilitate individual interests and to gain an impression of what was happening around her for those in similar professional roles and in the wider cultural landscape without any attempt to establish any limitations to the notion of network. Jane was similarly at ease with the notion of networking as an activity that had value and prominence within the curatorial everyday. Participation or lack of participation in instances of formal professional networking did not hinder the prominence of networking within curatorial claims of expertise.

I was concerned during the initial period of fieldwork that a dominant and formal network exclusively consisting of contemporary art curators in the UK was in some way eluding me. This concern was not based upon being unable to interrogate it as a necessary part of 'the process of

professionalization' (Wilensky, 1964, pp.141-146) that sociologist Harold L. Wilensky so argues, or the need '*to form a professional association*' (1964, p.144) (one of the 'professionalization theories' Abbott criticises (1988, p.19). Rather my concern resided in not identifying a formal network as a central part of what curators themselves valued. Was I missing something or did the contemporary art curatorial profession in the UK lack formal professional networks? The closest example internationally of what I was searching for in the UK is epitomised in the form of 'Independent Curators International (ICI)' whose mission statement seeks to situate themselves as 'a unique organization that focuses on the role of the curator in contemporary art' (ICI, no date). However, exclusively curatorial networks for UK-based contemporary art curators were notably absent from curatorial lives in the field. It became evident that there was a widespread lack of delineated curatorial groups created solely for the purpose of curatorial professional networking. This contrasts with the experience of heritage curators as they can attain professional development qualifications exclusively in the museum sector which provide them with a formal example of their professional group. This exists in the form of an 'Associateship of the Museums Association' (Museums Association, no date, a) or a 'Fellowship of the Museums Association' (Museums Association, no date, b). Contemporary art curators are lacking in this regard. However, UK-based contemporary art curators still participate in large multi-professional networks within the creative industries in the UK[28] and there is undoubtedly value to be found through participation in these types of networks.

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[28] Curators based in either England or Scotland who participated in this research would be aware of delineated networks including the 'British Art Network' organised by Tate, which is described as 'a Subject Specialist Network bringing together professionals working on British art including curators, researchers and academics, reflecting the combined strength of the UK's public collections, and curatorial expertise in this field', which includes the 'Early career Curators Group' (TATE, no date, c). There is also Plus Tate which is described as: 'A dynamic network of visual organisations stretching across the UK that exchange ideas, knowledge, skills, and resources and collaborate on joint programmes' (TATE, no date, d). Other organisations include the Contemporary Visual Arts Network who focus upon 'a broad range of artistic and curatorial practice across the nine English regions' (CVAN Contemporary Visual Arts Network, 2019, a) and the respective 'regional networks' (CVAN Contemporary Visual Arts Network, 2019, b). They are supported by another organisation Arts Council England whose mission statement is as follows: 'We champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections' (Arts Council England, no date). There is also the 'Scottish Contemporary Art Network', 'a member led network committed to championing and supporting the contemporary art sector in Scotland' (SCAN, 2013-2020) and Creative Scotland, who are the primary funder of the arts in Scotland (Creative Scotland, 2019). The Art Fund is a key organisation that provides 'funding' and resources across the UK (Art Fund_, 2021). 'The Contemporary Art

For example, Jane Scarth stated “You don’t get as many opportunities to meet with people working outside of London, but I always really enjoy it when you can. The Contemporary Art Society[29] and the Art Fund[30] tend to be the main organisations that host events that aren’t necessarily networking events, but there will be things happening where they will actively be bringing people from the regions so to speak, to London, and then you tend to find opportunities to meet other people through those things. Art Fund - part of what they consider their mission is to actively support curators from other parts of the country, to get together and to have those kind-of networks maintained.” Jane Scarth demonstrated how formal professional networking existed on the fringe of the curator’s everyday life, however its existence she associated primarily with its function to aid in the creation of the art space. The benefit of any instances of formal professional network, still, in Jane’s view, resided in the detailed connections that could possibly be made for this purpose. This supports Abbott’s statement about ‘the problematic’ nature of overt levels of attention being given to ‘the organizational structures of professions’ as he chooses to instead emphasise ‘the link between a profession and its work’ (1988, p.20). On this basis, contemporary art curators in the UK value the intricacies of their everyday work, rather than pursuing a need to unify as a professional type, in order to claim their expertise.

The framing of an art space does not require curatorial participation in formal professional organisations or delineated professional networks. In fact, the art space demanded the curators to engage in networking that was shown to be far more complex and varied within their everyday lives. Their lack of specifically curatorial professional networks certainly did not affect the degree by which networking has a role to play in the construction of the art space. Curator at Whitechapel Gallery, Jane Scarth sat across the table in a meeting room. “My partner, he works at South London Gallery and his role there is education manager but also is basically a curatorial role. I work here and he works there, and we both have our friendship groups. We have a kind of, as I am sure you are

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Society’ is an organisation that ‘donates works of modern and contemporary art to 72 member museums and public galleries in the UK’, it’s ‘Subject Specialist Network (SSN) for contemporary art in the UK’ focuses upon distributing ideas and ‘expertise for arts professionals’, and finally, they ‘raise income’ for the purpose of supporting ‘art’ across the United Kingdom (Contemporary Art Society, 2021). These are all examples of the types of professional organisations with which UK-based contemporary art curators might participate.

[29]An organisation residing in London (Contemporary Art Society, 2021).

[30]A charitable organisation that aims ‘to help protect and enrich the UK’s museum and gallery collections’ around which they also seek provide ‘access’ to artworks (Art Fund_, 2021), and for which there is further reference on page 6 of this chapter.

finding out with your research, we have kind of a fluidity between your personal life and your professional life. It is very open. We feel part of a community for sure." Jane introduced the idea of community and the notion of a close interplay between the personal and professional. The professional expertise of a contemporary art curator therefore arguably exists in the value of networking as extending into both professional and personal spheres. Furthermore, once we consider networking as being removed from a focus on professional status and progression, and look instead at the professional focus of curators, then we see that the necessity and centrality of networking exists as a framework of knowledge. As chapter one demonstrated in emphasising the inherent complexity and heterogenous nature of the profession, any fixed definition or professional group is unlikely to be identified nor productive in the case of contemporary art curators. Knox, Savage, and Harvey support this idea as they communicate the view that 'to define a bounded group (within which one can examine the whole network) will ultimately contradict the network idea itself' (2006, p.121). What became clear was that networking as referred to by curators in the field went beyond exclusive formal professional networking and professional organisations. Therefore, how curators refer to networking and its prominence in daily life appear to require another analytical concept for network to fully engage with curatorial lives and curatorial claims of expertise. It is for this reason that this chapter brings attention to networks of knowledge exhibited by curators themselves with implications for how they communicate and claim their expertise.

ii) Location-orientated knowledge networks

Therefore, the influence of spatially imposed knowledge networks revealed itself in several ways within the field. This includes a knowledge of the art-world as it operated within the immediate locale, a knowledge of the power and status associated with art institutions, and other types of commercial enterprise in the specific areas surrounding the gallery, amongst other focuses. The time spent with Alex coincided with Frieze week and the Turner Prize was in full flow at Tate Britain. These were programmed events in London. Frieze Masters produced a reflection on historical artworks from prominent art institutions (Frieze, 2020, a) and for 'contemporary art' there was Frieze London (Frieze, 2020, b). The Turner Prize is an award for British artists where shortlisted artists are displayed in an exhibition at a gallery, alternating annually between a chosen gallery in London and a gallery somewhere in another part of the UK (TATE, no date, e) which curators are involved in (George, 2015, p.23). The artworld was on high alert and London-centrism was most definitely at work. It appeared as though the rest of the UK lay almost silent to those frequenting the grassy spaces of Regents Park.

It was on the day of Wednesday 3rd October 2018 that I arrived at Green Park tube station. I emerged from the station and out into a buzzing lounging spot where tourists can rent deck chairs to rest their weary feet at a high cost and where the wood panelled coffee van sits behind the circular walkway that wraps around the Diana fountain sculpture by the artist Jim Clack. I checked my app and the directions I had been provided with and ascended from the park to the shoulder-rubbing bustle of Piccadilly. The meeting was due to take place towards the side of Smithson Plaza at Encounter's temporary exhibition space at the very bottom of Smithson Tower. It was nestled inside what became apparent was a series of high-end art dealers, art book shops, auction houses and galleries. This was all very close to the Royal Academy of Art who hold a highly problematic founding mission of 'enhancing the prestige of the monarch, the nation, and the era' (Hoock, 2003, p.2). As an institution, it more recently described itself as being at a landmark point in its establishment by stating: 'For over 250 years, the RA has existed to champion art and artists' (RA, no date). Its status remains however controversially, a central and dominant institution in London (Hoock, 2003, p.3).

The immediate surroundings of the Encounter Contemporary art space undoubtedly implied a degree of status within the art world directly due to its surroundings and its proximity to high-status arts institutions and art commerce. There was evidently value for Alex to be seen operating among organisations and institutions of this kind. When I asked Alex retrospectively about the value of the location and how it was beneficial, Alex responded in a way that supported the notion of spatial value as a form of 'cultural capital' that Bourdieu refers to 'in the *embodied* state' (1983, p.17). "It was very valuable and gained much wider exposure for the company. We sold art from the space and had many interesting industry visitors. The work by Zak Ove went on to be shown at Somerset House, Frieze Sculpture Park and The Design Museum so I think it was a great space to launch the work from." Alex's observation reflects the view of anthropologist Thomas Fillitz who states that 'the specificity of an art world is based on its locally normative debates in combination with how it is stretching out to international discourses' (2018, p.101). Alex's knowledge of the implications of this location appeared to be synonymous with his claims of expertise.

When I first emerged from the tube station on the first day of fieldwork with Alex, I followed the throng along the main thoroughfare and under the arches of the Ritz[31] before turning off the road to the right and making my way to a more isolated square. Based on these surroundings, well known to businesspeople and those with associations and access to the high-level private art sphere, St James' Place was undoubtedly a location associated with wealth and status. Alex communicated his

[31] A luxury hotel in London.

awareness of the financial value that could be garnered from their physical location as he referred to the value of the gallery space in terms of raising the profile of the business with positive financial, social and artist-orientated opportunities that arose from showing art in that specific site. The location of the gallery space (among leading arts institutions in London) implied a high degree of financial solvency and success alongside social status. Alex was performing the successful expert within the art world. His expertise resided in his ability to acquire knowledge of spatially-orientated networks that assisted in meeting the needs of his work and claims of expertise. Alex and Encounter Contemporary had attained a location with value created by opportunity, of artwork, artists, finances, conversation, and social encounters. Alex recognised the value of geographically imposed networks of commercial enterprise within his immediate environment. Importantly, the forms of commercial enterprise necessarily operated both within and outside of the art world. It was his knowledge of power, status, and opportunity residing in the location that was employed for the purpose of establishing the art space and in meeting the needs of his work and communication of his expertise that constitutes a location-orientated curatorial network of knowledge.

Alex could evidently see value in identifying types of value surrounding the art space, with specific audiences in mind. Alex had developed a relationship with a real estate company to utilise both the outdoor space and the lower floor of the space that faced the street, which again emphasised the way in which Alex sought relationships and saw value in opportunities that lay in forming connections outside of artistic, creative, and cultural spheres. Alex demonstrated that the creation and shaping of an art space demanded interactions with different kinds of people in various professions and sectors. Alex was led by his need to engage with people who had the ability to make things happen as part of foregrounding the needs of the art space with which he was occupied. This is a facet of the curatorial profession which art historian and curator Adrian George identifies when offering advice regarding 'collaboration' (2015, p.108) with a 'person or business', which included those outside of the art/creative sector (2015, p.103). Adrian George emphasises curatorial expertise as being associated with identifying 'new opportunities' and untapped resources (2015, p.306) but also with the ability to identify the motivating agendas in any partnership, and to ascertain any potentiality for 'controversy' through association (2015, p.103). Alex did refer to the various challenges that alliance and affiliation created; however these challenges were primarily noted as logistical and communication issues, which Adrian George also acknowledges in his statement that 'establishing and maintaining personal and professional relationships requires a great deal of sensitive handling' whilst also emphasising the scale and scope of these connections

(2015, pp.85-86). Alex evidently saw the value in taking the time to care for these facets of his everyday life and in forming a location-orientated network of knowledge.

Alex also used his network of knowledge relating to the location of the gallery and his work to mitigate risk associated with the creation and shaping of the art space. The sculpture in the outdoor space was titled ‘Autonomous Morris’ and was the creation of artist Zak Ove. The piece was a visually prominent mass of car bonnets, sourced by the artist, and described as a ‘cross-cultural totemic mask’ (Encounter, 2019, b). Its brightness and primary colour use, stood out against the flawless grey, and injected the colour and vibrancy of unexpectedness, of life’s adventure beyond the concrete walls of expensive office buildings and the suits inside. The contrasting cultural nature of the piece was the delight of the artist (Encounter, 2019, b). This was also Alex’s brainchild. It was his vision for an artwork to challenge a spatial context. Nevertheless, whilst Alex valued the way in which the artwork stood out in certain contexts, Alex also mitigated possible risks to the success of his project by utilising his knowledge of local arts and non-arts institutions as a barometer for success in the choice of artist and artwork. Zac Ove’s artwork had been assessed and trialled by other institutions, minimising the risk to the health and integrity of his business. Alex reinforced this point as he referred to the artist as an institutionally established artist within a conversation we had in the gallery space.

