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—ART REVIEW

***Curationism* sheds light upon a strange,
pervasive, and utterly contemporary
cultural phenomenon that goes far beyond
the gallery and into our everyday lives.**

‘Curate’ has become a buzzword, applied to
everything from music festivals to artisanal
cheese. Everyone, it seems, is now a curator.
But what is a curator exactly? And what does
the explosive popularity of curating say about
our own culture’s relationship with taste,
labour, and the avant-garde?

David Balzer explores the cult of curation,
where it began, how it came to dominate
museums and galleries, and how it has
permeated popular culture at the turn of
the millennium.



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teacher.

CURATIONISM HOW CURATING TOOK OVER THE ART WORLD AND EVERY- THING ELSE DAVID BALZER

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ISBN: 978-0-7453-3597-3



ART

cover design: David Gee



Pluto Press

www.plutobooks.com

Part 1 Value

We can't know who organized the first art exhibition. It is even more difficult to propose a teleology of curating, as it has become popularly known: any arrangement or editing of things, usually cultural. Arranging and editing, like sex and appetite, are common yet variously expressed. They are part of who we are and always have been. Mid-twentieth-century generalists spoke of this frequently. The great British art writer Kenneth Clark called collecting 'a biological function, not unrelated to our physical appetites' (think natural *selection*).

Sociologists, anthropologists and ethnologists contemporaneous with Clark, who looked for structural patterns across cultures, argued something similar. In his 1962 study *La Pensée sauvage*, French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss advanced a complex view of culture creation stressing the fine-art term *bricolage*, a concept not unlike what we currently understand as curating. (A present-day florist in Austin, Texas, is named Bricolage Curated Florals.) Patrick Wilcken, in *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Poet in the Laboratory*, elucidates Lévi-Strauss's theory of bricolage: 'Rummaging around their environment, [pre-literate societies] observed, experimented, categorised and theorised, using a kind of free-form science. They combined and recombined natural materials into cultural artefacts – myths, rituals, social systems – like artists improvising with the odds and ends lying around their studio.' The Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur* is, in Wilcken's estimation, 'a tinkerer, an improviser working with what was to hand, cobbling together solutions to both practical and aesthetic problems. *La pensée sauvage* – free-flowing thought – was a kind of cognitive *bricolage* that strived for both intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction.' The *bricoleur* is anyone attempting to plan, solve or create.

In his essay 'The Bias of the World,' art writer David Levi Strauss (no relation to Claude), formerly professor at one of the world's pre-eminent curatorial-studies programs at Baruch College in Hudson, New York, also acknowledges the curator as *bricoleur*. But he begins his examination of the curator by looking at the titular origin of the word, a revealing exercise illuminating the contemporary curator's conflicted, paradoxical role. The use of *curator* can be traced back to the Roman Empire, in which *curatores* were bureaucrats made responsible for various departments pertaining to public works. (*Curatores viarum*, for instance, were responsible for overseeing roads.) The root of the word is the Latin *cura*, meaning *care*; *curator* means, essentially, caretaker. The title of curator was used not just for bureaucrats, but for types of guardians or tutors under Roman law, who were either appointed to minors or to those with whom they were entering into contracts, in order to secure both parties from subsequent litigation due to the minor's inexperience. Curators could also be named as caretakers-cum-advisors for those classified as *prodigus*, or prodigal (i.e., proven to be squandering their estate or inheritance), and as lunatics. One should also not neglect the Roman procurator, most often a member of the equestrian class, and appointed to supervise outlying provinces. Pontius Pilate, the man who sentenced Christ to die on the cross, is referred to in the Bible as a procurator, although in other literature he is given the title of prefect.

By the Middle Ages, the Christian Church had appropriated the term. Writer Erin Kissane notes that *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates the term via William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*: 'curatoures' are parish priests, 'called to knowe [know] and to hele [heal] their 'parisshiens [parishioners].' David Levi Strauss rightly deduces that the early roles of curators thus constitute this Roman-medieval double duty, a 'curious mixture of bureaucrat and priest,' a

split between 'law' and 'faith' – not unlike the contemporary curator within major art institutions, who, we assume, wants to make the public believe in art and artists, and also to function successfully within the political machinery of the museum or gallery, liaising with directors, donors and trustees, and sometimes securing works for loan or purchase.

There are pejorative suggestions to add to Levi Strauss's interpretation. The Roman curator, and especially procurator, was an agent – some might argue a tool – of the state. A person of rank, the curator was nonetheless at the mercy of those above him. Pontius Pilate is the obvious example of the toadying Roman procurator, sent to a far-flung colony (in his case, Judea) to enforce the power of his superiors. In the Gospels, Pilate is reluctant to condemn Christ. Depending on which source you consult, Pilate's decision to crucify Christ was due either to pressure from the Jewish Sanhedrin, who claimed Christ was controverting Jewish law, or, as the Sanhedrin themselves argued to strengthen their case, to Christ's flouting of Roman tax laws. In this latter sense, the Roman procurator Pilate is little more than a glorified tax collector. One could gather that the procurator is superfluous, only a nominal 'caretaker.' In *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Roman historian Suetonius refers to procurators a few times, always with the implication that their titles are politic stepping stones. Of the Emperor Vespasian's greed, Suetonius writes, 'he advanced all the most rapacious amongst the procurators to higher offices, with the view of squeezing them after they had acquired great wealth. He was commonly said "to have used them as sponges," because it was his practice, as we may say, to wet them when dry, and squeeze them when wet.'

The medieval curate is a position that endures in the Church in varied form to this day. The curate's title is not as tokenist or honorific as the Roman curator's or procurator's could be; the curate has important duties within the hierarchy of the clergy –

he is what we commonly know as the parish priest. Said figure is responsible for the 'cure of souls,' a concept rooted in Pope Gregory I's sixth-century treatise *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, commonly translated in English as *Pastoral Care*, which outlines the role of the clergy and defines 'cure of souls' as the exercising of the priest's duty within his assigned district. Contemporary curators, whose roles and responsibilities can often be murky or splintered, may find it amusing that the curate or parish priest was also expected to do a host of tasks, from delivering sermons to tending to the sick. The etymology of the term, and the meaning of the Latin *cura*, can be brought to bear here. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *cura* had three main senses, 'care, concern, and responsibility'; 'cure of souls' is deceptive, then, because the curate or parish priest does not actually cure souls, per se, but care for them. The *Oxford* notes that it was only in late Middle English that *cure* develops its medical sense of healing. To care is not necessarily to cure, the former suggesting tending, the latter a more powerful ability to transform.

The stereotype of the curate or parish priest has long been one of a humble, hard-working, impecunious and at times obsequious man. The saying 'curate's egg' comes from an 1895 cartoon by George du Maurier entitled 'True Humility' in the satirical British magazine *Punch*. A curate, young, thin and hunched, sits in a restaurant with a bishop, his superior, who tells him he has been served a bad egg. The curate responds, 'Oh, no, my Lord, I assure you that parts of it are excellent!' Du Maurier's anxious-to-please curate may tickle disgruntled contemporary curators who feel pressure to answer to directors, trustees and artists, and to assure them that risky or contentious collections and exhibitions are indeed excellent. The curator is someone who insists on value, and who makes it, whether or not it actually exists.

And so it is that the two early understandings of *curator* that David Levi Strauss identifies – the Roman and the

medieval-clerical – suggest dependence and responsiveness rather than direct action and agency. This makes a lot of sense when we begin to think about the curator within the context of the museum or collection, an identity that starts to take shape around the sixteenth century. The curator cares for objects, and the objects, not the curator, are the focus. The history of the curator can, in fact, be seen as one of successive subservience: to institutions, objects, artists, audiences, markets. The phenomenon of the autonomous curator, which arguably began its brief tenure in the 1960s in tandem with the conceptual art movement, is thus a fleeting, strange, paradoxical thing. Even Obrist – his fame, industriousness and caricatured public persona a professionalized, effortful embellishment of that 1960s curator – depends on others to do what he does. In striving to give himself value and power, the curator doth, perhaps, protest too much. No curator is an island.

That said, the curator as we know her emerges with a twist of autonomy, through the vital concept of connoisseurship: a display of taste or expertise that lends stylized independence to the act of caring for and assembling. Early in its existence, 'curator' was arguably a grab-bag title, but nonetheless, according to writer Anthony Gardner, gained, after the Renaissance, a 'scholastic and artistic dimension.' Robert Hooke, a rival of Sir Isaac Newton's in Restoration England and Curator of Experiments for London's Royal Society, provides a fascinating example. Hooke, who among other things pioneered microscopic imaging, was, as Royal Society curator, responsible for putting on weekly demonstrations of material from the Society's Repository: a trove of specimens that, according to Sean Riley Silver, 'was driven by a grand institutional goal, an attempt to realize the ideal academic society imagined by Francis Bacon.' Ideally, the Repository was to have 'one of everything' (this Platonic notion of the comprehensive collection plagued early museums, which were

notoriously overstuffed, often with copies or fakes of unattainable objects). Hooke's demonstrations, which put him in the role of intermediary between the private, thing-filled Repository and the public audience of the Society, were theatrical 'experiments' showing and explaining its many wonders. Hooke the curator was both dependent and independent. His brilliant mind, as Curator of Experiments, was on display, but limited to what the contents of the Repository could evince. His experiments were in service of the Society, meant to heighten its value and that of the Repository's objects. Silver notes that some accounts suggest the excessive time Hooke spent in the Repository ruined his health, an example of the early-Enlightenment scholar whose entire being was given over to objects and their intellectual significance.

The Royal Society's Repository will sound familiar to students of art history, who will recognize it as an example of the Cabinet of Curiosities or the German *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer*. These are the main Western precursors to museums, their creator-custodians precursors to contemporary curators, eclectic mixes of amateur and professional, committed both to connoisseurship and to care of objects. (*Curious* and *curator* both have that same Latin root, *cura*; *care* in Latin connotes both custodianship and taking an interest in something.) Cabinets were rooms, typically belonging to royalty, aristocrats and wealthy merchants, which, like the Royal Society's Repository, contained sundry objects of importance, from religious to geological. In many respects the cabinets were endemic of their time, which saw a fervent interest in colonial exploration as well as humanist-scientific research, and thus the desire to house and catalogue the objects of such endeavours. Some curators of the cabinets were also their owners, while some were hired by their owners. The cabinet of Irish physician and Royal Society secretary Hans Sloane, which contained a vast array of antiquities and natural-history

objects, was bequeathed to the state and became the foundation for the British Museum. Many cabinet curators had a busy, idiosyncratic flamboyance in which contemporary curators like Obrist find their precedent. Athanasius Kircher, for example, a German Jesuit priest and intellectual eccentric of the seventeenth century, was a proponent of the magic lantern, an early form of cinema, and advised famous sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini on the construction of the Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome, perhaps the first example of an artist-curator collaboration.

The Cabinet of Curiosities might look like an early period of freedom for the curator, although there was a marked subservience to objects and the person who owned them, reflected in the exclusive nature of the cabinets, which were not commonly open to the public. Nevertheless, the curator was positioned importantly within the cabinet, which for many owners was microcosmic, a mini-Eden over which they held exclusive domain, with their curator as a kind of Adam. The multidisciplinary quality of Renaissance and early-Enlightenment scholarship is also appealing to the contemporary curatorial mind, with the Cabinet of Curiosities becoming a renewed fixation in the mixed-media, grab-bag contemporary art world. (To say nothing of the internet, digital *Wunderkammer* extraordinaire.) A 2008 group exhibition at the MoMA in New York was called *Wunderkammer* and included such artists as Louise Bourgeois and Odilon Redon; *Cabinet*, an art magazine that has been around since 2000, seems directly inspired by the *Wunderkammer*, its mission statement to 'encourage a new culture of curiosity.'

The Cabinet of Curiosity might also be allied with the concept of the readymade, still so popular in current artistic practices, and forged in the early twentieth century by Marcel Duchamp with his exhibition of mundane industrial objects, including shovels and, famously, an upturned urinal. (Duchamp

would also *Wunderkammer* himself with a series of *boîtes-en-valise*, portable suitcaselike museums containing his own work.) Yet the presentation of objects as a creative and formal act, one conscious of onlookers, would not define the emergent museum of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which like the Cabinets of Curiosity, was cluttered and not terribly accessible. Instead, it would be up to those like Duchamp – preceding and successive cohorts of avant-garde artists, from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries – to modernize concepts of both exhibition and curation.

By most accounts, the curator of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century museum was not much of a free agent. The late Edward F. Fry, associate curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s has described the nascent museum curator as a tool of the state, as many museum collections, notably that of the Louvre in Paris, developed because of political turmoil and imperialism. Like the Cabinet of Curiosities, the Louvre, opened in 1793, was inescapably symbolic, a literal piece of the body politic. Early in its existence, after the French Revolution, it became the flashpoint for the didactic aims of the emerging Republic and later, with Napoleon, morphed into a propagandistic ‘universal museum’ housing spoils of war. Its emperor-appointed curator, the ex-pornographer Dominique Vivant Denon, presided, in the words of scholar and gallerist Karster Schubert, ‘over the greatest museum collection that ever was (however thieved). Denon was unquestionably charismatic, yet his overarching task was to catalogue and care for this booty.

Shortly after Waterloo, the British adopted a similar mode with the British Museum. Exhibition halls were chronologically ordered but unlabelled and cluttered. In Schubert’s words ‘the curator simply envisaged visitors in his own image.’ This image was not dynamic, but pedantic, conservative and

bureaucratic; the curator was akin to a librarian or academic. ‘The museums presented their political masters as custodians of world culture,’ writes Schubert. ‘In effect, the museum became the handmaiden of imperialism.’

