

A Marketer's Journey:  
Understanding the Performing Arts Festival Programmer

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## 1. Introduction

The government has cut € 200 million in funding for the cultural sector in one fell swoop in 2013, which equates to about 21% of the entire available funding for the cultural sector. The cultural sector in the Netherlands can be defined as performing arts and museums, visual arts, film and writing, architecture, design and new media, and finally culture education, amateur arts and libraries. However, because monuments, cultural heritage, and libraries are exempt from these subsidy cuts, mostly performing and visual arts suffer. It specifically comes down to a cut of 40% for the performing and visual arts. A further political measure that is affecting the cultural sector is the increased value added tax on ticket prices and art sales from 6% to 21%. Finally, official policy is now that the performing arts and festivals must generate at least 21,5% of their own profits to be considered for government funding (Rijksoverheid 2011). About 60% of subsidy requests were denied in 2013 (Bockma 2012, 12), which further emphasizes the severe impact of this funding cut.

Less funding, pressure to generate more income, and the consequent need for higher ticket prices (and thus a likely decrease in attendance) demand a new way of producing performing arts festivals. As a result, ticket sales have never been as important as now and discussions on the value of art and cultural entrepreneurship are becoming daily conversations. New ways must be found to make more money and attract more people, two tasks which in larger arts organisations are generally handed down to the marketing department. However, an arts marketer hardly seems to be able to influence the product, which in the case of an artist is the art, and in the case of a performing arts festival is the event and its programs. The marketer is supposed to make more money with, or find an audience for these products. In designing the contents of a performing arts festival, a programmer tends to go on instinct and a marketer looks at numbers. Kim Joostens (2012) has shown that the relationship between the marketing and artistic departments functions with a certain tension, because both parties have opposing objectives: a marketing department focuses on the audience and an artistic department on the product. Even though there is a clear economic reason to incorporate an actual marketing strategy, 74% of the arts organisations decide on the program first, after which the task of the marketing department is dumbed down to simple last-minute distribution of promotional materials (Joostens 2012, 195-198).

In a conversation with Matthijs van Burg, marketer at SPRING performing arts festival in Utrecht (The Netherlands), he said that he recognises the same tension that Joostens identifies. As a result, he and artistic director (and festival programmer), Rainer Hofmann, now work more closely together but the struggle remains. Nevertheless, SPRING is evidently interested in genuinely exploring how the marketer and programmer can better understand each other for the benefit and future sustainability of the festival.

It is my hypothesis - based on the overall political pressure on the cultural sector, the tension that is mentioned by Joostens, and the interest SPRING has expressed - that once the marketer and programmer of a performing arts festival have a better understanding of each

other's work process, together they can create a festival that can tackle the new challenges in the culture sector. As a first step towards a more thorough understanding of this collaborative process, in this thesis I will explore how the world of a programmer can be understood from a marketer's point of view.

## 1.1 Questions & Method

My previously mentioned hypothesis leads me to the main research question of this thesis: *How can a marketer understand a performing arts festival programmer in the Netherlands?*

To further explore this question I have formulated the following sub-questions:

- What is a performing arts festival programmer and an arts marketer, and what are their roles?

This (cluster) question is really the core to understanding the variables in the main question of this thesis. Without knowing the different roles and how they work, it is impossible to address the main research question. But there are more questions:

- What are the dilemmas that are exclusive to marketing the arts?

This question concerns exclusive dilemmas pertaining to arts marketing. Exploring it will inform us about how arts marketing differs from commercial marketing. It is a difference that on occasion becomes so extreme that arts marketing can hardly be called marketing anymore. This is in itself indicative of the mental stretch a marketer needs to make if he or she wants to be effective in the arts. It brings us to the final sub-question:

- What are the aspects of the world of a performing arts festival programmer that are hard to grasp for a marketer?

Through this final query I will attempt to understand some aspects of the performing arts festival programmer's world through the eyes of a marketer. Doing so is indispensable in answering the main research question.

Because every author's experiences influence how he views the world, I will present relevant aspects of my own career to show how it has affected my perspective in this thesis. I managed two different companies from the age of seventeen, both of which were concerned with marketing and sales. This experience has provided me with first-hand knowledge of what a marketer thinks and does. It is the inevitable (speaking) position from which I will investigate the world of a performing arts festival programmer.