Fig.68 Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris*, 2018-19. Photograph by the author.

Alex used a knowledge of local art institutions to assuage the risks for the creation of his art space in terms of the approval of the artwork, the types of audiences and possibility of reinforcement through prior exposure to the work and by pursuing a balance of innovation with secure investment. For example, specific mention was made to Ove's relationship with the British Museum, an institution that was geographically in close proximity. Ove's work 'Moko Jumbie, 2015' is included in the collection of the British Museum (2019) which improved the possibility of wider audiences having prior exposure to his work. It was difficult to ignore Alex's instinct to harness the next big thing, of being 'innovative', of firsts, which as art historian Adrian George notes is associated and valued by curators and are in fact aspects of increasing focus but that also come with a lot of pressure (2015, p.306). Yet simultaneously Alex appeared to be identifying artwork that had already been tried and tested, publicly, artistically and in the market. Artwork that had been subjected to a kind of network, one that sociologist of art, Alain Quemin suggests had undergone a transformation wherein the proliferation of 'the market for contemporary art' has taken precedence over 'the museum' (2020, p.211). Thus, the inference was that Alex had managed to maximise the value of the artwork by balancing two contradictory notions; of innovation versus low risk, both of which are not usually considered as being associated with the other. The belief Alex had was that the value of the artwork in the market had a direct relationship with the type of value that museums gave the artist and artwork, and on this basis he strategically employed his location-orientated network of knowledge.

Fig.69 Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris*, 2018-19. Tourists circling the sculpture.
Photograph by the author.

iii) Dress codes as networks of knowledge

I had stopped at a café and purchased take-out pastries to demonstrate empathy with Alex's apparent pace and stress levels. He was running late so I settled myself onto a concrete bench fixed opposite to the sculpture which alongside the exhibition, Encounter Contemporary were also responsible, providing a platform for unusual artwork in an otherwise purely functional space. In terms of spatial interactions with the artwork, whilst waiting I witnessed a couple of tourists circling the sculpture, entering a space most often ignored by those in their capacity. However, it wasn't long however before the space was occupied by the expected – a businessman in his navy suit, in corporate camouflage and most likely from a nearby office, talking speedily into the phone held up to his ear. He circled the sculpture almost absent-mindedly before taking his second turn around the space and leaning in, peering between the car bonnets into the depth of the sculpture as he continued his call. The artist Zak Ové and Alex's intention for the sculpture was aimed at this type of juxtaposition which so fascinated them both (Encounter, 2019, b). Alex evidently valued the creation of unusual interactions and connections with the artwork. The interactions that Alex intended to create were most clearly relayed through a knowledge of dress codes and the types of social roles of those interacting with the work in the space.

Fig.70 Zak Ove. *Autonomous Morris,* 2018-19. Professional circling the sculpture. Photograph by the author.

It wasn't long before Alex confirmed his arrival via text as I sat by the sculpture, and yet his figure did not present itself. Alex directed me by text to the other side of the square and down some steps. When I greeted him, he was pacing up and down outside of the space already talking loudly on the phone and waved his greeting as I approached. After terminating his call he expressed his dismay at the need to attend a meeting which was in fact about to happen. He suggested we met again in half an hour in which time he recommended a trip around the corner to White Cube in Mason's Yard, expressing his interest in Julie Mehretu's 'SEXTANT' exhibition displayed there[32]. He evidently saw value in being able to connect people with other artworks and art-orientated organisations and institutions in the immediate locale, utilising the surroundings to further contextualise his own professional efforts. This was certainly reflected in his later reference to Adam Ball's work, as he outlined the opportunities that had emerged following the project due to the types of individuals who had visited the gallery, as he later acknowledged over email that "Adam Ball's work sold to several collectors and was installed in buildings in the local area." Adam Ball was the artist whose work Alex was showing within the gallery space (see figures 76-83).

Alex had barely completed his statement before a man appeared and I quickly gave him the croissant in a paper bag and retreated with the promise of returning in half an hour. The pace and speed of engaging with people is a significant contributor to the stereotypical construction of the contemporary art curator's identity within curatorial discourse and is arguably represented by academic in contemporary art, Rafal Niemojewski's consideration of the 'mobility', exposure to changing environments and 'contexts', 'versatility' and 'multitasking' that has been both critiqued and embraced respectively with regards to contemporary art curators (2016, pp.10-11). Alex's comments and behaviours demonstrated a desire to convey a degree of pace in his activity which saw him engage with these curatorial assimilations and to attempt to make it part of his personal <u>and</u> professional identity. This instinct demonstrated by Alex, invokes Niemojewski's argument that those who are contemporary art curators engage in 'making connections' as a dominant aspect of the profession (2016, p.11).

[32] The exhibition took place from September 21st to November 3rd, 2018, at White Cube in Mason's Yard, London (White Cube, 2021).

Fig.71 Area surrounding the Encounter Contemporary pop-up gallery space.
Photograph by the author.

Alex's art world clients and specialist network would undoubtedly have been aware of the gallery's surroundings which included a network of prevalent art galleries and institutions operating as '*embodied spaces*' (Low, 2003, p.10). At first the winding streets of private galleries, mostly showing antique and older period paintings, created a maze within which I promptly lost my way, partly disoriented and drawn in by the glass display windows, the paintings and the fine art books. This experience connects with academic in cultural management, Annukka Jyrämä's observation in 'French and British' terms in relation 'to the types of art shown' that:

> 'the existence of geographic divisions: similar galleries tend to locate close to each other. Thus, galleries form tighter groups according to their *taste* on art. These galleries have regular contact and often meet socially with art critics, artists, and other like-minded actors in the art field' (2002, p.57).

Fig.72 External view of White Cube, Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Eventually the gallery White Cube at Mason's Yard, revealed itself through an alleyway and into a secret courtyard where a towering contemporary building revealed itself in shining glass and concrete. The reception stared out onto the street and the heavy glass doors opened you up to the full view of the reception's occupants, giving you no choice but to announce your arrival to all those in the space. There was a warm welcome and yet I still felt as though I had just passed some sort of test, as I was provided with an exhibition information pamphlet. The muted tones of the clothes worn by the gallery team ensured that no one stood out and compromised the sense of uniformity that the status of the gallery seemed to require.

The space was relatively quiet and a gallery technician apologised for obscuring my view as he touched up the walls with a fresh bit of paint around the artworks. Given the exhibition had opened only a couple of weeks previously, I wondered how often this retouching took place throughout the exhibition. I rushed to reassure him that there was no inconvenience, surprised that he should be concerned about impeding access to the art as it seemed more likely that I would get in the way of his work. The gallery technician then apologised for getting in the way of photos I was taking which I assured him was not an issue. Moreover, there was a satisfying aesthetic as his white overalls coincided with the gallery walls.

After emerging from the upstairs gallery into the reception once more, I requested whether it was possible to go down the steps, unfamiliar with the space and seeking approval within it. There appeared a referential quality to the space. I felt like an outlier, which was unexpected given my familiarity with arts institutions. Yet Brian O'Doherty (academic, artist, and art critic) makes the point that: 'The white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions' which for the majority 'audience' (1986, p.79) must create a questioning of one's own participation and role within this construct? It did make me consider how this gallery would make someone feel without a certain level of familiarity with arts institutions. After all, my own uncertainty had surprised me. It began when staff could see you approaching through the glass door, no matter that they were certainly very friendly.

Fig.73 Entrance view of White Cube, Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Furthermore, participation in any sort of community was also signified by the types of dress, of those within the space. For instance, two tourists stood out in the gallery with their brightly coloured back packs, prepared for a day of endless exploring. They contrasted with three monochrome attendees, one bearing a designer jacket emblazoned with the designer's name on the back in gold and adorned with a black hat as a finishing touch. The front of house staff member was buried in a book. The feel was one of stage set of visual stereotypes of the art world, impressions that have made their way into superficial explanations in mainstream media such as the article in *The Guardian* titled 'How 'art world insider' became the look of the decade' (Cartner-Morley, 2019). It reminded me of the '*how*' in Acord's statement about '*how* curators draw on environmental and

semiotic resources in the production of explicit culture provides a window into the workings of implicit culture as an ingredient in meaning and knowledge-making' (2010, p.460). Acord focused on their 'role in the production of artistic meaning through exhibition-making' (2010, p.447) but this can arguably be extended more widely as it relates to other aspects of their immediate backdrop. Curatorial awareness of dress codes and its meaning, of buildings, of the behaviour of those within these locales… All these types of aesthetic and symbolic networks were shown to be valuable as they served as signifiers in terms of how curators might shape their expertise within the art world ecosystem and how they might make use of this ecosystem for that purpose. The accumulation of these experiences and observations within the area which Encounter Contemporary and Alex were operating highlighted the many facets of 'sense-making' to which journalist, author, and chair of the editorial board at the Financial Times, Gillian Tett refers (2021, p.202) of which Alex would be both consciously and arguably subliminally aware.

Fig.74 Litter and street art in the alleyway to Mason's Yard. Photograph by the author.

Later at the Encounter Contemporary gallery, two visitors descended the two steps into the gallery space. The artist was Adam Ball and his exhibition 'Remnants and Realisation' was summarised in an A4 sheet that was available in the gallery (see figures 78 and 79), as well as online, where it was described as work relating to themes 'of natural and technological visual stimuli' that explore the use of various materiality at their limits, described as being 'works caught on an unstable edge between release and restraint, accumulation and erasure' (Encounter, no date, c). As in the earlier references to clothing choices, symbolic value resided in the clothing choices of the two visitors. It was evident that the two visitors had given visible creative attention to their appearance. The woman had edgy cropped hair and the man sported a black hat. This aligns with the anthropological view communicated by Brent Luvaas (anthropologist) and Joanne Eicher (academic specialising in design, fashion, clothing, and culture with a background in anthropology and sociology) wherein 'dress' is conceived of in the following way:

> 'It does not merely represent who we are. It shapes who we are. Without dress we have no easy, visual means of communicating to others, or defining for ourselves, who we are as social and cultural being. To modify and supplement our bodies is thus a profound existential act. It makes us. It creates us. It forges us into our future selves, even, at times, entraps us within past versions of our selves' (2019, p.37).

The visitors to the gallery were not dressed in a way that was dissimilar from the unofficial uniform of the curator that has subliminally made it into our general awareness to the extent that media articles exist, such as *'What to Buy to Look Like: A New York Art Curator'* (Tan, 2019). This extends to general advice given to curators, as curator Adrian George states 'you are on show' (2015, p.286), with his advice including instances where one might be 'appearing on television' and how 'certain patterns and colours do not work well' (2015, p.281). As such, the importance and role of these active signifiers can be seen to impact directly on Alex's sense of his identity, knowledge and practice and his ability to form connections, among other aspects. Furthermore, the visitor's casualness suggested a familiarity with up-market art spaces, as was the case with this space, located opposite from Christies, described by Fillitz as 'one of the two branded market leaders' within 'the auction market' (2014, p.86), whose red emblazoned flags fluttered within sight.

Fig.75 Street view with the gallery on the left. Photograph by the author.

At first, they wandered around the space, and Alex refrained from approaching until he deemed enough time had passed. Alex shared a knowing smile with me, as the man exclaimed that on his tour around the gallery he had not initially noticed the subtle pink painting. The picture's alluring subtlety and placement in the gallery space had been a subject within our discussion the previous day. Alex engaged them in discussion about the artwork, synonymous with what Adrian George describes as how 'the curator must be able to engage in creative dialogue' (2015, p.308).

Fig.76 Adam Ball. *Indebted,* 2018. Hand-cut paper and acrylic on aluminium. 80 x 60 cm.

Photograph by the author.