At the same time, around the mid-nineteenth century, the salon reached its height. *Salons* and their ilk, including universal expositions and the annual exhibition of London’s Royal Academy, are early examples of the selection-based exhibitions that are now standard in the art world. Popularly attended, presided over by a jury and thoroughly academic – in deliberate reaction to the commercial art market, which was also developing healthily at the time – the annual or biannual Paris Salon originally exhibited only members of the state-sanctioned Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, but, after the revolution, opened up to non-members. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Paris Salon moved from the Louvre to the Palais de l’Industrie on the Champs-Élysées, a trade-showlike venue presaging the locales of today’s art fairs. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Salon no longer turned up its nose at commercialism. Its catalogue, for instance, published contact information for artists so that buyers could get in touch.

The artist rebellion against the Salon is legendary and has been duly romanticized by art history. The story goes that the Salon was a stifling force against which the most innovative artists of the day fought, but this is misleading. The Salon juries were inconsistent, accepting some artists some years and rejecting them in others. Wholesale rejection of artists now known to us as important was rare, and market autonomy was as vital to the rebelling artists as aesthetic autonomy. In 1855, for instance, Gustave Courbet set up an out-of-pocket Pavilion of Realism near the Salon because, even though the jury had selected ten of his paintings, his *The Artist’s Studio* was deemed too large. (In a 2014 *Mousse* magazine supplement about artist-curators, curator and writer Elena Filipovic

described this move as 'an entrepreneurial one-man show.' Eighteen sixty-three was pivotal, the year of the first Salon des Refusés, a.k.a. Exposition des Ouvrages non Admis. This was an exhibition at the opposite end of the juried show in the Palais de l'Industrie, one in which artists who had been rejected by that year's capricious jurists, who had only admitted 30 percent of applicants, were given the chance to show. Napoleon III was the instigator, perhaps the curator: in a provision befitting a ruler in a fairy tale, he offered artists a chance to exhibit so the public could judge their worth. Many refused the Refusés – to be shown there was, after all, the art-career equivalent of being pilloried or stocked – but proto-modernists like James McNeill Whistler and Édouard Manet did not. Famously, Manet's groundbreaking painting *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* was one of the pieces in the Salon des Refusés.

After the Salon des Refusés, artist-initiated exhibitions began to proliferate. There is no nominal curator here – artists themselves curate, a brave move for the time, complementing a newly personal, direct, collaborative and sometimes raw approach to making work, and in opposition to the academy-studio- and patron-bound practices that had become standard. Paris exhibitions held by the Impressionists in the 1870s and 1880s, such as by the collective Société Anonyme, ran concurrently with the Salon; the first, in 1874, was held at the studio of the photographer Nadar. The exhibitions might be seen as the forerunners of what we now call artist-run culture, but they were not divorced from the market. The emergent dealer played a role. Crucially, the Société Anonyme, following the Royal Academy (and vociferous individuals like Courbet) rejected the Salon practice of 'skying' works: hanging paintings in a busy constellation on walls, with works deemed less important receiving obscure placement. Instead, the works were organized in two clean rows, standing out better and thereby easier both to appreciate and to sell. The exhibitions of the

Société Anonyme would continue to be held in intimate houses or studios in the manner of current-day auction previews, and would set the stage for other artist groups who forged alternative markets and patron systems for themselves, such as turn-of-the-century artist group the Nabis, also Paris-based, who circulated among a group of wealthy Jewish intellectuals who exhibited them in their drawing rooms and offices.

The tactics of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century artists in exhibiting work to emphasize value, both ideological and commercial, cannot be divorced from the concept of the avant-garde. The term, coming from the military meaning of *vanguard* (the preliminary segment of an advancing army), was likely first used in conjunction with art in 1910, by the right-wing London newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*. As art historian Paul Wood notes, 1910 was also the year artist-critic Roger Fry, another progenitor of the contemporary curator, held his controversial post-Impressionist show in London featuring Gauguin, Seurat and others. These and other exhibitions were called 'avant-garde,' but not, Wood writes, in a good way, especially not in turn-of-the-century England, when French politics and art still 'connoted insurrection and instability.'

However, it is newness that truly characterizes any avant-garde expression, infatuating both left and right in the modern era, from industrialists to artists. Imagist poet Ezra Pound's famous slogan was 'Make it new,' and a popular understanding of *avant-garde* as difficult or experimental might mistakenly elide this crucial aspect of the term. (One can certainly think of difficult or experimental works that are not terribly shocking, or necessarily new.) And so new, while by nature challenging, can also connote improvement, refinement and innovation. In this way, exhibitions initiated by artists, including overhauls in exhibition design begun by the Impressionists, sought to improve, refine and innovate public and collector understanding of what art was and could be as concept and commodity.

The desire was above all to privilege art for art's sake, indeed often to redefine it. Heckling or confounding the establishment was secondary, for some a distant aim. And so it was that the avant-garde's commitment to newness was about enhancing an artwork's worth on all levels, including commercial, and most of all about granting formal and conceptual value. This is very close to what we now understand as an essential curatorial task. As anyone who has gone to a contemporary museum or gallery will attest, if an object is on a plinth, hanging from a white wall or placed in a Plexiglas vitrine, we are much more likely to see it in new ways and to contemplate it as art.

Unsurprisingly then, many avant-garde artist shows of the early twentieth century were openly opposed to museums as they had come to be known in the nineteenth century: dusty, fusty, musty jumbles of obscure, status-quo objects that were priceless yet unlabelled, kept away from audiences and from new, modern understandings of art's progress and worth. The swaggering, bumptious Italian futurists, who embodied a particularly contrarian aspect of the avant-garde, loathed museums. In their manifesto of 1909, F. T. Marinetti compares museums to cemeteries. (The futurists' iconoclasm soon became allied with the Fascist sensibilities of Benito Mussolini, a political avant-gardist par excellence.) While seemingly jejune, the futurists' denigration of museums alongside their championing of new, potentially violent technology like the automobile, which Marinetti describes as 'more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace [the popularly known *Winged Victory* in the Louvre],' was a salient provocation to art institutions of the day. If museums wanted to be relevant, they had to become like the automobile. They had to become exciting. They had, somehow, to become avant-garde. It was the young practices of industrial and interior design – avant-garde disciplines obsessed with newness, and also inherent to curation – that would help museums do exactly this.

It is a lovely irony for those interested in the development of modern institutional curation that, twenty-five years after the Futurist Manifesto, in 1936, MoMA's inaugural director and curator, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., would put a plaster cast of *Winged Victory* next to futurist sculptor Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. The gesture, by the pioneer of institutional curating, resonates multiply. Firstly, it acts as a wry comment on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century curatorial practice of having tacky plaster replicas fill holes in collections, which often privileged Greco-Roman statuary. (This can still be seen in kitschy abundance at London's Victoria and Albert Museum.) More than this, the action epitomized Barr's triumphant assimilation of the avant-garde, something many avant-garde artists thought impossible. In a comment now considered apocryphal, but that is nonetheless relevant, Gertrude Stein reacted to the opening of the Museum of Modern Art by quipping, 'you can be a museum, or you can be modern, but you can't be both.' Barr proved this wrong, building the MoMA in lockstep with avant-garde ideas.

Socially and in photographs, Barr seemed an improbable spokesperson for the avant-garde. The son of a Presbyterian minister and eventual scholar at both Princeton and Harvard, he became well-connected to art historians and philanthropists while still quite young. In 1929, at age twenty-seven, Barr was appointed director of the new MoMA by Paul J. Sachs, related to the Goldman Sachs banking dynasty, who approved him along with a committee that included MoMA founder Abby Rockefeller, wife of John D., and A. Conger Goodyear. Barr became recognized for his shrewd ability to organize and connect. He was extremely fond of the pioneering German art school the Bauhaus, which he visited shortly before his MoMA appointment, and was, accordingly, friends with architects, from the Bauhaus's Walter Gropius to American Philip

Johnson, co-founder of the popular mid-century International Style that was inspired by the philosophy of the Bauhaus, and a man soon to be intimately involved with MoMA's programming. Barr's flow chart connecting all of the modernist avant-garde's various isms with sobriety and clean fluidity is famous, suggesting his mind behaved like a museum. An iconic photograph of Barr from 1967 shows him in front of Alexander Calder's 1936 sculpture *Gibraltar*. By then greying and balding, Barr stands in a long coat next to the sculpture, which is a humble, abstract interpretation of the eponymous rock, as if next to a mirror. Poignant and cute, the photograph suggests Barr's fierce determination, his pride for his accomplishments eclipsed by his earnest admiration for the art for which he so tirelessly advocated.

As Mary Anne Staniszewski suggests so brilliantly in her seminal study of MoMA, *The Power of Display*, Barr not only minted contemporary exhibition design, including the notion of the white cube, but also the idea of the contemporary curator who is crucially informed by everything artists do. In borrowing heavily from Europe, collaborating with – and indeed pinching ideas from – artists, favouring group shows and mingling works of art from different time periods and cultures to illustrate influence and theme, Barr proved the museum could be as thrilling as the futurists' fetishized automobile. He also proved that the museum could be both a machine and a temple to machines, influencing their display, even their manufacture. In 1951, in fact, MoMA, under the aegis of Johnson, opened *Eight Automobiles*, an exhibition of cars.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., was galvanized by artists but did not fancy himself one, unlike some of the curators who would come after him. Similar to heads of Old Hollywood production studios, Barr imported ideas and people from Europe and Russia: the clean, white, minimalist display styles of turn-of-

the-century Berlin museum director-curator Wilhelm von Bode, and those of burgeoning European artist houses; the geometric latticework exhibition design of Russian constructivist El Lissitzky; Bauhaus methodology, including lecture programs, labels and explanations for works (architect Mies van der Rohe, one-time Bauhaus director, was a key collaborator with Barr). Like those Hollywood producers, Barr always aggregated and assimilated European ideas, never leaving them quite as they were, but creating a very American concoction.

The ability to impart value was of utmost importance. MoMA's mission was to articulate the modern across disciplines, regions, even time. Barr's favouring of minimalism in exhibition – his signature was exhibiting paintings symmetrically, in one neat, eye-level horizontal line, against walls covered in light beige monk's cloth – lent everything a formalist air. Staniszewski writes convincingly of the concurrent development of retail displays, and of the mutual influence American retailers and MoMA had on each other. The department store of the nineteenth century was, Staniszewski writes, as jumbled and as busy as the museum of the same era. Barr's Useful Objects shows, for instance, beginning in the late 1930s, displayed reasonably priced consumer goods as exemplars of sophisticated, accessible industrial design. Placed in the context of Barr's and his colleagues' streamlined, sleek spaces, anything looked valuable, meaningful and modern. In this sense, Duchamp may have invented the readymade, but it was Barr who most expertly appropriated it and understood its allure.

Barr was to remain the template for the institutional curator-director until the 1960s, an era that, as we will shortly see, marked the prolific embrace of the avant-garde and, in tandem, of the independent curator, the subject of increasing romantic fixation. In 1959, MoMA's *New American Painting* show – featuring abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko – went on an overseas tour, an

ultimate assertion of Barr's imperialist wresting of the modernist project from Europe. It is now no secret that abstract expressionism was covertly promoted by the Central Intelligence Agency as a Cold War cultural counterattack. (By the 1950s, art in Russia had devolved into state-sanctioned Socialist realism, a far cry from the modernist experimentation of the 1910s, making American abstract expressionism look like a metonym for freedom and opportunity.) It is worth mentioning as well that, in the press release for the touring show, Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson, MoMA's President of International Council, noted, 'The show was organized in response to repeated requests from institutions in Europe.' The exhibition, influenced in every sense by artists' innovations, was now a commodity, the curator-director a proven importer-exporter, following the rules of supply and demand.

Before the proliferation of curators, there was the proliferation of artists. This truly began in the 1960s and 1970s, when the avant-garde underwent a dizzying acceleration, largely due to the post-war economy in the West and the associated maturation of the baby boomers, who embraced bohemianism and experimentation en masse in unprecedented ways. Post-painterly abstraction, colour field painting, op art, pop art, action art, performance art, earth art, video art: a Seussian litany of art movements arose, and, if it existed, a Barrian flow chart depicting them would look pretty hairy. By 1975, such movements were ridiculed by Tom Wolfe in *The Painted Word*, which acknowledged that, yes, the early twentieth century had its own string of funny-sounding isms ('Fauvism, Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism, Orphism, Suprematism, Vorticism'), but they all 'shared the same premise,' that is, formalism or art-for-art's-sake. In contrast, the movements of the 1960s and 1970s saw a wilful fracturing, generally favouring what is now known as conceptualism. Wolfe describes, with flamboyant

dismay, the apparent abhorrence of the object in these movements, in which idea (concept) trumps object (form). Wolfe's *The Painted Word* could be a response to what is now understood as a major critical text of the conceptualist moment, an anthology published in 1973, two years before Wolfe's essay: *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Consisting of highlights of conceptualist work, it was edited and annotated by one of the first curators in the contemporary mode, Lucy Lippard.

Dematerialized art, or conceptualism, is the putative opposite of modernist-formalist fetishism, a reaction against what Barr did with MoMA. The modernist avant-garde ended, unexpectedly to many, in the heightened institutionalization and commodification of the artwork. But the avant-garde continued to search for new ideas and, superficially, radical ones. It follows that the next, novel project of avant-garde art would be, after the object itself was exhausted, this dematerialization: taking away the object's objecthood to get at the edgy essence of creativity and ideas, and to prevent art from being consumed and packaged by the bourgeoisie.