In my past career as a marketer I have had very little direct experience with arts marketing. Step two of this journey will focus on bringing forth the differences between commercial and arts marketing. It will show how exactly arts marketing differs from my earlier, more commercially oriented, experiences. This will require a certain openness on my part in order to construct as frank an account as possible of my confrontation with the arts marketing world.

Once I have acquired a firmer grasp of arts marketing, and what its crucial values and dilemmas are, the world of the performing arts festival programmer will be approached. The most relevant ideas with regards to the current cultural situation will be dissected as understood from a marketer's point of view.

The final step will be to test this analysis with programmers in the field in order to verify whether this attempt to understand the performing arts festival programmer is satisfactory from both the marketer's and the programmer's point of view and to determine what still may be missing.

Methodologically the majority of this research is based on a literary survey, led by both the main issues in the existing literature as well as my own experiences. An elaborate clarification of the desk research is given in chapters 1.3 and 1.4. The small empirical part is the interview that is part of the field test, in which I have chosen to use a semi-structured approach. Van Peer et al. define a structured and unstructured interview as opposites to a spectrum, where in a structured interview the interviewer has the control and in an unstructured interview the interviewee has the control (2012, 82). The nature of the techniques is different, whereas with a structured interview the questions are very clearly defined to provide a clear answer, which is opposite to an unstructured interview where the questions are open and allow the interviewee to flow in whatever direction his answer takes him. The approach I have chosen is a combination of both structured questions and unstructured questions. It allows for both clear answers where I need them and open answers where I am merely exploring an area of interest. Because of the nature of this research I need a few structured questions to simply test some ideas, but at the same time I need openness to allow for new insights.

## 1.2 Structure

This thesis has four chapters: Chapter 1 shows why and how choices have been made in this thesis and provides a clear overview of everything that will be discussed. Chapter 2 will explore the differences between commercial and art marketing. Chapter 3 will discuss performing arts festival programming from a marketer's point of view. Finally, in chapter 4, I will take stock of the findings in the previous chapters in order to answer the main research question and further formulate techniques or methods to strengthen the cooperation between marketers and performing arts festival programmers.

This introduction chapter will continue to discuss and argue the choices behind literature and authors in the following two subchapters. It concludes by indicating and explaining the limitations of this thesis by providing a concise overview of the main choices that have been made to keep this research within manageable proportions.

The marketing chapter consists of a few chronological steps. Firstly, my own commercially oriented professional past up until this point will be laid out. Secondly, an overview will be provided that shows the main differences between arts and commercial marketing. Thirdly, I will discuss from my own evolving perspective how I look at the quality of art and the tension between art and marketing. Lastly, the marketing chapter concludes with a summary and will show how my speaking position, which previously was solely commercial, has evolved as a result of this exercise.

In the programming chapter I discuss a few key models and aspects of programming performing arts festivals. Firstly, the reason for choosing the limited discourse on programming rather than the vast discourse on curating will be made explicitly clear. Subsequently, I will discuss three models of programming - environmentalist, transparent, and entrepreneurial. There is no specific logic behind the chronology of these three subchapters. Although the marketing chapter will present a clear status quo concerning how marketing and the arts are supposed to collaborate, in the programming chapter I will also carefully present a few ideas of how a marketer would engage with these models of programming. The final subchapter includes an analysis of an interview with Rainer Hofmann before answering the main and sub-questions of this thesis.

### 1.3 Marketing

The marketing chapter will focus on answering the questions ‘what is an arts marketer and what is his role?’ and ‘what are the dilemmas that are exclusive to marketing the arts?’ I will approach this by first reflecting on my own background as a commercial marketer and then confronting this perspective within the context of marketing the arts.

After laying out my own background, a theoretical overview will be provided which clearly shows the differences between commercial and arts marketing. From this, two main issues emerge - the quality of art and the tension between commerce and culture - which I will address more thoroughly to obtain a better understanding of arts marketing. This chapter concludes with preliminary answers to the questions posed above, and shows an evolved speaking position from which performing arts festival programming will be approached in the following chapter.

