

The Identity of the Curator and Educator:

A phenomenological analysis of the curation of *Postcards From Home*

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Abstract

Identity of the Curator and Education: A phenomenological analysis of the curation of *Postcards From Home*.

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This thesis explores the hybrid pedagogical identities of curator and educator, specifically where they overlap, converge, and conflict in the curation of an art exhibition. In this study, I curated an exhibition locating my identity and enacting the hybrid identity of educator, artist, and curator. I constructed a phenomenological text as an account of the connections and disconnections between the role of the educator and curator. The tension between inclusivity and exclusivity in the arts is discussed as a major tension between these roles, as well as didactic versus open-ended pedagogical strategies.

The phenomenological account of the curation of the exhibition *Postcards From Home* at Ste. Emilie Skillshare in Montreal, Quebec was used as the data for this study, as well as interviews with audience members and participating artists.

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Preface

My personal experience in the visual arts has led me to be interested how the roles within the arts intersect in particular the roles of administrators, curators, artists and educators. As an arts administrator and arts educator in public galleries and artist-run centers, I've always been interested in certain divisions within arts institutions. I'm curious, on the one hand, about the separation of roles between museum departments, and on the other hand, about the division of responsibilities among staff in smaller artist-run spaces. As an artist, I felt drawn both to teaching and to curatorial practices, but these two areas, although linked, are often separated within professional arts spaces. The connections between the identities of artist, curator and educator do overlap, but the professional structures that surround them are not always interconnected. Lacking the ability to move back and forth between these areas in institutional settings, I began to do freelance work in all three separately.

My curatorial practice is the most recent in terms of my roles in the arts. In terms of curation, though I had curated several small exhibitions during my undergraduate degree in studio arts, my professional practice began in 2010. It began with an exhibition with fellow artist and collaborator Jasia Stuart. Mixing art and pseudo-science, we set parameters for a group of artists to engage in a "pillow exchange" where artists sleep on each other's art pillows and then blog about their experience. We used social media such as Twitter to promote the project, which later culminated in an online documentation called *The Pillow Exchange: An Experiment in Art and Sleep* (<http://pillowexchange.wordpress.com>).

Having had reasonable success with this collaboration, I decided to curate another web-based project – *The Fountain Project: Duchamp as Muse* (<http://thefountainproject.wordpress.com>). This piece assembled art that had been influenced by Marcel Duchamp, which was mostly conceptual art. This ongoing project has also been relatively successful, although originally I had difficulty finding artists to participate. I believe this was due to the nature of the project, which instead of prompting artists to create new work and engage in artistic dialogue, sought to collect work that was already made and therefore not drawing a wider range of artists who might nonetheless be interested in Duchamp as a muse.

Another curatorial opportunity came when my colleague Scott MacLeod asked me and another artist, Jessica Ayslworth, to co-curate an exhibition for NDG Art Walk at Shaika Café. The theme of the exhibition was the perception of place, and occurred in August 2011.

Given my status as an emerging curator, it is important for me to consider how my curatorial style is situated within contemporary practices. It is also important for me to consider how other aspects of my professional life influence how I envision curatorial work and how this translates into exhibitions. Primarily my work within the arts has been as an educator and therefore this intersection will be the subject of this research.

As an arts educator, I worked in the gallery of the Art Gallery of Alberta, which significantly shifted my perceptions of the interpretation of art as a form of pedagogy. Rather than reciting or insisting that the curator or artist's interpretation was the correct one, I came to value the benefits of guiding visitors in considering

their own insights and relationship to the work. This interpretation strategy allowed for multiple meanings to be created rather than a single dominant perspective.

But I found myself wondering, as a curator, how I could translate what I had learned at the Art Gallery of Alberta's education department into better exhibitions, allowing the audience to consider pieces they encounter in numerous new and personal ways. The dense interpretive panels and didactic materials used in exhibitions often conflict with the way that art educators would want to prompt visitors to build interpretations based on their own experiences of the artwork. It is from these multiple perspectives and with these tensions in mind that I come to this research. I will attempt to deepen the dialogue between works of art and the audience, and allow for more pedagogy within the structure of the exhibition.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This phenomenological study explores the intersections and conflicts between the identity of the curator and the identity of the educator when one person occupies both roles. In this study I have examined my identity as both curator and educator during a curation of an exhibition for points of tension between these two roles. As I often approach these two identities as distinct roles, it is important to consider how the roles affect each other within each practice.

The data collected was gathered during the exhibition *Postcards from Home*. This exhibition was a postcard exchange and exhibition with the themes of displacement, and explored how ideas of identity and home affect us. I created an accompanying website so that the art can be accessed remotely over the Internet and seen by viewers from diverse geographical regions. This website also functioned as a catalogue for the exhibition.

Postcards from Home was an exhibition at Ste. Emilie Skillshare in Montreal, Quebec from February 17th- 24th, 2012. The exhibition was a collection of thirty-five postcards created by artists from Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, England, and Brazil. Each artist created five postcards, one of which was used for the exhibition. The remaining four were exchanged with the other artists. The works were diverse in nature some depictions were abstracts, others portraits as well as landscapes.

1.2 Rationale Statement

Given the ‘educational turn’ (Schmitz, 2010; Wilson & O’Neill, 2010) in curatorial practice and the theorization and deployment of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) in art and curatorial practice, the identity of the curator is changing significantly (Charlesworth, 2006; Farquaharsen, 2001). It is therefore important to define the identity and practices of the curator in relation to pedagogy to better understand their role in creating knowledge within the arts. I suggest that the idea of an exchange, as do Gillick (2010), Beech (2010), and Garoian (2001), rather than the authoritative voice of a single artist or curator, is a potentially strong model for the pedagogy of curatorial practice and the collaboration between curator, artist and viewer.

1.3 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the larger significance of the intersection of my identities as curator and educator as I curated the exhibition *Postcards From Home*. Understanding these usually separate identities as they are embodied in one person allows for a stronger knowledge of how educational pedagogy could be employed in curatorial strategies. This research also allows for insight into the conflicts and differences in goals of the curator and educator.

1.4 Research Question

In this study I have examined how the tension between curation and education, as well as the tension between the historical and contemporary roles of curator, are manifested in the curation an exhibition. I argue that these tensions arise

from the separation and segregation of two overlapping professions that often have diverging goals (Rice, 2003). I further argue that defining and navigating these roles is particularly important for emerging curators as they develop their professional style and identity. In turn, an arts educator can gain a deeper understanding of curation through appropriating aspects of the identity of the curator, which can be learned through the study of the socio-historical context of that role.

In this thesis, the act of curating an exhibition will be described and analyzed to see where and how the identity of the educator and curator conflict and where they harmonize, allowing both identities to be more clearly defined as well as recognizing the similarities and differences between them. These identities are constructed on three factors; internal factors, the social sphere and actions. The essential research question is:

- How do the qualities and characteristics of the emerging curator and educator develop, shift, connect, and contradict themselves during the curation of an exhibition?

The development of this question could lead to creating a model for the possible hybridization of the role of educator and curator.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Identity is constructed through three processes, self-reflexivity, social context and action (Oyserman et al., 2012). Self-reflexivity, how one understands ones memories and past experiences, play a role in one's identity (Callero, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2012; Sokefeld, 2001). These experiences are mediated by culture, gender, education, time, and place as well as many other factors. These

factors influence how my roles, as a curator and educator, are constructed.

Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) state “the self is both a product of situations and a shaper of behaviour in situations” (p.70).

Identity is also a force for action; it is directly bound to behaviour (Oyserman et al., 2012). How we conceive our identity influences the way that we act in certain situations (Goffman 1958; Oyserman, et al., 2012). For example, the teacher’s actions are bound their identity as a teacher within a classroom setting. This relates to the roles that we occupy as part of our identity and how the norms of these roles are viewed both by others and oneself.

Our identity is also socially constructed; we ground our “self and identity in social context” (Oyserman et al., 2012). This socially context is also reflected in Sokefeld’s (2001) assertions that we use identity as a way of categorizing both ourselves, and each other. In this way identity adapts to the norms of the social sphere (Callero, 2003; Goffman, 1958). Oyserman et al. (2012) state, “a clear way to signal an identity socially is to act in ways that are (stereotypically) congruent with it” (p.76).

These three factors, self-reflexivity, action and social dynamics shape how we perceive our identities and those of others. In this study these factors will be used to help create understanding of my identity as both curator and educator and how they interact while curating an exhibition. These factors will be discussed further in the Chapter 2 the literature review.

1.6 Justification

Museums and art galleries are contested spaces of power and culture (Garoian,

2001). They are important from a pedagogical standpoint. The “discursive weight of galleries, installations, and exhibitions ... are, as it were, spatial arguments about the world that they denote” (Fyfe, 2006, p.35). Who controls these portrayals of our world and how they connect to the viewer are significant reflections of our society’s views of knowledge.

The venue for my exhibition was Ste. Emilie Skillshare Gallery, a community space in Montreal. This gallery is run through an open-call system where submissions are juried by the Ste. Emilie Collective based on whether they meet for the space’s mandate. Artist-run spaces, galleries run by artists for artists, and the cultures that surround them have grown in their influence of Canadian artistic practice (Bronson, 1983). This is especially true in relation to art and artists that have historically been excluded from the mainstream due to marketability or media, such as new media or performance art. But these types of spaces have also made available new ways of exhibiting and viewing artwork and a new sensibility of space, access, and participation. In the particular case of this project, a gallery that is a collectively run skill-share space engages viewers in a way that is radically different than in a commercial or large public gallery. Given my curatorial goal to engage in dialogue with the viewer through the work, the choice to exhibit this curatorial work at Ste. Emilie with its community-based mandate was ideal as well as crucial, as it demonstrates the need for such spaces and what they inspire - a model of dialogue rather than that of unidirectional assertion and a transformative rather than a transmission model of learning. This type of learning is an exchange of information rather than a correct answer that needs to be found.

Mail art embodies the ideas of exchange that I hope to foster within this exhibition. Its focus is not on aesthetics but rather on communication (Friedman, 1995; Kusina, 2005). The exchange of these works engages the artists in a dialogue with each other and allows them to think about their work in a larger context. Exchange is therefore embodied in all aspects of the exhibition, from the viewer's experience, the curatorial style as well as the artists' participation.

1.7 Limitations

Because of the use of phenomenology as a methodology, this research is not generalizable, it is specific to both this exhibition and my curatorial and educational style and is not meant to be directly applied to other situations. It does however allow for a more in-depth understanding of the role of the emerging independent curator, one not affiliated with one particular gallery or museum and therefore lacking access to a collection. It also gives insight into the challenges that the emerging independent curator faces.

Additionally, this research is not a practical guide to how to curate an exhibition, although it may shed light on some of those aspects. It is rather meant to explore how the goals of the educator and curator intersect and how those roles interact within the curation of an exhibition.

1.8 Organization of Thesis

This thesis contains six chapters: the introduction; literature review; methodology; phenomenological account; analysis of interviews; and conclusion. Chapter two's literature review covers identity construction, the role of the curator and defines the educational turn in curatorial practice in detail, collective artistic

practices, pedagogical strategies, and mail art . Chapter three presents an overview of the research design, phenomenology's major thinkers, the methods used in this thesis, and their procedures. Chapter four is an phenomenological analysis of the curation of the *Postcards From Home* exhibition. Chapter five analyses the four interviews conducted as part of this research, two from participating artists, and two from viewers. Chapter six is the conclusion where a summary of the research will be presented, and the limitations and implications of the study will be discussed.

1.9 Terms and Concepts

1.9.1 Emerging Curator

An emerging curator is a curator at the beginning of their career who has yet to receive full professional status as a curator, much like an emerging artist, the emerging curator does not have an exhibition track record to give them full status as a curator. The definition and role of the curator is not agreed upon in the literature (Charlesworth, 2006; O'Neill, 2004) but for the purpose of this thesis it is broadly defined as the person or persons who bring together artworks, audience, venue (whether physical or virtual) and theory.

1.9.2 Independent Curator

Independent curators are defined as those who are not employed by a specific gallery or museum but rather work as freelance curators (O'Neill, 2005).

1.9.3 Contemporary Art

Contemporary art will be defined as art made by living artists (i.e. Those who are currently alive) or work that was made after 1970. Postmodernist as well as and some Modernist art falls under this category (Mayer, 2008).

1.9.4 Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to “a source of instruction or guidance” (Hamilton, 2009, p.6). It encompasses both informal and formal learning. Although its Greek roots would suggest that it applies only to children, its contemporary definition has expanded to also include adult education (Hamilton, 2009). As learning in this case refers both to the child and adult learner equally I have not made a distinction between pedagogy and andragogy, but instead used the term pedagogy to refer to both adult and child learners.

1.9.5 Transmission Methods of Pedagogy

In reference to pedagogy transmission methods are defined as knowledge being transmitted from teacher to student (Miller & Seller, 1990). These methods do not involve input from the student but rather is based on the retention of information given by the teacher (Miller & Seller, 1990). In the case of museum education this can occur when the educator or curator tells the viewer the correct meaning of the artwork, rather than encouraging them to find their own interpretation.

1.9.6 Relational Aesthetics

Nicholas Bourriaud (2002) defines relational aesthetics as an art form that is in “the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space” (p.14). Although he is referring to a specific body of practices, his definition can be applied to a broad range of artistic practice. In this thesis relational aesthetics will be used as a theory that re-conceptualizes the viewers relationship with artwork.

1.9.7 Networked Art

“Mail art, artist books, artistamps, assemblings, experimental and visual poetry, Email art, video, and performance art have all, at various times, been considered members of the loosely configured classification known as "Networked art"” (Kusina, 2005, p.1). The media is not the main connection but rather that these types of work use similar artist controlled systems of distribution (Kusina, 2005). These works also privilege communication over aesthetics (Friedman, 1995; Kusina, 2005).

1.9.8 Mail Art

Mail Art falls under the category of networked art and its definition (Kusina, 2005). It is unique in the fact that it uses the postal system as its method of distribution. To be mail art not only must it use the postal system as a distribution method but it must also be an important part of its artistic process (Friedman, 1995).

This section concludes this chapter on the role of the curator and educator. In the next chapter I will present the literature that addresses the role of the curator, defining the educational turn in curatorial practice, collective artistic practices, pedagogical strategies and mail art.

In the following chapter the literature surrounding these issues will be discussed in further detail.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I will summarize the articles that discuss identity construction, the factors that influence how one's identity is made. I also reviewed articles on who can be a curator, and how that identity is or is not defined. I investigate how the role of the independent curator may differ from that of a curator in an institution. I then present research about the framework of the 'educational turn' in curatorial practice as a possible identity for my curatorial identity. In relation, I found group practices and artist collectives that employed pedagogical strategies as a way of creating a more active viewers. Finally I discuss collected articles that cover the ideas of home, identity and the postcard format, which is at the heart of my own curatorial project.

2.1 Identity Construction

Slay & Smith (2010) define professional identity as "one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences" (p.86). It is important to ask how are these identities are created. Identity construction is an active process of creation and revision (Beech, 2008). Identities are not only based on past experiences but also on current interactions and perceptions (Beech, 2008; Callero, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2012). There are both internal and external factors that influence one's identity and therefore actions. (Beech, 2008; Oyserman et al., 2012).