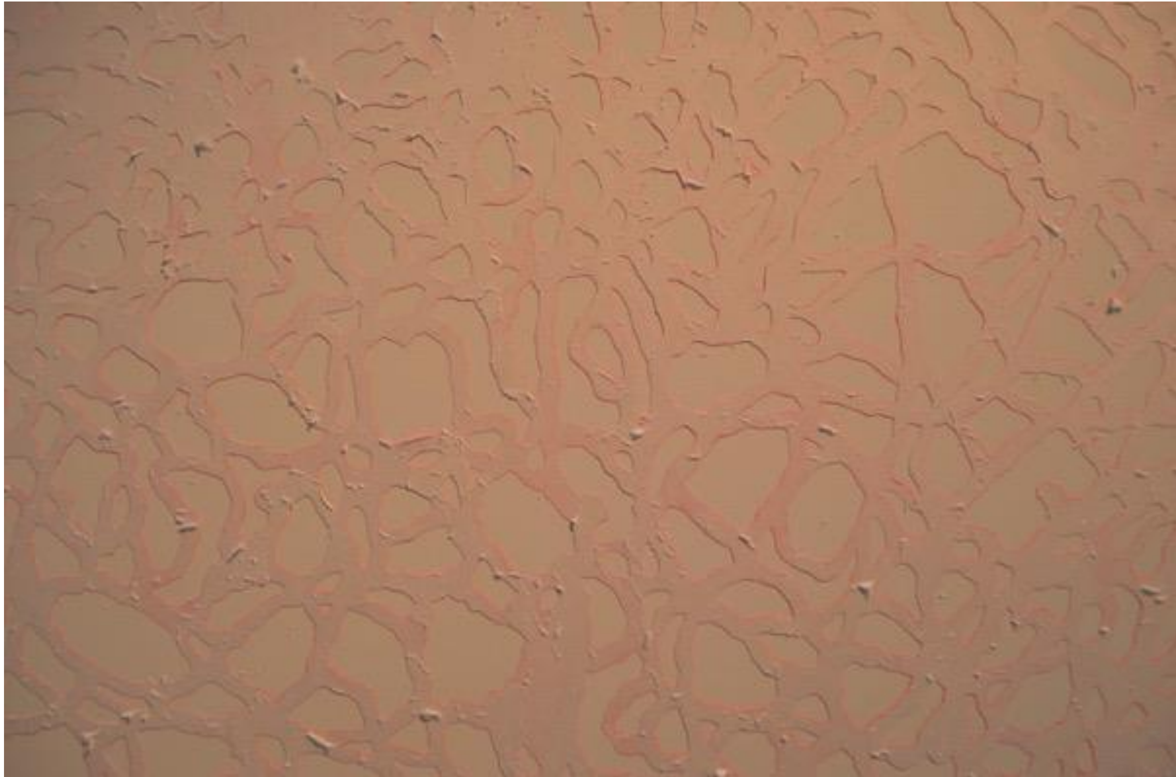


Fig.77 Adam Ball. *Indebted,* 2018. Detail. Hand-cut paper and acrylic on aluminium.
80 x 60 cm. Photograph by the author.

Once the couple had exited the gallery, I asked who they were. Whilst not close enough an acquaintance for Alex to engage in casual friend-like conversation, it did appear that they had prior contact. Alex nodded his head to confirm his acquaintance with the couple, before revealing them to be big art collectors, stated as a fact rather than as any great insight. Eyes-widening, I exclaimed them to be too young! Alex laughed and nodded his head emphatically, widening his own eyes and knowingly nodding his head in such a way as to indicate the status (the wealth) the young visitors had, yet simply confirming that it was possible. However, nothing else verbal was revealed and thus Alex confirmed only what I had already suggested was apparent and nothing more. This knowledge evidently had value and there was an inherent contradiction between Alex's knowing bodily gestures in contrast with the way as he refrained from verbal confirmation or elaboration. It appeared that Alex was aware of individuals who had a connection with art and investment. Alex demonstrated a need to guard and maintain this knowledge and to benefit and produce value from the connection. In a sense his expertise resided in making this judgement about the value of this knowledge. This is supported in Katherina Kurz's description of how: 'Gallerists mainly determine their reputation by the selection of artists they represent, their price level, and the quality and

quantity of buyers' which Kurz argues means that 'reputation is the value that is pursued in the art market, which then goes along with higher prices and revenues' (2015, p.548). Similarly, curators are very much encouraged to carefully choose their words (see George, 2015, pp. 282-285). This speaks to how curators aim to establish and maintain their reputational value. The likelihood of knowing individuals passing by a space in an urban city context may be unlikely, and yet Alex appeared fully expectant of the relationships and connections that his work and the gallery would facilitate. Alex's knowledge of key art world figures participating in the London art community was certainly part of this assessment. However, part of this assessment was also made by the evaluation of dress codes of those physically entering the gallery space. This informed Alex's approach to people and how to navigate relationships. The indeterminate nature of this network of knowledge relating to dress codes arguably reflects Bourdieu's acknowledgement of 'symbolic capital' wherein 'the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital' therefore operating as a form of 'embodied' 'cultural capital' (1983, pp.17-19).

iv) Networking industry knowledge

Alex made space within his day-to-day life to engage with people, places, institutions and even those beyond the art world. Even his own professional identity appeared to be flexible based upon the needs of the art space and the artwork. "I think the term curator is really charged, so I never really know how to introduce myself. I say I'm the director of Encounter Contemporary or I'm the curator of this exhibition or you know… an art consultant. Basically, it's a way of saying the role is so multifaceted. The role of a contemporary curator..." Alex's stream of consciousness did not reflect any anxiety as he was visibly at ease with his inability to produce a definitive assessment of how his own professional identity within the process of networking. The value of his professional identity in his claims of curatorial expertise was its ability to be variously drawn upon and at times disguised. His words intimated that he had a network of industry knowledge which required that he did not align himself with a fixed professional identity and remaining elusive in order to support his curatorial activity. Alex was secure in the knowledge of his expertise however the dimensions of his expertise was consistently being transformed and reworked. It was his attention on the process of reflection and rearticulation that arguably provided status his status as an expert with expert views. This was informed by a network of industry knowledge consisting of activity and identity relating to art world figures, institutions, artists, artworks, financial markets, impactful events, viable collaborators and so on.

Alex also with a network of industry knowledge through specific relationships with non-artworld figures. For example, Alex's status as an expert amongst experts presented opportunities led by his vision for the art space. Alex saw an opportunity to create a practical solution for a challenge presented by 'Tishman Speyer' (the real estate company) responsible for the renovation of 'Smithson Tower' previously 'the Economist magazine' office, which was being developed for office use along with 'Smithson Plaza' (Encounter, no date, b), Encounter Contemporary was partially occupying an otherwise unoccupied building mid-renovation with a gallery space in the ground floor and a sculptural installation in the outdoor space. Alex evidently recognised the need for connection-making that was not directly related to the artworld. Alex created a gallery model based upon this recognition which is aptly described by researcher in creativity and culture, Ella Harris who refers to how 'pop-ups are usually commissioned and monitored by intermediary organisations' (2015, p.598). In addition, Harris notes how 'pop-ups' can impact upon their surroundings and reflect back upon the space they occupy (2015, p.599). The gallery itself had a concrete floored warehouse style space with a basement feel, were it not for the glass window surround in the first half of the gallery. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner's acknowledgement of how 'most of the construction of the inside/outside divide is at the level of materiality and space' (2010, p.214) connects with notions of the push and pull of oppositional forces, the navigation of which forms part of a curator's expertise. It is the curator that strives to be the master of balance for the purpose of creating value specific to the construction of the art space and their own expertise, informed by a network of industry knowledge.

The connections that arose from industry knowledge for the purpose of constructing the art space were further reflected in conversation with Alex regarding the Zak Ové sculpture in the Plaza. "Could you explain a bit about the space out there, a bit about the artist, a bit about the relationship?" Like so many curators, Alex came alive when asked to discuss artists and artworks. He was entirely at ease and evidently felt comfortable with his curatorial identity, knowledge, and practice in this regard. Alex communicated: "The artist is Zac Ove. He is British/Trinidadian artist who is in his 50s. He is the first artist of the Caribbean to be included in the collection at the British Museum which happened last year[33]. He had a major installation at Somerset House and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and the New Arts Centre. He has also had work outside of the San Francisco Civic Plaza." Sociologist Sarah Thornton offers a description of how 'curators' dealers – they study art history and excel at scholarly justifications of their artists' work' (2008, p.91). This resonates with Alex as an example of a curator operating in a commercial space with a network of art world knowledge. Alex demonstrated

[33] Alex was referring to the year before the Encounter Contemporary collaboration with Zak Ové.

an awareness of networking industry knowledge in ways that would be specifically relevant to an individual artist. He communicated information about the artist with great pride and enthusiasm but also with a rehearsed degree of precision that is arguably demonstrative of what art fair, curator and art historian Matthew Israel describes, as he states:

> 'Curators have thus become prominent gatekeepers for art of the now – deciding, through inclusion in shows or acquisition of works, which artists are taken seriously and are considered part of art history, and which are not', although as Israel notes, the curatorial influence can be impacted upon by other individuals, such as 'collectors' (2020, pp.177-178).

I enquired further about the origins of Alex's relationship with the artist. "And how did you find Zak Ove? What was your relationship?" Alex responded. "I wanted to collaborate with this gallery, Vigo Gallery, who programme. They like a lot of art that I am interested in. I'm interested in a lot of African contemporary art, and another artist of theirs I collaborated with, on a show a couple of years ago. So, they suggested Ove's work and he has made the whole sculpture for it." By "it" Alex was referring to the artwork that emerged as a consequence of the collaboration between Vigo Gallery[34] and Encounter Contemporary. Alex certainly emphasised the connections being made based on a meeting of minds, of interests, duplicated in their focus on 'African diaspora' and experience of 'exhibitions', 'residencies' and their advocacy of 'artists' with the self-stated goal of drawing attention to 'historically significant yet often undervalued artists with strong museum and curatorial followings' (Vigo Gallery, 2022). Alex had actively sought out this collaboration, following his belief in the value of making connections and establishing a curatorial network based upon an interest in similar artworks and a sense of purpose for artist representation. He networked industry knowledge for the purpose of the creation of the art space.

Car horns beeped loudly outside and intruded into the gallery through the open door, acting as a rude conversational interruption. Inside the Encounter Contemporary gallery, Alex provided a 1:1 tour of each of the artworks in Adam Ball's exhibition 'Remnants and Realisation' (Encounter, no date, c), accounting for their materiality and display style, and demonstrating the 'intimacy' anthropologist Thomas Fillitz refers to as a feature he associates with 'the field of the gallery market' (2014, p.90). Networking industry knowledge in the private art sphere appeared to demand Alex had a visible precense in the gallery.

[34] Vigo Gallery worked on Zac Ove's 'Autonomous Morris' with Encounter Contemporary and Tishman Speyer (Vigo Gallery, 2022).

Additionally, in terms of utilising a network of industry knowledge, I couldn't help but sense some aesthetic resonance between Adam Ball's work and Mehretu's work at White Cube nearby (White Cube, 2021). I did not mention this to Alex, having subconsciously absorbed what I later found identified in an article in *The Economist* from 2010 which stated, 'contemporary art is a futures market in which "derivative" is a bad word' (2010). Nevertheless, there was the possibility of a shared aesthetic recognition, an unnamed connection from which Alex might ascertain value and prestige through association with a prominent private art gallery. Alex's suggestion that I visit the White Cube exhibition had already demonstrated his network of industry knowledge and his awareness of which exhibitions and artist's work was being shown in proximity to his own art space. Aside from aesthetic similarities between the exhibitions, there was also the relevance of the medium of the artwork. Adam Ball's work was two dimensional. This suggested that Alex had an awareness that Adam Ball's work in its two-dimensional form, could be capitalised upon in the market. Alex further demonstrated his network of industry knowledge based on Adam Ball's work being placed in the context of a preference for painterly medium in relation to 'art investment funds' relating to a network of market knowledge (Horowitz, 2011, p.2). A network of industry knowledge amongst curators based upon market preferences was also noted in the interview on Tuesday 16th April 2019 at Lisson Gallery[35] with Greg Hilty (curatorial director) who stated: "I think that in the past of the contemporary art world that this gallery works in, that shift has been part of conceptual art, part of performance art, part of video art already, so it is not such a big conceptual change. In fact, the art world recently has become… in spite of everything you say, which is true… it has become a little bit more focused on product. It has become quite conservative. Figurative painting is quite big in the market. It always has been. It's never really gone away. But there is a search for value, safe value, and having an object, having a painting, rather than a photograph or other more potentially transient media, let alone performance… The art world is feeling quite nervous… it is still working well, the economy is still turning over, but some of the more experimental practices are probably having more focus in the museum world and probably less appeal in the market. People talk about there being a market for performance and there is, but it is hardly registering in market terms." Art historian Noah Horowitz supports this in his statement that:

> 'Art investment funds paint a rather black-and-white picture of the art market. They typically base their business models on a specific and limited product – durable, singular art goods

[35] Lisson Gallery is a commercial gallery and one of the noted 'twenty-five powerhouse dealers of contemporary art' (Chong, 2011, pp. 438-440).