This strange, rhetorical and arguably illogical movement of art away from the object, effected by the bourgeoisie itself and thus in many senses an absurdist project straight out of Swift, was understandably interpreted in different ways. Some wanted to put a complete stop to the class-, leisure- and diversion-based idea of art that had existed since the Renaissance, creating, as Carl Andre did with a line of hay bales in Vermont, works that 'are going to break down and gradually disappear... [that] never [enter] the property state.' Eva Hesse, Mel Bochner and others, in related acts of dematerialization, interpreted objects loosely, constructing them of ephemeral, deprecated and/or natural media. Some wanted to revive the non-tangible and even spiritual ideas of the creative act. Yoko Ono's popular book *Grapefruit*, like Lucy Lippard's contemporaneous series of

exhibitions based on directions for artist projects written on index cards (instruction art was then a trend), contained poetic directions that made dematerialization seem not terrible but beautiful, the instructions themselves constituting an exquisite poem: 'Light canvas or any finished painting with a cigarette at any time for any length of time. See the smoke movement. The painting ends when the whole canvas or painting is gone.'

It was during this concentrated questioning of both art institutions and what they housed that, ironically, curators, those sedulous figures historically intrinsic to these things, underwent a reinvention. They became both prominent and, eventually, romantic. In this crucial moment, the curator's custodial or caretaking position becomes supplanted by that of the connoisseur; or, rather, custodianship *becomes* connoisseurship. Curators no longer tended ground, but secured, organized and landscaped it. This emerged out of a real need: in the 1960s and 1970s, the art world increasingly yearned for a figure to make sense of things, to act as advocate for an ever more obtuse, factionalist art scene. Too many artists, too many movements, too many works in too many shows, too much discussion: who would parse them? The curator's new position entailed duties of ringleader, translator, mediator, diplomat, gatekeeper. It was a full-time job, and a completely new one.

It is not, however, as simple as to say that the curator made a swift ascent, especially not professionally. In the wake of conceptualism, a variety of non-exhibition, non-artist entities ascended. They would, come the 1990s, coalesce into the curator's role, birthing the curationist moment. Until then, the critic, fine-art publishing and the dealer would also play crucial roles in parsing and elaborating on the art world's bewildering commitment to dematerialization. These would also, unsurprisingly, be roles taken up by artists themselves, who, in this period of incipient multidisciplinaryism, were eager to try on new hats, appropriate art-world machinery and confuse

fixed notions of who was supposed to do what. Early contemporary curators were not quite outliers, but they were variously groomed in different fields. (There were certainly no curatorial-studies programs back then.) Jean Leering, director of Eindhoven's Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum from 1964 to 1973, was trained as an architectural engineer; important California curator Walter Hopps, described by Obrist as a 'mercurial iconoclast,' began as a booker of jazz musicians; Seth Siegelaub, extraordinary proponent of conceptualism in New York, started out as a plumber, and when he quit the art world in 1972, went on to do more traditional curatorial work, cataloguing and founding a research centre devoted to textiles.

Then there is Harald Szeemann – probably the most discussed and romanticized curator of the era. Well-known present-day curator Jens Hoffmann calls him 'the father of modern curating – or creative curating, if you will.' Szeemann began in the theatre, as a set designer and actor. Another present-day curator, Daniel Birnbaum, in his *Artforum* eulogy for Szeemann in 2005, humorously describes Szeemann's last theatrical endeavour as an 'egomaniacal one-man production of *Urfaust* in 1956 (yes, Szeemann played all the roles himself).' This controlling nature of Szeemann's, usually toward creative ends, explains both his mythology and controversy. Preferring to describe himself as an *Ausstellungsmacher* (exhibition-maker) rather than a curator – an apt nomenclature update that unfortunately never quite caught on – Szeemann would turn the curator, in Birnbaum's words, into 'a kind of artist himself... a meta-artist, utopian thinker, or even shaman.' Physically, he resembled more of an artist than Barr's gentlemanly museum director, with his characteristic full beard, tousled hair and loose, partially unbuttoned collared shirts.

Szeemann made his name at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland, which suggests art institutions were not completely hostile to the interventions of these new curators or

exhibition-makers. (The *kunsthalle* is a type of non-collecting, artist-centred European institution usually supported by government funding and often run in part by artists; the *kunsthalle*'s dedication to the display of avant-garde and contemporary art, and its attendant bureaucratization in the form of publications, symposia, outreach, fundraisers, etc., is reflected in most major museums today.) Live in Your Head:

- When *Attitudes Become Form* (1969) was Szeemann's breakthrough show and is now canonized and much-discussed in the contemporary art world. What Szeemann did was not unique: several shows like *Attitudes*, in which conceptual art was handled conceptually, transforming the space in which it was exhibited, were happening internationally around the same time. But in concert with his ongoing project to turn *Kunsthalle Bern* into a kind of lab or artist's studio, and with what came after, particularly his co-curatorship of *Documenta 5* in 1972, *Attitudes* remains a landmark exhibition. Soon-to-be-famous European conceptualists such as Joseph Beuys were included in the show, as well as members of the New York scene, including Walter De Maria, Fred Sandback and others.

One could talk endlessly about *Attitudes*, and the contemporary art world has: its reputation versus its actualities, its problems versus its triumphs. Ultimately, to discuss it opens up the tensions and triumphs that would come to surround the contemporary curator. As a microcosm, it is a remarkably predictive event. For one, the show, along with other conceptualist exhibitions mounted by Lippard, Siegelaub, Hopps and others, again demonstrates how the curator was a culling figure: in a way the herder, even the alchemist, of a self-dispersing scene. (The notion of the curator as alchemist persists strongly into the curationist moment; in 2007, critic Jerry Saltz published an article about the 52nd Venice Biennale called 'The Alchemy of Curating.')

In his study *The Culture of*

Curating and the Curating of Culture(s), Paul O'Neill discusses how shows like *Attitudes* asked artists to respond to the exhibition space. Rather than Barr and his MoMA, which treated all objects with the same kind of sleek uniformity (plinths, vitrines, horizontal eye-level hangs), *Attitudes*, or at least its utopian hope, made artists intervene spatially. Some work in the show: Lawrence Weiner chipped away a square in the plaster on a wall; Michael Heizer smashed the concrete on the sidewalk in front of the building; Alain Jacquet exposed its wiring system. The renegade avant-garde interpretation of such 'actions' is that they, in the terminology of Siegelaub, 'demystified' the conditions of exhibition, deconstructing the gallery or museum space.

But the curator proves this is not quite the case. As an agent of these acts, both in the sense of being a representative, but, more powerfully, of being a catalyst, the curator is still centralizing, magnetic. Szeemann's connection to process-aspectacle, which he got from his theatre background, stylistically united artists who seemed opposed to the very notion of style.

When *Attitudes Become Form* was sponsored by cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris. To call this informative, which many in the contemporary art world do, may act as its own form of demystification. But to think of it solely in this way is facile. First, one must acknowledge that it was during this time that more corporate sponsorships and partnerships emerged to buoy conceptualism. Calling Szeemann a sellout, then, and seeing an acknowledgment of the Philip Morris sponsorship as a mere exposure of the corporate bones that prop up the art world, is not that illuminating. One finds more complex significance, a fascinating overlap in motivation between curator and sponsor, in the exhibition catalogue for *When Attitudes Become Form*. A short introductory note from John A. Murphy, president of Philip Morris Europe,

emphasizes the connections between avant-garde practice and the business world:

The works assembled for this exhibit have been grouped by many observers of the art scene under the heading 'new art.' We at Philip Morris feel it is appropriate that we participate in bringing these works to the attention of the public, for there is a key element in this 'new art' which has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation – without which it would be impossible for progress to be made in any segment of society. Just as the artist endeavours to improve his interpretation and conceptions through innovation, the commercial entity strives to improve its end product or service through experimentation with new methods and materials. Our constant search for a new and better way in which to perform and produce is akin to the questionings of the artists whose works are represented here.

One could call Murphy's interpretation of Attitudes definitively modernist in sentiment: an obsession with 'innovation' via 'new methods and materials.' Yet the association of 'new' with 'better' is couched within 'perform[ing]' and 'produc[ing].' It is as if Murphy has made the modern the postmodern, avowing that the definitive dematerializing attribute of conceptualism is still a push to generate object or commodity. Many artists involved with Attitudes probably scoffed at this; Szeeman himself would undertake much more unconventional means of financing future exhibitions. Yet Szeemann said of Philip Morris (and the PR firm Ruder Finn, which partnered with it as a sponsor), 'They offered me money and total freedom.' There is more than a hint of what would become a common task of contemporary curators: securing funding and

parlaying with those outside the art world, those who don't necessarily understand fully the complex premise of a work or exhibition. And we cycle back to Courbet's 'entrepreneurial' exhibition outside the Salon. It is in the conceptual moment that artists begin to put their trust in curators as managers. It is in this moment of diversification that, indeed, the contemporary art industry diversifies to the point of necessitating a fresh (or refreshed) position. The curator must understand the avant-garde aesthetically and commercially, combining the two to turn something that is new and thus vulnerable into something that is nothing short of invincible. The curator ushers forth the avant-garde, not making, but shaping, it new.

In this way, Murphy's statement articulates the residue of modernist marketing that clung to conceptualism through the curator. As a dealer-curator, Seth Siegelau expands the advocacy of early avant-garde dealer-curators in America and Europe, such as Paul Durand-Ruel, who represented many Impressionists, and Alfred Steiglitz, who championed early photography. O'Neill writes of the way Siegelau had to work to make the artworks he selected and, in fact, promoted – such as Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, which involved the release of gas into the atmosphere – 'palpable.' Siegelau did so by producing basic-but-sleek fold-out poster-invitations, in a way, a step backward from conceptualism to minimalism, in which aesthetics are articulated rather classically. These invitations, forerunners of the impeccably designed exhibition invitations of the 1980s and 1990s, have become, like many publications of this period, expensive historical artifacts. As O'Neill explains, Siegelau also took out text-based ads in *Artforum* for artist Douglas Huebler that became part of his art. One reads: 'This ¼ page advertisement (4½" x 4¾"), appearing in the November 1968 issue of *Artforum* magazine, on page 8, in the lower left corner, is one form of documentation for the November 1968 exhibition of DOUGLAS

HUEBLER.' This would presage artist ads in *Artforum* in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Lynda Benglis's notorious 1974 ad featuring a photograph of her nude in sunglasses, holding a dildo at her crotch.

The confusion between artist and curator characterizes the conceptualist moment – all art-world roles went through a deliberate, gleeful shakeup – but it was not always an amicable thing. Artists were hostile to the powerful Harald Szeemann on more than one occasion. Although he was not invited to participate in *Attitudes*, French artist Daniel Buren wanted to. Two artists in the show offered him space, but instead he placed his characteristic striped posters around Bern, and was subsequently arrested by police for installing works on public property. The curator was becoming an endorsing force, especially with an institution behind him. He could orchestrate the kind of rebellion that was appropriate only in his gallery-cum-laboratory. In a 1972 *Artforum* review of Documenta 5, British art critic Lawrence Alloway claims that a group of New York women artists felt Szeemann had ignored them, and after complaining and asking him to contact them, nothing really happened. More well-known is the manifesto (oddly but appropriately, a modernist form) signed by several artists, including Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, which accuses Szeemann and his co-curators of presenting their work in themed sections without the artists' consent. Alloway also notes that land artist Robert Smithson later wrote in an open letter to the magazine *Flash Art*, 'I do not want to participate in international exhibitions which do not consult with me as to which work I might want to show.' In *The Curator's Egg*, Karsten Schubert notes that Judd, for 'over nearly four decades of his career...[acquired] a fearsome reputation as the uncompromising defender of his art, forever berating curators, collectors and dealers for being blind to what his sculpture required in order to exist at all.'

Such protests are both eerie and laughable today, for the curator of such prestigious international events as Documenta and the Venice Biennale has been accorded such power and autonomy, and there are so many artists vying to be shown, that many artists cannot, in light of their fragile careers, afford to be so principled. Still, the question lingers in the twenty-first century: what are the moral dimensions of the curator becoming a creator by using other artists' work as raw material? The romanticization of the curator plays an integral part in this query. The curator's liberation in the conceptualist moment, his transition from caretaker to connoisseur, generated a persona that could be as intimidating as it was supportive and avuncular. In a March 2013 panel discussion at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit about Jens Hoffmann's 'response exhibition' to *Attitudes*, cheekily titled *When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes*, gallerist Susanne Hilberry recalls Sam Wagstaff, famous curator, impresario and lover of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe: '[He] had a very intuitive, emotional response to work. The way he appreciated things was...almost unpredictable. He walked around with a volume of poems by Yeats and a book of sayings by Logan Pearsall Smith... He was this combination of somebody who was casual, elegant and perhaps when you first spoke with him you wouldn't think he had the kind of insight and interest in new art [that he did].' The curator-connoisseur keeps you guessing. In demystifying exhibition- and art-making, and then remystifying them on new terms, the curator self-mystifies, becoming alluring and vexing in equal measure.

The curator is a condition of the contemporary. The proliferation of ideas and works in the 1960s and 1970s was nothing compared to that of the 1980s. It was in this decade that what we now call 'the artworld,' a term attributed to critic Arthur Danto in the 1960s, fully emerged. Says critic Jed Perl of 1980s

New York: 'The size of the art scene had expanded so dramatically – and so much of the expansion added so little to the general level of quality – that while there was certainly as much good work being done in the 1980s as there had been in the 1950s, it was now impossible for any but the most assiduous gallery-goer to pick out the artists who were really working along, pursuing personal views.' According to scholar Bruce Altshuler, in 1949 there were only around twenty American contemporary-art galleries, with the number of collectors investing in 'advanced work' around a dozen; by contrast, there were approximately 1,900 single-artist exhibitions in New York in the 1984–85 season alone. In a 2014 *Financial Times* article, writer Harald Falckenberg cites a claim that more art was sold in the 1980s than 'in all previous centuries combined.'