Internal factors include physical memory, experiences and self-recognition (Oyserman et al., 2012). Past events help to shape internal perceptions and identity norms (Beech 2008; Oyserman et al., 2012). One does not necessarily have a uniform identity and therefore "identity work may be a mélange of different identity projects,

co-present within the self but distinct and [are] potentially conflicting” (Beech, 2008). Internal factors also include one’s goals and motivations (Oyserman et al., 2012).

External factors, such as time, place and other contextual information can impact one’s identity (Callero, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2012). The socio-historical context and ones day to day activities influence one’s identity, as well the awareness of how one is perceived by others also affect one’s identity (Callero, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2012). Interacting with others allows one to act in a way that reinforces one’s identity (Oyserman et al., 2012). When one is in a situation where their identity is unclear one often acts in a normative way, reinforcing stereotypical aspects of their identity and role (Oyserman et al., 2012).

Internal and external factors also play a key component in the creation and understanding of roles, which form parts of one’s identity (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Roles are also important in how one perceives their identity (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Simpson & Carroll (2008) as well as Goffman (1958) argue, “roles are conceptualized... as different social ‘masks’ that actors may choose to adopt in their ingoing construction of both self and society” (Simpson & Carroll, 2008, p.30). These roles set up a set of expectations between the person in the role and others (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). This allows for the identity of the person in the role to be fairly predictable when these expectations are met (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Roles allow for people to know how to act in a certain situation and become a tool within a larger identity.

Identity and roles play an important part of how one behaves. Identity can direct choices that are made by an individual, rather than relying solely on contextual

information (Oyserman et al., 2012). One's identity impacts "how they make sense of themselves and other, the actions they take, and their feelings" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p.70). Simply stated one's identity and behaviours are directly correlated. I do mean to imply that contextual information does not also affect behaviour however identity also plays an important role in decision making process (Oyserman et al., 2012).

The following sections discuss external influences and roles within the curatorial and educational fields. These positions have impacted the construction of my identity within this study. These factors will be used to discuss the roles of educator and curator and how these impact my identity as both a curator and educator.

2.2 The Role of the Curator

Many of the articles suggest that the role of the curator is ill defined and that the lack of definition makes it difficult to establish criteria for good curatorial practice and to determine who can legitimately call themselves a curator (Charlesworth, 2006, O'Neill, 2005). This allows for shifts in the identity of the curator.

Curating Doubt by JJ Charlesworth (2006) delves into the distinction between the artist and the curator. Charlesworth (2006) believes that these types of divisions are "navel- gazing" (p.2) in contrast to the more serious theoretical or practical considerations about past and present curatorial practice. He uses Liam Gillick as an example of an artist and curator who has curated exhibitions which spoke to the position of the artist and curator simultaneously within the institution. Charlesworth believes that this position of critic of the institution has itself become institutionalized

and therefore uninteresting. This phenomenon however points to “the uncertainty of curators regarding the definition of their institutional roles” (Charlesworth, 2006, p.5) and poses the question, “who claims to curate, on behalf of whom, and on what terms?” (Charlesworth, 2006, p.5) His scholarship emphasizes the lack of a clear definition of a curator, and critiques the endless self-reflexivity of the curatorial world. And yet, he does not offer a definition or solution to this problem. Furthermore, although the relationship between artist and curator and the artist-curator duality is explored in this literature, there is still a surprising lack of research into the connection between the educator and curator and the role of the educator-curator.

Paul O’Neill (2005) goes further by cautioning against conflating the role of the curator with the role of the artist or considering “curating a medium” (p.10) because it confuses the main functions of the artist and the curator. O’Neill suggests that we should not consider curatorial practice as an artistic medium, such as painting or installation - to do this would only further obscure its actual definition and purpose. He, like Charlesworth (2005), points out that the lack of a clear definition of the role of the curator is problematic. Although I agree that the overly self-reflexive exhibitions about curatorial practice can easily become repetitive, there is certainly a need for a clearer definition of the curatorial identity in scholarly literature. As contemporary practices explore new ways of working, the role of the curator must expand and be redefined to best develop a dialogue between audience and artwork. In this light, the link between educator and curator, in contrast to the link between artist

and curator, may be more relevant to develop in order to reflect the more interactive contemporary condition of curatorial practice.

In *Que font les commissaries? / A study of curators and curating* by Christophe Kilm (2010), he proposes that being a curator is not a profession at all but rather a series of distinct activities, this is because of the significant differences in the activities which curators engage with. The activities include, but are not limited to, historical research, hanging exhibitions, finding donors, fundraising and marketing. He claims that this position cannot exist without the institution and its hierarchy among the administrator, curator and artists (Kilm, 2010). Kilm argues that an essential role of the curator is to ask questions about what is and is not art, and thereby defining art. The curator does this through labeling certain practices as art by choosing to exhibit them over other practices. Although he makes a convincing argument, Kilm fails to acknowledge how the hierarchy within art institutions affects what is shown, how it is presented, and who gets to present it. Also, who is excluded from the curatorial position is an important aspect of what is shown, and perhaps more importantly, how it is shown. The authoritative voice of the curator does not allow room for the exploration of multiple voices and the voice of the audience within the exhibition (McLean, 1999).

In O'Neill's article *I Am Curator*, he addresses the "lack of any discipline-specific discourse within the curating of contemporary art" (O'Neill, 2004, p.7). He views the phenomenon of the artist-curator as a struggle for power within the institution of the art world. O'Neill (2004) believes that the artist-curator has a distinct display aesthetic and identity; bringing a flexibility of vision and

collaboration to what otherwise might just be seen as a blurring of professional roles. His piece argues that the disintegration of the boundaries between artist and curator has been accepted overall by the artworld¹, and artist-curators have produced many exhibitions (O'Neill, 2004). My point however is that the art world has not accepted the dual role of educator-curator although there is an equally large overlap in their professional interests. If the artist-curator has a distinct aesthetic, could not the educator-curator also have a distinct aesthetic that combines these two roles? O'Neill's article also speaks of the attempt to create a clear definition of the role of the curator, although, much like Charlesworth (2006), O'Neill does not offer any solution to this problem.

These definitions, or lack thereof, point to the changes that are occurring and the lack of stability within the field. This lack of clarity should not necessarily be viewed as negative, as it allows for new ways of working within the field and opens it up to critique and evolution. As the audiences of museums and galleries shift, so too must the role of the curator, giving rise to new methods and theories of curatorial practice. The growing number of independent curators as well as the educational turn in curation are by-products of the expansion of the artworld beyond the traditional museum parameters.

2.3 The Independent Curator

The lack of definition of the curator stems from the contemporary curator's shifting role. Traditionally, curators worked within an institution to allow for access

¹ The art world is defined as "a loose network of overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art." (Thornton, 2008, p.xi) This includes galleries, both public and private, curators, artists, art educators, auction houses, granting bodies, and other cultural institutions and professions.

to collections and funding. The shift in definition of curatorial roles leads to the emergence of the independent curator, one who is not officially tied to one institution, and a position in which many emerging curators find themselves. This identity is distinct from that of the permanent museum curator (O'Neill, 2005).

In the article *The Co-dependent Curator* (2005) O'Neill explores the relationship between the independent curator and the institution. He warns that it is important to separate the role of the curator and the role of the artist, and that curatorial practice is not art (O'Neill, 2005). O'Neill (2005) suggests that curators are unable to be completely independent of art institutions and must create temporary co-dependent relationships with them. He states that the lack of time, space and money (funding) are problematic for the independent curator's success (O'Neill, 2005). The creating of temporary institutional ties provides those components to independent curators, while forcing them to operate under the larger programming of the gallery and lose part of their creative control (O'Neill, 2005). The article also considers whether the artist can be a curator and whether there is too much self-reflexivity within curatorial practice (O'Neill, 2005). His main argument against this type of reflexivity is that the exhibition theme can often become about the curatorial practice rather than about the artworks themselves. I consider this to also be a concern when looking at the 'educational turn' in curatorial practice, where the exhibition becomes about education rather than educational, just as the independent curator can make the exhibition about curating rather than the artwork.

The ambiguity around the definition of curator has led to practices that are outside of past traditions of curatorial practice. Alex Farquaharson's (2003) *I Curate*,

You Curate, We Curate... explores the shift from the curator taking a passive role in art production to that of an active body in the production of artwork. The de-centering of the artworld and the rise of curatorial practice as an academic field has caused a shift in the way that curators work and therefore their identity (Farquaharson, 2003). Farquaharson (2003), as others who are involved in relational aesthetics, calls for the museum to become more of a workshop or laboratory. This role for the museum involves a more active viewer as well as a more educated viewer (Farquaharson, 2003). This in turn calls for a curator who mediates the relationship between viewer and art (Farquaharson, 2003); a distinct role from the transmission method of curating. His example of “performative curating” (Farquaharson, 2003, p.8) is an exhibition that is in constant shift, becoming an event rather than merely a static space. The exhibition itself, not only the role of the curator, shifts, through interaction with the audience, curator, artists, and space (Farquaharson, 2003). He also suggests that this strategy draws attention to the structure of curating itself. However, Farquaharson (2003) sees one potential problem in this type of curating: that the artworks themselves can be reduced to pawns or props within the exhibition rather than the reason for it.

The two articles discussed above bring up an important problem with the emergence of curators as more high-profile figures within the art scene. They question the point of the exhibition – namely, does the curation serve the artwork, or vice versa? Exhibitions become problematic when they stop being grounded in art. I believe that the work must first be grounded in an aesthetic and conceptual framework; the curatorial role is then to engage the viewer in interpreting the work

and to make connections between various different works. The curator's identity is problematic if it overpowers the experience of the artwork; it is only then that self-reflexivity in curatorial practice becomes conflicting.

In some ways the independent curator has more freedom than permanent curators, but, as O'Neill (2005) points out, they are still dependent on the institutions that host their exhibitions. Using community sites, rather than art institutions, not only alleviates some of this tension, but can also engage a larger community (Marsden, 1996). This does not however solve the problems of funding, garnering community support, and locating appropriate venues, which are all part of the activities of the curator (Marsden, 1996). These challenges also shape the way that the educational turn develops as a curatorial strategy, because educational curatorial practices attempt to speak to new audiences and use alternative venues. Curators who engage in community based projects are often independent curators, and do not have permanent ties to the venues that they work with. Even more than those who work within traditional art institutions they are dependent of the funding agencies and community centers with whom they work. These challenges shift the curatorial roles by shifting the audience and their expectations for the space.

Whether or not a curator is working in tangent with art institutions or community centers they must make choices regarding the style and content of the exhibition. Much like creating artwork the solutions to these problems are not prescribed and there are multiple solutions to the same problem. The identity of the curator is a major factor in these decisions. These technical and procedural elements of curatorial practice – securing funding, finding artists, locating a venue, hanging the

work and writing didactic materials – can differ greatly between curator and situation. Each curator has their own strategies to deal with these issues. The way that these problems are handled speaks specifically to the goals of the curator and their aesthetic choice. The educational turn in curatorial practice suggests the possibility for a closer relationship between the curatorial and educational roles of the exhibition of artwork.

2.4 ‘An Educational Turn’

The ‘educational turn’ in curatorial practice offers a way of considering curatorial roles in relation to how the exhibition is experienced by the audience. As a new way of curating, its exact structure has not yet been fully defined. Nevertheless, the debate about its nature offers strategies that could be useful to define the identity of emerging curators and educators.

In the last decade, the emergence of the educational turn in art curation has been particularly strong in North America and Europe. This new practice could have great significance to those working both in curatorial and education departments within the museum and gallery systems. This could also bring the roles of the curator and educator closer together. The educational turn in curatorial practice has many contributing factors, including but not limited to: pressure on museums to attract higher numbers of visitors (Aguirre, 2010), the influence of relational aesthetics (Beech, 2010; Bourriaud, 2002) and the open work (Eco, 1962), the rejection of modernism by postmodernist thinkers (Beech, 2010; Mayer, 2005), and, finally, collaboration as a method of producing art (Gillick, 2000).

Shifting away from the highly didactic nature of traditional curation, the educational turn involves the audience more actively in the creation of meaning in the

arts (Aguirre, 2010). Rather than dictating an interpretation to the audience, this method poses questions to the viewer and allows them to come up with their own responses and opinions about the work (Aguirre, 2010). Many different strategies are used to encourage this interaction: formal workshops, turning galleries into creation laboratories, simple methods such as more open-ended wording on interpretive panels, and display strategies that encourage multiple connections between works (Aguirre, 2010; O'Neill, 2010; Raqs Media Collective, 2010). This suggests that strategies that I use in my role as a educator could be translated into my identity as a curator.

Peio Aguirre (2010) looks at how the educational turn has affected curatorial practice in *Education with Innovation: Beyond Art-Pedagogical Projects*. This article discusses the potential for only a superficial turn, a rebranding, of curatorial practice (Aguirre, 2010). Aguirre (2010) claims that to truly count as an 'educational turn', curatorial practices need to change from a transference and didactic method to one that creates dialogue between the artwork and the viewer. Remaining aware and mindful of superficial connections is important in determining where the identity of the curator and the educator truly integrate and where there are only tenuous, artificial connections.

Dave Beech (2010) also presents an educational turn in curatorial practice in his article *Weberian lessons: Art, pedagogy and managerialism*. He, however, does not view it as superficial but rather a result of the relational aesthetics movement, the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary art, and the culture of 'the expert'. Artists draw from many different disciplines, and Beech (2010) believes that there is a need

for an educational concern in contemporary art because of these multiple methods working within the arts. This suggests that it is necessary that there be a greater understanding between the role of the curator, the artist, and the educator, to be able to understand and communicate about these diverse ways of working.

This phenomenological study fosters a greater understanding of the identity and roles of both the educator and the curator. By doing so it avoids superficial connections between curatorial and educational roles. It also, however, seeks to understand the conflicts between such roles and therefore problems that may arise in attempting to merge these two roles.

The Raqs Media Collective (2010) argues in *Wonderful Uncertainty* that education within the gallery should be based on the interpretation of the viewer rather than the desire of the artist or curator to create meaning. This is the type of relationship between viewer and artwork that truly would create a successful educational exhibition. The Raqs Media Collective (2010) suggests that it is the role of the museum education department to foster this relationship, although the way that the exhibition is physically oriented can play a big part in the educational process by asking the viewer to question what they see. By truly considering audience interaction with the artwork when mounting an exhibition, a curator insures that interpretation is privileged over an authoritative stance.

This article suggests that it is not only the role of the educator to create a pedagogical experience within the exhibition but that the curator can also undertake a more pedagogical role. The Raqs Media Collective (2010) suggests that there are different levels of engagement in pedagogical activities within the gallery and that the

concern of educating the public rests mainly on the education department. This differs from other articles (Aguirre, 2010; Beech, 2010; O'Neill, 2010) in that it does not hybridize the roles of the curator and educator.