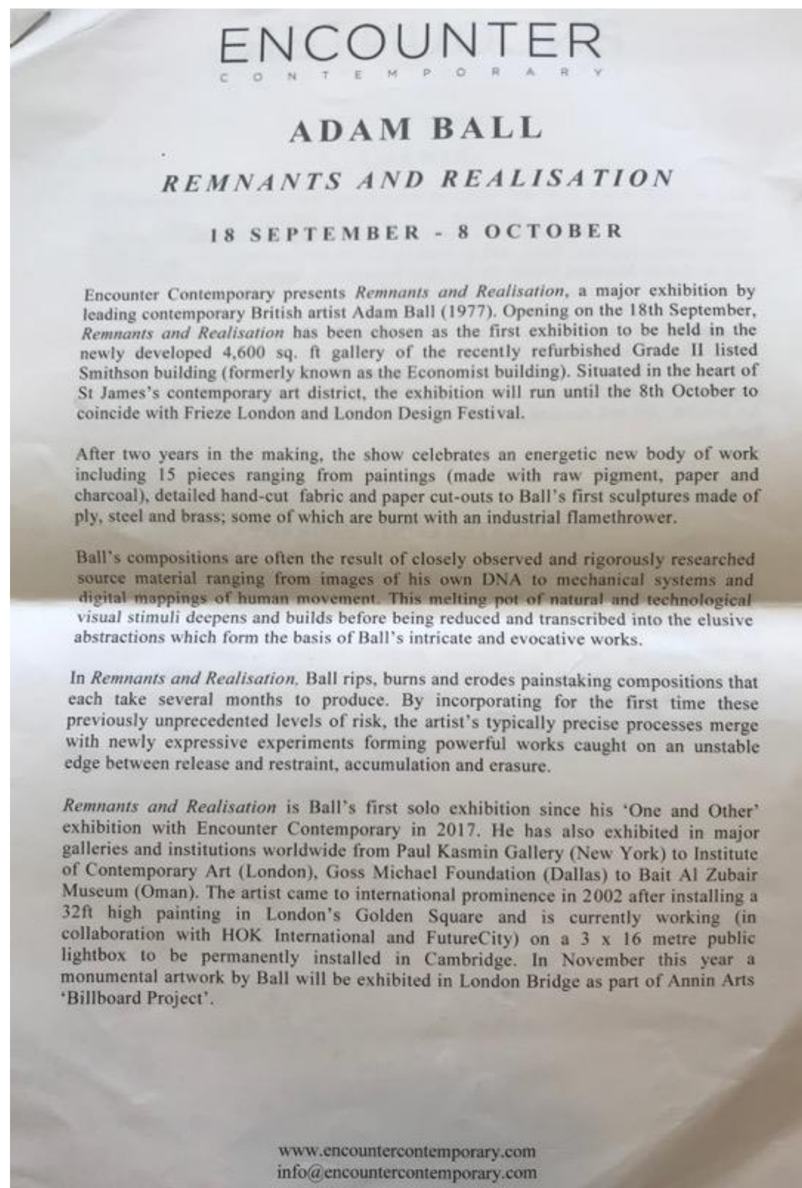
(paintings, overwhelmingly), while practically turning a blind eye to the rest of art production' (2011, p.2).

This suggests that Alex had an awareness of market influences in the choice of what he was exhibiting based upon a network of industry knowledge about the art market which appeared to support a painterly style or 2D medium. In this respect, artist Adam Ball's pieces were definitively consumable and whilst they had various materiality, most of the pieces shared many of the qualities of paintings.

Engaging with a network of industry knowledge included an awareness of the 'activities of the art world' (Joy and Sherry, 2003, p.155), one that includes but is not limited to 'the art market' (2003, p.157). However, there appeared to be an awareness amongst curators, as demonstrated by Greg's comments, of the increasing pressure of 'the commercial' (George, 2015, p.313). This is accompanied by wider curatorial discourse which includes observations by art historian and curator Adrian George who warns curators of any instinct to pursue formulaic 'projects' with the safe options based on what is 'statistically popular' stating that the curatorial mission conversely is 'to create challenging, exciting, unexpected encounters' (2015, p.313). There is however opportunity for the private art curator to attain monetary value but in the context of their expertise, networking industry knowledge is a balancing act of value. For example, for Alex this would include the need to balance his art market acumen and the need to make calculated moves, versus any desire to engage in creative risk-taking. Alex appeared caught between an instinct to sell and be sold, in contrast with the ideological, aesthetic, and creative ambitions, beyond the art market. This indicates the precarious nature of individual curator's networks of industry knowledge and consequently the precariousness of their claims of expertise.

Furthermore, Alex demonstrated how the notion of a network of industry knowledge that is exclusively associated with the curatorial profession is subject to debate. Alex himself questioned the notion of curatorial industry knowledge, stating: "I am not sure there is such a thing, but I think that having a wide network of artists and curators and knowledge of where they are showing (galleries, museums etc.) and developments in their practice are very critical to the job. I am also of course approaching the job from an art historical background which provides a certain contextual base of theory and knowledge however I don't believe this is necessarily required." Alex's instinct was to steer you away from any notion of an attainable curatorial industry knowledge and towards a more individual expression of networking industry knowledge. He noted the value of a

network of industry knowledge that would likely include a knowledge of other artists, curators, institutions and art historical contexts. However, he was not comfortable prescribing a certain type of industry knowledge as equating to curatorial expertise and instead he communicated that networking art industry knowledge was only ever an interpretation and led by individual curatorial needs. Alex demonstrated how he felt that he was only able to offer advice, that even he himself acknowledged could be questioned. Overall, navigating a network of industry knowledge is not a prescriptive, neutral or easy space for the contemporary art curator to inhabit.



ENCOUNTER
CONTEMPORARY

ADAM BALL

REMNANTS AND REALISATION

18 SEPTEMBER - 8 OCTOBER

Encounter Contemporary presents *Remnants and Realisation*, a major exhibition by leading contemporary British artist Adam Ball (1977). Opening on the 18th September, *Remnants and Realisation* has been chosen as the first exhibition to be held in the newly developed 4,600 sq. ft gallery of the recently refurbished Grade II listed Smithson building (formerly known as the Economist building). Situated in the heart of St James's contemporary art district, the exhibition will run until the 8th October to coincide with Frieze London and London Design Festival.

After two years in the making, the show celebrates an energetic new body of work including 15 pieces ranging from paintings (made with raw pigment, paper and charcoal), detailed hand-cut fabric and paper cut-outs to Ball's first sculptures made of ply, steel and brass; some of which are burnt with an industrial flamethrower.

Ball's compositions are often the result of closely observed and rigorously researched source material ranging from images of his own DNA to mechanical systems and digital mappings of human movement. This melting pot of natural and technological visual stimuli deepens and builds before being reduced and transcribed into the elusive abstractions which form the basis of Ball's intricate and evocative works.

In *Remnants and Realisation*, Ball rips, burns and erodes painstaking compositions that each take several months to produce. By incorporating for the first time these previously unprecedented levels of risk, the artist's typically precise processes merge with newly expressive experiments forming powerful works caught on an unstable edge between release and restraint, accumulation and erasure.

Remnants and Realisation is Ball's first solo exhibition since his 'One and Other' exhibition with Encounter Contemporary in 2017. He has also exhibited in major galleries and institutions worldwide from Paul Kasmin Gallery (New York) to Institute of Contemporary Art (London), Goss Michael Foundation (Dallas) to Bait Al Zubair Museum (Oman). The artist came to international prominence in 2002 after installing a 32ft high painting in London's Golden Square and is currently working (in collaboration with HOK International and FutureCity) on a 3 x 16 metre public lightbox to be permanently installed in Cambridge. In November this year a monumental artwork by Ball will be exhibited in London Bridge as part of Annin Arts 'Billboard Project'.

www.encountercontemporary.com
info@encountercontemporary.com

Fig.78 Exhibition information sheet. Page 1. Photograph by the author.

ENCOUNTER
CONTEMPORARY

ADAM BALL

Born in 1977, Adam lives and works in London and has exhibited in galleries and institutions internationally, including Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York; Dallas Contemporary, US; Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas; Gagosian Gallery, New York; galerie laurent mueller, Paris; ARCO Madrid; Centre of Contemporary Art, Bahrain; Bait Al Zubair Museum, Oman; Pharos Arts Foundation, Cyprus; The Jerwood Space, London; ICA, London and CCA, Glasgow.

Previous reviews and features include; The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph, The Independent, The Guardian, The Observer, The Times Magazine, The Independent Magazine, The Observer Magazine, The Evening Standard Magazine, Esquire, Elle, Elle Decor, Time Out, La Repubblica, Times of Oman, Modern Painters, Art Review, Art and Auction and BBC TV, ITV, Channel 5, Channel 8 (US) and BBC Radio.

ENCOUNTER CONTEMPORARY

Founded in 2013 by Alexander Caspari and Jordan Harris, Encounter Contemporary is a curatorial platform, dealership and contemporary art consultancy. The company focuses on promoting a diverse and innovative group of established and emerging contemporary artists who are transforming the way art is made and presented. We run an international 'moving' exhibition program curating academically rigorous, ambitious and immersive shows. Working closely with both long standing and new collectors on an ongoing basis our aim is to support critical art practice internationally.

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Fig.79 Exhibition information sheet. Page 2. Photograph by the author.

Fig.80 Adam Ball. *Foundations*, 2018. Hand-cut paper and raw pigment on canvas.
160 x 200 cm. Photograph by the author.

Fig.81 Adam Ball. *Erosion,* 2016. Charcoal on canvas. 80 x 100 cm. Photograph by the author.

Fig.82 Adam Ball. *Interfade,* 2016. Charcoal and hand-cut fabric on canvas.
125 x 100 cm. Photograph by the author.

Fig.83 Adam Ball. *Foundations*, 2018. Hand-cut paper and raw pigment on canvas. 160 x 200 cm; Intercession, 2018. Hand cut paper and graphite powder on paper. 130 x 180 cm; Unleashed, 2018. Burnt birch plywood. 112 x 243 cm. Photograph by the author.

v) Utilising textual resources

Another form of knowledge networks within the curator's everyday life relates to textual resources. A knowledge network of textual resources has seminal impacts on the creation and shaping of curatorial expertise. This relates to Bourdieu's framing of 'cultural capital' in specific relation to 'the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods' (1983, p.17). Placed upon the table in the Encounter Contemporary gallery was the latest copy of Wallpaper* Magazine.[36] 'Contemporary art magazines' as well as 'published interviews with contemporary curators' are among several types of 'material' referred to by art writer, artist and curator Paul O'Neill who acknowledges 'the sheer quantity of printed material on curatorial practice' (2012, p.3) noting that the '1990s' brought a more extensive 'publishing industry' drawn upon by what O'Neill refers to as 'a new generation of curators who had access to such publications' (2012, p.38). There was however in O'Neill's view, a curatorial drive towards 'demystification' in 'the 1960s' with 'publicly sited exhibitions, art magazines, publications, and transient events' (2012, p.38). This evidences that media and textual resources are a powerful tool to be wielded by the curator. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner refers to media publications as one of the means of arguing for the existence of 'a 'community'' in relation to her fieldwork in 'Hollywood'' further demonstrated by that fact that their consumption must be fervoured and constant (2010, p.213). Curation operates in a similarly high-profile way (Charlesworth, 2007, p.91). That said, there is conversely, within the curatorial profession, a simultaneous and contradictory emphasis on urging each other to reject 'the press' (Bonami, 2001, p.31). Again, we see an example of the precarious and complex professional landscape that the contemporary art curator occupies. Creating a knowledge network of textual resources was a confused exercise premised upon an assessment on behalf of the curator, of what is valuable to them.

[36] Wallpaper* is a lifestyle magazine and website that covers various categories which includes an 'art' component (no date).

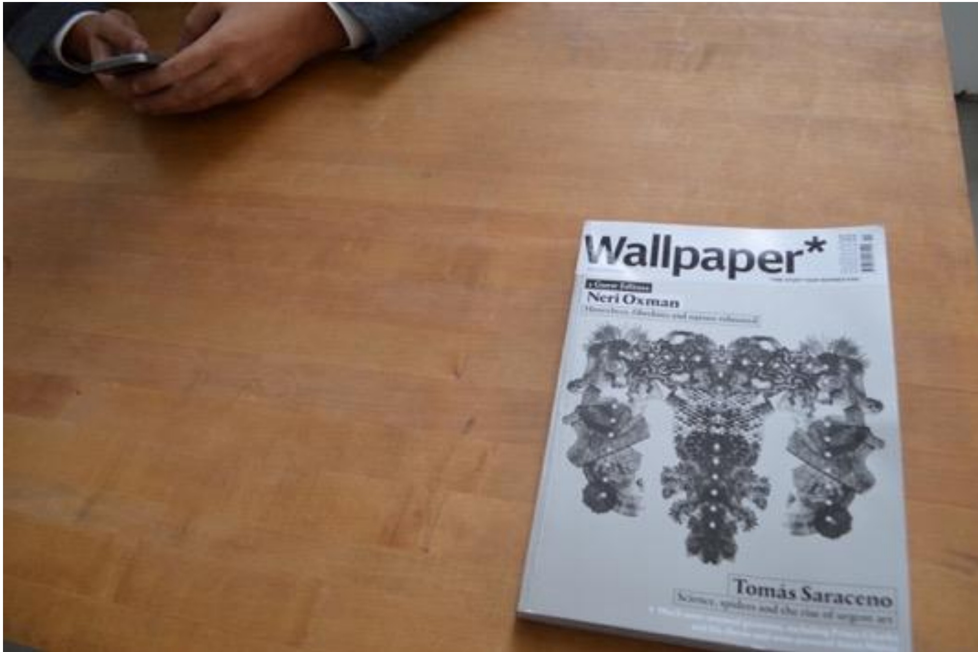

Fig.84 Table view with magazine. Photograph by the author.