It follows that the 1980s art-world boom in America privileged not the curator but the dealer and, actually, the critic. The art critic may have risen as an authority in the modernist era, around mid-century, as typified by abstract expressionist–extolling Clement Greenberg, but it was in the 1980s that cultural consumerism surged, with an accompanying glut of culture writing. Robust, well-read alternative weeklies, their exemplar the *Village Voice*, popped up through the 1990s in every major urban centre, with staff writers able to make a living at their trade. Roger Ebert and Peter Travers followed the 1970s example of Pauline Kael in film criticism; Greil Marcus and Kurt Loder followed the 1970s examples of Lester Bangs, Dave Marsh and Robert Christgau in music criticism. There has never been a way to quantify or prove a critic's influence on a medium or its success, but it is incontrovertible that many critics of this time were powerful, feared and loathed. Sonic Youth's 1983 song 'Kill Yr Idols' begins, 'I don't know why / you wanna impress Christgau.'

It is telling that the few critics still working and well-recognized in the art world were already busy and authoritative

in the 1980s. Peter Schjeldahl, now at the *New Yorker*, worked at the *Village Voice* through the decade. Roberta Smith began at the *Voice* and in 1986 moved to the *New York Times*, where she remains. In addition, highbrow visual-arts journals proliferated, such as the influential, avant-garde–allied *October*, founded in 1976 by *Artforum* alumni Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson. Trade-oriented alternatives to *Artforum* also appeared or expanded: *Art Monthly* was founded in 1976; *Flash Art*, which had been around since the 1960s, opened its New York office in 1980 under the editorship of soon-to-be-art-world-mogul Jeffrey Deitch; *Modern Painters* was founded in 1987; *Art in America*, which had been around since 1913, was rebooted under the editorship of Elizabeth C. Baker beginning in 1974.

As art historian and theorist Beti Žerovc notes, the critic, acting in concert with the ever more popular and successful dealer, was so influential during this time that 'studies of the art system published in the 1980s, which may otherwise be excellent, today seem out of date.' The curator's management of the avant-garde in the 1960s and 1970s had turned into a full-fledged business, one from which actual curators, who have always tended to view their activities as outside commercialism, shied. Arguably, in the 1980s, there was a renewed divide in the Western art world between America and Europe. A rash of new conservative regimes were affecting institutions on both sides of the Atlantic, but in Europe, as evinced by the experiences of the young Hans Ulrich Obrist at places like Kunsthalle Zurich, where Szeemann had ended up after acrimoniously parting with Kunsthalle Bern and pursuing freelance work, more public monies were being invested in culture. In many respects, the contemporary curator, very much a European invention, lay in waiting during this time.

In America, under Ronald Reagan, institutions suffered, yet the demand for art was proportional to the economy. The

orgies of success of traders in Wall Street in the 1980s were a kind of expression of the avant-garde impulse inherent in American capitalism: leveraged buyouts were just one of the ways in which Wall Street was making it new. Moving into the millennium, the economy would continue to have much in common with the avant-garde and its curatorial ambassadors, with traders attempting to substantiate and reify complex, fleeting notions of loans and investment.

In 1980s New York, as prices for artworks rose in proportion to the cresting economy, dealers stepped in to assure collectors – now interested in work not merely for aesthetics or philanthropy but for status and even as an investment – that what they were paying for was worthwhile. Dealers had grown in stature in the art world alongside the avant-garde. When American painting took off in the 1950s, dealers like Betty Parsons, Ileana Sonnabend, Leo Castelli, Sidney Janis and Paula Cooper nurtured artists like wealthy relatives; this filial relationship would be – but in most cases was not yet – fulfilled by the curator. A new 1980s generation of art dealers, among them Mary Boone, Larry Gagosian, Barbara Gladstone, Marian Goodman, and Janelle Reiring and Helene Winer (of Metro Pictures) were steely and shrewd. Reiring and Winer, in the manner of the 1960s curators who demystified and then remystified art, developed a stable of artists that would become known as the Pictures Generation, post-pop art figures like Cindy Sherman, Richard Longo and Barbara Kruger, whose sleek, photo-based work acted as an ideological critique of 1980s consumerist excess, but was also, in the minds of collectors and advertisers who co-opted it, complementary to it. Other dealers – famously, Boone – became curators of painters, developing stables of mostly male figures, each with a swaggering, neo-Romantic persona. In the thriving New York art world of the 1980s, it was the dealer who dictated who was in

and who was out. Value abetted value to create works that achieved notoriety simply because they were expensive.

When the American economy entered a recession in the early 1990s – with the art market experiencing a definable, devastating crash in the spring of 1990 – dealers were made examples of for their avant-garde approaches to selling. Siegel's materialization of Robert Barry's gases through beautifully designed invitations might, in this context, be compared with Boone's instating of waiting lists for in-demand artists, which, her detractors claimed, caused inflation by raising prices of works that had not yet been made. Perverting and elaborating on the tactics of Siegel, Boone took it upon herself to promote non-existent art.

Dealers would remain important figures in the 1990s and beyond: Charles Saatchi, who had collected since the 1960s, brought to prominence the Young British Artists, Damien Hirst among them; current power dealer du jour is New York-based David Zwirner. But never again would dealers and art critics inhabit the cut-and-dried oligarchical positions they did in the 1980s. In that decade, a work of art's value could be easily quantified by the market and the press. In the dispersed and tenuous 1990s, however, the contemporary curator gained a toehold as the main imparter of value.

The 'power' or 'star' curator of the 1990s was thus a concomitant of institutional uncertainty and attack. The right-wing Western governments of the 1980s, notably in America and Britain, made drastic funding cuts to the arts or, when unable to, vocally questioned the legitimacy of such funding. Endemic is the antagonistic relationship toward the National Endowment for the Arts that defined Reagan's tenure. He attempted to abolish the agency when he first entered office in 1981, but failed to get sufficient support from Congress. By 1989, the NEA came under public scrutiny for its support of artists such as homoerotic photographer Robert Mapplethorpe

and Andres Serrano, whose *Piss Christ* depicted a crucifix submerged in urine. In 1990, several performance artists went to court (and won) when their NEA grants were nervously vetoed by NEA chair John Frohnmayer. The debate raged on through the 1990s and 2000s, with right-wing politicians becoming more vociferous in their objections to government funding of art. While Napoleonic imperialism certainly lived on in the neo-conservative late-twentieth century, it was without the attendant, nationalist commitment to culture.

The examples of Serrano and Mapplethorpe suggest it was not only the right wing that put major museums and galleries under pressure. In the 1980s, it was dealers, not large institutions, who advocated for the work of artists deemed controversial. In many cases, dealers, in showing such work, valiantly stood by their artists and their right to be avant-garde, continuing a hallowed twentieth-century alliance between noisome, bohemian maker and tolerant, bemused patron. By the 1990s, many museums and galleries were so distanced from the display of controversial work that its appearance in these venues, an obvious attempt to retain or regain relevance, was, as the NEA controversies suggest, novel and shocking. Add to this the budding trend in early 1990s artwork of directly examining, critiquing and deconstructing the perceived exclusions and elitism of museums, and the major art institution was under attack from both sides of the political spectrum.

Who would stand by the latest iteration of the avant-garde in a recessed economy? How would the art institution assert itself and stay alive? The answer lay in audiences: crowds and donors became crucial to survival. The 1990s were marked by the significant development of the blockbuster museum show; the associated initiation of marketing teams and demographic research, something almost non-existent before the 1980s; the launching of museum-branded products, including books and postcards, sold in gift shops strategically placed near exhibition

exits; and the investment in renovations and additions helmed by 'starchitects' like Daniel Libeskind and Frank Gehry, whose brashly egoistic projects became the primary impetus for visitors to come. Major art institutions also realized that the artists who were critiquing them could, if embraced and exhibited, demonstrate their contemporary savvy. What better way to attract broader demographics than to show work pertaining to the exclusion of those very demographics? What better way to change the perception of the museum as staid and elitist than to show work that drew attention, in the form of a brave corrective, to these very accusations?

Audience-courting thus defines the institutionalization of the decade's major aesthetic fixations: identity politics, as typified by the divisive 1993 biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, which contained an unprecedented number of works by women, non-white and queer artists; an ongoing commitment to controversy and (often juvenile) provocation, as typified by the 1997 exhibition of the Saatchi collection at London's Royal Academy entitled *Sensation*, which, when it came to the Brooklyn Museum in 1999, was denounced by New York mayor Rudy Giuliani as 'sick stuff'; relational aesthetics, in which artists engage in social practices in galleries or museums as a way of acknowledging audiences and institutional frameworks; and biennials, nationally or internationally ordered group exhibitions with distinct institutional ties and global-tourism mandates, more than forty of which were inaugurated during the decade.

In all of these trends, the curator dominates, indispensable as agent, ambassador, organizer, facilitator and provocateur. This was already the case in the 1960s, but in the 1990s, the curator moved from eccentric, enterprising amateur to professional necessity. As with Barr and MoMA, the museum of the 1990s befriended the avant-garde as a means of survival. Before the decade, no one had seen the curator doing so much in so

many places, and wielding so much power. So it was that the curator, who for centuries in her incipient occupation was seen as a wan librarian type, cataloguing objects in backrooms, became the mouthpiece for institutions, artists and their ideas. The curator had apotheosized into an outreach connoisseur. If the 1990s and 2000s signalled the triumph of audience-oriented art, it was the curator, equally triumphant, who was recruited to make this happen. In the words of Paul O'Neill, the 1990s marked the 'supervisibility of the curator.' This curationist moment would last for almost two decades.

The idea of the curator as a charismatic, magical organizer of exhibitions persists. Those committed to contemporary art still prefer to see the curator in the vein of the pioneering Szeemann: one who uses an eccentric horse sense in combination with an encyclopedic knowledge of art and philosophy to juxtapose deftly, creating thoughtful, challenging and surprising exhibitions that change the way we see art and the world. While it is true that more figures like this exist than ever before, it is also true that they comprise only a handful of those doing curatorial work. Nonetheless, such star curators, like Obrist, most of whom began their careers during the contemporary-curator heyday of the mid-1990s, are responsible for how we understand and talk about the industry of curating today. They are curators of curators, filling ambassadorial roles in order to elucidate the most hallowed iterations of the profession to the art world and beyond. They are the profession's face.

While the present-day star curator's efforts are authorial and often predictable, it is much too simple to reduce this to sheer egotism. As we have seen with Obrist, star curators are aware of their vulnerability, voicing self-effacement in response to their celebrity. And why not? Their role in their respective institutions is prominent yet vague. What exactly do they do?

Are they distant mandarins who force-feed us super-theoretical art? Hyper-professionalized agents – effectively business consultants – working for high-powered international cultural organizations? Bridges between artist and audience, showing us the best of what contemporary culture has to offer, and translating it in an effective, accessible way? The last proposition is idealist, the former two pejorative. One thing is certain: all contemporary star curators possess flexible intelligence and learning, are effective parlayers and do not shy away from discussing the problematic nature of their positions. Indeed, a willingness to discuss the contradictions, even the hypocrisies, of contemporary curating, especially in the context of institutions, might be the primary characteristic of the star curator.

This said, certain aspects of the star curator's job are more visible than others, and there are particular ways in which star curators prefer to critique what they do. The job description may seem complicated from afar, but it can be reduced to what the twentieth-century curator has always done: parse, manage and thus act as a type of midwife for the avant-garde, the new. The curator remains in charge of *stuff* – and since the turn of the millennium, it's more stuff than ever. What's different, however, is that the contemporary curator has come to play a pivotal role both in cataloguing stuff and generating it. When the contemporary curator's job altered from advocating for new objects (the modernist era) to advocating for new ideas (the conceptualist era), to advocating for herself as the newest institutional entity, she changed the avant-garde forever. The star curator has created an incestuous cycle that signals the end of the avant-garde. Instead of finding and advocating for the new, she immediately orders and manicures it, negating the very possibility of newness.

This is hardly a fresh idea, although the curatorial establishment is not ready to acknowledge it, and when it does so, tends to adopt a rhetorical or obfuscating tone. In *The Curator's*

Egg, first published in 2000, Karsten Schubert explains one key, fascinating institutional root of the avant-garde's demise: the drying-up of available historical works in the market after the late 1980s. "The collections of most old museums are, in effect, "closed," he asserts.

That is to say the lack of available historic works of exceptional importance makes it impossible for institutions to acquire works of the kind that would dramatically change the balance and overall character of their holdings. The only field that is constantly replenished is that of contemporary art... Under these conditions the concept of the avant-garde has become truly notional – today's museum culture has made the discovery, interpretation and historicisation of new art virtually simultaneous.

The collection of contemporary artwork by institutions, Schubert notes, poses any number of logistical problems, making 'arguments about the preservation of old master paintings look straightforward and clear cut in comparison.' Understandably, collection itself has created a mini-industry within large collecting museums and galleries, from storing and preserving the work (which can be made of esoteric, obsolete and highly ephemeral material) to creating dossiers about how to install the work in a variety of potential future situations.

It may surprise those outside the art world to know that building institutional collections in many cases rivals Szeemannesque 'exhibition-making' as the main activity of contemporary curators. However, many star curators working today are employed by institutions that, in the *kunsthalle* model, do not have permanent collections. Obrist is at the Serpentine in London, a non-collecting institution; Massimiliano Gioni, curator of the 2013 Venice Biennale, is at the non-collecting

Nicola Trussardi Foundation, and the New Museum in New York, which only occasionally collects; Okwui Enwezor, who will curate the Venice Biennale in 2015, is at Munich's Haus der Kunst, also non-collecting.