In my survey, I will lean quite heavily on Patrick Butler’s (2000) theories on the differences between commercial and arts marketing. Although there are other authors who discuss this subject (Boorsma 1998a; Kotler and Scheff 1997; Joostens 2012), they tend to discuss the differences rather broadly, whereas Butler developed a “robust model of the structural features that characterise arts marketing”, which has the “objective to capture those dimensions of arts marketing that would be of concern to marketers ‘taking the product to market’” (2000, 346). Butler’s model, furthermore, “is intended to draw out those issues that are distinctive” for arts marketing (2000, 347). With this Butler does not claim that arts marketing has unique features, but that compared to commercial marketing, it is “distinctive enough to warrant particular attention by the marketer” (ibid.). Two issues that Butler discusses which this thesis will further develop are the quality of the product, and the tension between commerce and culture.

The quality of the product, which in this thesis is the performing arts festival, will be approached from four different angles in order to find a deeper understanding of arts marketing. First, is the ‘magical triangle’ angle provided by Hans Onno van den Berg, Miranda Boorsma, and Hans van Maanen (1994). I will use this triangle because it clearly shows the interdependency of product, user, and society - whereas other authors tend to discuss these elements independently of one another. Secondly, this thesis will look at the different kinds of art - broad, infrastructural, or small - as defined by Boorsma (1998b). Thirdly, we will delve into the aspect of value of the arts for which we will again draw on Butler, because he provides the clearest argument. Lastly, we will look at price and pricing strategies of the arts, using the theories of Philip Kotler and Joanna Scheff (1997), which provide clear insight into pricing in the arts.

The tension between commerce and culture will be approached with reference to Joostens’ Ph.D. dissertation (2012). She provides a useful in-depth discussion on this issue. In addition, I will draw on the work of Elisabeth Hill (2003), Hye-Kyung Lee (2006), and Paul O’Sullivan (1997) to further contextualize some of Joostens statements.



## 1.4 Programming

In the past (e.g., Hupkens 2010 and Rispens 2012), several Master of the Arts theses about programming have drawn on the extensive discourse on curating. The logic for this is solid: the specialized discourse on programming is very limited. Secondly, the role of the curator and programmer seem quite similar: They both put together a program (exhibition or performing arts program) by combining different artistic components.

Not all authors who write about programming actually use the word programming. Some use the word curating, which has its roots in the visual arts. This might seem confusing at first, but when relevant it will be mentioned explicitly. The discourse on programming that is central to this analysis is derived from the 55th issue of the Croatian theatre magazine *Frakcija*, which focused on curating contemporary performing arts. *Frakcija*'s intention in this issue was to "investigate and define the unique particularities of curating in the various forms of time-based art - theatre, dance, performance" (2010, 2). Because very little has been written about programming dance, theatre, and performance, *Frakcija* wants to give a "starting signal" (ibid.). It invited renowned theorists and practitioners, to reflect on curating in the performing arts. Three of these authors will be singled out, because they explicitly suggest new models of contemporary curating: Elke van Campenhout, Christine Peters and Mårten Spångberg.

Van Campenhout, researcher and writer, suggests a new approach to curating which she calls "environmentalist programming" (2010, 38), in which the role of the programmer and artist start to intertwine. The two ideas that seem central to this concept are communities and interstices, which we can better understand through the help of Thomas Plischke, Karl Marx, and Nicolas Bourriaud. Peters, curator and dramaturge, advocates a different, more "transparent" starting point for curating than what is normally the case (2010, 80). The two issues that are central to this subchapter are the shortsightedness of Peters' view on marketing, and the consequences or potential upsides of the transparency she proposes. Spångberg (2010), choreographer and festival director, advocates a more entrepreneurial mindset in artists and programmers; more entrepreneurial but not necessarily more marketing-oriented. This subchapter explores the not-so-delicate balance between good cultural entrepreneurship and bad marketing.

*Frakcija* will be used as the main source for programming. The reason for this is that the current discourse on programming is mostly focused on the policy of programming, for example, Pascal Gielen discusses how programmers make their selection (2003). Gielen does not discuss any potential futures of programming (like I am trying in this thesis), which (speaking as the curator of this thesis) seems to be the more relevant.