Fig.85 Table view with exhibition information sheets and
Encounter Contemporary business cards.
Photograph by the author.

Fig.86 Window ledge view with exhibition information sheets,
Encounter Contemporary business cards and magazines.
Photograph by the author.

Encounter Contemporary identify on their website, under the heading ‘Conversations’, thumbnails of various publications with which they had engaged or received press coverage from (Encounter, no date, d). Relatedly, Alex communicated certain expectations regarding a participation in a knowledge network of textual resources. For example, Alex had placed exhibition summaries, business cards and industry-relevant magazines on the table at which he sat and on the window ledge (see figures 85, 86 and 87) that formed part of the expected supply of information related to ‘exhibitions’ (O’Neill, 2012, p.3). Certainly, anthropologist Sherry Ortner similarly describes in relation to ‘Hollywood’ and ‘’The Writer’s Expo’’ that ‘the tables in the lobby were littered with flyers for screenwriting classes, workshops, and software, as well as screenwriter support groups and therapists’ (2010, p.219). The display of business cards and exhibition information alongside Werte magazine and LUX[37] within the art space, demonstrated how Encounter Contemporary were

[37] LUX has various components including a magazine, ‘Latest stories, ‘Leaders & Philanthropists’, ‘Art Space’ and ‘Advisory’, with topics including ‘Sustainability’, ‘Travel’, ‘Art & Design’, ‘Culture’, ‘Cars & Collectibles’, and ‘Fashion & Jewellery’ (LUX, 2021, a). The magazine has international circulation, and with a very elite purpose they additionally state: ‘It is also distributed to out VIP database and to those of some of our luxury and

displaying their participation in ‘an industry’ just as Ortner describes (2010, p.219). Werte magazine is described as ‘the client magazine of Deutsche Bank Wealth Management’ has person-focused content and news ‘from social, cultural, political and business circles’ (WERTE, 2020). Alex’s inclusion of this magazine within the gallery space was intended to demonstrate his participation in a knowledge network which arguably furthered his own claims of curatorial expertise. Frieze London was also happening that week and ‘Deutche Bank’ were the ‘Global Lead Partner’ of Frieze (2020, c). Through his knowledge network of textual resources, Alex was attempting to relay an ideological and market-based proximity to this prominent art event.

An awareness of the role that textual resources had in the construction of an art space was further demonstrated within Frieze London itself (the contemporary art portion of the fair) (Frieze, 2020, b). The status of arts publications was demonstrated by its spatial prominence, coupled with the various galleries stands, in which exhibition material and contact details were displayed. As academic in art and media, Panos Kompatsiaris acknowledges, ‘published material’ is produced for the specific purpose of these events (2017, p.42).

Fig.87 Deutsche Bank Wealth Management Lounge entrance at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

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private partners’, even with the occasional special ‘bespoke editions for different markets and partners’, all of which Alex wanted to associate himself with (LUX, 2021, b).

Fig.88 Book shop at the entrance of Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.89 Table view of a gallery showing work at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

However, questions remain regarding the actual consumption of industry literature and textual resources and publications. Is the value curators find within a knowledge network of textual resources based on their actual consumption or primarily based on the symbolism of their physical form? In terms of Encounter Contemporary's gallery space, it felt as though the textual material was acting as a prop within the space, rather than as texts to consume. These types of industry-focused 'magazines' also have a 'coded' nature wherein they only reveal themselves fully to those who would be able to translate them into valuable resources within their own knowledge networks (Ortner, 2010, p.214) (Fig.20). Alex's participation in Christie's podcast series 'Think Like An Art World Expert'[38] also spoke to the more specific forms of value that could be provided by media and organisations. Alex used the podcast platform to communicate the purpose of the business, drawing attention to their desire to establish connections between artists, artworks, and audiences in response to specific types of spaces. "I saw your interviews online and good photos as well!" I commented, based on my prior observations of Alex's many interviews in the media which were heavily portrayed in textual form on their own website (Encounter, no date, d) and distributed on social media. Alex was visibly pleased with this acknowledgement, with his raised profile possibly representative of art writer and curator Francesco Bonami's acknowledgement of curatorial '*responsibility*' ultimately 'to create a legacy' (2001, p.31). However, Alex's pride also appeared to reside in his ability to activate this knowledge network of consumption for his own purposes. This resonates with anthropologist Sherry Ortner's statement, that:

> 'The effect is to strongly reinforce the inside/outside divide, as insiders (they assure me) 'get it' and outsider don't, whilst at the same time leaking the valuable information that keeps the industry humming' (2010, p.214).

There was certainly a wealth of arts publications which I drew upon throughout fieldwork, often for the latest commentary (Ortner, 2010, p.213) such as Hans Ulrich Obrist's interview in *CEREAL* magazine that emerged during my fieldwork year titled 'Collecting, Archiving, & Curating' (Obrist, 2018, pp.133-135). I consumed arts publications such as *The Art Newspaper*[39] and *Art Monthly*.[40] Even so, these publications are not a homogeneous impression of a community, but rather they

[38] The podcast was made available online (Christie's Education, 2020).

[39] 'The Art Newspaper' describes itself as 'an online and print publication that covers the international art world' (The Art Newspaper, no date, b).

[40] 'Art Monthly' communicates its identity as being 'the UK's leading magazine of contemporary visual art' (Art Monthly, no date).

demonstrate attempts at discerning what it all means, much like taking the temperature of the art world, artists, dealers, audiences, and curators alike. Founder and editor of Aesthetica magazine and its additional symposia, exhibitions and festivals, Cherie Federico described Aesthetica magazine's role among leading arts publications.[41] She stated in an interview with her: "When you say communities… I suppose for the readers of the magazine, maybe it is about the fact that you know that this magazine is about discovery. And so, when you open it, if you are a curator or someone working in that sphere, for your professional development maybe you would read a publication like Aesthetica because you know you are going to read about somebody new in there and that is really exciting because if you are making an exhibition you are always going to be on the lookout for new people with new ideas; bringing new things to the table. But for actual practitioners, Aesthetica is a publication that gives you opportunities because we will look for new practitioners and we will engage with people who maybe haven't had an exhibition before but who are making work that is incredibly fascinating." Cherie demonstrated how these publications attempt to each contribute something identifiably theirs but are also trying to serve varying purposes that collectively contribute to the creative industries and by proxy, form various and evolving impressions of various creative communities. However, whilst we are left with traces of tangibility and connection, publications and textual resources must be many things to many people. This is arguably the case for curators themselves as they are caught between a desire for the certainty of connection, but conversely to hint at constructs beyond the physical art space. Both these contradictory instincts are of value for the curator.

Alex demonstrated how his work took precedence in the forms of textual resources that he engaged with. I probed Alex in interview about the creation of press releases associated with the Encounter Contemporary art space. "Do you deal with press, or do you hand over to the PR team and they handle it for you?" Alex paused, clearly formulating his answer before he spoke. "Erm… the PR thing is very unusual. It is only really to do with this property. They are the PR company for the property company, so part of their role is to help promote the art and things like that." Alex was referring to the role of the real estate company who were owners of the site in which the exhibition was taking place. This relationship was presented by Alex as being a unique type of collaboration within his professional experiences by having a real estate company as an influential partner within the context of the exhibition.

[41] 'Aesthetica magazine' articulates its mission as being to 'foreground today's most innovative practitioners across art, architecture, photography and design', and it runs alongside 'the Aesthetica Short Film Festival, the Art Prize, the Future Now Symposium and the Creative Writing Award' (Aesthetica, 2022).

Fig.90 Smithson Building. Photograph by the author.

As such, I enquired further with regards to the profile-raising activity in the form of the textual resources of press releases. “So, you do your own press releases?” Alex answered in very general terms. “Yeah, I do our own press releases. All the press that I have got, it really has been self-generated.” Alex had proven, based on previous projects, that he was able to attain value by engaging in promotional activity through textual resources. Having worked in PR, the process of sending press releases and their success was entirely dependent on the other party being responsive and identifying value in the information they were being supplied with. Alex was obviously wanting to communicate an identity of being stand alone in his success with regards to the PR he had undertaken and there was definite skill in being able to make something saleable and consumable. However, there was also something to be said for the whims and reasoning of the other party. In this way, Alex was almost setting Encounter Contemporary up as being exactly what people were looking for, even though in a contradictory sense, he was the one who had gone looking. The idea of self-promotion in terms of himself and the art space was evidently an aspect Alex wanted to distance himself from, and yet conversely, he wanted to demonstrate how he would utilise every type of textual resource to generate value. This demonstrated how a knowledge network of textual resources was not prescriptive and included many contradictory discourses and required a flexibility in approach which also relates to how curators claim and maintain their expertise.

vi) The value of a shared calendar

Another example of knowledge networks as communicated by curators themselves in the field, emerged from various references to an art world calendar. Value was attained through the recognition, utilisation and perception of the peaks and troughs of art world activity, which includes in the UK, the role of Frieze London. Art fairs are acknowledged to be a large-scale consolidation of art world figures with implications for the curatorial profession and with the expectation of providing what academic in business, economics and sociology Tamar Yogev and sociologist Thomas Grund refer to as a 'commercial' opportunity, acting as 'meeting points' with international and 'local' consequences (2012, p.24). The value of these events is further summarised by anthropologist Thomas Fillitz who states:

> 'art fairs assure the display of a multitude of works of artists in high demand, often alongside a few young, promising artists. Neither single galleries nor auction houses could provide such an environment. Finally, prestigious art fairs promise the attendance of a large number of potential buyers from all over the world' (2014, pp. 89-90) and includes 'Frieze Art London, funded in 2003' (2014, p. 89).

Independent curator Attilia Fattori Franchini reflected on this knowledge network of art world activity. Attilia had an accessible curatorial profile on Frieze online which detailed her career trajectory (Frieze 2020, d) and close to the time of our interview, she had been responsible for curating 'the BMW Open Work' section at Frieze London in 2018 which focused on the work of Sam Lewitt (Frieze, 2020, e).[42] Attilia shared how she allocated her time. "Fifty percent is art. Looking at exhibitions, attending events, attending biennials, art fairs and doing studio visits." This demonstrates how the curatorial profession experiences peaks and troughs in activity that have almost unquestioningly provided an impression of a so-called 'art world calendar' (see Grabski, 2008, p.104; Luke, 2012). This was further reflected in an interview with Greg (curatorial director) at Lisson Gallery, which Mark Godfrey[43] referred to in an article as 'one of the galleries that introduced Minimal and Conceptual Art to the UK' (Godfrey, 2006). Greg delivered an authoritative perspective of the art world calendar. "There is a rhythm to the art world. Sort of spring, May, June, and September to November are the key activity points. They are partly built around art fairs. Basel is a

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[42] Attillia has continued to return 'annually' to Frieze London as the curator of the BMW Open Work (Frieze, 2020, f).

[43] Mark Godfrey was previously a curator at Tate.

key one which is in the middle of June. Around the auctions as well. Although that is less directly relevant because we're more a primary art business rather than a secondary art business. But in terms of collectors, energies and activities are kind of focused around the spring and autumn sales. It all becomes a cycle. The museums will put on their key shows at those times. The galleries will put on their key shows. The other thing is October with Frieze London which is important. And we, classically you know, do our big show of the year at that time. We obviously have arguments with artists about it. If they don't get that slot, what does it mean? It's not the only slot but it needs to be evidently commercial in let's say May and October because that is what people expect. They are less receptive to more experimental projects at that time because that is where their mindset is, so we have to kind of work within that. Which means conversely that in the summer or say January we can be more experimental and try new things. Obviously, we are a commercial gallery, we are a business, we have a commercial role and experimental exhibitions and artworks are less familiar in market terms. In terms of the rhythm of exhibitions, it's a bit relentless. It is not as bad as say fashion with its seasons. But it's a bit relentless in terms of one show after another." Within these impressions of a shared calendar, different events appeared to produce different kinds of value for the contemporary art curator and are also influenced by the specific contexts within which each individual curator operates, which is certainly evident in Greg's description. Knowledge networks influenced by these impressions of an art world calendar arose from the recognition of value specific to individual curators and through which they also claimed and maintained their expertise.

Fig.91 John Baldessari. *Penguin*, 2018. Frieze Sculpture, 2018. Regent's Park, London. Photograph by the author.

Fig.92 Art fair attendees interacting with a *Live* artwork by Camille Henrot.
Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.93 Preview of Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.94 Art fair attendees looking at artwork at one of the gallery stands.
Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.95 Julia Scher. *Performance art.* Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.96 Tour guide at Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

Fig.97 Private tour at preview. Frieze London, 2018. Photograph by the author.