Critiques and concerns regarding the educational turn pose important questions however. The challenge is that the educational turn can easily be superficial rather than an attempt to truly engage the audience and to internalize a pedagogical perspective. In other words, the superficial combination of the two roles is only a marketing strategy (Kahn, 2010; Podesva, 2007). There is a risk that exhibitions or curators will borrow educational signifiers without actually encompassing a pedagogical approach (Kahn, 2010; Podesva, 2007). Others (Schmitz, 2010; Wilson & O'Neill, 2010) claim that very diverse curatorial practices are being categorized into an overly broad heading of 'the educational turn'. They therefore refuse to name these practices as such even though they may in fact have a strong pedagogical leaning as part of their scope. The educational turn suggests that there is a desire in curatorial practice to hybridize the roles of curator and educator. This hybridization could create new educational prospects for exhibition design. Consequently, none of the articles discuss possible conflicts of this hybridization.

Edgar Schmitz (2010) suggests in *Some turn and some don't (On set-ups)* that in evaluating the educational turn we must look both at what the exhibition says it is doing and what it actually does. In other words, we must look at how the educational elements are actually implemented within the exhibition. Schmitz (2010) also suggests that there are curators who do not put themselves within the context of the educational turn but who are in fact using pedagogy successfully in their practice.

These curators should not be overlooked when discussing the educational turn as they are making significant contributions to it. These overlooked curators may provide a useful model for the hybrid identity of the curator and educator, and provide insight into which methods are at ease between these identities.

Another issue with the educational turn and curatorial practice in general is that, as a relatively new profession, its identity and standards have not yet been firmly established (Hoffman, 2007). Hoffman (2007) argues that the curator is not only responsible for putting together art work of a high quality but also creating a debate about the nature of art within larger frameworks and societal concerns. This demands of the curatorial role a sensitivity to the space, the artwork, and the audience. The complexity of these criteria makes it difficult not only for the audience to evaluate the curator but also for the curator herself to evaluate her own efforts, and therefore making an evaluation of the presence of the educational turn at times tricky to identify. This lack of criteria makes it difficult to judge whether integrating pedagogical elements is a successful curatorial strategy.

Given that discrepancies between both theory and practice within the educational turn, one might ask, can it even be called a 'turn' at all? The answer to this question may only be solved with time, but regardless of whether the 'educational turn' survives the educational prospects of exhibition design will remain significant. What is perhaps more important is how and where pedagogy is being used in exhibitions and which of the strategies are effective. To truly consider this, one must look at the factors that have influenced contemporary curators and how appropriated theories and practical concerns are applied in the contemporary context.

Postmodernism has changed the way that many museums view their audience and their collections. Rather than each object having one clear meaning, postmodernism has created a pluralistic world, where the experience of each viewer is considered.

2.5 Postmodernism and Museum Education

Postmodernism has challenged the role of the museum visitor in relation to the notions of interactivity and interpretation (Mayer, 2005). This in turn forced the identity of the museum educator to shift. Interactivity is defined as the viewer being able to manipulate the exhibition or displays (Mayer, 2005). Melinda Mayer (2005) looks at how the attitudes of museum educators have changed during the postmodern period, and some of these changes could apply to the shifting identity of the curator. After modernism, the process of the interpretation of artwork changed from finding the authorial or curatorial meaning to finding meaning as it relates to the life of the viewer (Mayer, 2005). Using visual literacy and John Dewey's writings as a model, museum educators began to teach using interactivity (Mayer, 2005). Visitor participation became a key component of this educational model, creating "active interchange" (Mayer, 2005, p.358) which caused the role of the educator to change as well. As well, some curators involved with the educational turn also used the pedagogical model of interchange rather than passive knowledge acquisition (Beech, 2010; Gillick, 2010). Postmodern theorists began to question the idea of a positivist view of knowledge, which allowed more room for the viewers' experiences in the interpretation of artwork (Fehr, 1994; Mayer, 2005).

The juxtaposition of art and the way that the interpretive panels are written and laid out are important aspects in how the viewer comes to make meaning about the artwork (Mayer, 2005). Rather than having interpretive panels that are highly didactic, that is, that tell the viewer what to think and give only one interpretation of the significance of the work, text can be presented that guides the viewers' questioning, allowing the audience the space to come to their own understanding (Fehr, 1994; Mayer, 2005). In the past, many exhibitions as well as education programs within museums used a transmission method of interacting with the audience. The museum held the power as it was the keeper of the one true meaning and significance of the artwork (Robbins, 2005). The curator's role was then to make meaning between works and the education department to impart this to the audience (Mayer, 2005). However, in a collaborative, postmodern model, the audience is seen to hold the same power as the curator and the artist, creating contexts for and connections between the works and the outside world (Fehr, 1994; Mayer, 2005).

Claire Robbins (2005) states that curators not only dictate what the viewer is able to see but also "how they are encouraged to construct meaning and understand their experiences" (p.150). In the past, the viewer in the gallery or museum had been seen as "deficient, lacking knowledge and in need of instruction" (Robbins, 2005, p.150) both by the curatorial and education staff. As the audience began to question how and who was being exhibited in these spaces, and as feminism and post-colonialism brought other established conventions into question, the role of the curator came under new scrutiny. Questions about where the curator's power comes from arose (Robbins, 2005). By making the role of the curator and her selection of

works the object of inquiry, viewers regained some of their power of interpretation. Postmodernist thought in curation gets away from the idea of “artefacts and exhibitions having finite meanings determinable only by the artist or the gallery/museum” (Robbins, 2005, p.154). The postmodern shift in theories regarding museum practice advocates for a shift in the identity of both the curator and the educator.

In relation to this, dialogue is an important part of contemporary museum education (Hubard, 2007). Dialogue is created between the viewer, the work and the educator when “[v]iewers pay close attention to the works in front of them, drawing from their lived experiences to make sense of what they see” (Hubard, 2007, p.18). Educators can then use open-ended questions, connect audience responses, and probe deeper into the meaning of the work (Hubard, 2007), creating personal relationships with it. On the one hand, information regarding the artist’s meaning and historical data can stunt this relationship by setting up a right and wrong interpretation of the work (Hubard, 2007). But this contextual information can have the ability to enrich the experience too, if it is used to engage the viewer in their own thinking, privileging the viewers’ experience as primary (Hubard, 2007). This aspect of the educator’s identity will be incorporated to that of the curator during this study.

Although the educational turn encourages the viewer to interpret the artwork in a unique way, one that has more relevance to their experiences, it does not question overall museum and gallery practice and the role this practice has in determining what is and is not art (Wexler, 2007). To a degree, by becoming more viewer-centered, curatorial practice is able to gloss over how works are chosen and which

artists are being omitted, which creates an uneven amount of engagement based on whether the viewers' experiences are being represented (Wexler, 2007). Although one may state that these issues have been dealt within post-colonial literature within the arts, the actual practices of museums and galleries have changed very little. To take on a pedagogical role, curators must also acknowledge their role in a profession that has routinely underrepresented a significant portion of the population.

Critically questioning the role of the museum and how it operates must occur if the viewer is to become a central figure in creating meaning. If the past experiences of the viewer are to play a role in this process, understanding the viewer is also essential. Understanding who has been traditionally excluded from museums and why can help curators understand how to include these populations in contemporary museum practices. Postmodern practices have opened up the artistic community to those who have traditionally been excluded from it. It has also opened up a debate regarding the role of both curatorial practice and education in museums and art galleries.

With the help of postmodern thinking, contemporary artistic practices have re-envisioned the role of art and the gallery. Relational aesthetics and collaborative practices have shifted the role of the viewer while engaging in art. These practices actively and intentionally create a dialogue with the viewer and allow them to question their role in creating meaning.

2.6 Dialogue, Relational Aesthetics and Collaborative Practice

Relational aesthetics and collaborative practices can both encourage dialogue. This being said, more traditional works and approaches can also interact with the

viewer, if they are framed in the correct context. The changing identity of the viewer requires a new considerations in the roles of the curator and educator.

Interactivity in and of itself does not create dialogue (Witcomb, 2006). To do this, it is important to take the time to understand the audience and why they go to museums (McLean, 1999). In the past, the curator's role, their conceptual framework and scholarship had been privileged, exhibitions were designed around their desires and the visitor was largely ignored by the curatorial department of the museum (McLean, 1999). Kathleen McLean (1999) proposes that, in theory, including educators in the exhibition design would be beneficial in creating dialogue with the audience, although she cites problems with its execution. She found that the end-result of the team model – having specialists from different areas work together to curate an exhibition – made “no discernible improvement” (McLean, 1999, p.94) and “dulled creativity” (McLean, 1999, p.94). Rather than merely adding an educator into the exhibition process, it is perhaps important for the curator to themselves deeply consider the audience as an educator would when curating the exhibition. By incorporating elements of both curatorial practice and museum education practice in building an exhibition – by having one person who is capable of both, the consensus style of curation which can hinder a clear creative vision does not have to be utilized. By blending the scholarly sensibility of the curator with the educator's consciousness of the visitor and their experience, curators can ensure that the exhibition will more effectively relate to the audience.

The notion of dialogue also brings up the idea of collaborative practice not only in the production of work, but also in its display, which is a major pretext for

understanding that engages all parties. When a dialogue is created between the artwork and the audience meaning is made in a collaborative way and rests between the ideas of the curator, artist and audience. As Mayer (2005) states, “meaning [is] constructed through an interactive dialogue between work, viewer, and their respective contexts” (p.364). This collaboration happens among the artists, curators and audience as they think about, define and work towards an understanding of contemporary art. Paul O’Neill (2007) suggests that the formations of such cooperation allow for a critique of the notion of the artist as the lone genius. The rejection of this notion opens the door to multiple readings and understandings of artwork. This gives the viewer the ability to go beyond the artist or curator’s intent. The transcendence beyond ‘one correct answer’ allows the audience to create their own interpretations – an essential feature of the educational turn (Raqs Media Collective, 2010). By encouraging the audience to bring their own knowledge to the artwork, the curator facilitates the visitors in building a stronger connection to the art as it becomes integrated with their worldview and knowledge base.

The educational shift in curatorial practice relates to many of the ideas of the relational aesthetics movement in artwork, which Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) defines as “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space” (p. 3). Rather than defining the gallery space as one for private introspection, relational aesthetics values the social context in which meaning is made (Bourriaud, 2002). This causes the work to be in flux, in a constant state of reinterpretation based on the perspective of the viewer (Bourriaud, 2002). This does not, however, mean

that the pieces themselves need to be in a constant state of change, but rather that the interpretation of each viewer changes the meaning of the work (Bishop, 2004). According to Claire Bishop (2006), participatory artwork has three concerns: activation of the audience; the hierarchy of authorship; and the creation of community. Although the activation of the audience in these cases is generally considered in a more physical sense, I argue that it could also be taken in a more general way; when the audience is actively engaged in connection with the conceptual and formal elements of the work. The hierarchy of authorship can also be applied when the audience interpretation is considered to be equal to that of the artist or curator, and this can be done in many ways. Finally the creation of community, which can be applied not only to relational aesthetics and participatory works but also to any viewing situation where the audience, artworks, artists and curators are communicating with each other.

Kristina Lee Podesva (2007) in *A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art* describes how artists who use relational aesthetics integrate pedagogy while co-creating meaning with their audience, inspiring a dialogue between them and the artwork as they communicate with each other, either through art or verbal communication.

These works seem to shift the interpretive power to the audience and away from the artists, who can no longer claim sole domination over meaning (Podesva, 2007). This moves us away from a model of art where the artist and curator are transmitting authoritative information to a model where viewers use past knowledge and experience to come to their own meaning of the work (Podesva, 2007).

In this light, the educational perspective on curatorial practice appears to engage the viewer in a more profound way. But is it truly reflective of a change in the way that museums operates, or just an attempt to pander to a wider audience? When a work becomes open to interpretation beyond the museum's take, the curator "does not know the exact fashion in which his [/her] work will be concluded, but [s/]he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his [/her] own" (Eco, 1962, p.32). The audience in fact is encouraged to change the meaning of the work through their own interpretation and thought process (Eco, 1962). This engages a social participation between the audience, the work and the curator, where they are creating meaning together. This meaning then becomes a negotiation rather than a right or wrong answer.

Collaborative artists groups such as N.E. Thing Co., General Idea, and Art & Language, have changed the way that viewers interpret work in the same way that the new curatorial identity is attempting to do. The notion of the collective disrupts the modernist notion of individual genius, and therefore forces the audience to reconsider the meaning of artwork (Gilbert, 2007). Art & Language created conceptual work in which "a web of meaning and connections emerged, while the reader, made active rather than passive, was invited to retrace and reactivate the connections" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 84). The viewer therefore became part of the collective by their ability to make meaning of the artwork, therefore altering its concept (Gilbert, 2007). I believe that this is the type of engagement that is ideal to strive for in exhibition design.

In *The neighborhood effect* (2000), Liam Gillick states that the nature of collaborative practices has changed. These practices, which used to meld multiple

producers' bodies of work into a unified vision, have now become temporary project-based collaborations (Gillick, 2000). Curators have begun to use these strategies to create exhibitions where the artist and the curator collaborate to create a project that blurs the boundaries between their respective roles (Gillick, 2000). Artists and curators who question the hierarchical nature of art institutions challenge the identity of didactic curators, those who contextualize work independently (Gillick, 2000).

2.7 The Pedagogy of the Educational Turn

The varied perspectives discussed above have opened the museum to new an awareness of pedagogical practices, which seek to connect the previous experiences of the viewer with the newly viewed artwork. A major challenge to the contemporary museum is re-conceptualizing this relationship between the audience and the museum (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). As the museum strives to be more inclusive, its educational role and pedagogy is debated among museum professions (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Within museums, the education component is often viewed primarily as the pre-booked tours or school programs; the potential for other more integrated or fundamental learning contexts are not considered, even though “within museums the phenomenon of display (or of exhibition) is the major form of pedagogy” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.4).

Instead of focusing on learning mechanism of museum display, traditional didactic methods are considered the educational norm (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). But these methods are insufficient for changing museum audiences who have diverse cultural backgrounds and social characteristics (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The viewer creates meaning at an exhibition mainly with the objects on display and the narrative

formed by the juxtaposition of objects within it (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). “Objects are subject to multiple interpretations, some of which may be contradictory” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 3), and there is no one correct interpretation. By allowing the audience to be confident in their interpretations, a stronger connection can be made to the artwork. The texts that the curators include in the exhibition, which are the preferred readings of the work, do not guarantee that the viewer will respond in the manner suggested. More often, multiple unofficial meanings are made within all exhibitions (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

The pedagogy of the museum can be separated into two categories: the content of the exhibition or collection, and the style of the curator (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The content is what is being said, and the style is how it is being said (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). These two elements form the main components of the curator’s identity, and are how viewers learn through exhibition. The artworks themselves which relates to the content and the hanging, interpretive panels and display strategies which relates to the style.

Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (2000) suggests that a constructivist model of pedagogy is best suited to the contemporary museum, and that meaningful interaction with the work is key in creating understanding and knowledge. The audience’s interpretations and reactions to the work need to be heard and be considered as valid as the curator’s texts and analysis (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The curator should use constructive processes to build on the prior knowledge, experience and interests of the viewer (Falk et al., 2006). Rather than being imagined as a blank slate on which knowledge is written, the viewer should be seen as an active agent who chooses to

create meaning using their own life (Falk et al., 2006). It is necessary to be aware of the personal, socio-cultural and physical interactions between participants (site, art, curator, artist, visitor) and to view them not as static but rather as constantly shifting factors; similarly, appreciating learning as a process is important when looking at how pedagogy is used in curatorial practice. By looking at the validity or the truthfulness of what is learned rather than its reliability – whether other not viewers come to the same result, we can strengthen our understanding of how learning occurs within the gallery (Falk et al., 2006). This allows for multiple meanings to be created rather than an authoritative educational objective that is handed down to the learner from the curator or artist.