As the only practical aspect from the programmer's world, a semi-structured interview with Rainer Hofmann, programmer and artistic director of SPRING performing arts festival, is added to test the ideas gained from a marketer's point of view concerning environmentalist programming, transparent programming, and entrepreneurial programming.

### 1.5 Limitations of the scope of my research

Ever since I started the master's program for Theatre Studies it has been my interest to research how marketing and art can come together in a, perhaps utopian, synergetic relationship. Through looking at the current state of affairs and keeping my ear to the ground (as marketers do), the most current and relevant aspect of this potential relationship lies in researching the marketer and the performing arts festival programmer.

There are two very broad limitations of this thesis. The first is that I will approach the world of the programmer from the viewpoint of a marketer and will not cover the other way around. This is solely because this thesis will be written by me alone, and I do not have the expertise or knowledge to grasp the complexities the other way around. I suspect, however, that if I manage to clearly demonstrate how a marketer works and thinks and what he has trouble understanding in the world of a programmer, this exercise will also enhance the programmer's understanding of a marketer.

Secondly, this thesis will not contain a case study. Because analyzing the programmer's world from a marketer's perspective is already quite complex, adding a full case study to test all the ideas in practice would take away valuable research time and as a result would hinder any real potential depth of this thesis. Nevertheless, to verify at least some of the conclusions, from a practical perspective I have included the interview with Rainer Hofmann.

More specifically concerning the arts marketing chapter, there are obviously more potential issues to investigate than the two I will be focusing on here. In chapter 2.2 a few of these other issues will be brought forth. The two issues for this thesis seem to be the most relevant for the questions I seek to answer, and given the limited time and space available for this thesis I needed to restrict myself to these.

Much the same goes for the programming chapter. There are an almost infinite amount of curatorial models (ways to curate/program), and I can only discuss a few of these here. Even within the confines of *Frakcija* there are more models that could be discussed, but confining this thesis to only three - environmental, transparent, and entrepreneurial - allow me to unpack a few important issues concerning the programmer of performing arts festivals.

Although semantic and philosophical debates have their roles in discourse analysis, because this thesis is one written from the point of view of a marketer, certain terms (for example 'interstice' in chapter 3.1) will be dissected, but not necessarily applied in the same way others have.

From a purely academic perspective the biggest objection to the method of this thesis could be the highly personal way of approaching the discourses. However, it is exactly my professional background that allows me to write this thesis. Without placing my own professional experience into the mix this thesis would be a purely academic exercise with no actual connection to the practical world. I believe incorporating my own experiences as the lens through which to approach theory will be of value to practitioners in the field and scholars in academia.

Although this thesis sets out to explore a big question, its ambition is not to provide a single definitive answer, but rather aims to construct a personally led journey through the academic literature and hopefully provide some useful answers in the end.

## 2. Marketing

This chapter will focus on answering the questions ‘what is an arts marketer and what is his role?’ and ‘what are the dilemmas that are exclusive to marketing the arts?’ I will do so by first reflecting on my own background as a commercial marketer and then confronting this perspective with the context of marketing for art.

Because every author’s past influences how he views the world, it is necessary to first reflect on my own experiences so that the influence these have on this thesis become clear. The relevancy of this lies in the two different companies I was involved in over the span of seven years, which were very much concerned with marketing and sales. This experience provides me with first-hand knowledge of what a marketer thinks and does. It obviously informs the (speaking) position from which I will investigate arts marketing and, later in chapter 3, with an evolved view the world of performing arts programming. Since in my past career as a marketer I had very little direct experience with arts marketing, I will focus on bringing forth the differences between commercial and arts marketing. This will be a journey in itself: an experimental construction of an account of my confrontation with the arts marketing world.

This chapter is structured as follows: in 2.1 under the subheading ‘speaking position’, I will outline my professional past and the values I have gained from seven years as a marketing entrepreneur. Part 2.2 is entitled ‘overview’ and provides a survey of the main differences between arts and commercial marketing. In subsections 2.3 and 2.4, I will dive into two of these differences that strike me as unique. These parts focus on ‘quality’ of art and the ‘tension’ between art and marketing. In 2.5 the explorations in the previous sections are summarized and I will particularly address how my speaking position has evolved as a result of these explorations.