Such curators may not collect in an official capacity, but they are powerful arbiters influencing the shape of collections worldwide. Their exhibitions behave like high-end fashion shows, generating desirability for specific works and, perhaps more importantly, asserting trends. (Think of Meryl Streep's Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* unintentionally recontextualizing Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 1944 idea of 'the culture industry': '[T]hat blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and so it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing the sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room. From a pile of stuff.') As is the case in fashion, which has always embraced the capitalist nature of the avant-garde more readily than the art world, a show with buzz can have a profound effect on how those in the industry think and create. An alliance with a star curator makes an artist's career, among other things facilitating their collection by institutions sensitive to their work's specific needs. It can also permanently associate an artist with the sensibility of that star curator, as if the artist has been inducted into a sort of tribe.

As artists began to work with ambitious materials, and as difficult-to-collect forms such as performance and video art became more and more common in the 1990s, the curator became institutional dealer par excellence. It is only recently that dealers have learned how to behave as curators, forging enterprising transactions with institutions to facilitate the purchase of difficult-to-commodify works. Participatory art and performance in particular is so deeply associated with the contemporary curator's repertoire that to speak of origins is a

chicken-or-egg debate: which came first, performance art or performative exhibitions such as When Attitudes Become Form or Lippard's index-card instructional actions? In one of its 2011 draft additions reflecting the expanded use of *curate* as a verb, *The Oxford English Dictionary* dated the transitive, passive construction *curated by* to a 1981 review of a performance at New York City's legendary experimental SoHo space, the Kitchen: 'The Kitchen presented three different programs of "New Performances from PS 122," curated by and including Mr. [Charles] Dennis.' There is a case to be made for the art world's mindfulness of audiences being the very thing that began to change *curator* into a verb. In order to exist, any performance must secure a venue, draw spectators and translate instructions or intentions for execution into a real-life scenario. All these things are hallmarks of the contemporary curator's activity.

It follows that, from about the mid-1990s, most prominent artists didn't just want a curator as advocate, but needed one to initiate, realize and in many cases give meaning to their work. 'Curator art' or 'biennial art' became the last genre of the avant-garde, a sometimes unwitting, decadent parody or commentary on its one-hundred-year trajectory. Reactionary works pushed against coded forms of looking and consumption presumably upheld by museums, galleries and art events, but in many cases existed only by virtue of these entities. Installation-oriented, 'curatable' art became favoured even in more traditional media. Photographers, for instance, became photographic artists; Christian Boltanski, Wolfgang Tillmans, Jeff Wall and others became popular for producing images with sculptural, site-specific elements.

As a result, most star curators began to groom a stable of iconoclastic artists with ties to performance and audience engagement, advantageous professional alliances that boosted the institution-affiliated curator's authenticity. The most famous

current example of this is perhaps Marina Abramović and Klaus Biesenbach, who curated Abramović's 2010 retrospective at MoMA, setting a new precedent for the institutionalization of performance art. (The exhibition consisted of conspicuously attractive performers, some naked, reenacting Abramović's performance works from the past, while Abramović performed a new work, *The Artist Is Present*, for which crowds of people lined up for the chance to sit across from her in a sort of durational staring contest.) Abramović and Biesenbach remain close friends. In early 2014, before the premiere of artist Matthew Barney's new film, *River of Fundament*, Abramović was whisked away from the media by Biesenbach, who reminded her they were late and needed to find their seats, telling reporters that their questions to Abramović about actor Shia LaBeouf's latest performance-art project, plainly influenced by her work, were a waste of time. 'What if he invented the wheel tomorrow?' Biesenbach asked the reporters. 'The wheel is invented. She did it, right? And we all know it.'

In her 2012 book, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, critic Claire Bishop cleverly describes this 1990s social turn in art through the marked shift in vocabulary it effected: 'the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a "viewer" or "beholder," is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*.' The irony of the statement as regards audience-courting contemporary museums or galleries is obvious. With its new branding initiatives and marketing outreach, the cultural institution wants all of these things too. In particular, the cultural institution wants, like participatory art, a lack of a finite relationship with its audience. Go to an exhibition, then take in a screening, eat at the café, shop at the

gift shop and bring a pamphlet home with you to consider your next outing. Through audio and smartphone guides, touch screens and videos, and play spaces for kids, in addition to traditional didactic panels, the cultural institution wants your experience to be thoroughly interactive, satisfying from an investment standpoint (i.e., you felt you got your money's worth) and, like participatory art, everywhere and ongoing.

Bishop's statement is also useful in terms of its implications for a discussion of the ways in which museums court audiences through avant-garde practices, although Bishop, while critical of participatory art, maintains faith in its radical potential. She is emphatic in contrasting her understanding of participatory art – which still, especially in non-Western contexts, can occur well outside the commodifying purview of cultural institutions – with the aforementioned 'relational aesthetics,' a coinage from curator-writer Nicolas Bourriaud, whose eponymous book (published in French in 1998, in English in 2002) made, in Bishop's words, 'discursive and dialogic projects more amenable to museums and galleries.' This is putting it mildly. The relational-aesthetics movement is likely the first example of a curator naming a movement in contemporary art and, given the curator's significant role in unintentionally dismantling the avant-garde, will likely be the last. Bourriaud's book might also have doubled as a rule book for the new museum: no avant-garde movement has become so rapidly institutionalized. The fact that most artists associated with relational aesthetics, like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Höller, are among the most successful and powerful artists working today, and that, despite the apparent difficulty of their work, have managed to become affiliated with the most prestigious international collections and private collectors, speaks volumes about the institutional and curatorial drivers of this movement.

It is most salient for the purposes of this short study to dwell on the implications of relational aesthetics' unmistakable

institutionalization: the 2008 show *theanyspacewhatever*, curated by Nancy Spector at New York's Guggenheim Museum and featuring many big names associated with the movement since the mid-1990s, among them Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick and Pierre Huyghe, in addition to Tiravanija and Höller. Yet, 'unmistakable institutionalization' seems inept here, for the exhibition was a bookend to the (institutional) beginning of the relational-aesthetics movement, the 1996 group show *Traffic*, curated by Bourriaud at the Musée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux, France. In other words, relational aesthetics was institutional from the start. Regarding *Traffic*, critics seemed unclear as to its purpose. Carl Freedman, in a contemporaneous review in the magazine *Frieze*, describes it as 'ambitiously funded' but 'unhelpfully vague,' its 'primary beneficiaries... tending to be the participating artists and their associates.' Projects such as Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's room in which viewers were encouraged to draw plans of their childhood homes, or Tiravanija's groupings of cardboard tables and chairs around a mini-bar, were certainly interactive, but to what end? Was this art-as-therapy? Art-as-party? The dubious transformative import of most if not all works remained confined to the institution in which they were displayed.

If *Traffic* was vague in its intentions, *theanyspacewhatever* seemed cynically clear. In the twelve years between the two shows, star curators like Massimiliano Gioni, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Daniel Birnbaum and Beatrix Ruf had all, to varying degrees, latched on to this movement, which, to quote the catalogue jacket copy for *theanyspacewhatever*, involved a group of artists who 'claimed the exhibition as their medium.' Instead of being threatened by these artists, who might have been seen as upstart contemporary curators, star curators stepped in as glamorous facilitators, liaising with museums and galleries, initiating tricky paperwork pertaining to insurance and liability issues around the involvement of real people

in the art, collaborating on and arranging what could be complicated installs, and, of course, speaking and writing at length about the importance of such art. The final word on theanyspacewhatever remains with critic Jerry Saltz, who reviewed the show for *New York* magazine, emphasizing his experience sleeping overnight in Höller's *Revolving Hotel Room*, which was just that, a revolving hotel room installation at the Guggenheim, booked solid for the duration of the exhibition for between \$259 and \$799 per night. Saltz described relational aesthetics as beginning in the manner of a 'palace coup' but quickly attracting 'a legion of sheeplike curators [who have] embraced it with a vengeance.' Saltz noted that the exhibition catalogue had twenty essays written by curators, and that the exhibition, although curated by a woman, woefully included only one of the many women associated with the movement. Reading Saltz's review more than five years later, one is struck by its percipience, by how this kind of art has come to define New York's culture industry. Recent examples of relational aesthetics in New York include MoMA's 2013 Rain Room and the New Museum's 2012 Höller retrospective. In a city that has emerged, in direct synchronicity with the development of relational aesthetics, as a kind of Disney World for grown-ups, this self-consciously curated, installation- and performance-oriented art reigns supreme, generating lineups to rival those for nightclubs, and providing fodder for countless social-media selfies and blog posts.

Unlike relational aesthetics, biennials have been a staple of the art world for more than a hundred years, with the Venice Biennale established in 1895 in the model of then-popular world's fairs and universal expositions, an art-world Olympics with an unabashed agenda of trying to foster the international art market. (In the 1940s through the 1960s, the Venice Biennale housed a sales office to help artists find buyers for their work.) By the 1990s, then, the biennial was seen both

as a stale idea and one ripe for reimagining. Popular and acclaimed biennials founded in the 1980s as, in large part, cultural-tourism draws, notably the Havana Biennial (1984) and the Istanbul Biennial (1987), contributed to their renaissance during the following decade. Like museums and galleries, many cities with a middling tourist industry became keen on rebranding themselves through the then-trendy global-is-local ethos. (Film festivals, also prevalent in the 1990s, had similar motivations.) The audience-driven nature of biennials meant that star curators had a close relationship with their development in the 1990s, although it wasn't until the 2000s that, in classic contemporary-curator mode, discussion of the biennial's plain-as-day market-driven aspects effected a demystification and then a remystification of the very notion of the biennial, putting the curator in an even more central place.

'It has become a national sport to dismiss biennials,' said Massimiliano Gioni at a talk at Toronto's Power Plant in March 2014, effectively summing up the ways in which star curators became ascendant in 2000s biennial culture. 'What I like about biennials is that they are institutions where the very meaning of an institution can be called into question every two years.' And so it was that in dismantling and querying biennials, star curators became the focus for these biennials. Two pivotal examples, both of which can be directly associated with Gioni, are Manifesta, an itinerant European biennial founded in 1996, and the 2003 Venice Biennale, directed by curator Francesco Bonami.

Manifesta might be seen as the art world's response to (and arguably its mimicking of) the dissolution of the Soviet Union as well as the Maastricht Treaty and its initiation of the European Union. The first Manifesta took place in Rotterdam and was collaborative: chief curator Katalyn Neray worked with four 'associated curators,' Rosa Martinez, Viktor Misiano, Andrew Renton and Hans Ulrich Obrist. The

manifesto of Manifesta is everything classic avant-garde manifestos were not: open and warm in its questioning, ambitious only in the sense that it seems to want to be everything to everyone. 'Manifesta 1 is about life and emotions, depressing and funny ones / about all the big troubles and great pleasures involved in communication / about migration / about having a place and having no place at all / about integration / about the necessity of imaginary worlds / about the necessity of inventing new relations in this world.' Reading almost as a naive parody of the modernist invective, this is classic utopian thinking, *utopia* being Greek for *good place* and *no place*. It is also contradictory: how can you curate *everything*? However earthy, hopeful and free-spirited, Manifesta was and is obviously an industry. Although placeless, or rather multiply placed, it finds significant grounding in its headquarters in Amsterdam, where it produces a journal, symposia, books and other entities intrinsic to the activities of professional curators. Its board members, past and present, form a kind of European curating cabal; its sponsors, past and present, run the gamut from corporate to public, the latter a list of international arts councils, ministries and foundations. In a weird echo of *When Attitudes Become Form*, Manifesta 1's principal sponsor was Philip Morris Benelux.

The 2003 Venice Biennale, its fiftieth edition, proposed something similar to Manifesta in its intent to be, in the words of director Francesco Bonami, 'a reaction to Harald Szeemann's persona' (Szeemann curated the Venice Biennale twice, in 1999 and 2001) and thereby to instigate 'community curating.' Szeemann had been too dominant, too singular, too authorial, too canonized. It was time to demystify and disperse duties, and so Bonami pieced up the Biennale into sections, to which he assigned high-profile confreres including Obrist and Gioni, as well as artists Tiravanija and Gabriel Orozco. The title of the Biennale was *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the*

Viewer, the subtitle an apparently cheeky acknowledgement of what had driven the art industry, contemporary curation and the avant-garde since the mid-1990s. Writing for *Frieze*, Ralph Rugoff identified another irony: 'the only dictatorial attitudes accommodated by this Biennale were those of its curators.' Obrist, with Tiravanija and Molly Nesbit, co-curated an exhibition appropriately (yet again, not necessarily ironically) entitled *Utopia Station*, that, in the words of Rugoff, 'crowded the work of more than 160 artists into a cluttered lounge-like environment, replete with the obligatory computer stations and clubhouse ambience.' Curator Charles Esche of Eindhoven's Van Abbemuseum later quipped that 'as a project it was dressed up in a Che Guevara T-shirt, shrinking and consuming its own radical possibility.' Commenting on Obrist and company's use of 'utopia,' Esche noted that 'using the term the way Obrist did, without a sophisticated analysis, repeats exactly the same model in which the artist is at the service of the curator, the ultimate utopian – like Stalin, orchestrating everything.' Despite the notably mixed reviews, even hostility, directed toward the 2003 Venice Biennale, it and other international art events have continued in a similar vein.

The 2013 Venice Biennale, artistic-directed by Gioni with a team of curators, was entitled *The Encyclopedic Palace*, and, in its sprawling group show spread out over the Biennale's Giardini and Arsenale locations, teemed with art objects by contemporary as well as deceased and/or obscure artists. This commitment to outlying figures rather than Obrist's 'clubhouse ambience' might have been a refreshing shift, had a similarly cluttered effect not dominated. Here, the star curator presented himself as a hoarder, like Orson Welles's Charles Foster Kane at the end of *Citizen Kane*, presiding alone over a mansion of acquired stuff. Yet the comparison is not apt, for Gioni had his curatorial team and, despite its overflow, *The Encyclopedic Palace* was hardly encyclopedic, incorporating many usual-

suspect names and genres. Problems that had plagued the art world since the 1980s and 1990s abided, and the exhibition's apparent cluttered inclusiveness effaced its bureaucracy and orthodoxy. In a problem extant since the notion of globalism took off as a pet project of the Western art world in the late 1980s, non-Western artists seemed cherry-picked for their sociological and/or exotic, mystical qualities. And while the exhibition did include painters and drawers, who have held a tenuous place in the art world for decades, only a handful were formally trained, sane and alive.