John Dewey has influenced museum education practices (Hein, 2004). Dewey (1934) suggests that art cannot be separated from the everyday experience of the viewer. John Dewey (1934) believed the work of art should reflect and build upon the experiences of the viewer, therefore connecting it to their lived reality. The work should create an experience for the viewer, which can be differentiated from experience in general because it has a beginning and an end, it must stand out in one's memory (Dewey, 1934). The experiences that Dewey describes are singular and individual, and are built on the basis of past experience (Dewey, 1934). "For 'taking in' in any vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously known" (Dewey, 1934, p.42), and an experience can change the way that we relate to other experiences, both emotionally and intellectually. It is the relationship between the object and the person who is encountering it that gives an experience meaning (Dewey, 1934). "The work of art

tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their own experience” (Dewey, 1934, p.86). The exhibition’s connection to the viewer’s experience is essential to the educational turn.

The artwork, rather than merely representing a pre-set reality, represents an experience (that of the artist), and the viewer must experience it to understand its meaning in his or her own context (Dewey, 1934). This amplifies and shifts the viewers’ perception of the world and the meaning of their past experiences (Dewey, 1934). To create an educational experience, the situation must allow for the growth of other possible memories and understandings (Dewey, 1938). This involvement with art occurs within the framework of a community, and past realities help shape current ones (Dewey, 1938). It is the job of the educator, and in this case the curator, to create situations where positive participations can take place (Dewey, 1938). The factors that will create this situation are dependent on the learners and must be adapted to each set of learners; there is no formula that will work universally (Dewey, 1938). Viewer-centered learning is the most important factor of the educational turn in curatorial practice. If the curator considers the viewer not as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge but as a responsive participant filled with lived memories that the curator has a chance to build upon the understanding of the viewer will be greatly improved (Dewey, 1934).

The skillful combination of the exhibition narrative and the personal narrative of the viewer is crucial to create a truly substantial interaction between art and visitor within the gallery. Charles Garoian (2001) argues that a museum’s pedagogy must include the viewers’ knowledge and position them as active participants in their

experience, giving them agency in their interaction with the art. Garoian (2001) states “Viewers' use of personal memory and cultural history to interpret works of art enables the performance of their subjectivities, the acting out of private content that challenges the public historical assumptions of museum culture” (p. 236). Viewers consider whether their autobiographical information and the information presented by the museum are in conflict and this allows them to consider the work and its contexts in different ways (Garoian, 2001). In the traditional museum model, the curator has the interpretive power as she alone controlled the narrative being constructed, but through the process of decolonization these narratives were called into question, and the voice of the viewer began to be heard (Garoian, 2001; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

It is important that museums take pedagogical risks and give up part of their authority to the viewer (Garoian, 2001). Garoian (2001) also argues that “Viewers' performances of memory and cultural history in response to works of art represent a disruption of the museum's dominant historical pedagogy” (p. 242) and allow space for their identities to be expressed. If museums want to stay relevant to a diverse audience, they need to consider the social practices and cultural knowledge of the viewer (Garoian, 2001; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). To do this they must know who their audience is and encourage multiple meanings of exhibitions to be created (Garoian, 2001; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

2.9 Postcards and Art Exchanges

Viewing and reacting to the artwork exhibited is the main way that the majority of visitors will learn in a gallery or museum. In this case the exhibition, *Postcards from Home*, is an exchange of postcard sized (four by six inches) mail art.

It is important to understand the definition and history of mail art to understand its role in this thesis.

2.10 Mail Art

Networked art, such as mail art, attempts to open avenues of communication between artists and facilitate an exchange of ideas (Kusina, 2005). Rather than focusing on the artwork itself, networked art emphasizes exchange and the development of relationships between artists (Kusina, 2005). These relationships are used as a way of combating alienation from society as well as growing artistic communities (Kusina, 2005). Mail art is a “process which allows all people to be artists and where all artists are treated as equals” (Francois, 1995, p.122). It is common practice to include all work submitted for mail art projects without the consideration of a jury so as to privilege communication over aesthetics (Kusina, 2005; Phillpot, 1995). Creative and open communication is a very important aspect of mail art (What mail-art is about, nd) and it is important to note that the mail art network was considered by its members to be “a human phenomenon more important than art” (Friedman, 1995, p.15).

The type of materials used to create mail-art are diverse, from paper works that incorporate rubber stamps and collage, to mailing large unpackageged objects (Friedman, 2005). The materials and aesthetics do not define the movement but how these elements are influenced by the use of the postal system (Friedman, 1995). The mere use of the postal service to export art does not make that work mail art, as the goal of mail art is communication between sender and recipient rather than mere distribution (Friedman, 1995). The “stream of perception and re-perception” (Cole,

1995, p.67) causes a dialogue between the senders when the art is made as a correspondence. This creates an open work, where the receiver can insert their aesthetic response through the mail.

2.10.1 The History and Influences of Mail Art

The Fluxus and Dada movements heavily influenced mail art (A brief summary of mail-art history, nd). Ken Friedman (1995) suggests that these two influences correspond to two overlapping but distinct periods of mail-art.

The Dadaist influence corresponds to a period where individuals were corresponding privately in a closed network (Ray Johnson was a part of this period) and the Fluxus period corresponds to the opening of the network to the public through large distribution publications finally making mail art a public medium (Friedman, 1995). These periods are not clear-cut and practices from both influence the contemporary mail art movement.

Ray Johnson, who created the New York Correspondence School, moved away from the traditional gallery system and distributed his work through the mail (Kusina, 2005). These artworks were gifts and he sometimes urged those who received them to continue the cycle by adding to the work and mailing it to someone else, therefore intervening in his work (Kusina, 2005; Phillipot, 1995). The temporal nature of his work emphasizes the communicative, rather than self-promoting, nature of his mail art endeavor (Kusina, 2005). It was important to Johnson that each work was made specifically for the person receiving it, an intimate gesture, to create a relationship between the sender and receiver even though he would recycle elements from other works (Kusina, 2005; Phillipot, 1995). Ray Johnson envisioned mail art as

a one to one communication rather than a public activity (Phillpot, 1995). This goes against the monetary valuation of artwork and places emphasis on art as gift and as a private communication (Phillpot, 1995).

The Fluxus movement grasped the possibility for mass communication using mail art (Friedman, 1995). They create publications which disseminated lists of mail artists' addresses, reproduced mail art and widely distributed it and created exhibitions of mail art (Friedman, 1995).

These publications included *FILE Magazine*, *Something Else Press*, *VILE Magazine* and exhibitions such as *Omaha Flow System* (Friedman, 1995). These Fluxus publications would routinely publish their members mailing addresses and phone numbers on the final pages so their members could reach out to each other (Friedman, 1995).

A problem with mail art, which was referenced by a number of its original figures and through *FILE Magazine*, was the sporadic quality of mail-art (Banana, 1995). As the movement grew some of the work degraded in quality; this was mainly caused by a growth of membership (Banana, 1995). Unfortunately this caused many of the original members to leave (Banana, 1995). However, a core group of mail art's original members stayed as a result of their commitment to the ideology of free communication, and because the number of strong submissions compared to the low quality ones (Banana, 1995).

There were many Canadian mail-art figures, they include but are not limited to, The Image Bank, run by Michael Morris and Gary Lee Nova, the Poem Company collective, ManWoman, Anna Banana, and General Idea (Varney, 1995). In Canada

the mail art movement started in Vancouver, British Columbia but quickly expanded to include key figures from all over the country (Varney, 1995).

2.10. 2 The Aesthetics and Process of Mail Art

Mail art does not have any set rules; this is because it does not have any centralized leadership (Cole, 1995). The main goal of mail art is to create communication and its concerns with aesthetics are minimal. “[M]ail art is a process art, and its products are not always attractive by established standards” (Francois, 1995, p. 118). The defining aspect of mail art, rather than materiality or aesthetic continuity is that its communication system is the mail, or postal system (Bleus, 1995). It utilizes a “piracy ethic” (Francois, 1995, p.121) where members of the network build on, rework and destroy the work that they receive.

“In principle, every Mail-Art work is unfinished. It is an aesthetic text asking for a reply” (Bleus, 1995, p.85). If the work is viewed as communication rather than an object then at the point of reply is when the communication is complete, rather than the moment in which the object is finished. This means that the work remains both aesthetically and conceptually open as correspondence suggests multiple cycles of sending and receiving.

2.10. 3 The Politics of Mail Art

Many mail-artists do not consider mail-art to be art. This is because it does not enter into the traditional commercial market in the way that other art does (Baroni, 1995). In the Dadaist sense it is anti-art (Milman, 1995). Although many other avant-garde art forms have been incorporated into the commercial market, for example the ready-made, mail art has not successfully been incorporated into the market (Held Jr.,

2000). Despite this, the mail art network has expanded. The Internet and reasonably inexpensive access to postal service may account for some of this growth (Hoffberg, 1995). Mail art is a “process which allows all people to be artists and where all artists are treated as equals” (Francois, 1995, p.122).

2.10.4 Mail Art Projects

The media of the postcard has been explored in the past. The project Post Secret, curated by Frank Warren, is a collection of postcards, online, in exhibition and in book format, that anonymously expose the author of the postcard’s secret. This project is similar to my proposed exhibition, but it varies on theme and intention. The authors of the work also do not necessarily identify themselves as artists. My work builds on Warren’s ideas of exchange and the format of the display of this work. As well as a history of postcard works and exchanges established by printmakers and print media departments in universities.

The section on mail art concludes the literature review regarding the role of the curator, defining the educational turn in curatorial practice, collective artistic practices, pedagogical strategies and mail art. Identity construction, the educational turn, postmodern museum practices, collective practices and mail art rely heavily on the idea of exchange. The exchange of both material, in the case of mail art and ideas in the viewing of art is integral to the exhibition *Postcards from Home*. In the next chapter the methodology and procedures used for this study will be outlined.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Through curatorial practice I would like to expand upon my knowledge of how the role of curator and educator are performed, as these two roles make up much of my professional identity. Although there are instances where the same individual carries out these roles, often they are not incorporated into each other but rather viewed as two distinct tasks within that person's identity. This also plays out in the stratification of the two roles when performed by different individuals in large galleries and museums, something I experienced while working at the Art Gallery of Alberta. For this study, I curated an exhibition as a way to explore, understand and define the roles and identities of educator and curator, using phenomenology to write consciously about interactions with others, internal and external factors which helped to define my identity, and about the procedures that are associated with both the role of curator and educator. This chapter gives an overview of the main thinkers in phenomenology and their ideas. I will then explain how these ideas have been incorporated into this thesis through its methods.

Phenomenology is a way of describing and creating understanding of lived experiences (Gadamer, 1971; Heidegger, 1996; Husserl, 2006; van Manen, 1982). Phenomenology is the study of experience and hermeneutics is then used to interpret and understand these experiences. This interpretation creates new and plausible meanings for the experiences. These meanings help create understand of our everyday experiences.

3.2 Philosophy of Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (2006) developed phenomenology as a way of understanding and translating experiences into knowledge. He believed that through the bracketing of experience, one can separate one's experiences from those that one is writing about. This involves the suspension of our presumptions of the phenomenon. Through this one can separate one's own experiences from those that we are writing (Husserl, 2006). Using bracketing, we must make the world that we have become accustomed to alien or new so that we can perceive it how it is (Husserl, 2006). Phenomenology counters the positive attitude that knowledge can be built only on objective data and analysis, and instead privileges individual experience and understanding (Husserl, 2006). One cannot merely describe an object or situation but rather, one must seek to capture how one sees an object or situation (Husserl, 2006). Phenomenology requires an active effort by the observer to be attentive to detail and the context which surrounds them (Husserl, 2006). This always involves interpretation by the viewer, to pay attention or see one thing and disregard another, regardless of measures to accurately describe the experience. Husserl refers to this attentiveness to one object or experience over another as intentionality (2006).

Phenomenology stems from an existential philosophy and was further developed by Martin Heidegger (1996). He believed that we must become conscious of our everyday existence and that it is through everyday practical endeavors that we can better understand what it is to be human (Heidegger, 1996). Interpreting these everyday activities then becomes the key to understanding our existence; Heidegger

(1996) goes so far as to say that it becomes our existence. However, unlike Husserl, Heidegger did not believe that one could bracket experiences; instead he believed that creating a phenomenological account became a mixture of the participant and the researcher (Heidegger, 1996; Husserl, 2006). Although, Heidegger (1996) believed that the conscious act was an important part of understanding existence. He describes “Dasein,” or a being – and this being, as a human, cannot be conscious of all around him/her simultaneously (Heidegger, 1996). Heidegger believed that rather than placing a meaning on phenomena we must look careful at them and interpret the meaning that they are projecting to create understanding.

Rudolph Bultmann (1955), having been influenced by Heidegger, questioned the objectivity of scholarship and attempted to focus on the act of interpretation. Bultmann believed that language goes beyond a manner of conveying pure fact but rather through interpretation creates personal meaning. Although Bultmann was a theologian and focused his work on scripture, the idea of the creation of personal meaning through interpretation is essential to his thesis. That hermeneutics becomes about creating a self-understanding and self-awareness rather than functioning as generalizable knowledge is a key tenant of phenomenology (Bultmann, 1955; Gadamer, 1989). But Bultmann differed with Heidegger on an important aspect of hermeneutics: rather than viewing hermeneutics as understanding, as Heidegger did, Bultmann viewed it as a *guide* to understanding (Bultmann, 1955; Heidegger, 1996). He refuted the idea of objectivity in scholarship, and the scientific method especially in the field of history.

Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989), who studied under Heidegger, echoed the earlier ideas of hermeneutics and was heavily influenced by Kant. Gadamer (1989) believed that understanding could be created through interpretation. He devised three main points for interpretation: first, there must be a theoretical understanding of the text; second, one must understand the reader or interpreter; and finally, one must look at the process of understanding. Gadamer (1989) believes that text also must have authority, information, and truth, and therefore something to offer the reader. This de-emphasized the context of the text and emphasized its content, bringing the work back to the text itself.

Both Gadamer and Heidegger believed that the most important characteristic of human existence is that it “exist in time” (Gadamer, 1989, p.265) - that we are temporal beings. Unlike objects, we have a strong relationship to time and are only temporarily in existence; we are uniquely situated in our time and its cultural norms. Gadamer (1989) also believes that we are subject to our historical traditions, meaning that we cannot be truly free of presumptions and are not objective beings. Gadamer asserts that there must be something already in your mind to be able to understand other phenomenon. Without the context of other experiences, we are unable to understand new phenomena. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge these past experiences. He refers to this as prejudice though we should be careful not to give this a negative connotation (Gadamer, 1989). This prejudice helps to shape our experiences by giving them context and meaning.

Influenced by Heidegger’s thinking, the interpreter is then vital to Gadamer. Gadamer believes the process of understanding as the blending of interpreter and text.