## 2.1 Speaking Position

In every article, book, or thesis we read, the speaking position of the author tends to determine how we view the subject at hand. For that reason, I consider it important to outline my own past, and thus my speaking position, because it inevitably shapes the course of this investigation towards understanding the performing arts programmer.

My career so far can be divided in two different phases. Phase one consisted of becoming an entrepreneur and learning about sales and marketing. Phase two consisted of being an entrepreneur and training others. Together these phases account for about seven years of my life.

Phase one started when I was seventeen, a year out of high school, when I acquired my first client as a freelance marketer in the Netherlands. The client in question was the CEO of Doors International BV - at the time one of the most successful email marketing providers (SaaS<sup>1</sup>) - who personally mentored me in my sales activities. He helped me to better understand the marketing goals of a company. At age eighteen, CEO and owner of Pieterman Trainingen (one of the best communication training companies in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>) came into my life. He ended up being an even bigger influence on who I am today. I officially set up my own company and ran it from within his building. This had the added benefit that his own employees saw my work, a young man with only a little experience, as an example of a better telemarketer whom they could learn from. In return, he would invest his time training me in entrepreneurship, leadership, sales, and marketing. This relationship lasted for two years.

At the tender age of twenty I was a bigger success than I thought I would ever be; I had employees, more clients than I ever thought I would have, more knowledge and skill anyone my age should have, and two partners (both executives who got me there). I knew what to do, how to do it, and I was good at doing whatever it took to get the job done. I was taught to be able to sell anything, to anyone, at any time. What I did not fully realize, however, was the emotional toll this work was taking on my life. I knew that although I really wanted to keep this life going, I could not; I had to get out. This rollercoaster of an adventure ended up blowing up in my face and I stepped out of my company. When I did, it fell apart.

After a few months recovering from all the intensity, all I wanted was to run another company. This time it was going to be just me, however, and it was going to be different. This brings us to phase two.

Phase two started with the simple realization that I was good at talking. Looking at what was needed in the market I realized that with the growing attention towards social media, I could be one of the people training and consulting on how to best use the power of social media for marketing purposes. Over the course of the next four years I read about three hundred books on marketing, social media, influence, management; anything I thought might help my new goal of running a company on my own. In contrast to phase one, however, phase two never really had just one focal point. My initial intention was to train people, and over a period of four years I

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<sup>1</sup> Software as a service.

<sup>2</sup> Number 1 in marketing and sales in 2014, based on testing done by Springest (2014).

trained over 10,000 people, in individual and group settings. However, my workshops, lectures, and training sessions only focused on social media for a short period of time. Before I knew it I was combining my new knowledge with my previous experience in direct sales and marketing. Over the course of time I diversified. Let me illustrate this with a few examples: project management for government entities, branding consulting on a cross-Canada tour for a country music artist, and consulting management teams on result-only-work-environments.

These seven years of entrepreneurship, marketing, and sales have inevitably shaped my mind and viewpoint concerning life and business. First, one of the most prominent insights I developed in this period is that in the commercial world quality is only partially important. I learned early on that in this domain perfection is a fool's errand and that there is no goal as futile to pursue as perfection. Once you think you are there, you are not. And even if there is 'nothing' left to improve, you are not actually attaining any happiness, because there is always bigger and better. The biggest flaw of perfection seen in terms of commercial entrepreneurship is that it takes too much time. As a marketer and personally, there are two reasons I need things to go at a rather fast pace. Without it I get bored as a person and from a marketing point of view getting somewhere first is the key to success because you beat your competitor. Coming in second place is never considered a success in this world, so if you leave perfection behind your odds improve significantly. Buyers will accept imperfections as long as you do not ignore them.

Secondly, being unique is key. There is nothing more annoying to a potential buyer than hearing the same pitch over and over from different people trying to sell him something. Whether it is telemarketing, email marketing, or face-to-face sales, if you cannot differentiate yourself, you are already at a marked disadvantage.

Thirdly, you can get everyone to say yes to whatever it is you are selling. Going deeper into the value of being unique, the key to persuasion is the ability to combine your unique selling points with the potential buyer's desires.