A year before *The Encyclopedic Palace*, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev unveiled her ambitious Documenta 13 – or, to use her favoured printed appellation, dOCUMENTA (13). Her scheme for this edition of the art world's influential avant-garde quinquennial shirked the time-based aspects of international art events, introducing a publication project before the event's opening. She commissioned many artworks that had a life beyond the event's closing. In addition to Kassel, the traditional headquarters of Documenta, she had several 'outposts,' including Kabul and Banff. And, of course, she rejected 'curator' as a title, instead calling herself and her international team 'agents.' In a 2010 interview with artist, curator and writer Carolee Thea, Christov-Bakargiev foretold of this gesture, claiming, in the context of her co-curation of the Turin Triennial, that she was 'intentionally moving the attention away from the auteur/curator,' but that she doesn't 'try to beat the spectacle,' which she considers an 'agent' or 'decoy' in the manner of Renaissance artists who did church commissions depicting Christian stories and themes while also conveying 'something else, something secret.'

Christov-Bakargiev was, then, perhaps indifferent to the press-preview kit for Documenta that featured, on an enclosed disc, nineteen photographic portraits of her. While Documenta has always been difficult to preview because its lineup is

traditionally kept vested until opening, Berlin journalist Nadja Sayej, in a hilarious, trenchant coinage published in a blog post affiliated with her web series ArtStars*, called this suite of portraits 'curator porn.' In Sayej's words, it featured 'various glamour shots of [Christov-Bakargiev] in a forest, lounging on a lounge chair, wearing business blazers, working hard, hardly working, throning it and more.'

Curator porn may be a mere decoy, but it is also content, a common method of marketing institutional shows and, especially, biennials. The more recognizably outfitted the star curator, the better. One might note that while the archetypal contemporary-artist outfit still skews toward anything-goes shabby-chic bohemian (especially for men), the one for the contemporary curator, as if to reflect her professional expertise in selecting and arranging, is tasteful, soigné, uniformed. Christov-Bakargiev is known for her voluminous curls and voluminous scarves; Obrist for his glasses and agnès b. suits, worn sans tie; Gioni for his boyish matinee-idol good looks; Beatrix Ruf for her close-cropped hair and black Pagliacci-style blouses; Biesenbach for his, to quote *W* magazine, 'large wardrobe of tailored Jil Sander suits.' Curator porn suggests the contemporary star curator must curate her very identity, not unlike a politician or a celebrity. In this respect, the contemporary star curator is indeed Christov-Bakargiev's 'agent,' behaving, in a glamorous iteration of the Roman colonial procurator or the Medieval curate, as the representative of a large organization or concept, the face of an event or exhibition before it has been unveiled to the public.

A less egregious iteration of curator porn might be the fixation of star curators from the mid-1990s onward on the history of, to use Szeemann's phrase, exhibition-making. It is curmudgeonly to look only askance at this. The history of exhibitions, rather than that of individual artworks and artists, has been so underemphasized in art-history programs as to create

generations of students with a very poor understanding of the conditions of artistic production, as well as of the nature and evolution of the art market. (The fact was certainly evinced during research for this book, which, despite curating's ascendance, felt positively magpielike.) The new attention paid to the history of exhibition-making since the mid-1990s is, however, not merely an enlightened form of pedagogy. Concomitant with the rise of the contemporary curator and curationist culture in general, it can smack of arch incestuousness. And the history of exhibition-making, when delivered by curators, takes on the fetishistic, de-/remystifying cast that is their wont, an exaggeration, perhaps, characteristic of any contemporary endeavour designed to establish and assert new canons. Bruce Altshuler's *Salon to Biennial* and *Biennials and Beyond*, for instance, both subtitled *Exhibitions That Made Art History* and published in 2008 and 2013 respectively, comprise a history of avant-garde exhibition-making from the Salon to the present-day that acts as an indispensable primer for anyone interested in the topic. The set is published by Phaidon in large, gorgeously designed editions, chock full of previously unavailable documents to form an important reference compendium. But the books are large and heavy, emphasizing, in consummate avant-garde manner, art for art's sake. They are easier to display on a coffee table than to read.

The primary de-/remystifier of the history of exhibition-making is star curator Jens Hoffmann, mentioned earlier for *When Attitudes Became Form* and *When Attitudes Become Form*. The title alone suggests the kind of playful poststructuralism on which Hoffmann has founded his curatorial brand. As an upstart curator in 1999, he co-organized the notorious 'Sixth Caribbean biennale' with puckish Italian artist Cattelan, inviting usual-suspect curator-friendly artists of that decade's biennials – Vanessa Beecroft, Douglas Gordon, Olafur Eliasson

and others – to go on vacation to St. Kitts. There had been no previous five events, and no actual biennial was staged for this hoax project. Instead, the artists sipped cocktails, swam and suntanned, with only some producing ephemera around the experience. Artist Ann Magnuson, who participated, summarized the biennial in a mock-*Gilligan's Island* lyric for the website artnet: 'Sit right back and you'll hear a tale / a tale of a fateful trip / to an island in the Caribbean / with artists who are hip / the curator was a prankster smarty pants / his young partner liked to smirk / they hosted a Biennial / but there would be no work / there would be no work.' Hoffmann, the Weird Al Yankovic of star curators, would go on, through the '00s, to engage in a dual parody and celebration of the art world, making a name for himself with response exhibitions at eminent institutions. His *When Attitudes...* show, held at California College of the Arts' Wattis Institute in San Francisco (where he was then director, and as such guided students at the affiliate institution's renowned curatorial-studies program), culled contemporary, younger artists working in the vein of Szeemann's original cohort. His 2014 Jewish Museum show *Other Primary Structures* was a response exhibition to the classic *Primary Structures* show of 1966 that effectively introduced late modernist sculpture to a wider audience, adding non-Western artists to the original show. Both projects are certainly critical of curationism, but at the same time are canon-asserting and celebratory of the curator's conceptual power. Like many contemporary academics, Hoffmann points out exclusions while also being the conspicuous arbiter of inclusions. His most recent book, *Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, is yet another unintentional postmortem on the avant-garde, a beautiful coffee-table book asserting, through a list, a canon of shows that rarely predate 1990. The oxymoronic phrase *instant classic* comes to mind.

A different kind of response exhibition opened at the 2013 Venice Biennale, away from Gioni's Encyclopedic Palace at the Ca' Corner della Regina palazzo, now operated as an art space by the Prada Foundation. When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013 was curated by legendary Arte Povera curator Germano Celant 'in dialogue with' artist Thomas Demand and architect Rem Koolhaas. An uncanny restaging of Szeemann's famous show, it might be deemed 'exhibitions porn.' It also belongs in the broader cultural context of 'nostalgia porn,' examples of which include the ongoing performances of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Prague's Estates Theatre, at which the opera debuted in 1787; period-precise Shakespeare performances at London's recently rebuilt Globe Theatre; rampant Hollywood remakes, from *Psycho* to *Carrie*; or album tours by reunited older bands, for which classic albums are delivered live, often start-to-finish. These phenomena can be inspiring as well as tedious; regardless, they are conspicuously, fundamentally anti-avant-garde. Their collective dictum might as well be 'Make it old.'

How odd, then, that one of the most emblematic shows of the 1960s avant-garde, When Attitudes Become Form, should fall into this category. Granted, it does so in a complex, ambiguous manner. The actual title of Szeemann's exhibition is, of course, Live in Your Head, a phrase that glibly sums up conceptualism, for which idea is greater than form. To resuscitate a constellation of conceptualist works, then, makes sense, or at least seems ready for facilitation; many such works are designed not to have a specific objecthood, a specific installation context, even a specific look or form at all. In a 1969 Swiss television documentary made about Szeemann's show, artist Lawrence Weiner summarizes his work's potential multiple lives, through place and time: 'The idea...is very exciting to me. This [the chipped-away square on the Kunsthalle's wall] is very unimportant compared to the idea. If I do this piece in Amsterdam

or New York it's exactly the same piece. Even though it may be a little bit different, a different kind of wall: it's still the same piece. I don't need to do it; somebody else can do it.'

As Catherine Spencer noted in her review of Celant's show, its pamphlet claimed a conscious distancing from 'a fetishistic and nostalgic dimension.' However, many elements of the exhibition suggested otherwise. The co-curatorial involvement of Rem Koolhaas and Thomas Demand likely contributed. Koolhaas has designed museums and museum spaces (such as a Serpentine Pavilion for his friend Obrist) as well as retail spaces for Prada; Demand is known for his eerie paper reconstructions of public and bureaucratic spaces, which are then photographed or filmed. Celant's enlistment of figures invested in display (think Barr's avant-garde department-store presentations), as well as in simulation, had a significant effect. The floor plan of Kunsthalle Bern was precisely mapped out onto that of the Ca' Corner, a fetishistic act that also drew attention to venue differences. Dotted lines on walls and the floor were drawn to indicate 'missing' works, the definition of which was multiple (unavailable, lost) but which, in the opinion of more than one critic, gave the exhibition the flavour of a crime scene, similar to the Dutch Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardiner Museum in Boston, in which empty frames hang where Rembrandt and Vermeer works once did, marking their still-unsolved 1990 theft.

In effect, this 'live in your head' exhibition seemed all about the value of objects. Documents and photographs related to the original Attitudes, many lent to the exhibition from the Harald Szeemann archive at the prestigious Getty Institute in Los Angeles, were available for perusal on the ground floor. Spencer wrote that the show '[reeked] of money: from the couture-besuited guards keeping close watch on attendees, to the beautiful brick of a catalogue weighing in at about £75.' And although someone else 'could do it,' Lawrence Weiner agreed to recreate his work

for the exhibition, attending the opening with much fanfare, an American conceptualist grande dame.

Spencer likens Prada's place in facilitating this exhibition to that of Philip Morris in facilitating the original, although the difference is at least as telling. There has been, to sum up, a profound acceleration. Since 1995, Miuccia Prada, with partner Patrizio Bertelli, has, through their foundation, produced projects, collected art, devised a permanent exhibition space (designed by Koolhaas and set to open in Milan in 2015), held conferences, published monographs and established an award for curators. Few institutions, and no contemporary curators, could effect this kind of autonomous, broad-spectrum programming.

And Prada is not alone. Luxury brands, banks and other companies have fully embraced the curatorial ability to impart value, self-brand and court audiences through art. Some are working with 'real' curators; some are doing it on their own. The 'new and better way in which to perform and produce' that John A. Murphy of Philip Morris identified as such a vital lesson in his introductory note to the catalogue of Szeemann's original exhibition resonates today in corporate practice. The next logical chapter in this twilight of the avant-garde, after curators curating themselves and their own histories, is everyone else, including and especially companies, objectifying, fetishizing, appropriating and indeed curating curators – becoming and, in many cases, supplanting them.

'Curators are the best vampires.' So said Germano Celant, with considerable jocularly, at a lecture about *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* at the Reel Artists Film Festival in Toronto in February 2014. Celant's equation is not his alone. In the 2011 book *Curation Nation*, a plainspoken business-world guide about, as its subtitle proclaims, *How to Win in a World Where Consumers Are Creators*, writer Steven

Rosenbaum tackles the critics of content aggregation – and its most successful current digital news-media incarnation, the *Huffington Post*, which, like *Reader's Digest* before it, largely culls and organizes content rather than generating it anew. Rosenbaum looks back to his childhood scheme of gathering day-old papers and selling them door-to-door at a discount as an incipient understanding of what it means to, in his understanding, curate. Then he concedes that obstreperous U.S. businessman and sports mogul Mark Cuban, who owns Magnolia Pictures and the Dallas Mavericks, 'would call me a vampire,' later quoting Cuban: 'Don't let [content aggregators] suck your blood... Vampires take but don't give anything back.' (Here we might cycle back to Obrist's cultural voracity and reluctance to keep regular sleeping patterns.)

Director Jim Jarmusch's film *Only Lovers Left Alive* stars Tom Hiddleston and Tilda Swinton as centuries-old vampire lovers Adam and Eve. He's a reclusive musician tucked away in a warehouse apartment in Detroit; she's a bon vivant in Tangier. When it entered wide release in early 2014, critics echoed Celant's statement in reverse. Richard Brody, blogging for the *New Yorker*, called the film 'the second-most-intensely curated movie of the season' (the first being, in Brody's estimation, Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, also starring the eminently curatable Swinton). Edwin Turner, on his site Biblioklept, wrote an essay about 'curation and creation' in the film, inspired by Mike D'Angelo's *Nashville Scene* review calling Adam and Eve 'much more like curators than monsters.'

The idea of vampire-as-curator serves as an *amuse bouche* to how curation, in a manner very similar to the art-world chronology we have just seen, has infiltrated popular culture. In *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Adam and Eve turn their basic instincts – feeding on blood – into an elite expression of taste. Blood oenophiles, they source their food from hospital labs, abhorring feeding on actual people. In one scene, Eve shows

Adam her invention, a blood popsicle made of O negative, as if it's the latest creation of New York-based iced-treats purveyors People's Pops, self-described popsicle 'matchmakers' who 'couple fruits with herbs and spices and marry them into delicious and dynamic flavors.' Everything that Adam and Eve do, in fact, and everything that Jarmusch surrounds them with, evinces popular culture's understanding of curating as fine-tuned selecting and matching. Eve is so adept in her knowledge of the nature and provenance of objects that, as Turner notes, 'she merely has to touch [something] to know its age.'