It is through the fusion of the two that understanding is created. The interpreter projects meaning on the text and the text changes the prejudices of the interpreter. Much like a conversation, both the text and the interpreter play an important role in creating meaning. Given this perspective, there is no original meaning to find but rather understanding clarified in a relationship. This becomes an ongoing project, where understanding is not something we gain and have; instead, it is an important part of our lived experience. Gadamer (1971) argues against positivism in that he believes context must play a central role in the interpretation of text.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that “we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world” (1990, p.5). It is the affect of phenomenology that allows us to become conscious of our everyday experiences. The world cannot be perceived without context as it changes our perception of phenomenon. Science is unable to describe phenomena correctly because it perceives them within the rigid structures of objectivity by creating a structure that does not allow for multiple (contextual) readings of phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 1990).

It is then the pre-objectified world that we must explore to fully understand experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1990). This can be captured by writing down the phenomena as we experience it, rather than just analyzing it for meaning from a distance (Merleau-Ponty, 1990). We want to fit new experiences into the paradigms of what we already know, whether it is appropriate for the new phenomenon or not, to create associations one must become conscious of this behaviour when one conducts phenomenological research (Merleau-Ponty, 1990). We cannot perceive one object

without ignoring several others, and like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty (1990) believes that all perception involves interpretation. It is through attentive perception that we are able to make sense of our world, and through this attention we are able to re-experience objects that we have become accustomed to through everyday experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1990). This attentiveness not only applies to the objects that surround us but also to the internal, our emotions and consciousness.

For the relationship between phenomenology and pedagogy, we can turn to Max van Manen (1982), who believes that the best way to understand the latter is precisely through the former, because it is grounded in real life. He writes, “phenomenological theorizing takes any pedagogic life world incident or concern as a topic for asking in what way pedagogy shows itself in this situation” (1982, p.288). This questions what the pedagogical essence is exactly of each of our experiences (van Manen, 1982). Max van Manen argues that although positivism has certain uses in understanding pedagogy, it does not allow us to truly understand its effects as it places it outside of actual experience.

E. Louis Lankford (1984) identifies five steps to the phenomenological method: receptiveness, orienting, bracketing, interpretive analysis, and synthesis. Although his work is in reference to the experience of images, it can be equally used to understand other art education experiences. Lankford (1984) suggests that the phenomenological description not only encompasses external stimuli but also must incorporate internal response (for example feelings or memories) – this is what gives the description significance. Receptiveness is an attempt to disregard preconceived notions and allow the phenomenon to speak for itself; to allow oneself to focus on the

phenomenon (Lankford, 1984). Orienting opens up communication with the phenomenon and looking at its context (Lankford, 1984). This delineates where the phenomenon begins and ends, defining its borders (Lankford, 1984). Bracketing, also described by Husserl but rejected by Heidegger, “is a conscious act in which an individual engages to focus upon the qualities of an object, applying to an interpretation of that object only those things from past experience and present context that actually contribute to its meaning” (Lankford, 1984, p. 156). Interpretive analysis is a description presenting what is “perceived, including visual elements and their relationships, representational and symbolic meanings, and feelings controlled by these factors” (Lankford, 1982, p.156). The connection between external and internal stimuli is explored in this interpretive phase. Synthesis tends to occur naturally, creating meaning from the stimuli experienced (Lankford, 1982). This creates value and meaning from the phenomenon and allows for understanding of it.

Randall Teal (2008) suggests that it is “the backgrounds, processes, and interrelations that serve to illuminate extant things” (p. 14) and that these are the focus of phenomenology. It is these relationships, rather than positivist numbers, that give meaning to everyday life and a better understanding of our existence. To create a phenomenological study, one must extract oneself from the mundane nature of the everyday, which can be done through re-conceptualizing it (Teal, 2008). Through existential angst – feeling out of place in our world, we are able to be astonished again by the unfamiliarity of life (Heidegger, 1996; Teal, 2008). This can be done through writing and rewriting lived experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology is a useful methodology for activities that are dependent on

context, such as learning and teaching. Researchers employing positivist knowledge out of context confuse tools that pedagogues use with pedagogy (van Manen, 1982). Rather than looking at how one learns they only consider the tools employed during that learning. However, van Manen suggests that the relationship between teacher and student, rather than the specific tools used, is what defines pedagogy. These relationships can only be understood within their contexts, and therefore phenomenology can be used as a tool to better understand pedagogy. Phenomenology asks, “What is it like to have a certain experience?” (van Manen, 1982, p.296). It is human experience that brings theoretical frameworks, and not the other way around (van Manen, 1982). Max van Manen (1982) argues that although phenomenological knowledge is not generalizable and cannot be directly applied to different specific situations, it can change the way we think about and understand them. Phenomenology, rather than finding a tangible answer to our questions, allows us to better understand our lived experience and find out whether our questions are worth asking.

As experiences and social interactions play an important role in identity construction (Callero, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2012) it is important to fully describe these factors when seeking to understand identity. These experiences not only help us to define the role of the curator and educator (Simpson & Carroll, 2008) but also how the individual identity shifts these roles.

3.3 Validity

One could criticize phenomenology by stating that it is not generalizable and therefore not reliable, and this argument is not without merit – any study using

phenomenology is not generalizable, but this is not its goal (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1982). By judging research solely on the basis of whether we can generalize its knowledge, we are overlooking an important aspect of human life, that of experience (van Manen, 1982). Experiences are specific, rather than broad, but they allow us to understand the context in which we live and our identities within those contexts. They allow us to have a deep understanding of one phenomenon rather than a shallow understanding of many (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Creswell, 2007). Rather than being concerned about whether the data can be reproduced, a goal in phenomenology is “to create an account of method and data which can stand independently so that another trained researcher could analyze the same data in the same way and come to essentially the same conclusions” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p.110). Although this does not create reliability, it does show a systematic and structured analysis, which shows rigour in method. Although it is not generalizable, the resulting knowledge can be used in other situations where the conditions are perceived to be the same (Schon, 1995) – John Creswell (2007) describes this as transferability.

Rather than evaluating a study based on whether it can be generalized, Creswell (2007) suggests that trustworthiness is a more appropriate way of evaluating qualitative research. Trustworthiness is determined by three factors: credibility; authenticity; and transferability (Creswell, 2007). The research process and not the data must be reliable and systematic in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). The more systematic and well planned the system of interpretation, the more information can be acquired from a study (Mays & Pope, 1995).

The interpretation as well as the context allows knowledge to relate to our lives. Abraham Olivier (2011) asserts that although positivist research may explain our physical world, humans have “mental properties that evade empirical observation” (p.184). Merleau-Ponty (1989) echoes this idea by stating, “empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for” (p.28), that without context, information is not useful “because it is not concerned with what we see, but with what we ought to see” (Merleau Ponty,1989, p.31). Phenomenology allows researchers to describe and analyze phenomena that cannot be accessed through positivist research.

Phenomenology acknowledges bias and allows the viewer to plainly see and evaluate the author’s subjectivity. Even by choosing a research topic we already are generating bias; why did we choose one topic while ignoring another? As researchers we never expose the whole truth, but rather a small section of it (Mays & Pope, 1995). In phenomenology it is important to understand why we have chosen to study our subject (Gadamer, 1989). By creating a written account of the researcher’s views and including it within the research text, the reader is able to weigh the researcher bias within the accounts (Gadamer, 1989).

Post-structural theorists argue that a problem with phenomenology is that it takes experience as knowledge and does not question its underlying conditions, therefore reproducing these experiences (Stoller, 2009). When phenomenological accounts are “imagined to be independent of time and space” (Stoller, 2009, p. 709), without context, this argument holds true, but by contextualizing the site of the experience this problem is easily remedied. Phenomenology is centered in one time

and one experience; therefore it cannot be read without context. One's perception of phenomena can never be truly separated from past experiences and therefore is always situated in time (Stoller, 2009). The structural analysis of the experience contextualizes it within the account (Creswell, 2007). Our past experiences dictate what experience we are able to have in the present as well as our identities. Space and time cannot be separated from experience and therefore experience cannot be imagined independent of them. Phenomenology does not allow researchers to directly criticize the condition in which it is situated, but it also allows for a better understanding of the experiences under those conditions (Stoller, 2009). This is because phenomenology describes specific experiences rather than the larger contexts that create them.

Creswell (2007) recognizes a concern regarding who has the right to tell phenomenological accounts and make private experiences public, which also poses the question of whether or not these experiences are typical of the community in question. In this thesis the researcher is studying herself and additionally received informed written and oral consent of other participants, so these concerns are minimized. However, though interviews may be consented to, it is important for the researcher to take into account and be aware of both physical and verbal cues that may suggest that a participant is uncomfortable (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Although this experience may not be typical of the community in that it cannot be used as a template to curate an exhibition, some aspects of the process will resonate with those in similar situations.

The goal of this research is not to predict or dictate a pattern of strategies

regarding the educational turn in curatorial practice, but to understand how educational and curatorial identities overlap and conflict during the curation of an exhibition. The interviews will be used to evaluate the exhibition, as well as to understand whether I have successfully embodied the roles of the curator and educator.

3.4 Methods

Using phenomenology, I looked at the curation of this exhibition as a whole, rather than in distinct parts. Adopting a holistic view of the experience of creating an exhibition and also grounding curatorial frameworks in practical experience allowed me to gain a stronger understanding of what it means to be an emerging curator and educator who is integrating pedagogical practice into an exhibition. It was also important to curate the exhibition as it allowed me to access the role of the curator. However when writing the account, I have separated the data into sections that correspond to the activities during the exhibition to allow for better readability. This account may allow other curators and educators to better understand how their roles affect their identities as multifaceted professionals. Through conscious description of performing both roles, each is illuminated for readers as well as myself.

It is van Manen's notions of phenomenology that will form the basis of the methodology and methods of this thesis, detailing the experience of being an emerging curator and an educator how these experiences influence identity. Max van Manen (1990) suggests that one must look at "the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon" (p.10). One must describe these structures and phenomenon at first "without offering causal

explanations or interpretive generalizations” (van Manen, 1990, p.54). To do this, I have taken field notes and photographs of the process of curating an exhibition. These do not include explanations of why these phenomena are taking place but rather attempt to describe both their internal and external contexts in as much detail as possible. I have been conscious of assumptions that I had made during this process, reducing these biases through reflection of how they affect my research as well as exposing them explicitly to the reader (Merleau-Ponty, 1990). This process allowed me to record the lived experience of curating an exhibition as it happens, without the experience of these identities being mediated by interpretation. Although perception is always an interpretation, as discussed earlier, writing about the experience as it occurs, rather than in one account at the end of the process, helps separate the current experience from being influenced by past experiences. Photographs also help in describing the process, and in conjunction with the field notes will give a more complete view of what was involved.

Through phenomenological observation I looked for tacit knowledge that is left unattended to in everyday activity (Schon, 1995). As identity becomes engrained in one’s ways of working one does not attend to it specifically in daily activities (Oyserman et al., 2012). This knowledge is similar to the knowledge Heidegger (1996) describes when hammering a nail, in that we do not conceptualize the hammer as we use it in the everyday, and in fact, if we did we would likely be unable to use it properly. Tacit knowledge, however, allows practical information to be documented (Schon, 1995). When describing these tacit activities one comes to the understanding of what one knows, but cannot verbalize (Schon, 1995). “If we want to teach about

our "doing", then we need to observe ourselves in the doing, reflect on what we observe, describe it, and reflect on our description" (Schon, 1995, p. 30). Although this is similar to phenomenology, the initial reflection on what we observe is a key difference -reflection during action. Roth, Lawless and Masciotra (2001) criticized this step as destructive to the ability to attend to a task because it requires time out of the situation, that being in the space, or being-in-time as Heidegger (1996) describes it, is a more important part of understanding everyday activity. Being fully involved in the activity and being conscious of the work, rather than reflecting on it at the time of doing is an important part of phenomenology. Reflection during the activity prevents one from responding to issues as they come up and suggests that phenomenology is a better method of describing activity because it allows for full attention to the activity at hand (Roth et al., 2001). Therefore only description and not reflection was done during the field note stage, to take care to be engaged with the process. Schon's (1995) process is not phenomenology because of its analysis during experience. However, the underlying philosophy remains the same and Schon's understanding of practical knowledge adds to one's understanding of phenomenology.

Through these original texts, the story of the experience of curating an exhibition will be retold, using a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2007). Retelling the experience allows for the researcher to be "reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of that experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.78) as well as consider how these experiences were influenced by the roles of curator and educator. By identifying quotes and situations that best describe my experience and developing "clusters of

meaning” (Creswell, 2007, p.61) and themes, I was able to better analyze the first descriptive texts. I first looked at the textual understanding – what has been experienced, and then the structural meaning – in what context it has been experienced, to create a composite of these two factors. These factors directly influence both experience and identity. This composite text creates a narrative of the experience (Creswell, 2007) as well describes how my dual roles effect that experience. Analysis also narrows down the essence of the experience of curating an exhibition as both a curator and educator. Creating a text helped me externalize the knowledge of the experience of having dual identities, allowing others to access it and space to reflect on it (van Manen, 1990). The process of looking objectively at a subjective experience concerns itself with giving the most accurate account of it (Olivier, 2011). Through the accurate account, readers have access to phenomena that they have not gone through.

3.4.1 Photography

Photographs can “trigger recall of the experience, including the thoughts and feelings which arose” (George & Stevenson, 1991, p.206). Because curating an exhibition takes an extended period of time with extremely varied levels of engagement during certain periods, photographs have been used to help me position myself with the experience that I describe in my research journal. This allows me to recall the events and visualize them more clearly, it also allows me to present to reader a more detailed account of the visual material throughout the process and within the exhibition.

3.4.2 Interviews

Since Gadamer suggests that “conversation is a process of coming into an understanding” (Gadamer, 1971, p.385), as part of my understanding of the phenomenon of curating an exhibition, I have incorporated four semi-structured interviews done with two artists and two audience members, asking them to reflect on their interactions with the exhibition. These interviews were used to weigh the effectiveness of the pedagogical component of the exhibition, both in terms of how the audience engages with the work as well as the collaborative aspects with the artists. This will be used to determine if the roles of curator and educator have both been effective and embodied within the exhibition.

The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed me to better understand the context in which I was working, thinking about how both the artists and audience gained or did not gain understanding from participating in the project. This allowed me to have a stronger comprehension of the phenomenon and of how this experience impacted my identity. It also allowed me to assess my role as a curator from an outsider’s perspective and consider how it interacted with the role of the educator. The participants signed a consent form, which was also verbally reiterated at the beginning of the interview. The participants were given transcripts of the interviews to look over and clarify any points before the analysis. These experiences have also been retold, looking for patterns that intersect not only with their experiences but also to connect them to the experiences of others.

Although conducting semi-structured interviews does not allow for a large sample size it allows for much more depth within each interview, thus allowing me to

have a better understanding of the impact of the exhibition on the artists and viewers. Because the nature of the learning experience was experiential and depended on the viewers past experiences and knowledge base, it is difficult is not impossible to gauge its efficacy using a simple survey or a structured interview. Using a semi-structured interview allowed for differences in learning to be acknowledged and explored in greater detail (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Through the processes of guided conversation with the participants, described as a “relational conversation that is guided by the purpose of understanding a phenomenon” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.71), an encompassing view was related of how they connected to the subject matter, display strategies and process of either participating in or viewing the exhibition. Since visitors’ “prior experiences, knowledge, and interests are essential variables in collecting and making sense of the data” (Falk et al., 2006, p.330), a semi-structured interview is the most efficient way of truly considering the impact of these factors on the interpretation and understanding of the exhibition.