Fourthly, I never give up, although getting out of my first company might seem as giving up it was not; giving up would be to stop being an entrepreneur entirely. It is easy to say you have never failed at anything if you simply never give up. On top of this there is the simple fact that people want to be sold, this means there is always an angle. People always have desires they want fulfilled, all it takes is finding out what those desires are.

From the above you might correctly conclude that I have internalized Mark Cuban's famous words "sales cures all" (Entrepreneur 2012) to the extent that at one point in my life I actually said 'sales is all'. Although some might say it is dishonest to convince people to buy whatever it is you are selling, the fact of the matter is for a commercial marketer it is absolutely necessary, without sales he loses his job. We know it is naive to believe that if you have a good product 'people will find you'. On the other hand, morally speaking it is soulless to sell regardless of the buyer's needs. In most cases I lean towards a more soulless approach for the simple reason that it actually gets me somewhere. However, I do always focus on trying to fulfil a buyer's needs, however small or latent they might be.

Within the previously mentioned four viewpoints there is a lot unsaid and even more is implied. As a global overview of my past, however, it should be sufficient for now to give the reader a good idea of the starting perspective from which I approach the world of arts marketing.

## 2.2 Overview

Ever since the 1980s, marketing has achieved a growing role in the public arts sector, resulting in a proliferation of academic publications on this subject (Boorsma and Chiaravalloti 2010, 298). Since this point in time much has been written about the “clash” between marketing and the arts. This clash, as Patrick Butler calls it, comes down to marketing and the arts not fully understanding and appreciating each other (2000, 350). Even though there are authors, such as Jeremy Isaacs (1997), who comment on the idea that it is not true that artists have no interest in the efficient management of their lives, even today the tension between the two remains (Joostens 2012, 46). It would be foolish and arrogant for me to assume that I can ‘just’ apply my marketing knowledge to the arts without walking head-on into this same clash. Butler believes that most texts on marketing in the arts concentrate too much on “providing arts administrators and managers with an overview of the management tasks associated with business development” (2000, 344). I tend to agree with Butler that the differences between commercial marketing and arts marketing are not outlined precisely enough (Boorsma 1998a; Kotler and Scheff 1997; Joostens 2012). Consequently, Butler has made an effort to more clearly define and discuss the main differences between commercial and arts marketing.

The core of marketing in any context comes down to an offer, a seller, and a buyer, or as Butler prefers to put it: product, organisation, and market (2000, 347). He further states that “the distinctive characteristics of arts products are that they are cultural; they are human performances of a kind; and they tend to have strong location identities” (ibid.). Butler’s argument comes down to the belief that marketers have to be more sensitive, whether it be towards “cultural attitudes associated with product offerings” (2000, 348) or that the performance sold is “infused with artistic vision and commitment” (ibid.), which makes it inseparable from the artist. Butler also argues that “place identity [is] important to the artists, organisations and the general public” (2000, 349). An example of place identity could be if a play is on-Broadway or off-Broadway. If a marketer wants to sell art, in whatever form, he must be sensitive towards these influences. A commercial marketer normally does not have to consider the maker of a product, so having to do this as an arts marketer adds a layer of tactful communication towards the maker concerning why his product does or does not sell.

Concerning the arts organisations and what differentiates them from commercial enterprises, Butler believes that an arts organisation’s focus “may be primarily internal on the artist and the art” (2000, 350). Whereas in a commercial organisation “a company-wide marketing orientation is perceived to be the great goal of marketing” (ibid.), an artist within an arts organisation might come across as “obstinate selfish” (ibid.), which could actually be key to an artist’s success. This brings us to what Butler has defined as the “clash of commerce and culture” (ibid.). Butler clearly paints the contrasts of the two sides by calling art an “open system: it creates, cajoles, undermines, confronts, challenges” (ibid.) and commercial organisations “closed systems: they are controlled systematised, resistant to change” (ibid.). Butler comes to a one-sided conclusion, one where the implications for marketing “include the political decisions regarding the involvement of artists in the marketing activities and decisions”



(2000, 351). In other words, the artist is allowed and encouraged to mingle in the marketer's affairs, but not the other way around. Marketers should, in Butler's belief, "be wary of distracting the cultural arm" (ibid.) of the organisation - by cultural arm Butler refers to the part of the organisation that creates the art. In other words, arts organisations have an internal orientation that the marketer need not only be aware of, but also should be careful not to interfere with.