Brody suggests *Only Lovers Left Alive*'s other metaphor is vampire-as-hipster, not far off from the first, but meaningful for implying the roles personage and persona play in imparting value. Adam and Eve are undead snobs who do not eat what humans eat. (They dismissively refer to humans as 'zombies,' and the particularity of their diet is reminiscent of outlandish celebrity riders; I thought of Grace Jones, who reputedly only consumes oysters and red wine.) And so it is that Adam and Eve's rarified perseverance has the distinct whiff of cult celebrity – because as they see it, straight celebrity is vulgar and best left to the zombies. Their good friend Christopher Marlowe, played by John Hurt, ascertains that he indeed wrote all of Shakespeare's plays, and it makes him cooler that he didn't get the credit. In a memorable scene, the camera turns to a salon-style wall of portraits in Adam's place – an exhibition, essentially – of all the bohemian cult celebrities he has known, and who were probably vampires, Buster Keaton and Edgar Allan Poe among them. Brody makes the astute observation that the film is 'in effect, a movie written to be performed by Patti Smith and Richard Hell' – cult celebrities par excellence, who, for some, can turn cool anything they touch. In a 2011 piece in *Grantland*, Brian Phillips calls Smith, an object fetishist and artist worshipper in the Catholic vein, the 'curator of rock 'n' roll': 'listen to *Horses*

now and it's impossible not to notice that Smith is absolutely hell-bent on re-curating rock's lost past.'

Madonna has also been called a vampire – and a curator. Her vampiricism seems twofold, first accumulating around her sang-froid approach to aging and sexuality, from her incubus/succubus kiss with Britney Spears at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards to her ad for a 2010 collaboration with Dolce & Gabbana, in which she makes out with a young guy in an elevator (as the paparazzi scream for her) and leaves bloodlike lipstick traces on his neck. The D&G collaboration, for which she designed several models of sunglasses, suggests Madonna's other, well-known vampiric/curatorial role, as a culler of cultural modes and cues, and an impartor of value. As a May 2014 guest of comedian Marc Maron's podcast, drag superstar RuPaul commented that 'Madonna is a curator. She understands how to market. That's where we are in culture today. The world has caught up to what she was doing. [Fashion designers] Tom Ford...or Karl Lagerfeld, they are curators. Tom Ford doesn't know how to sew, Karl Lagerfeld doesn't sew. Madonna's the same. She sings, and does it all – not the greatest, but she knows exactly what to do and how to put it together. And that's genius.' RuPaul suggests curating – in Madonna's case, amassing and fusing an assortment of pop-cultural and counter-cultural texts, from Old Hollywood and German expressionist film to the ballroom voguing scene of late-1980s Harlem – has become *the way* in which celebrities and entrepreneurs supercharge their brands and attract audiences. It is hardly a stretch to assert that it is precisely the ethically shady side of this – its vampiric/parasitic qualities, feeding on previously authored works and styles – that makes it alluring. It's also what makes it dangerous, wobbly. Witness the scathing reviews for Lady Gaga's 2013 album *Artpop* or Jay-Z's 'performance art film' *Picasso Baby* of the same year, which, with their pandering art-world obsessions, risibly dive into the middle of the curationist fray.

Madonna is now a curator in the stricter sense. In September 2013 she co-initiated Art for Freedom with *Vice* magazine, an online exhibition featuring art by various artists on the topic of human rights. But Madonna is not the only curator of Art for Freedom. She appoints guest curators, like Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry, to select art as well. Obviously Cyrus's and Perry's powers of connoisseurship and contemporary-art know-how are not the main reasons why they've been selected. Their celebrity lends value to Art for Freedom, creating an audience for it and making themselves ready subjects for Madonna's curation. The curated celebrity curator: this is curator porn 2.0.

And so it is that not only galleries and museums, but also corporations, businesses, cultural organizations and not-for-profits, are using the model of the curator to imply their products and services have been created, selected and expertly managed in their buyers' favour. Obviously, an air of glamour and authority attends this intervention. These so-called experts, like art-world star curators, are demystifiers who remystify. Their amateurism tempers the remoteness of their celebrity, as if they've hand-selected a few books off their living-room shelf for you to take home with you. Mid-1990s curators like Obrist, inspired by Szeemann's out-of-the-box, untrained approach, worked to legitimate their practices and, arguably, to ascend as brands. At the present moment of their reckoning, art-world star curators are seeing the converse taking place. They are being complemented and supplanted by dilettantes.

Examples of guest curators like Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry are everywhere and alone could fill a small book. The music festival is perhaps the celebrity curator's most salient provenance, for, as we have seen, the use of *curate* as a verb began, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, with organizers of performances. Although Perry Farrell, ex-member of Jane's Addiction and founder of the Lollapalooza festival in 1991,

was not called 'curator of Lollapalooza' then, he is now; same for Belle & Sebastian, who organized the Bowlie Weekender music festival in 1999, a precursor to the U.K.'s now-massive All Tomorrow's Parties festival, and were called 'curators' of Bowlie when it was revived at ATP in 2010. Similarly 'curated' concerts and festivals by the likes of SBTRKT, Jay-Z and others are now abundant, obvious manifestations of their celebrity initiators' tastes, affiliations and brands.

Art institutions are branching out from the realm of star curators to bona fide stars. Toronto has seen several recent examples. At the Art Gallery of Ontario, pop philosopher Alain de Botton's project with art historian John Armstrong, Art as Therapy, opened in May 2013. An extension of their book of the same name, the exhibitions activate institutions' collections by framing them within the book's proposition that art can contribute to self-understanding and even self-actualization (the project was also staged at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria). Hyper-audience-driven, Art as Therapy is an egregious example of curationism. Instead of engaging the AGO's many curators to create an exhibition around its permanent collection (which these curators presumably know very well), the AGO hired celebrity thinkers from abroad to mimic a curatorial role, producing videos and a highly coded and instructional exhibition design to suggest how and why to look at art. In his long, WASPY didactic for Warhol's *Elvis I & II*, de Botton sounds very much like a parish priest or curate, proclaiming that 'Elvis stands for something that can go very badly wrong around money' and that perhaps less money, which forces us to 'save up,' 'choose carefully' and 'learn from [our] mistakes,' is better than too much. (Like most of de Botton's art interpretations, it's bafflingly off, for Warhol's depiction is of a young Elvis, likely from a publicity still for the Western *Flaming Star*, and so instead of thinking of fat Elvis, 'we' would

probably instead think of 'Love Me Tender' Elvis, of birth-of-rock-'n'-roll Elvis, of teen-idol Elvis.) In the fall of 2015, actor-comedian Steve Martin will open a co-curated exhibition of paintings by key Group of Seven member Lawren Harris at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, later set to tour to the AGO. Martin collects Harris, whose modernist landscapes are virtually unknown outside Canada (but quite well-known within it). Martin's celebrity is no doubt a boon to the exhibition's potential success at the AGO, as well as to the worth of the Harris estate.

In 2014, musician Pharrell Williams co-curated *This Is Not a Toy*, an exhibition for Toronto's Design Exchange that positioned designer toys (a.k.a. urban-vinyl art) as fine art. Pharrell's participation suggested the Design Exchange's commitment to drawing audiences, and indeed to collaborating with them, arguably in the manner of conceptualist or relational art. The very premise of the exhibition was, after all, to elevate ostensibly non-art objects into art, and this was done through a wilfully and garishly curated exhibition. Aside from Pharrell, who provided the value of celebrity, the design of *This Is Not a Toy* was integral. One commenter on designboom.com made the observation that the motifs on walls and plinths echoed certain conceptualists, with one monochromatic vertical-stripe motif reminiscent of Daniel Buren, and another diamond motif reminiscent of Frank Stella. At the same time as *This Is Not a Toy*, Pharrell collaborated with successful French gallerist Emmanuel Perrotin on a show for the latter's new space in a former ballroom in the Marais district of Paris. Entitled *G I R L*, after Pharrell's latest album, the show had Perrotin's roster of celebrity artists – Takashi Murakami, *KAWS* and Rob Pruitt among them – make work specifically inspired either by Pharrell or by his loose album themes of 'women' and 'love.' One could easily compare this blatant cross-promotional gesture with the subtler work of

the art world's star curators, who both commission work on specific themes and corral artists of similar sensibilities, seeming to make them over in their own images.

Artist-curators have also emerged as new phenomena in the curationist era, although of course they're not new. As we have seen, artists were the first curators in the contemporary vein, taking charge of their own work for aesthetic, commercial, even political purposes. The conceptualist moment saw an overlapping and confusion of roles of artist and curator, a template that persists to the present day, with many in the visual arts calling themselves by both (and other) titles. (The aforementioned Thomas Demand is a leading example of artist-curator and is plainly the best curator of his own work.)

New, however, is the institutional enlistment of artists, where artists are invited by the institution to curate, in the hope that their celebrity status and/or affiliation with creative communities will aid institutional visibility. In fall 2013, the Canadian art world was shocked by the appointment of artist Paul Butler as curator of contemporary art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, because he had been known primarily as an artist, and his curatorial work, which he didn't to that point define as such, seemed loose, unprofessional. Butler is best known for hosting 'collage parties,' which he has done internationally (and are exactly what they sound like). He also ran Other Gallery, 'a nomadic commercial gallery [focusing] on introducing overlooked and emerging canadian artists to an international audience.' After a call for applications and about a dozen interviews, WAG director Stephen Borys had not found the right candidate, so, in a casual meeting with Butler, proposed the position to him. 'I wasn't hired to be a traditional curator,' Butler said at a talk at Toronto's Drake Hotel in November 2013, ten months after his appointment. 'I never considered myself a curator, even when they handed me the box of business cards with my title on it.'

The WAG's press release pertaining to Butler's appointment makes the curationist intention of the hire clear, quoting Borys as saying, 'As a practicing artist with diverse curatorial and exhibition experience, [Butler] offers a fresh perspective on the contemporary art collection and programming at the WAG, which is one of our priorities going forward. And the fact that he has an excellent network of colleagues and supporters on the local and national arts scene is a big plus.' Butler had not just been hired, but had been curated by the WAG, with audience-building and artist outreach top of mind. In July 2014, a mere sixteen months after his appointment, Butler resigned, evincing a divide, which I will discuss shortly, between the project-management drudgery faced by most curators and the alluring, breezy creativity of their star counterparts. 'I realized that I'm an artist who sometimes curates,' he told *Canadian Art's* Leah Sandals in an online interview, 'and not an institutional curator.'

New York-based artist Kara Walker, best known for her unsettling silhouettes exploring iconography of U.S. slavery and segregation, was, in 2014, the third invited artist in the Katherine Stein Sachs and Keith L. Sachs Guest Curator Program at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art, which recruits artists as curators for exhibitions every three or four years. In response, Walker presented the group show *Ruffneck Constructivists*, a title that, according to the ICA's exhibition statement, references both the Russian constructivists (modern exhibition-design innovators through El Lissitzky and others) and the Italian futurists and their 1909 manifesto, an impish heralding, as we have seen, of newness and thus one of the key articulators of the avant-garde ethos that birthed curationism. Modernism was in fact evoked everywhere in the show. Included, for instance, was Johannesburg artist Kendell Geers' *Stripped Bare*, a play on Duchamp's sculpture *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, which Duchamp declared

finished when its glass was cracked in transport. In Geers' piece, holes in two panes of glass suggest bullet marks from a drive-by shooting.

Although the politics of the exhibition were, in Walker's words, only a 'background hum,' one can see Walker's enlistment by the ICA as an expression of the ways in which institutions recruit artists to impart not just the value of celebrity, but the value of opposition. As an artist and woman of colour, Walker is in a unique position to do what she did – to engage in a curatorial project for which many in the curatorial field (which is largely white and middle-class) would be criticized. Walker's coup with *Ruffneck Constructivists* was staging her own, ironic and arguably scathing version of curator porn, going back to the first artist exhibitions to activate a clever meta-institutional critique.

It is noteworthy to reiterate that curated group shows around race and ethnicity have been a strong facet of the curationist moment since the 1990s, and constitute attempts to court new demographics and add value to the institution as a progressive and accepting entity. Artist Adrian Piper brought this to light with her refusal to participate in the Grey Art Gallery at New York University's 2013 *Radical Presence* show, focused on 'black performance.' Piper asked instead to be included in a 'multi-ethnic' exhibition about performance art, and told National Public Radio that she no longer allows her work to be a part of 'all-black shows.' A year before *Radical Presence*, Piper humorously and cuttingly announced on her website that she would not be curated for her race, turning her back on the ghettoizing effects of this curatorial version of affirmative action: 'Adrian Piper has decided to retire from being black. In the future, for professional utility, you may wish to refer to her as The Artist Formerly Known as African-American.'

Corporations have long taken similar approaches to art and creativity and their cultivation, all ways of signifying

humane, open and philanthropic business practices. The aim of corporate collections is not investment – art is a notoriously dicey way to increase short-term wealth – but outreach and public profile. Banks in particular are now prolifically collecting art. This can be traced back to David Rockefeller, youngest son of John D. and Abby Rockefeller, the former responsible for the MoMA's Cloisters branch of medieval art in North Harlem, the latter instrumental in founding MoMA. David Rockefeller, who has long refused the title 'collector' for himself, is the pioneer of corporate collections, and consulted art historians in the building of the vast collection of Chase Manhattan Bank in the 1950s, famously decorating its headquarters with the abstract expressionists, collected by his brother, Nelson. (Viewers of *Mad Men* will notice a parallel with the character Bert Cooper, who has a Mark Rothko hanging in his office.) It is no coincidence that bank engagement with art runs parallel to modernist exhibition practices and, then, the rise of the contemporary curator. Mid-century America was expert at conflating the avant-garde motivations of finance and art.