3.5 Outline of Procedures

3.5.1 Recruitment

The two audience members were recruited using a poster next to the door of the exhibition. Each artist who participated in the exhibition had consented to be interviewed as part of their participation in the project. Two artists were chosen to reflect geographical and gender differences. Due to language barriers and cost, both artists interviewed lived in Canada - one an established female artist from Vancouver, British Columbia and the other an established male artist from Montreal, Quebec.

They used different media and conceptually their work is very different.

3.5.2 Data Collection

During the process of curating the exhibition *Postcards From Home*, I kept a research journal detailing not only the physical and procedural elements of the curatorial process but also the emotional and intellectual elements. This journal as well as the photographs taken during the study will be used as the main source of data.

The data from the four semi-structured interviews will be used to give a broader sense of the phenomena from all parties involved. Both audience members were interviewed at Ste. Emilie Skillshare directly after their viewing experience. The audience interviews were short and therefore took place in the gallery space directly after viewing the work. One artist interview took place over the telephone; the other took place in person. The interviews were then transcribed and the participants verified the transcriptions.

3.5.3 Analysis

The analysis of these documents is compared to each other to find larger themes that describe the essence of the phenomenon, looking once again for patterns but also for any inconsistencies between the experiences of the artists, curator, and audience. The essence of the phenomenon refers to the aspects that cannot be removed without the phenomenon no longer retaining its same nature. This allows for triangulation of experience (Cole & Knowles, 2001), pinpointing problematic interpretations but also gauging whether the pedagogical strategies were successful and how the exhibition was received overall. This allows to me to see whether my

goals as curator and educator were successful.

I used Lankford's (1984) steps: receptiveness, orienting, bracketing, interpretive analysis, and synthesis. In receptiveness, I wrote down my experiences I have had with curatorial practice, museum education and exhibiting work to begin to think about how my past experiences with these themes affect my current understanding of the phenomena. Through the literature review I oriented myself to the phenomena, understanding its history and where the scope of curatorial and museum education practices. Through bracketing – remaining conscious of how my past experiences with these phenomenon have affected my current experiences, I attempted to separate my past experiences of the phenomena with my current ones. Through interpretive analysis, I connected the external and internal experiences, by reading and rewriting the phenomenon several times. Finally, through the process of writing and re-writing, synthesis occurred.

The use of phenomenology to conduct this research addresses concerns that there are no clear evaluative processes within the curation of an exhibition, much like in an artwork, where the experiential capacity far outweighs any technical evaluative model (O'Neill, 2005; Schmitz, 2010). Thus the actual experience of the exhibition must be weighed as a whole, and the only way to gauge this is through interviews with viewers. The interplay of what the participants experienced and the context in which they experienced it reveals the essence, the essential elements, of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data focuses on the common experiences of the participants, allowing the reader to better understand what it means to be an emerging curator.

3.6 Example of Phenomenological Writing

Although the provided example does not relate directly to the field of art education or curatorial practice, it helps to clarify and ground the methodology of phenomenology. The strengths and weaknesses in the text are accessed in an effort to create a strong model for a phenomenological study.

Max van Manen and Catherine Adams (2009) describe the phenomenon of writing online versus other forms of writing in *The Phenomenology of Space in Writing Online*. They explore how writing changes with the change of writing tools. Due to the fact that most computers and word processors are connected to the Internet, writing on a computer in our times can legitimately be referred to as writing online (van Manen & Adams, 2009). The purpose of van Manen and Adam's phenomenological research is to describe writing online to better understand how it may affect online learning. Max van Manen and Catherine Adams identify space as an important part of the writing, both the physical and mental space of the writer and the textual space of the writing. He points out the qualities and the uniqueness of the handwritten manuscript versus the openness and visual conformity of the online manuscript. Max van Manen and Catherine Adams (2009) describe the experience below:

Some of us still remember how it was when entire papers were written exclusively 'by hand'—scrawled, crossed-out, scribbled, with numbered pages, notes in the margins, pencilled arrows and occasional taped-on sections. Only the final draft would be laboriously and carefully typed (and sometimes retyped). And too, we may recall the first time we ever used a

word-processor to write. Having typed just a few sentences, perhaps using the delete key or even the mouse to make a change, we may have sat back amazed. Suddenly, with these magic tools, the words verily invited us to edit them, to try out new possibilities. At the same time, the text already ‘looked’ so perfect, so clean, so published. (van Manen & Adams, 2009, pp.12-13)

This descriptive writing draws readers in, connecting their own experiences of handwriting and typing on the computer to the central text. The phenomenon of writing online is broken down into several essential elements: the physicality of the typed word in contrast to the handwritten; the loss of control over the use of the work, this being compared to the spoken word; the framing of the internet as an in-between space; the difference between online and in-person conversations; and the role of the reader in perceiving texts (van Manen & Adams, 2009). This description contributes to our own understanding of writing online and having experienced this phenomenon first-hand, as most readers probably have, I was able to much more successfully analyze and consider my own personal experience. Consequently, if I had not experienced the phenomenon, would the same reaction have taken place?

Phenomenon that is less common must be described with particular attention to detail to be able to bring the reader into the experience. On a final note, given that many readers may not have experienced curatorial or museum education practices, I have been attentive in describing these processes in as much detail as possible.

This concludes the methodology section. In chapter 4 I present the phenomenological account of the curation of *Postcards From Home*.

Chapter 4: Phenomenological Analysis

This chapter is a phenomenological account of the curatorial process for the exhibition *Postcards From Home*, which involved 35 artists or collaborative groups. Although the majority of the artists reside in Canada, there were also participating artists from the Netherlands, England, Brazil and the United States. Each artist submitted five postcards, one of which was included in the gallery exhibition. In return they received five postcards back, one of their own and four from other artists.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the data consists of research journals as well as photographs. Identity and roles are described using reflexivity, social influence and action. In the Educational and Professional Background section I will discuss my educational and professional background and how it contributes to my biases and curatorial practice, this consists of both internal and external factors. Next, the chapter is divided into sections that correspond to the process of curating the exhibition *Postcards From Home*, all three factors will be discussed. To conclude, I look at the major conflicts between the identity of the curator and educator as well as where these identities are at ease.

4.1 Educational and Professional Background

My formal studio training at Alberta College of Art and Design has significantly oriented my views towards art and artistic practices. I was trained mainly in the apprentice/master model of pedagogy, by practicing artists who were not necessarily trained educators. As students our artwork was deconstructed in the minutest detail both from a formal and conceptual standpoint, both by our colleagues and our teachers. This allowed me to develop a very robust aesthetic and conceptual

framework by developing my critical abilities. The competitive nature of the institution led me to develop quickly as an exhibiting artist and the gained critical skills became engrained in the way that I view art.

When I was nineteen I began working in arts administration and shortly after began teaching art in galleries, which I continue to do. During this time, I had to develop strategies to separate my teaching skills from the skills necessary to be successful as an artist. For the most part, I do not consider my students to be artists, and I see their activities as disconnected from those of artists. I also do not consider my students' work to be art, but rather technical exercises; in the same way I do not consider my sketches to be art. This is because it lacks the refinement necessary both in concept and technical ability to be successful art. At the outset of teaching, I separated my roles as distinct jobs within the arts, viewing my artistic practice, teaching and art administration work as separate fields that did not inform each other. This strategy allowed me to practice all of the associated roles without concern for their separate goals and sometimes contradictory messages.

Although I do not consider what my students do to be art, I believe that teaching them visual and critical thinking skills is necessary for their conceptual thinking, which is essential for their overall development as artists. Consequently, I believe that experiences that promote these skills should be accessible to everyone, which is why I teach in community and museum settings. These two aspects of my professional life – the desire to be inclusive and the desire to curate and create artwork with strong formal and conceptual elements – are in constant conflict in my

practice. These conflicts, as well as where the two identities conformed in curating *Postcards From Home*, will be discussed below.

4.2 Exhibition Research

The traditional role of the curator is an academic one (Hoffman, 2007). Their role is to conserve and research the works in their collection. Although a variety of skills are used to curate contemporary art, research is still an important aspect of curatorial practice. As an emerging curator it was important for me to understand the practices of other contemporary curators, which was done through reading literature on historical and contemporary curatorial practices (See Chapter 2). This research allowed me to understand the social construction of the role of the curator.

It was also important for me to have a strong grasp on mail art, as it was the media used for the exhibition. To do this I not only read about mail art but also engaged in several mail art correspondences. Creating mail art gave me a much better understanding of its goals and overall aesthetics.

As an educator I believe that the best way of learning about a technique or media is to use it. This comes from my experiences learning art, which were through studio work and critique rather than reading. I was therefore provoked in my curatorial research to involve practicing mail art. This also led me to use a concept that I have explored before in my artistic practice.

4.3 Concept

As an artist, I have often engaged in trading artworks with other artists. My background in print media and the ability to create relatively large editions of works has facilitated this process, which greatly influenced me as I was exposed to diverse

print media practices and conceptual ideas. Exchanging art clarified my understanding of my work in relationship to other contemporary print media and was an important part of my education. These experiences influenced my identity as an curator. As I was researching the educational potential of curatorial practice, exchange became a central theme of my curatorial work on this as well as other projects.

During my undergraduate degree in studio arts I participated in many postcard exchanges with fellow students and faculty and co-created print portfolios, so I felt familiar with the territory. The accessibility of the postcard format was also a big part of the decision to use this format for the exhibition, as is illustrated in the raw data from my research journal:

I generally work in a very intuitive way. I guess I have always liked the idea of exchanging work. As a printmaker I exchanged artworks with other artists, even with monotypes. This really started to come together as a concept with *The Pillow Exchange*². The idea of getting art in the mail, art that you have never seen before, is intriguing. The idea that anyone can make a postcard sized work. That the materials aren't daunting, and that they aren't the same for each work, or at least not dictated by me is good. (Research Journal, December 11, 2011).

² *The Pillow Exchange: An Experiment in Sleep and Art*, was a project curated by Jasia Stuart and Stacey Cann. In this project artists exchanged altered pillows and slept on them over a period of several months, documenting their dreams.

Since 2007, the idea of home and how it relates to identity has been a central subject of my artistic practice. Moving multiple times for school and work made me consider how my relationship to my home has affected my identity and my interactions with others. The economic necessity of moving and changing homes has also affected all aspects of my practices as a teacher, artist and curator. The need to constantly rebuild professional relationships and learn about the specificities of the new art community where I lived exposed me to many different ways of thinking about home, art and teaching.

Home is also a theme that affects many people. The wide parameters that contextualized the theme (See Appendix A- Call for Submissions) emphasize how it applies to a range of artists and practices. I struggled between choosing a narrower theme that would create a more cohesive exhibition, and a broader theme that would create more dialogue between the works. A narrower theme would have simplified my curatorial task, however, from an educational standpoint, it would not have produced the same broad response that finally occurred. I felt that the broader the theme, the more diverse the responses and the more educational potential the exhibition may have. As an educator I feel that the more points of view the audience sees the more that they may change their outlook on the idea of home. But this does not make for a visually cohesive exhibition and makes it conceptually vague. There was a strain between my desire as a curator to have a visually and conceptually strong exhibition and the desire to produce diverse representations of home, which would allow for more connections between the audiences' past experiences and the work.

4.4 Call for Submissions

The exhibition had an open call for artwork, and all artwork was accepted; because of this the call itself became an integral part of the curatorial process. The choice to have an open call and to accept all work put my artistic and curatorial sensibilities in direct conflict with my sensibilities as an educator.

As an educator, I believe that it is important to be inclusive. I taught art to many age groups and abilities, 6 years to adult and beginner to professional, and I believe that art should be accessible to everyone. Yet my training as an artist and curator is in direct conflict with this pedagogical approach. At the Alberta College for Art and Design I was taught that only the most technically proficient and conceptually interesting art was acceptable. Professors telling us that we were mediocre artists, drawing on top of or throwing our work out were not uncommon experiences. These experiences had a strong impact on both my identity as a curator and educator. To be able to produce the ‘acceptable’ standard of work one would have to have a high level of formal training in studio arts. But from an educator’s standpoint, it’s more important to nurture artistic practices despite abilities. My belief in this was part of my decision to curate an exhibition of mail art and to accept all works that were submitted. The format of the postcard is accessible both in cost of materials, as the work is four by six inches and mainly on paper, and in scale of production, as it generally takes more time to create larger works.

The tensions between my desires as an educator and those of a curator are very present in the raw data:

As an educator I tried to avoid making judgments about concept and rather allowed my students to deal with that while teaching them about technique³. While curating though this is more difficult, as the exhibition is a combination of the vision of the artist and the vision of the curator, as perceived by the audience. I do not want to give up control, and in some ways, I never will, as the concept of the exhibition is mine. However giving up aesthetic control is difficult for me (Research Journal, December 16th, 2011).

I circulated the call using connections created through my practice as well as through artists that had participated in past curatorial projects of mine. I asked my contacts to circulate the call widely. I also posted a call for submissions on Instant Coffee, a Listserv for artists in Canada. By circulating the call through channels that are generally only used by professional artists, I hoped that the quality of the submitted work would be high. I also created a website with all the relevant information. The call for submissions was reposted on multiple art websites, which brought in a large number of submissions to the exhibition. One of the unforeseen results of the circulation of the call for submissions was that *Postcards From Home* became an international exhibition, with works from five countries. I also received more work than I had anticipated.

³ These students were generally adult non-artist professionals who took evening classes at the Art Gallery of Alberta or Harcourt House Centre for the Arts.



Figure 1: Small portfolio filled with envelopes of postcards Photo Credit: S. Cann

Although this was beneficial to the exhibition itself, I had to make more frames and it involved far more organization to send the work back to the artists.

4.5 The Art

Overall the work received was of high quality both in formal and conceptual elements, they were stimulating both visually and intellectually. However there were certain pieces that did not my standards with conceptually or formally. It was in regard to these works that my views toward education and curation were in conflict.

This is evident in the way that I thought about it at the time:

Some of the work isn't very strong, but it will all be included. Coming from a background that really pushed for high concept and strong technical abilities, I find it difficult to accept these works. The cheesy nature of some of the works

makes me cringe a little bit, but other works are amazing. (Research Journal, December 16th, 2012)

When looking at the work that I received for this exhibition, my formal and conceptual bias permeated my thinking about it. I found that I was immediately disinclined to like works that did not have a high level of technical ability or that I found conceptually superficial. I began thinking of strategies to divert attention away from these works, such as locating them on the lower row and towards the middle of the wall. This was also tied to my concern regarding my professional status as a curator, as my name would also be attached to this work, and would effect my identity as a curator in the public sphere. Gaining a reputation for creating strong exhibitions greatly improves my ability to have artists agree to work with me in the future. This relationship and reputation with artists is key to being a successful curator, which was admittedly a preoccupation for me.