How these impressions of an art world calendar are formed became evident in discourses surrounding particular types of events. For example, in specific reference to the art fair, curator and art historian Matthew Israel states ‘art fairs function as the trade shows of the art world’ and Frieze was no different, adhering completely to Israel’s general description of ‘art fairs’, as it was located in ‘tents where galleries rent booths’ (2020, p.109). Israel makes further note of ‘the network of Frieze Art Fairs’ and its increasing popularity (2020, p.110). He describes its prominence by noting how similar or alternative events ‘do not have the international reach or strong branding of Art Basel or Frieze’ (2020, p.110). These types of descriptions assist in comprehending the way Greg viewed the impact of large-scale events when placed alongside wider gallery/institutional programming (Yogev and Grund, 2012, p.24) and the way that it has value in terms of demonstrating how curators create their own knowledge networks based on impressions of an art world calendar.

Greg also focused upon maximising value for artists, which then inevitably translated into value for himself as a curator as he constructed and framed his expertise. “There is the art fair programme, the gallery programme, and then there are museum or institutional programmes, and that is obviously not within our control but we can relate to the curatorial world, responding to interest by curators or artists and arrange for them to look at people that they might not have been looking at… Ai Weiwei for instance had a big exhibition in Brazil which we were very closely involved with. This year he is having a big exhibition in Dusseldorf in Germany which we are very closely involved with. For him that’s crucial because he is reaching a wide audience and its crucial for us because it validates his work and helps provide a focus of attention that helps his market. It’s clear that there is a relation. And so, we work on those different tracks… The art fair is a very clear one. The gallery is at one level with one show after the other and the museums are sort of big key points.” Greg’s

reference to a “curatorial world” arguably acts as a descriptor for what I have argued are specific forms of value that arise from networks of knowledge that relate to impressions of an art world calendar, that can be used for the purpose of framing curatorial expertise. Greg again demonstrates how forms of knowledge networks are responses to individual needs in the context of variable impressions of an over-arching art world.

Impressions of an art world calendar also existed within the physical spaces in which curators occupied. For example, outside of the Encounter Contemporary gallery during Frieze week in London, a black elongated car rolled by with a Frieze Masters VIP sign stickered along the side. Further down the road, what looked like a large packaged framed artwork appeared to be being loaded for transportation. There was little doubt that this location was a prime place for the art-focused at the high end of the art market and Encounter was operating within what Tamar Yogev and Thomas Grund (from a sociology and business perspective) describe as ‘the geographic propinquity of art fairs’ wherein they acknowledge ‘the importance of networks’ as a means by which to comprehend interactions between ‘galleries’ and ‘fairs’ (2012, pp.24 and 25) albeit this is limited to ‘social network analysis’ (2012, p.23). Peak levels of activity in London arguably took place during the period in which Frieze London was taking place and relates to anthropologist Thomas Fillitz’ recognition that ‘major art fairs constitute a space of encounter and dialogue between galleries, collectors, curators, and experts from various regions of the work’ (2014, p.90), emphasising the prominence of networking for curators during these periods of activity. Furthermore, Fillitz’ suggests that ‘not participating’ in ‘art fairs’ could have economic and reputational consequences (2014, p.90).

Alex appeared to have an awareness of how knowledge networks formed by impressions of a shared professional calendar helped him to construct and frame his own work. Alex’s association with Frieze London was in-direct yet he had an awareness of his own offering by arranging a “sculptural breakfast” which also existed within the remit of what anthropologist Annelise Riles refers to in a consideration of professional networking as ‘concrete activities’ (2010, a, p.3). Alex identified his own needs relating to Encounter Contemporary which related to what Fillitz describes as he states: ‘Art fairs nevertheless do not provide the intimacy that is so dear to the field of the gallery market’ (2014, p.90). Alex utilised his own knowledge network in relation to impressions of an art world calendar, not just in ways that supplemented prominent events, but also in ways that identified what these widely known art events were lacking. He sought to create opportunities born out of the gaps in prominent art world events and discourses.

The “sculptural breakfast” took place on the final day of fieldwork with Alex and Encounter. I emerged from the tube station having navigated rush hour and I made my way along the busy street. Smithson Plaza came into sight and the sculpture was there, as it had been previously, however a relatively modest collection of people were stood around the space. On one side there was a coffee maker and fresh pastries. It was busy enough to not be awkward but select enough that the space wasn’t overwhelmed with people which provided an impression of having been expertly created. Alex was deep in discussion when I arrived and so I stood near the sculpture, looking at it as if I was observing it for the first time in an attempt to blend in and appear occupied. Shortly however, Alex greeted me by introducing me to the artist and launching into the artist’s context. Even though I had heard much of this context before, Alex was unstoppable and provided me with descriptions of the art collections that the artist Zak Ové was included in and even some additional background about his childhood. It was evident that Alex was performing a network of knowledge as reassurance to the artist, the needs of the art space and his own claims of expertise. We chatted briefly, but Alex was acting as an advocate and moved along to another person, with whom he again acted as artist spokesperson. Alex recognised the value of his ability as a curator to provide a steadying hand and after the event he apologised for not having spent enough time speaking 1:1. He communicated that he needed to be constantly connecting people and facilitating conversations and connections between people, the artist, the space and the artwork. This instinct that Alex demonstrated is reflected in Kompatsiaris’ description, that: ‘Curatorial words about art objects and exhibitions offer the stability of an authorial point of view, construing meaning within an otherwise chaotic, information-ridden universe’ (2020, p.760). This was somewhat reflected in Alex’s prevalent focus on the value of artist engagement. However, Alex’s ability to provide a more detailed and nuanced example of knowledge networks helped to remedy some of the vagueness attached to an artworld calendar, as relationships formed within the space.

Yet despite the apparent tangibility of the connections that Alex had created within the art space, it was also evident that there was a contradictory desire to attain a degree of intangibility. I started talking to an individual who was also standing looking at the sculpture, perhaps also to fill the time with an illusion of purpose and intent. I enquired into his professional life. He was recently retired but his previous business in framing artwork partially explained his presence. One might assume from his retirement that his professional life had concluded and yet his art world activity continued and evidently had a currency, further demonstrating the personal and professional dimensions of expertise. It was clear that the value Alex identified as part of knowledge networks did not begin or

end based upon any sense of someone being an active professional. The retired art framer was very friendly and noted my similarly friendly demeanour making a general observation that not everyone in the artworld was so inclined and how this was a big mistake made by many. Personability, he assured me, was still the most covetable attribute among the successful. He also tried to decode the relationships developing around us. In this sense we became event-specific allies, assisting each other by no longer being awkward or uninvolved in the space, although he didn't appear to be impacted by a concern about this in the first place. This was unlike myself, who had felt on edge, unable to clearly see the knowledge network of Alex's imagining and consequently I experienced a degree of disorientation. It was incredibly revealing how a purposefully professional networking event to facilitate connection-making was also benefitting, conversely, from its lack of transparency. There were no uniforms, no name tags… It provided an example of Alex's perception of knowledge networks as a constellation of un-ending value, the breadth of which none of us were fully aware, but all of us brought together by an impression of an art world calendar.

Alex had briefly mentioned a list of high-profile galleries, organisations, and institutions in London from whom there were representatives but no names. It was the whispers of possibility that sustained interest. Alex was able to create an impression of a developed and tangible professional network, whilst also making it appear entirely separate and unattainable in its lack of transparency. It seemed that connection-making required a degree of mystery and Alex was the master of that mystery.[44] Ultimately, it was clear that the art world calendar had a relationship to the creation of various forms of knowledge networks and this appeared to be generally understood by curators. However, impressions of the art world calendar had a variety of different consequences which were typically led by the individual needs of the curator with respect to the acquisition of value for their specific purposes with the creation of a network of knowledge that reflected and constructed their own expertise.

[44] Anthropologists Anette Nyqvist, Hege Høyer Leivestad and Hans Tunestad's analysis of the 'central features of the professional large-scale gathering that raise the question of identification' (2017, p.8), provides an example of how there is often a desire for 'identification' and the need to validate participation (2017, p.8), which is very relevant to Alex's event. Alex purposefully capitalised on his event's illusory nature by not fully disclosing these aspects, unlike the procedures of some events, like those that Nyqvist, Høyer Leivestad, and Tunestad describe, such as the use of 'the name tag' (2017, p.9).

Fig.98 Attendees of the Sculpture Networking Breakfast being given a tour of the Smithson building mid-renovation. Top floor. Photograph by the author.

Fig.99 View from the top floor of the Smithson building mid-renovation.
Photograph by the author.

In summary: Establishing the value of knowledge networks

In an initial consideration of professional networks, it became evident that the UK lacks exclusively curatorial networks, however this doesn't reflect the centrality of networks and networking as communicated by curators themselves within their everyday curatorial lives. It became clear that if we move away from a focus on formal professional networks and instead consider the construction and framing of curatorial expertise, then this opens up a new way to conceive of network as it relates to the curator. The intangibility of professional curatorial networks and the individualised notions of networks that have been communicate by art curators themselves has led to the primary argument and focus of this chapter. By using the concept of knowledge networks as analytical tool it is possible to analyse curatorial claims of expertise whilst also acknowledge the status that notions of network have been given on behalf of the profession. The consequence of using the concept of knowledge networks as an analytical term has been to allow for the variable and individual ways that curators claim their expertise.

Anthropologist Sarah Green acknowledges that 'within networks, people can make their own webs, connecting anything with anything else' (2002, p.181). However, Green also argues that there are challenges posed by free-flowing descriptions of network (2002, p.181). This warning connects with the question philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour asks, although differentially applied, 'why then use the word network, since it is open to such misunderstandings?' (1996, p.370). The value that the notion of network has for contemporary art curators based in the UK within their everyday lives is in part encapsulated by Sarah Longhair's statement (even though her institutional position at the British Museum places her primary focus on the museum curator) wherein she usefully communicates that:

> 'The curator sits at the intersection of multiple networks: institutional, disciplinary, scholarly, and professional, all of which can vary in geographical reach from the municipal to the international' (2015, p.4).

The curatorial relationship with their own knowledge networks within the field was shown to be a source of value for curators as they engaged in the articulation and maintenance of their expertise. Therefore, the concept of knowledge networks provides a more productive framework for reflecting on the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators within their everyday lives, than any formal

homogenous professional network could ever afford them. Consequently, this chapter has presented various ways in which curatorial knowledge networks might be performed.

Within the ethnographic descriptions focused upon Encounter Contemporary and founder, director and curator Alexander Caspari, the various forms of knowledge networks that he presented have consequences for his creation of curatorial work and consequently his claims of expertise. The various categories that Alex's knowledge networks were seen to relate to included professional networks, location and spatial considerations, symbolic and aesthetic knowledge, institutional, object and people-focused knowledge (e.g., cultural industries, art market, art world calendar). In visualising Alex's own individualised version of networks led by the needs of his own work and expertise, it has also been possible to further identify his forms of knowledge networks as relating to artists, artwork, friends, family, art galleries, art institutions and organisations, location and space, notions of the art world, art dealers, academics, journalists, arts publications/media, luxury and lifestyle publications/media, cultural industry contacts, a real estate company, affluent individuals, those in the banking sector and investment, patrons, a PR company, catering suppliers, events, a culture/art sector calendar. It is then detail of these knowledge networks that reveals itself within the everyday in ways that provide evidence of the facets of curatorial life which offers specific forms value as they aim to construct and maintain their expertise.

The implications of an analysis of knowledge networks in the context of curatorial expertise has further emphasised the diverse nature of the profession beyond an assessment of 'a range of types' (Israel, 2020, p.178). By emphasising the way knowledge networks are conceived on behalf of the contemporary art curator in the UK, this chapter has ultimately demonstrated that contemporary art curator is a profession which is not reducible to a fixed knowledge, identity, or practice but that is more productively explored by working alongside the profession's diversity as the ethnographic descriptions of Alex's everyday curatorial existence has demonstrated. Often these knowledge networks were formed by the curator in ways that appeared to be a balancing act, between seeking innovation and creating a sense of stability. They were also formed with a desire to create connective opportunities. The expansive and individualised knowledge networks that curators employed for the purpose of claiming their expertise were also shown to be created and shaped through a curator's personal and professional life in ways that are often non-discernible from the other. Furthermore, these knowledge networks were subject to various temporal dimensions. If you were to distil the ethnographic representations detailed within this chapter then it should be in recognition of anthropologist Nancy D. Munn's view that 'people are "in" a sociocultural time of

multiple dimensions' (1992, p.116). The consequence in her view is that: 'these dimensions are lived or apprehended concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world' (1992, p.116). Contemporary art curators create unique strands of value for the purpose of claiming and maintaining their own expertise in ways that can create an illusion of surety regarding curatorial expertise, but that is in fact an inherently responsive and nuanced reaction to their own needs.

Ultimately, knowledge networks are not prescriptive and are variously engaged with on behalf of individual curators. All of these forms of knowledge networks that emerge from everyday curatorial life demonstrate how networking as a concept can retain a centrality within curatorial existence, but in a way that recognises the diverse and individualised forms of knowledge that can form a new understanding of networking in relation to curatorial expertise. Knowledge networking as an analytical concept has the potential to reflect the diversity and evolving nature of curatorial expertise. Any one curator's knowledge networks were shown to be variously conceived and non-prescriptive, sometimes contradictory, requiring flexibility and responsiveness.