Today it is Deutsche Bank, not JP Morgan Chase, that has the largest collection of art, started in 1979 and boasting just shy of 60,000 objects. Like many bank collections, theirs has curators. Deutsche Bank's New York curator, Liz Christensen, began with them in 1994, in the first years of curationism. To listen to Christensen's job description, however, is to be reminded of the earliest curators, people like Robert Hooke of the Royal Academy and those responsible for the *Wunderkammern* or *Kunstkammern*. 'Here, every floor is furnished with a particular selection of art, and very different people have to live with it,' she told Deutsche Bank's art magazine in 2003, of the bank's New York headquarters. 'I play the role of a bridge – between contemporary art, which can be difficult and sometimes even somewhat prickly – and the "everyday" people

who work here, whether they're guests or employees. We offer tours, and we have an internal website profiling the works exhibited in the Lobby Gallery or in the collection. For us, it's simply a part of our job to impart a knowledge and understanding of art to our staff.'

Christensen's role is a common one in many banks, and although she distinguishes the curatorial exigencies of a bank from those of a private collection, these latter entities, too, boast curators who not only manage and acquire (again, in the vein of centuries-old curators), but who also lend significant value through exhibitions and, frankly, status. Multimillionaire U.K. property developer David Roberts, for instance, has enlisted influential contemporary-art curators, such as Parisian Vincent Honoré, to manage and exhibit the many works in his collection.

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. (The very slipperiness of what it actually means to be a professional curator is no doubt part of this.) This is the logical extension of touting celebrity curators like Alain de Botton, Pharrell Williams, Steve Martin, Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus instead of their institutional counterparts. (One might add that star institutional counterparts like Obrist and Biesebach, with their project-managing personnel, are not, in certain lights, dissimilar in practice from these dabblers.) If curating curators is part of the curationist moment, then, equally, curating without curators is as well. In late curationism, it is the signification of having curated, an unmistakable cultural fetish, that matters. A curator proper need not necessarily be involved.

Bank of America's collection, unlike Deutsche Bank's, touts not curators but exhibitions. Their collection is so vast that

they have had it project-managed into touring exhibitions, featured on their website on a pick-and-choose page reminiscent of subscription-service companies like Trunk Club and Birchbox, who send clients 'curated' lifestyle boxes containing clothing, makeup and other items each month through the mail. The exhibitions are also reminiscent of those of New York-based non-profit group Independent Curators International (ICI), which, since the late 1970s, has generated more than a hundred exhibitions to tour internationally, in a brazen packaging and bureaucratization of the activities of freelance curators.

Which exhibition would you like from Bank of America? A beautiful selection of the art books of Henri Matisse? Or perhaps Andy Warhol Portfolios: Life & Legends is more your style. Do you fancy photography? It's our specialty; choose from Ansel Adams, Julie Moos and many others. Touring exhibitions are, of course, cost-cutting initiatives, part of the audience-oriented museum shift of the 1990s. Staffs and resources are being scaled back, and readymade exhibitions can offer works and time savings unavailable to institutions otherwise. (They are also, often, populist and an easier draw; the same phenomenon is occurring in the theatre world, with endlessly touring productions of major Broadway successes like *War Horse* or chestnuts like *Cats* trumping locally produced work.) Bank of America, whose shows have been taken on by the Bronx Museum, the Tucson Museum of Art and many others, even waives shipping fees. A 2009 article in the *New York Times* indicated there was a waiting list for these exhibitions. It is up to the hosting institution to involve their own curators, although in the *Times* article, the Guggenheim speaks out against such shows because, according to its director, Richard Armstrong, 'the reason the museum exists is to make exhibitions on its own.' More and more, however, this seems an antiquated philosophy (though not surprising coming from

the modernist bastion that is the Guggenheim). Unlike ICI, Bank of America certainly lists no in-house curators on its exhibitions page.

Bank of America is not alone in leaving out curators while curating. Some corporations, who in the 1990s would have pursued curators to manage their collections, are doing it on their own. Alden Hadwen, Director, Community Engagement, at AIMIA, a global loyalty management company, recruited the company's own staff to choose a significant portion of the works in their Montreal offices. PDFs were circulated, and although some curators were brought in to emphasize particularities of the works to the staff – essentially to give provisos about technical elements that may not have been readily apparent in a digital document – the choice was ultimately up to them. Hadwen had trained the AIMIA staff to be curators, in many respects echoing the utopianism of someone like Obrist or of relational aesthetics, albeit in a human-resources manner, celebrating the agency and quality of life promised by curated spaces.

Increasingly, high-profile commercial galleries like Gagosian and David Zwirner are mounting museum-style shows in museum-sized spaces with no ostensible curator-auteur. Zwirner's two gorgeous spaces that opened in 2013, on 20th Street in New York's Chelsea district and on Grafton Street in London, England, are reminiscent of small *kunsthallen*. Directors rather than curators are involved in mounting the shows, and they work closely with the artists, eventually receiving the input of Zwirner himself. Many commercial gallery shows, especially in New York and London (where Charles Saatchi arguably set the precedent), are now ambitious, sophisticated and researched, but there is no 'curated by,' no name – just the signification of curation (plinths, vitrines, precisely mapped out and arranged works, impeccable selection, vast amounts of white space). The value imparted

by curating, the aura of curation, is now undoubtedly possible without the curator.

Naoshima Island and its surroundings, notably Teshima and Inujima islands, located in Japan's Seto Inland Sea, are stunning, large-scale examples of late curationism, of curating without curators. The islands are sparsely populated, known both for their unique fishing-village culture, including a vernacular architecture that inventively employs smoked cedar, and for their wildlife (the islands were the first national park to be designated in Japan, in 1934). The area was transformed by post-Edo industrialization, turning it into a hub for refineries, which, especially in Teshima in the 1970s, polluted sea and air with emissions and dumping. While the nearby city of Okayama thrived, the islands, with their centuries-old traditions and precious ecology, were falling away. At the same time, Naoshima, home to copper refineries, became depressed due to the sourcing of cheap copper from the U.S.

Several factors have made the Seto Inland Sea what it is today, where few superficial traces of its industrial and economic devastation remain. Due to an impressive, inspiring and decades-long backlash by the residents on these islands, who number only in the thousands, Naoshima had become an 'eco-town' by the 2000s; its north, once home to Mitsubishi and its affiliate copper refineries, was now a treatment plant for industrial waste. In south Naoshima, droves of tourists, from Japan and elsewhere, arrive daily from the ferry docks at Okayama, about an hour away. A large, spotted-red pumpkin sculpture by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama sits goofily on the coastline, greeting visitors who, on disembarking, are eager to have their photos taken with it. (Islanders as well as tourists are fond of Kusama's pumpkins, both this and another, yellow one located elsewhere. Houses display polka-dotted gourds at their entranceways, paying tribute to it, and it is rumoured

that when one of the pumpkins fell into the sea during a typhoon, fishermen rushed to rescue it.)

Kusama's winsome pumpkins are only a small part of a large project. Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima have become art islands or, to use a phrase cropping up more and more in the art world, art-tourism destinations. This is largely the doing of language-training publishing mogul Tetsuhiko Fukutake, director and chair of Benesse Holdings Inc. and chair of Fukutake Foundation. Fukutake's speech at the Setouchi International Symposium in 2010, excerpted in press materials for Naoshima, expresses a utopian and social belief in the transformative power of art that is resonant with the art world's most prominent curators, particularly in the context of biennials. Fukutake, in fact, began the Naoshima art site in 1989 with the unveiling of the Naoshima International Camp, in effect a participatory-art project. Here, visitors were encouraged to 'experience the natural landscape' of south Naoshima by staying overnight in pristine-white Mongolian yurts on exquisitely designed grounds by starchitect Tadao Ando. That year, Naoshima's first public sculpture was unveiled, Karel Appel's *Frog and Cat*.

In Fukutake's speech, he stresses the concept of a 'happy community':

Many people around the world still believe that there is no utopia in our world and that they will find it in heaven or paradise after they die. Can this really be true, when there is no one back from the other world saying that paradise there was wonderful? After seeing the elderly people in Naoshima become rejuvenated by cheerfully interacting with contemporary art and young visitors to the island, I decided to define a happy community as one that is 'filled with the smiles of elderly people who are our mentors in life experiences'...

I believe that Naoshima is thus the happiest community in the world and attracts many visitors from overseas...

I believe contemporary art has the great potential to awaken people and change a community.

Of course, *benesse*, its Latin etymology commonly expressed in many romantic languages, means *blessing* or *gift*. The Fukutake Foundation and Benesse Holdings have interpreted it as *living well*.

I visited Naoshima in October 2013 and can attest to its intoxicating, paradisiacal qualities. The natural landscape alone is worth the pilgrimage, but each art site initiated by Fukutake since that first campsite in 1989 can, in the manner of the island's alluring vernacular architecture, boast a seemingly perfect integration with that landscape. It is as if contemporary art now grows out of Naoshima.

Devotees of Tadao Ando will find much of his important work here. He is a brilliant fit, known for integrative minimalist architecture in the great Japanese tradition, with stress on structural integrity; clean, geometric spaces that work with light as a design element; and hard, simple construction elements like stone and concrete. Ando's three standout constructions are the Benesse House Museum and the Benesse House Oval, which houses a hotel and restaurant amid a display of works from Fukutake's impressive Benesse collection. Constructed on a cliff, it has several terraces providing sublimely constructed views of the coast, from which one can look in any direction and see dreamy vignettes of nature intersecting with Ando's clean, canted lines. Ando's Lee Ufan Museum, a home for works by the Korean minimalist with whom he shares aesthetic affinities, dips down onto a spare field, its entrance a staircase next to a formidably high concrete wall. Ando's Chichu Art Museum goes underground, a cold vault that displays only three works: selections from Claude

Monet's *Water Lilies* series; a light piece by James Turrell, who has another work on Naoshima; and a dramatic space designed by Walter De Maria that looks like something out of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

The constructions on Naoshima have a quiet elegance that belies their complexity. De Maria's work at the Chichu in part consists of a giant, polished, granite ball, which sits halfway up a staircase surrounded on both sides by long gilded-wood geometric forms. Elsewhere on Naoshima, Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Go'o Shrine* from 2002 updates an old Shinto-Buddhist shrine from the Edo period, its altar, in Sugimoto's retooling, a glass staircase going down into an underground stone chamber, accessible via a long corridor that, when one reaches the end, provides a reflective view of the inland sea resembling one of Sugimoto's spare, melancholy black-and-white photographs.

Exhausted from such beauty, I and several international journalists brought to Naoshima by the Japan Foundation were, after a perfect (curated?) lunch at the Benesse restaurant, brought to a conference room where we were given a detailed presentation on the activities of the Fukutake Foundation and Benesse Holdings. Impressed and slightly overwhelmed, I asked the presenter if there were any curators involved in any of the island's projects. Surely, given the consistency of vision and the impeccable installation, there was a behind-the-scenes curatorial team cultivating everything. My question was translated but the presenter seemed flummoxed. After a pause he said, 'We hope Mr. Fukutake lives a very, very long time.'

Evidently Naoshima represents the directed vision of one person fanned out, notably with the aid of Ando, into manicured reality. Naoshima (unfortunately our tour did not include Teshima) seemed a wonderland, but one in which aggressively finessed value was the lure. Naoshima may attract tourists from nearby Okayama, but it can be expensive for Japanese to travel even within their own country. For others not in

Part 2 Work

Japan, Naoshima, while not itself curated per se, becomes part of a curated, luxe lifestyle. 'Have you seen it at Naoshima?' may have been on the tongues of collectors who visited alternate, expensive versions of Kusama's pumpkins at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2013 and Frieze New York in 2014.

The aura of the curated is not only expressed in the remote Seto Inland Sea. Today we see it, for instance, in most of our retail experiences, in which we are presented with a total experience, a selection of curated items, the organization of which, again implicitly inspired by Barr's Useful Objects shows, constituting an amplification of their value, along with that of the brand presenting them. Popular American grocery-store chains Whole Foods and Trader Joe's are obvious examples of the aura of the curated in the everyday, where, merely by walking in the door, you are promised access to certain foods and not to others, as well as to a certain style, which comprises packaging design, store geography and staffer personality. It is not this book's intention, nor within its scope, to enumerate all expressions of curated auras in the retail world and daily life. Doubtless you are aware they exist (IKEA, Pottery Barn, Restoration Hardware, Uniqlo, Uline, the list goes on). Less evident is the work, yours and others, that rationalizes their existence. Value, as regards connoisseurship, selection and promotion, is one thing. Work, the execution and fostering of such value-based visions, is another.

Thus far our story of curationism has centred on value: how the inherent novelties of the avant-garde, under the translating influence of the curator (or, later, something like the curator), became assets. A contrarian, insouciant and critical attitude toward work is also essential to the avant-garde's value imparting, and we have certainly seen this not only in radical artists but also in star curators and dilettante celebrity curators, whose 'labour' over the choices they make for a variety of exhibitions and product lines can seem either dubious or overarticulated. Musician Santigold's 2014 collaboration with Stance Socks, to whom she provided three patterns is, for instance, described in elaborate terms in the press release:

Carefully curating this three piece collection of one-of-a-kind socks – Santigold spent the last year creating designs stimulated by music, travel and more. The new collection includes three unique socks titled Brooklyn Go Hard, Gold Links and Kilimanjaro. Santi...found inspiration from her trip to Tanzania where she climbed Kilimanjaro as part of a documentary to raise awareness for the global clean water crisis. Her visit to a Masai village during this trip influenced the mix and match pattern found on her Kilimanjaro sock.

Sometimes you have to climb a mountain to properly curate a sock.

Let us return to the art world. What allies contemporary star curators with the kind of eminent artists they promote is not just strong institutional affiliation and sensitization to audiences. Both factions are also committed to what is known in art-theoretical circles as 'deskilling': they make livings doing