4.6 Venue

Ste. Emilie Skillshare (<http://steemilieskillshare.org>) hosted the exhibition *Postcards From Home*. This converted apartment in the St. Henri region of Montreal is a “community art space devoted to empowerment, self-determination and collective liberation” (Ste. Emilie Mandate, nd). Due to their mandate to share skills and information at a grassroots level (Ste. Emilie Mandate, nd) I felt that this venue fit well with the spirit of the exhibition. The fact that it is a converted apartment with the layout of a home was an unintended benefit to the concept of the exhibition. The apartment setting both fit conceptually with the idea of home as well as making

viewers more comfortable in the space, which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

I had been a volunteer educator at Ste. Emilie Skillshare for a year prior to this exhibition. As an educator who works within community and museum spaces, using a community space for this exhibition was important to me. As a curator, this caused some challenges, but also had added benefits.

One major challenge with the space was the walls, which were very uneven, and the floor, which was not level. They had also been damaged through use of the space for multiple purposes. I spent five hours repairing and painting the walls, and in the end I was still not entirely happy with the results and felt that I could have done more repairs. I was conscious of my notions of gallery spaces, in particular the White Cube⁴ format. Although I wanted clean white walls to hang the work I did not want to obliterate the characteristics of Ste. Emilie Skillshare that make it distinct. As the exhibition spoke to ways that we engage with spaces, I felt that the clean white non-space of the traditional modernist gallery did not serve the conceptual ideas of this exhibition.

I was not able to control the lighting in the space, although I originally anticipated that this would be a problem, in the end I do not believe it detracted from viewing the work. However, the lack of controlled lighting and the two medium sized windows made it so the experience of the exhibition was very different during the day and night.

⁴ The White Cube is a modernist convention that claims a neutral environment for art-viewing characterized by clean white walls and no ornamental factors (Klonk et al., 2011).

4.7 Other Considerations

For an emerging curator in a community space, there are many tasks that go beyond the normal duties of the role. These tasks include patching and painting the walls, building frames and cutting mats, marketing, getting food and drinks for the opening, and more. These tasks unfortunately caused me a great deal of stress and anxiety and left me with less time to consider the artworks, curatorial and educational strategies themselves. As both a curator and educator, I felt comfortable with hanging an exhibition and theorizing about it, however I had no idea about how to deal with other more practical concerns, especially those surrounding the opening.

4.8 The Website

The decision to create an online component⁵ was due both to the diverse geographical locations of the artists as well as the desire to allow a larger viewership. This relates directly to the ideas of Networked Aesthetics (Kusina, 2005) in which the main goal is to create communication between people. I wanted the work to be accessible to the artists who made it; this aspect of the project connects directly to my values as an educator, to be inclusive and to make art accessible to a wide range of people.

The website did not mirror the exhibition - it included all five works submitted, rather than just the one chosen for the physical exhibition. Although I picked the postcards that I felt best related to the theme, or that I found aesthetically interesting for the exhibition, I felt that it was important to acknowledge all the works that the artists created.

⁵ <http://postcardsfromhomeexchange.wordpress.com>

Through the experience of the physical exhibition I found that audience members were drawn to different works based on their own experiences of home. Their choices sometimes contradicted my own opinions – some were drawn to work that I disliked and others disliked work that I preferred. I found this surprising; however, this only reinforces the importance that all the works be included on the website.

4.9 The Exhibition

The exhibition was hung in a small room in Ste. Emilie Skillshare. Due to the uneven walls and floors, it was incredibly difficult to hang the work level. After several hours of work I managed to hang the work in a way that I felt was professional.

I also struggled with whether I should frame the work at all. Framing the works takes something away from their materiality, but the walls in Ste. Emilie Skillshare were extremely damaged and the frames drew attention away from their poor condition. Though I went ahead with it, conceptually the postcards lost their nature as postcards because they were framed. The decision to frame the work also related to having a professional aesthetic as well as masking works that were not as resolved.

I also tested the order and orientation of the artwork on the walls in Concordia's Art Education graduate studio before I tried to hang them in Ste. Emilie Skillshare. This allowed me to be able to visualize the different ways they may look in the space. Over several weeks I repositioned the works until the groupings worked formally.



Figure 2: Test-hanging in the Concordia Art Education graduate studio. Photo credit: S. Cann

I had to be in Ste. Emilie Skillshare any time that the exhibition was open and because of this the exhibition ran for one week and was open from 11am to 7pm.

Although several people came to see the exhibition during that time, the hours could have been cut down significantly, with no effect to project.



Figure 3: East View, *Postcards From Home* Exhibition. Photo Credit: S. Cann



Figure 4: West View, *Postcards From Home* Exhibition. Photo Credit: S. Cann



Figure 5: South East View, *Postcards From Home* Exhibition. Photo Credit: S. Cann

4.10 Communication versus Aesthetics

Mail art values communication over aesthetics (Francois, 1995). Although this is the case my aesthetics as a curator overpowered some of the communicative aspects of the work submitted in particular the choice to frame the work, which obscured the backs of the work.



Figure 6: Building Frames for the Exhibition. Photo Credit: S. Cann

This choice was made for four reasons: to aesthetically change the artworks from postcards to art, therefore clearly demarking them as art; to protect the artwork; to hide the fact that the walls were uneven and finally to give thirty five very different works a common aesthetic that tied them, and the exhibition together. None of these decisions had to do with the educational value of the exhibition or work but rather my sensibilities as a curator and artist. In fact the decision to show the works in such a formal way could be detrimental to the comfort of the audience and therefore to their experience. On the other hand the formal hanging of the work matted with frames allows for better aesthetic continuity between the works.

4.11 The Opening

The opening took place on February 17th, 2012 at 7pm. An invitation to the exhibition and opening had been sent out both via email and through handbills.



Figure 7: Invitation to the Exhibition. Designed by Jennifer Bassett.

These were circulated one month before the exhibition opening and again one week before. I was exceptionally nervous, as I had no way of knowing how many people would show up. My stomach was knotted and I couldn't eat most of the day. Though it was basically unnecessary, I spent the entire afternoon and evening at Ste. Emilie Skillshare setting up and then reading to alleviate some of the tension.

I was also concerned that people would not be able to find the venue, which is in an obscure location and in a converted apartment that you cannot see from the

street level. Overall the experience of the opening was the most stressful aspect of the curatorial process for me.

Despite the stress involved the opening was successful. I found trying to engage with people difficult because it was quite loud in the space.



Figure 8: Image from opening. Photo Credit: G. Scott MacLeod

4. 12 Community Outreach

Communidee, a homeschooling group, came to visit the exhibition. This was arranged through an intern at the site. The group consisted of seven children, age six to fourteen, and four adults. I spoke to them mainly regarding the process of curating an exhibition, as well as answering their questions regarding the images. This used both my experience as a curator and as an art educator. Mainly, I spoke to the works the same way that I had spoken about art as a museum educator.

I felt incredibly nervous with that many children in the space because as a curator I felt responsible for the care of the artwork. As a museum educator, I also felt this pressure, but it was particularly strong with the exhibition because there were less protective measures (the work did not have glass over it). I had also built a relationship with the artists over the months we had corresponded, and felt personally responsible if their art was damaged. To make the work accessible to this age group (13 years of age and under) the concept of certain pieces needed to be simplified, this is because of the great difference in experience between adult's experiences of home and those of children and adolescents. This was very different than my interactions with adults in which they mainly controlled the experience and interpretation of the work. As a curator I found that this in many ways oversimplified very complex and personal works. This oversimplification of works to attract a larger audience is a very problematic aspect of museum education.

4.13 Mailing the Work Back

The work was mailed back Monday February 7th, 2012. Organizing this became a major systematic effort. Each artist received one of their works back as well as four works from other artists. But some artists made separate works and lived together, which complicated the process. In the end, this was straightened out through laying all the works out and switching the works around until no household received two of the same works. There was no particular thematic sorting, but I did try to include pieces that I identified strongly with, and pieces that I did not connect to, to give each artist a set of four works that best represented the exhibition. Throughout this part of the process, there was no conflict between curator and educator. I felt that

it was fair to redistribute the pieces in this way because I did not personally know many of the artists and I could not anticipate which works they would identify with. As a curator I did not want the artists to be angry with me if they received only works that were not as evolved conceptually or formally, as I may want to work with them in the future.

4.14 Reoccurring Themes

The main and reoccurring conflict that I felt between myself as a curator and myself as an educator was surrounding the quality of the artwork. This conflict came up during nearly the entire mounting this exhibition. It began even with the choice to disseminate the call through avenues that were mainly accessed by professional artists. Although these Listservs are free and technically anyone would be able to join, it is primarily art professionals who use them. Rather than being truly inclusive, this limited the scope of the responses that I would receive for my call. On the other hand, I believe that this dissemination technique is one of the reasons why the works submitted were acceptable to me overall. Also, from an administrative and curatorial standpoint, having a very widespread call would make it difficult to deal with the volume of works submitted.

Another recurring conflict was the tension between being open-ended in my interpretive text versus being didactic. After having spent a lot of time with the artworks and doing research on both the theme and the pieces, I found it difficult to avoid telling the audience what they should think about the show or about the artists' conceptions of their work. On the other hand, as an educator I know that giving didactic readings of the works shuts down the audience's ability to make personal

connections and bring the work into their own understanding of the world. I felt a bit disappointed that this research became only part of my understanding of the work and that it was not displayed within the exhibition space, and I now better understand the compulsion to put dense interpretive panels within exhibitions. But in the end refraining from doing so benefited the audience allowing for them to have more interpretive room.

Overall, the desire to make a connection with the audience and to consider them within the exhibition design satisfied my goals as both a curator and educator. Additionally, the decision to create a website, to use a community venue, and to keep the interpretive information separate from the exhibition itself were all decisions that came easily from both a curatorial and educational standpoint.

Chapter 5: Interviews

To better understand the results of my exhibition in terms of curatorial and educational roles, I conducted interviews with two audience members and two participating artists. These interviews focused on the educational and viewing experiences of the interviewees. Roles influence behaviour and therefore to gauge the success of these roles I wanted to understand if elements of both educational and curatorial identity were achieved and successful.

The interviews with the audience members were fifteen minutes long and conducted within the gallery space directly after their viewing experience. Subjects were not provided with the questions in advance. The interviews were confidential and each participant picked a pseudonym.

The artists' interviews were longer as they were scheduled in advance. One took place over the phone and the other in person. The artists were chosen based on their background and geographical locations. They took place within two weeks of completion of the exhibition. The artists were provided with the interview question two weeks in advance of their interviews.

5.1 Audience Interviews

5.1.1 Background of Interviewees

The audience members will be referred to by the pseudonyms Rebecca and David. Both Rebecca and David visit art galleries and museums regularly. Rebecca reports going to galleries every week and David going two to three times a month. Both have a strong interest in contemporary art. They both reported mainly going to

commercial galleries but also viewing works in public galleries. Neither mentioned community spaces or artist run centers initially, however later in his interview David mentioned that he helps run a community art space in Montreal. Both have completed undergraduate university degrees, Rebecca in Fine Arts and David in Liberal Arts.

5.1.2 The Exhibition Space

When asked how the experience of this exhibition was different than other exhibitions that they have seen, both participating viewers began talking about how the physical space differed from other galleries. As using alternative spaces is important to my current identity as a curator I wanted to understand it's impact on the audience.

Rebecca spoke to how the small space “brings you closer to the work” (raw data, p.1) and how that relationship is different than that of a larger gallery where she tends to stand away from the work. Rebecca spoke about how this space worked well with the small-scale postcard images.

David, who was familiar with Ste. Emilie Skillshare's space, talked about a comfort that he has within the space, which differed from other gallery spaces he had visited. He explained how this comfort was both because of his familiarity with the space but also because of the low ceiling and windows.

5.1.3 Ideas of Home

Both Rebecca and David reported that their ideas of home had changed after viewing the exhibition. Rebecca in particular connected to this idea. She had moved many times throughout her adult life and the exhibition made her reflect on these experiences:

It's not necessarily a literal representation and it's an idea that I find very intriguing because I've moved around a lot so my home is usually wherever I am. It's not an actual building; to me I create my home. (Raw Data, p.2)

David on the other hand did not connect in the same way to the work. Rather than reflecting on his own experience, the exhibition made him consider how others might relate to their home. When asked if this exhibition made him think about his ideas of home differently he replied: "Not about my ideas of home, in terms of my home, but about ideas of home in general" (raw data, p.4).

5.1.4 Interpretive Text

The interpretive text was a printed page (see Appendix B), which the viewer could take with them as they viewed the work and which was located near the entrance to the exhibition, rather than being displayed on the wall. This text was meant to supplement the viewer's experience while keeping their interpretation as primary (Hubard, 2007).

Rebecca looked at the artwork twice before reading the text. This is habitual for her when viewing work in a gallery. She likes to make her own connections between the works before reading the curator's text. In this case the text reinforced her thoughts about the exhibition. David also felt that the text helped him understand the work. It also allowed him to "get more out of the postcards" (raw data, p. 5).

5.1.5 The Artwork

Rebecca and David were attracted to different artworks in the exhibition for different reasons. This was not surprising as audience members come from different

backgrounds and experiences. While Rebecca was drawn to work that mirrored her experiences of home, David was drawn to the formal characteristics of the work. Rebecca had difficulty with work that she could not relate to conceptually, whereas David disliked work that he did not like formally. Neither identified the works that I connected to the most as their favorite pieces, nor did either interviewee identify the works that I found not fully resolved as their least favorite. This was surprising to me, however it makes sense given how past experiences affect the way that one views art. This demonstrates that multiple readings of work, based on both past life and art experiences, can be present simultaneously within an exhibition (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).

David mentioned that he did not feel that framing the works made sense for this exhibition because the works were postcards - he would have liked to be able to hold them. He spoke about the tension between professionalism in the arts and community spaces, an issue that he was currently grappling with in running a community arts space. This was also a tension that I felt as a curator at Ste. Emilie Skillshare.

5.1.6 Conclusion

These interviews support the idea that the majority of the curatorial strategies were successful, in particular the wording of the curatorial text. This indicates that I had successfully embodied the role of the curator. This however may be deceiving as both interviewees, as well as the majority of viewers of the exhibition, already had a strong knowledge of fine arts. Compounding this is the choice of venue, which has minimal signage and no street presence, and therefore attracts those who are already

aware of the venue or those who are connected to the Montreal arts scene. How these curatorial strategies would work with audience members who have less experience in the arts are still very much unknown, and would certainly benefit from further study, though that is beyond my scope here.

5.2 Artist Interviews

Two artists were interviewed to better understand their involvement in this project – Phyllis Schwartz over the telephone and Brandon Gunn in person. These interviews were more in depth than those that took place with the audience members.

5.2.1 Call for Submissions

Both Gunn and Schwartz found out about the exhibition through colleagues, rather than through the Instant Coffee Listserv or other postings. Although Schwartz had participated in other projects that I have curated, it was her collaborator and colleague who had originally brought this exhibition to her attention. Gunn also found out about the project through a colleague at Concordia University.