However, the question remains regarding how qualitative analysis can reveal what is precipitating the inclinations towards certain forms of knowledge networks. What is ultimately propelling the contemporary art curators' interests? By acknowledging the ethnographic descriptions that have revealed the centrality of knowledge networks in curatorial life, we can envisage another means by which to observe both the complexity and the integrity of the expert. It is therefore useful to acknowledge the view of anthropologist Hannah Knox, sociologist Mike Savage, and anthropologist Penny Harvey in their consideration of the development of the study of networks in anthropology by focusing on 'the art of networking, and to the aesthetics and texture of networks in their multiple guises as they appear as variously structural and performative entities' (2006, p.128). The value of knowledge networks for the curator arguably resides in how they are performed.

Thesis Conclusion: Fielding the Professional

'Professionals have been disturbed to find that they cannot account for processes they have come to see as central to professional competence. It is difficult for them to imagine how to describe and teach what might be meant by making sense of uncertainty, performing artistically, setting problems, and choosing among competing professional paradigms, when these processes seem mysterious in the light of the prevailing model of professional knowledge. We are bound to an epistemology of practice which leaves us at a loss to explain, or even to describe, the competences to which we now give overriding importance' (Schon, 1983, pp.19-20).

In summary, this thesis has sought to provide an ethnographic answer to the question, what are the implications of an anthropological study of UK-based contemporary art curators and their expertise? This thesis has collectively demonstrated the over-arching existence of diversity, precarity, confidence and complexity within a single profession. What has been consistently reaffirmed is the contradictory and complex nature of the profession and its transformative nature. An anthropological study of the expertise of art curators has ramifications for anthropology as a discipline, curatorial discourse, the curatorial profession, and the study of professionals. The contradictions within the profession have become a springboard for the consideration of a multitude of disciplinary, practice-based, and social issues. However, perhaps most importantly, the ethnographic vignettes presented within this thesis have demonstrated how new insights emerge regarding the expertise of contemporary art curators by using an anthropological approach.

Consequently, this conclusion submits a five-part reflection. This consists of a series of curatorial propositions, an assessment of the potentially problematic qualities of the profession, curatorial ethics for curatorial expertise, the relevance of the curatorial profession within discourse relating to professional expertise, and finally, an outline of ways ahead for curators that I will argue is vital to the integrity, longevity, and impact of the profession. All these aspects are emphasised and contextualised through an engagement with the everyday lives of curators and a commitment to an anthropological approach.

i) Curatorial propositions

In anthropologist Dominic Boyer's manifesto, he sets out an invitation to explore how an 'anthropology of experts' may be further developed and in which he proposes several focuses that

may help to guide these efforts (2008, pp.44-45) which I have outlined and discussed within the thesis introduction. By taking up this invitation I have managed to elucidate key curatorial propositions based on entering the daily lives of curators. These include several observations. Firstly, curators within this thesis have variously demonstrated that they think in multiple temporal frames. With various projects, exhibitions, audiences, programming, textual, verbal, and performative approaches, the array of temporal frames that these aspects of curatorial life incur are often embodied simultaneously. This contributes to an acknowledgement of the complexity of curatorial daily life.

Secondly, curators within this research have demonstrated forms of facilitation. The facilitative dimension of their expertise includes engagements with artists, audiences, stakeholders, local and global communities, as they seek connections and the feasibility of ideas, intentions, projects, programmes, artworks, and exhibitions. Thirdly, there is a widespread incorporation of interdisciplinary approaches. Curators within this thesis have demonstrated how expertise is necessarily framed as cross-disciplinary as it should never operate in isolation from collaborative discursive landscapes. Curatorial expertise should be seen to rely on cross-disciplinary engagements.

In addition, I have argued that curatorial expertise is not separable from social and political contexts and engagements. If the curator is to engage with multiple temporal frames, embrace a facilitative role, and engage with cross-disciplinary approaches, it is consequently impossible to separate them from social and political landscapes. This is of particular interest given Arts Council England's controversial statements in their 'Relationship Framework' that prompted their succeeding statement (Arts Council England, 2024) following widespread concern about political expression within artworks and by artists and the consequences for funding and support being removed as a consequence of political content and discourse.[45] If we acknowledge the status of curatorial expertise as being inseparable from social and political landscapes, then Arts Council England were risking the creation of an oxymoron with implications for the curatorial profession in England.

[45] Widespread concern was reflected in the media and includes articles such as: Ware, J. (2024) 'It's censorship': Arts Council England under fire over new policy deterring 'overtly political statements', *The Arts Newspaper*, 15 February. Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/02/15/arts-council-england-under-fire-over-new-policy (Accessed: 9 March 2024).

It is also worth noting a dimension of curatorial expertise which exists in the form of placatory tendencies. There is evidently a knowledge and identity that resides in the various ways that curators seek to placate various artists, audiences, stakeholders, and others in the process of pursuing their own interpretation of an ideal equilibrium. This connects with a further curatorial proposition that the profession necessarily interacts with multiple professions. It is this ability to engage with varied lived experiences punctuated by engagements with other forms of professionals that is reflected in their expertise.

Another curatorial proposition is that their expertise exists in forms of advocacy. As curators they have the potential and capacity to act as a defender of people and ideas. This responsibility and dimension of their professional life is variously engaged with and has differing levels of success, however it remains a dominant aspect of the profession. The final proposition is that curators within this research have demonstrated forms of mapping.[45] Far beyond the notion of pre-determined navigation, curators are often mapping the unknown, trying to find new routes and territory. How they proceed with this endeavour requires consideration. Certainly, if we consider colonial contexts as a necessary consideration for curators, then we require curators to account for how they engage with others. In an effort to decolonise everyday curatorial contexts, we must propose a curatorial expertise that emerges from a desire to attain direction and guidance from those already on the pathways that they seek to navigate. These collaborative and decentralised efforts are arguably a necessity for current curatorial practice. Curators within this research have demonstrated that they are often navigating through the unknown. There are various ways in which journeys into the unknown are undertaken with diverse consequences, audiences, impacts and engagements. However, the curatorial potential to engage the unknown and to forge new pathways is undoubtedly part of their expertise.

Overall, curators are not limited to these propositions, but these aspects are acknowledged as some of the dimensions of curatorial expertise that reside within this research. These are the propositions for curatorial expertise that have been elucidated from an anthropological approach to the study of curators and within these propositions arguably resides their expertise.

[45] Art historian Terry Smith refers to mapping in relation to 'the Visual Arts Exhibitionary Complex (VAEC) as he outlines various 'curatorial genealogies' (2017, pp.171-172). However, the reference to mapping in this thesis is to be considered as a descriptive term for curatorial expertise relating to their everyday construction and claims of expertise in ways that go beyond any delineated categorisation.

ii) The problematic qualities of the profession

However, there are several keyways (amongst other possibilities) where the curatorial profession has the potential to inhabit a problematic position. For instance, at its worst the curatorial profession is a manifestation of nepotism. An exercise in ego, preferential exchanges, and elitism. Another manifestation of the profession with limiting consequences is its potential for stripping away the autonomy of others, e.g. the artist. It is also possible to bring into question whether a curator is required in all the spaces in which they may be present. Is the precense of a curator always necessary? Are there instances when a curator is rendered ineffectual or unnecessary? It is not possible to definitively provide an answer to these types of indeterminable questions. However, it is arguably necessary to ask these questions so that the profession does not become complacent.

In terms of claims of expertise, the potentially problematic qualities of the curatorial profession could arguably reside in a lack of engagement with curatorial contexts and a stand-alone narrative of curatorial success. Furthermore, a problematic quality of the profession could also exist in a lack of engagement with reflective practice. This connects with the final example of problematic manifestations of the curator that I will submit within this conclusion, which is a lack of depth, whether scholarly, practically, or ideologically. For instance, it is necessary to recognise that the curator does have the potential to occupy an uncritical space.

iii) A curatorial ethics for curatorial expertise

As has been acknowledged within this conclusion, there is the potential for a lack of criticality and reflexivity within claims of curatorial expertise. However, a curatorial expertise that is embedded within ethical discourse and practice allows professional expertise to emerge from a space of ethical liminality.[46] Arguably, an ethical curatorial expertise would be formed by a conscious effort to claim expertise based upon ethical provocations. Those such as philosopher Meng-Shi Chen argue that:

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[46] 'Liminality' in the context of this statement should be understood in relation to social scientist Bjørn Thomassen's assertion that 'we require different tools – often unknown ones – to deal with a novel situation. In other words, liminality involves the experience of inbetweenness itself, as well as how exactly that experience is shaped and structured anew as subjects and collectivities move through the in-between, try to overcome it, and leave it behind – with a difference' (2015, p.40).

‘Ethical issues are related to everyman, and there is of course no exception for curators. To investigate the ethics of curating is thus no less crucial to inquire about the essence of curation itself’ (Chen, 2023).

Certainly, in the curatorial propositions that have emerged from curators within this thesis, we can see how ethical questions pervade all of these anthropologically formed elucidations of curatorial expertise. By engaging with curatorial discourse, we can further interrogate ethical dimensions of the profession. Arguably, ethical curating needs to break out of abstraction and move into action in everyday terms. There is certainly enough discourse on curatorial ethics to build upon. For instance, curator Maura Reilly refers to curators who embrace ethics in specific terms by stating: ‘Theirs is not affirmative-action curating, it is smart curating. Theirs is a practice rooted in ethics’ (2018, p.215). However, regardless of the type of ethical focus or analysis of the profession that is being made, it is only within the commitments within the everyday lives of curators that we can see the formulation of ethical questions and impacts. I have outlined the potential for destructive impacts to be made on behalf of the profession, therefore we cannot take for granted that curatorial expertise is guided by ethical approaches. As Chen further points out:

‘Ethics involves the combination of emotional insight and logical insight to help us make the right choices in our everyday lives. It’s an attempt to make reasonable decisions while taking the positions of others into account, which is exactly the situation a curator always confronts’ (2023).

However, it is necessary to ask how the curator specifically engages in the formulation and communication of professional expertise based upon ethical practice and discourse within their daily lives? Ethical reflexivity for the curator arguably involves a consideration of their expertise in relation to artwork and exhibition content, the artist/curator relationship, issues of accessibility (both physical and ideological), political positionality, personal lives and knowledge networks, the financial contexts that they engage with, and workplace dynamics/hierarchies (among other components). These aspects have undoubtedly been brought into relief within the anthropological consideration of curatorial expertise within this thesis. However, there are arguably several additional ethical provocations that have emerged alongside the way that we comprehend curatorial expertise from an anthropological approach. For example, we can discern from within the daily lives of curators the ways that they engage with the formation of an ethical expertise. For example, sociologist Sophia Krzys Acord refers to ‘curatorial meaning-making in action’ (2010, p.448). Whilst there isn’t an

explicit connection made with ethics, it is an interesting way of considering the ethical dimensions of curatorial practice. This is especially true if we are to consider Acord's argument that:

'Additional studies that focus on "how people do what they do," not simply "what people do," could help to unpack the nuances of knowledge work as it occurs in situations of practical action' (2010, p.463). Arguably, this thesis responds to that call.

Therefore, to consider the curatorial profession and their daily lives, we can use an anthropological approach to ascertain the ethical considerations and components that exist within their claims of expertise. Ethical approaches that permeate claims of curatorial expertise may include a consideration of curatorial expertise in relation to the notion of care, which curator and academic in art and education Elke Krasny and art historian Lara Perry outline as:

'Curating with care, understood in the broadest sense possible, asks of curators and theorists to confront themselves with what their work 'cares about' and how they 'care for' what they 'care about'. An ethics of care as praxis and theory of curating therefore thinks, feels, analyses, and works with the complexities and contradictions that economically, emotionally, epistemologically, materially, and technologically present themselves when aiming to align 'caring about' with 'caring for'. Curating with care as an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist praxis and politics not only examines what curators' work cares about, and what their work cares for, but can also contribute to new caring imaginaries and new caring ontologies that help us to learn how to care for care' (2023).

Furthermore, the way that curators might be seen to claim curatorial expertise in their daily lives based upon ethical provocations, might be elucidated from the collaborations inherent in their daily lives. This relates to an observation made by George Vasey in an online talk he delivered titled *'A brief guide to interdependent curating'* for the Freelands Foundation where he talked about curation in relation to the concept of "interdependent curating" which he states is "a riff on the notion of the independent curator" (Freelands Foundation, 2020). He stated:

"In terms of curatorial practice, words like care, community, and locality, have replaced buzz words such as globalism. Things have become much more pragmatic, with a welcome shift in focus to ethics as much as experimentation. And I guess what I am proposing here is that all forms of creative practice are interdependent. My own practice has grown out of necessity, serendipity, and strategy.

Its reliant on the support of many other people. Whilst I am freelance, I am certainly not independent" (2020).

George added that: "The art world that we thought we knew in 2020 no longer exists. The idea of independence feels to me like a mirage" (2020). Perhaps the focus on the ethical propositions within everyday claims of curatorial expertise would form a response to philosopher Jean-Paul Martinon's statement that: 'Because curating now permeates the lives of many people around the world, curating thus needs a new mode of thinking adequate to its vast undertaking' (2020, p.xxii).

For myself as an early-career curator and anthropologist this might appear in the everyday claims of curatorial expertise that arise from my own engagement with interdisciplinary discussions, emerging ethical discussions, the way that I may variously engage with both practice and research as a reciprocal part of professional life (among other aspects of daily life). Ultimately, I would argue that ethical conversations surrounding the contemporary art curator are still often made in relation to the structures which surround the curator e.g. finances, institutions, and a curator's relative independence. These are important ethical considerations. However, we need more engagements with the nuances of everyday curatorial claims of expertise, to elucidate the more detailed ways in which ethical curatorial expertise variously emerges and is claimed. The ethnographic vignettes within this thesis have revealed a lack of conscious and proactive engagement with ethical discourse. That is not say that ethical issues were not being addressed by curators within this thesis. However, ethical consideration are dealt with instinctively rather than through a conscious process of engagement.

The variety of curatorial claims of expertise present within this thesis have demonstrated that there cannot be a universally applicable form of curatorial ethics. It would not be appropriate as it would negate the particularities of engagement, practice, and research. Neither would it recognise what it is to live in the world. This means that any claims of expertise based upon ethical commitments are to be considered within the particularities of the specific and various everyday lives of curators. This is the promise of an anthropological approach to the study of claims of curatorial expertise. It can also offer a productive means of developing a nuanced understanding of the ethical dimensions of curatorial expertise.

iv) What does this study of the curatorial profession reveal about professional expertise?

Overall, this thesis has foregrounded the level of inherent sociality through which curatorial expertise can be framed. An anthropological approach has provided insights into the navigation of curatorial expertise within everyday life. This thesis has therefore revealed the variation, flexibility, responsiveness, and uncertainty that is at the core of curatorial expertise. This arguably has wider applications and potential in terms of how we approach the study of professional expertise in general.

Anthropologist Annelise Riles makes an assertion that 'for the experts I knew, what was at the forefront was the incongruence between disparate forms of expertise' (2010, b, p.799). This certainly speaks to the view that there is no instant solution or perspective that might be able to comprehend and account for the diversity of a profession, the everyday lives of professionals, or their expertise in its contradictory and nuanced nature. Any acknowledgement and enquiry into professional life needs to be based upon sophisticated resources and a substantial amount of time, to give due consideration or anywhere near substantial enough reflections on expertise. Even then, the very least we can do is to make in-depth considerations of what we are presented with in the daily lives of professionals that doesn't default to superficiality within the conclusions drawn from these interactions. Rather we must arguably acknowledge the convolutions and intricacies of professional life and its jarring effects. This is arguably a challenge well-suited to the anthropological endeavour. This is demonstrated in a statement by anthropologist Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov in the way that he asserts and puts forward a specific approach for ethnography, when he states:

'it is more interesting to approach complexity and open-endedness not as results but *tools* of highlighting what is unknown. It is in this quality that ethnographic conceptualism is useful in its performative stance' (2013, p.16).

Ultimately, we need expertise (Friedson, 2001, p.197) but there are efforts that can be made to explore expertise and professions through the means of anthropology, whilst being mindful of what Mosse recognises as the production of 'ethical' and 'epistemological' complexities (2006, p.937) and not as a fix-all answer aimed at the protection of expertise or professions either. Curators are arguably well placed to reflect and perhaps represent the complexities of identity and knowledge and practice, more widely.

In very direct and candid terms, Frances Morris, director of Tate Modern, stated in a direct response to the social and political landscapes relevant to the time of the interview in 2018, that:[47] “There does have to be expertise, but, when you think of how politics is currently perceived by the general public, there is also the danger that if the profession is empty and not trustworthy, then the public will lose its trust. So, it is an interesting moment. How do you demonstrate that your expertise is anything more than your PhD or the fact that you did a curating course at Goldsmiths?” Frances highlights the way that contemporary art curators in the UK are undoubtedly implicated within the wider issue of ‘a crisis of confidence in the professions’ (Schon, 1983, p.4) with the view that this has

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[47] These social and political landscapes relate to what curator Russell Storer identifies with regards to ‘curators’ as: ‘new technologies, shifting demographics, globalizing artistic networks, the addressing of racial and gender biases in art history and museums, and the “educational turn” in the making, presentation, and communication of art toward research and knowledge production’ (2020, p.xviii) among other aspects. More specifically, within the UK, trust in experts and by-proxy people in positions of trust and power, could be held accountable for and impacted by the aspects academic in politics Daniel Devine outlines for example, in terms of how ‘prejudicial behavioral change’ is indicative of ‘discrete political events’ (2020, p.374). Devine who refers to how ‘the “Brexit” referendum led to a historically significant increase in racial and religious hate crimes’ (2020, p.382). Lorenzo Pasculli (academic in crime science) also states that ‘unethical lobbying in the context of Brexit is an excellent example of the anomic condition that affects the British society’, and furthermore, the ramifications are that it has the potential to encourage, in Pasculli’s words, ‘various collusive arrangements that frustrate the democratic processes of political representation and aggravate the perceptions of the disintegration of social trust and dysregulation of social leadership typical of the anomic state, thus eroding the legitimacy of political institutions’ (2019, p.709), among other things! Even regardless of ‘Brexit’, instances including ‘the prorogation of the Parliament’ in relation to which ‘the Supreme Court’, as Constantina P. Tridimas (academic in law) and George Tridimas (academic in political economy) describe, ‘delivered a verdict on the limits of executive discretion and the scope of parliamentary power in the UK as it has been established by statute, practice and convention’ by which they supported ‘the supremacy of Parliament’ and subsequently highlighted leadership failures in government (2020, p.221) within the domestic political sphere. More widely, there is also the global impact of the banking crisis in 2008, which Roger Bennett and Rita Kottasz (academics in business and marketing) refer to in relation to the ideological climate of the United Kingdom by stating that ‘a substantial deterioration in the favourability of public attitudes towards the banking industry seems to have occurred following the crisis’ (2012, p.128), which is also followed by the acknowledgement that ‘situations could elicit certain common public perceptions of a group even when group members had different histories and characteristics’ (2012,p.129). In addition, the transformations of technology include ‘worries about deepfakes and the erosion of knowledge’ (Rini, 2020, p.1). Either way these types of debates, events and contexts are relevant to the everyday of curatorial professionals.

only been further compounded by recent social and political contexts.[48] In such a case, how might the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators be understood?

This thesis is arguably meeting a moment of urgency in the consideration of professionals, as the disparate nature of the expertise of the contemporary art curator directly relates to an awareness of threatened notions of expertise. The instinct to foreground those whose expertise is based upon their ability to simply shout the loudest, means that we are at risk of giving too much credence to guesswork, the power of a forceful personality, or belief in a wider system that generates reward for motivating people to express themselves in a way that rejects nuance, to express themselves as experts based upon garnering support for their biased and prejudiced perspectives which are dressed up as certainty. This is a credible risk to expertise and the knowledge, identity and practice of professionals, and society generally.

v) Ways ahead for the curatorial profession

By providing an ethnographic answer to the question of what curatorial expertise is, this thesis has demonstrated a need to reconcile with the existence of a diverse and multifaceted expertise based upon the everyday contexts in which curators shape that expertise. The conditions within which this reconciliation with curatorial expertise should be enacted, do not however necessarily lend themselves to this kind of nuanced understanding. The potential for curatorial expertise to be framed within polarising narratives is aptly demonstrated by Niemojewski for example, who describes some of the conflicting ways contemporary art curators are conceived, stating:

'Some could argue that such multitasking implies that the curator uses a variety of disparate practical skills, dabbles in many areas but is not necessarily a specialist or master of any of them, and often lacks the academic grounding to sustain his or her intellectual claims that originate in a variety of fields. Others may see the curator as a polymath, a master of integration and fusion of different disciplines into a functioning and innovative whole that is more than a sum of its parts' (2016, p.11).

[48] Various types of happenings, and socio-political developments are mentioned by human geographer Merje Kuus in the context of 'undercutting the professional expertise' (2021, pp.1339-1340), before she states that 'to speak of a professional culture does not imply one culture; it implies a field of struggle over the terms of engagement on a social field' (2021, p.1351).

The challenge of pursuing an ethnographic answer to curatorial expertise is further demonstrated within this thesis in terms of the way that it provokes us into a questioning of how we account for and reconcile with the 'multifaceted' nature and subjectivity of the profession (Milliard, 2016, p.8). Boyer highlights that as anthropologists, we can give a voice to the intricacies of professions, most powerfully perhaps to 'humanise' and create accessible narratives 'of expertise' (2008, p.45), that it could be argued, are otherwise compromised within the increasingly volatile conditions that seek to undermine the notion of expertise and the complexity of professionals. Contemporary art curators are directly affected in the form of social and political shifts, such as that which is noted by curator and academic Simon Sheikh, who acknowledges, 'a reaction to globalism in the form of rejection, xenophobia, and anti-internationalism in the form of the march and success of the populist Right', creating what Sheikh calls 'a disdain for the very liberal and humanist values of contemporary art' (2019, p.28). Yet Sheikh argues that: 'Curating after the global, then, is to think both within the uncertainty of the interregnum, and to plot ways out of it, into the new' (2019, p.29).

Claims of curatorial expertise as they emerged from the everyday lives of UK-based contemporary art curators in the field were variable and extensive. These claims did not adhere to dominant disciplinary or professional narratives. Neither were these claims able to be categorised. The specific nature of curatorial expertise therefore arguably can be most usefully viewed within everyday contexts. The lives of curators need to be increasingly breached for the purpose of comprehending the slower, elongated daily reality of the curator. Esche's call for attention to be given to curators by those within the realm of 'field research' (2015, p.244) can be set within a context where there remains a significant lack of ethnographies of curatorial life. This thesis has therefore sought to respond to a need for a consideration of expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators within this frame. Accounting for the expertise of UK-based contemporary art curators within their everyday lives can emerges as a new burgeoning strand of both curatorial discourse and the anthropology of professionals[49] with ramifications for the profession itself and a wider acknowledgement of the need for differing analytical engagements with professionals.[50] The

[49] Anthropological studies of professions include works such as Karen Ho and her focus on investment bankers (2009, a), Boyer and journalists (2013), Yarrow and architects (2019), and edited texts such as '*Adventures in Aidland. The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*' (Mosse, 2011) and '*Life Among Urban Planners. Practice, Professionalism, and Expertise in the Making of the City*' (Mack and Herzfeld, 2020), among others.

[50] James Holston acknowledges the offering of 'anthropology' as existing in the ability to foreground 'assumptions and contradictions', to create a questioning 'of daily life' in ways most often left unconsidered

everyday lives of UK-based contemporary art curators should therefore have their expertise considered with the acknowledgement that… Not the devil, but rather the expert/professional/contemporary art curator, really is in the detail.

Summary

This thesis has responded to what was notably absent from engagements with UK-based contemporary art curators and considerations of their expertise. It was established that the approach of this thesis was to engage with UK-based contemporary art curators in a way that is different to the analytical approaches that have often dominated narratives surrounding the profession. The distinctive contribution of this thesis has been to foreground the expertise of art curators within their everyday lives as curators themselves present it and has therefore demonstrated the rich potential that resides within an anthropological study.

Overall, it has been made evident within this thesis that curators are the ideal litmus test for how we, as a society, approach the notion of professional expertise. Curatorial expertise is difficult to pin down, variable, flexible and open to changing circumstances. UK-based contemporary art curators have demonstrated the diverse nature of their skills, knowledge and practice as they made decisions about what is and is not art, and what is or is not a curator of contemporary art, what to include or exclude from the art space, what to value or not value in their everyday lives. It is the performance that surrounds art, exhibitions and institutions which constitutes the expertise of art curators. It is only by utilising an anthropological approach and foregrounding their everyday lives in this way, that allows for this conclusion to be made. Curatorial expertise was revealed in ways that demonstrate the need for continued questioning, consistent reflexivity, and that there can be unity in diversity. After all, we need to unite behind an understanding of the flexible and disparate nature of professional expertise. Not the devil but rather the curator really is in the detail. [51]

(2020, p.235). Holston also highlights how 'anthropological' endeavours acknowledge that 'everyday life is also fragile' and the 'possibilities' of such an 'anthropological' approach is in its ability to give a platform to these complexities (2020, pp.235-236).

[51] Weng-Choy proposes in relation to 'the curation of contemporary art' (2020, p.306,) a consideration of 'slow "unfoldings"' (2020, p.307) with similarities drawn that include a reference to 'complex *decentralized* nervous systems' (2020, p.309). This approach is also reflected in Mack's ethnographic anthropological study of 'urban planners' in which she notes that: 'Living life *among* planners rather than reading their practices solely through

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official plans, documents, and histories – reveals instead the complicated, emotional, cultural, social, and always human dimensions of their work' (2020, p.13).

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