5.2.2 Choice to Participate

The two artists were motivated to participate based on different factors. Schwartz, who does not usually make work that relates to the idea of home, felt that this exhibition was a way of pushing herself to explore a new theme. She spoke to both the format and the timeline as a way of focusing her work, especially given the broad nature of the subject. Her goal was to be more efficient, to distill her thoughts into a concise statement. Because of the size and quantity of the work she was able to achieve this. Gunn on the other hand was not interested in the project because of the exchange. He decided to participate because the theme of home related to his current

body of work. He does not usually participate in exchanges because he feels they make him produce work that is not related to his interests.

5.2.3 Learning about their Practice

Both Schwartz and Gunn worked quite differently with the size constraints of the postcard, which was four by six inches. Whereas Schwartz found the small size allowed her to be concise with her statement, Gunn was unable to fully resolve his work in that size. This led him to reflect on the larger size for the rest of the body of work, which he believes is important for the series of work he is currently making. He thought that the larger size was more successful because it encompassed the viewer.

Both artists state that they learned about their practice through looking at the other artists' responses to the work. This was of particular interest to Gunn as he had worked with the theme of home since graduate school. He was interested in how the other depictions of home fit into his concept of home, which is quite developed. He was particularly interested in the ways that other artists abstracted representations of home as well as the mark making that they used. This could be because of the way that his work is mediated through technology and the hand of the artist is devalued.

Schwartz, who had not worked with the theme of home, had a slightly different relationship with the works that she received. She had gone to university with one of the participants whose work was given to her, and therefore felt a very strong connection to it. She was also very interested in the materiality of the works. Gunn on the other hand was interested very much interesting in the concept of home and the visual language used by other artists to relay this concept.

5.2.4 The Concept

Both artists were interested in the plurality of the concept of home. They both approached the concept in very different ways, drawing from their own experience of home. These two cases of difference could account for the diversity of works in the exhibition as a whole.

5.2.5 Website

Neither artist went to the gallery exhibition, however they both accessed the work through the website. As mentioned, both artists found it useful to be able to access the other artists' work through the website. This allowed them to think about ideas of home and how other artists related to this topic. Schwartz however was very interested in receiving her work in the mail because she found that the digitization of the work flattened them, especially due to her interest in the materiality of the work. Although this is an accurate statement, the benefits of having the website outweigh the shifts in the work due to digitization.

5.2.6 Conclusion

Both artists found that participating in the exhibition and exchange was very beneficial to them. From an educational standpoint, having a broad theme, in this case 'home', resulted in artists producing work that was very diverse. This allowed for the audience and artists to relate to the artworks and depictions of home in a more varied way. The exhibition as a whole allowed them to think about the theme in new ways through viewing others' artwork. The scale of the work, four by six inches, pushed artists to think about how to translate their work into a very nondescript format and to

consider the way their work relates to scale. In the case of Schwartz at least, the format also brought her to try to make a concise statement. Both artists found the website to be useful in how they approached the exhibition. The accessibility of others' pieces gave them perspective on the ways that they related to their homes.

5.3 Overall Conclusions

Based on the four interviews, the exhibition was an overall success. The viewers were able to connect to the works on a personal level. Although they primarily used their past experiences as a basis of looking at the work, they also found the curatorial statement useful in their reflections. This is a sign that I was able to successfully perform the role of educator and curator simultaneously, despite the tensions that arose.

In terms of the artists, they learned through viewing their peers' artworks. It is more the artwork rather than the accompanying text that informed their practices, as well as the experience of creating works within size parameters, which prompted unexpected challenges. In Gunn's case it complicated his practice; in Schwartz's case it pushed her to simplify her practice and make a clear point.

The venue for the exhibition allowed the audience to experience art in a space that was uncommon, viewing the work from a closer distance than they ordinarily would. The intimate space, with low ceilings and windows, caused them to have a different interaction than what a larger commercial gallery offers. Given the overall goals of the exhibition, this was a successful element. However, the lack of clear street access and the location of the site caused less traffic than anticipated.

The interviews reinforced many of my thoughts and impressions regarding the exhibition. One unexpected takeaway of the interviews was the divergent reasons why the two artists participated. On closer reflection of course there are many reasons why one might participate in an exhibition, and it should not be surprising that they had such different motives.

This concludes Chapter 5, which discusses the interviews conducted as part of this research. The next section will be a summary of the research and discussion of the implications, recommendations and limitations of this study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this section a summary of the research will be presented. The limitations and implications of this research will also be discussed and conclusions will be drawn.

6.1 Summary

In this study I examined how my own goals as a curator and educator intersect. Even within myself I found conflicts between these identities. In the past, I have separated these roles as a way of coping with the identity of curator and educator's internal conflicts, but when these roles were considered for the purposes of this research, the conflicts came very much to the surface.

The result of creating a hybrid role of educator-curator could be beneficial to the museum audience. However, the conflicts between these two roles need to be both understood and analyzed if the roles are to be combined. Although both the educator and curator should represent the needs of the audience, how they work towards this goal is at odds.

Given the literature surrounding best practices for museum display are often ignored the most accessed site of museum pedagogy, the display of artifacts and artworks, is often not as effective as it could be (Hubbard, 2007). This again points to a discord between curatorial and educational goals. On the other hand, this also could be caused by conflicting research or even conservatism within museums.

Despite the lack of a clear definition of the curator (Charlesworth, 2006; O'Neill, 2005), the role of the educator and the perceived view of the curator are in conflict in many ways. In particular, the goal of the educator to be inclusive and the

role of the curator to be exclusive are in clear tension. This was the main internal conflict that I experienced within the curation of the exhibition. This exclusivity on the part of the curator relates to their role in deciding what is and is not art. For me, the desire to present work that was highly skilled was in conflict with the desire to have artists of all abilities participate and therefore improve their skills and knowledge about contemporary art.

The need to express my opinion regarding these works, at least conceptually, was another conflict in the curation of this exhibition. However, the educational belief that the primary function of art is to connect to the experience of the viewer easily overshadowed the desire to impart my research to the audience. Knowing that interpretive texts can stunt the viewer's relationship with the work made me confident in the decision to include less background and theoretical information. Both interviewed audience members found what was provided to be enough context to guide their thinking about the featured pieces.

Status, which was motivated by the social sphere, also played a large part in the conflict between my goals as curator and educator. As someone who does not yet have full status as a curator, being professional and creating a high-quality exhibition was important to me for my future career. Given that the field of visual arts is generally based on reputation and exhibition history⁶, having a successful exhibition early in my career was of the utmost importance and would also allow me to create valuable contacts for professional advancement.

⁶ The Canada Council for the Arts bases eligibility for curatorial and artistic grants based on exhibition history, as well as recognition from peers (Eligibility of Applicant, 2011).

Despite these conflicts, a number of aspects of my curatorial process were in harmony with my identity as an educator. This is partially because in using a community space one cannot ignore audience. This was especially true since Ste. Emilie Skillshare does not have street presence, given that it is on the second floor with no signage. Communidee's visit was a direct result of ties in the educational community. Having groups such as Communidee visit the space matched my educational goal to promote public understanding of contemporary art practices. This understanding also meets my curatorial goal of communicating ideas about home through the exhibition of artwork as it allows people to have more exposure and therefore comfort with contemporary art practices. It was important to realize that often what benefits one role also benefits the other.

Having ties to both the artistic and educational communities was incredibly helpful to my ability to curate a successful exhibition. Special knowledge of and access to Ste. Emilie Skillshare was a result of previous volunteer teaching there and also related to my experiences as an art educator. This venue was beneficial to both the educational and curatorial goals of the exhibition. As a converted apartment, it allowed viewers to feel comfortable in the space. Both audience members interviewed spoke about the human scale of the venue and how it created an intimate viewing environment, which changed the way they interacted with the artworks. It is also a space that has a clear educational mandate and it is a community-based site.

Overall, my findings are important not only to discussing how the roles of curator and educator could be hybridized, but they have also caused me to reconsider how I view myself in those roles. This type of critical self-reflection is extremely

beneficial to emerging professionals in the visual arts. These findings can also be applied to the theorization of the educational turn in curatorial practice. This type of inquiry is necessary to avoid a superficial educational turn and instead combine pedagogical strategies with curatorial practice in a meaningful way.

Both artists interviewed reported having learned through other artists' conceptualizations and depictions of the idea of home. As the participating artists had already been thinking about how they relate to their home, they were able to make personal meaning and interpretations of the other exhibition pieces (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The audience members were also able to connect certain works with their experiences of home. They were particularly drawn to works that they related to on a personal level or that had a high level of technical skill. The interpretive panel served to reinforce their thinking regarding the exhibition rather than contradicting it, allowing for their interpretations to be primary in the exhibition (Hubard, 2007).

6.2 Recommendations

This study sheds light on the conflicting goals between the curator and educator, but how these issues are resolved is still obscure. As an art professional who is at the beginning of her career, understanding how the differing positions I occupy intersect is important to my mastery of these roles. However, taking time to consider how I made decisions related to which roles are prioritized when they are in conflict is in need of further inquiry. Although neither the identity of educator or curator was dominant in the curation of the exhibition, when they were in conflict how decisions were made was not explicitly dealt with in this study.

This study suggests that curatorial practice could benefit from an active consideration of pedagogy within both the content and style of the exhibition. Nevertheless, on a different level, it is unclear how much the personality of the curator affects the success of the exhibition and how much can be related to curatorial and pedagogical strategies. This study explores how I have understood these conflicts however different curators may perceive these conflicts in different ways. The intersection of these roles also changes based on the pedagogical and curatorial approaches, for example if one was to use a transmission approach to pedagogy there would be no conflict with didactic interpretive panels.

6.3 Implications

This research has implications for both curatorial practice and art education. It is important to understand how the role of curator and educator could intersect in museum practices to create the richest possible viewing experience for the audience. Given the hierarchy in large museums, it is beneficial to understand how these two roles can complement each other so that their mutual goals can be best achieved. In smaller centers where one person holds both the roles of curator and educator, it is important to think about where these roles conflict to be able to complete each role's functions while emphasizing areas where their goals are mutually beneficial.

The conflicting goals of the educator and curator can lead to the compartmentalization of these roles when one person embodies them. In particular, the conflict between the curatorial desire to have a cohesive exhibition and the educational desire to be inclusive and accessible can be difficult to reconcile. Consequently, it is only when these desires are examined that the potential for the

hybrid identity of the educator-curator opens up. Being aware of how these goals conflict is also important to understanding the hierarchy within art spaces as well as the relationships between the curatorial and education departments within larger institutions. The conflicts allow critical room to reexamine the ways one embodies the two roles, and how the goals of each role are expressed throughout the curation of an exhibition. Although these conflicts would be resolved differently by different individuals, being aware that there is not one universal goal and motivation within the field of visual arts is important to acknowledge.

Whereas the role of the artist-curator is more open and collaborative (O'Neill, 2004) the role of the educator-curator is entrenched in the viewers' experience. Given museums' desires to reach out to new audiences (Farquaharson, 2003) who may or may not have experience with contemporary art, curators should consider new methods of pedagogy within their displays. They cannot assume the audience will have a consistent level of education and similar social backgrounds. A new emphasis on education is vital in attempting to increase the number of gallery visitors.

By breaking through the segregation between roles in the arts, a more holistic view of exhibition design could be reached. A collaborative model, one that privileges audience, artist, educator and curator equally, could be a useful way of expanding knowledge in the arts. This collaborative model can only be successful if the goals and desired outcomes of each of the participating groups are fully understood, which is possible through careful reflection by each involved party and sharing of insights.

There is also potential for artists to learn through participating in group exhibitions. Both interviewed artists reported that viewing other artists' work shifted their own ideas of home. By having access to other visual depictions of home, the two artists reconsidered how their depictions of home related to their experiences. This suggests that audience members are not the only party whose comprehension could be affected through display strategies, but that artists also learn about their own lives through participation in group exhibitions.

There are many other potential implications for this research, especially within non-commercial gallery spaces. These spaces are particularly relevant because unlike commercial galleries these spaces often have an educational component to their programming. Artist Run Centers, because of financial restraints, often have small staffs that are responsible for multiple roles simultaneously. Acknowledging how roles may conflict within the arts can help illuminate how decisions are made, which goals are favored and why.

This research suggests that in some cases it would be beneficial for curators in the visual arts to incorporate elements from art education theory and vice versa. A role that integrated multiple aspects of various art professions could be beneficial to museum practices. In the least a more open communication system between curatorial and educational roles is needed.

6.4 Limitations and Further Study

The results of this study are not generalizable and are only applicable in this case. On the other hand, the study and findings can serve as a case study to others for self-reflection in regards to the dual role of curator and educator. Although they

cannot be broadly applied, the findings here serve as points of reflection that could stimulate discussion regarding different goals within arts institutions and how these goals are expressed through different professions.

The relationship between the role of the curator and educator warrants further study in particular because of the literature being developed around the educational turn in curatorial practice. More research is needed on how the conflicts between these two identities are resolved. When do the goals of the curator overtake those of the educator and vice versa, and how are these decisions negotiated? Similar inquiry is also needed in other overlapping roles in the visual arts, for example the roles of artist and educator and how the hierarchies between these roles affects the way that decisions are made and perceived within the museum.

This study could also be expanded to encompass multiple case studies. This would allow for more diverse depictions of both curatorial and educational style and content. It would also allow for a stronger understanding of how personality affects these practices.

6.5 Conclusion

Given that many arts professionals hold multiple roles within the artworld, it is important to consider how these positions overlap and conflict and inform one another. The tension between inclusivity and exclusivity is an ongoing issue in the visual arts as aesthetics are being questioned by postmodern practices, feminism and postcolonial theory. These tensions are particularly clear and unresolved where curators and educators are involved, in the debate over which is more important - the communicative or aesthetic experience. These issues cannot easily be decided and

remain very contested. Reflection on these issues can only lead to stronger curatorial and educational practices. Further research is still needed to understand how multiple identities are resolved within the artworld when they are embodied in one person.

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APPENDIX A

Postcards from Home- Call for Submissions

How has home affected you? What makes a home, a physical space? A persona? Certain objects? Do you bring your home with you?

The idea of home is a complicated and multifaceted one. For this exhibition artists are asked to create 5 postcards, which can be either a series or edition, on their relationship and understanding of home. They postcards must be 4 x 6 inches and two-dimensional but may be in any media (drawing, print media, painting, collage, etc.). The artists will receive four postcards made by other artists shortly after the submission deadline. One work from each artist will be kept for exhibition at Ste. Emilie Skillshare Gallery from February 17th to 24th, 2012 and included in an online catalogue. This work will be returned to the artist after the exhibition.

Submission Deadline: January 15, 2012

Please email Stacey Cann at home.postcard.exchange@gmail.com for more details.

APPENDIX B

Postcards From Home

How does your home affect who you are? Is your home where you were born, where you live now, or somewhere in between?

A home is not only a physical location but also a construct of the mind. How can you exchange a piece of your home with another? This exhibition asks you to consider how your home affects your identity, and how you can capture the nature of home in a postcard.

Using diverse media, including digital images, printmaking, collage, drawings and paintings, these artists have captured their experiences of home. Some of these experiences are harmonious and others contradict each other; depictions of homes that are sweet and nurturing while others are harsh and disregarded.

This vastness of experience of home points to different relationships with our surroundings. As home is not only a physical space but also a set of relationships with people and places, one's relationship with their home can direct other aspects of their lives. This exhibition attempts to illuminate these relationships.