An arts organisation's market is different from a commercial organisation's because according to Butler "it presents a complex mix of private and public support and resourcing; it contains a diversity of support and opposition; and it involves critics on whose opinions the art is highly dependent" (2000, 352). By contrast, a commercial organisation typically has a (segmented) market to which it can sell and make a profit, and does not rely on private and public support to find the right to exist. Concerning the implications for the marketer with regards to support and resourcing, Butler believes that "straightforward commercial necessities tend to force compromises on principle" (2000, 353); in other words, the internal culture of the organisation will guide the final policy. The moment Butler discusses the actual market - the audience - also known as the buyer, he notes that the marketer should not be concerned with "what makes great art, but what makes a great audience" (ibid.). To answer that question Butler suggests that the marketer should not focus excessively on demographic segments (as he would in commercial marketing), but more on behavioural segments<sup>3</sup>. Even after considering all this, however, Butler still believes that the influence of critics can make or break art. To counter this force, marketers should therefore focus on "long-term strategies that emphasize positive word-of-mouth support" (2000, 354) and with this "the development of reputations may be useful in countering any adverse critiques from an influential few" (ibid.).

For me, as a commercial marketer, I seem to have the most trouble grasping two aspects of arts marketing. First, in Butler's argument, the marketer should have no influence over the product, but all influence over the market, which is in my opinion the most short-sighted way of defining the role of the marketer: to influence a market. Marketers have better luck successfully and consistently influencing markets if they can influence a product to fit a market, instead of having to find a market that works for a specific product. However, this logic seems to be one of the core aspects of the clash between commerce and culture. I am curious to find out why, after all these years, the clash between commerce and culture still exists and what exactly causes this clash.

Secondly, although only implicitly mentioned above, because the arts organisations are mostly internally focused on their art, which marketers are not allowed to influence, the quality of the product must be one of the arts organisation's biggest priorities. As I explained earlier, quality is something that was never high on my own list of priorities in the past, so I am very curious to learn more about the how and why of quality in art organisations.

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<sup>3</sup> Demographic market example: 30/40 year old unmarried Dutch men. Behavioral market example: Upper middle class couples who go out to cultural events at least once a month.

## 2.3 Quality

Robert M. Pirsig famously said “quality cannot be defined, you know what quality is!” (1974, 318). As discussed above, in my previous career I was never overly concerned with the quality of the products I sold, as long as I could convince a prospective buyer of its value for him. In practice this always worked for me, up until a certain point. Speaking about extremes, it is relatively easy to sell a bad product once, but it becomes extremely hard to sell another product - good or bad - to that same person in the future. Although Kotler and Scheff are of the belief that “even the most creative and dramatic advertising cannot sell an audience on a fundamentally weak offering” (1997, 189), I would argue that it is relatively easy to get a big crowd to see a show. The real challenge lies in getting them to return. Margee Hume has shown, in her research about repurchase intention in the performing arts, that people come back for the overall experience (the show, the venue, the location, the service all together) and not specifically for a particular product. In other words, “respondents did not distinguish between ownership of the show and ownership of the venue, they saw the venue as intrinsic to the experience” (Hume 2008, 49). In other research Hume and Mort suggest a “shift in cultural organisations away from purely focusing on show delivery” (2008, 321). In this study, they confirm that the ‘quality’ of performing arts for the audience is more than just a great performance. Theoretically, then, we could use high pressure sales techniques<sup>4</sup> to get an audience to come back for more of the same experience, since apparently the show was not the deciding factor. Other discussions concerning the quality of the performing arts state that even though reputation, identity, and attendance are indicators of quality, they all come to similar conclusions as Hume (Abbé-Decarroux 1994; Radbourne et al. 2009; Tobias 2004).

For now it seems evident that most arts organisations still focus primarily on the product. The quality of a product, in our case performing arts, can be approached from three different angles, also known as “the magical triangle” (Van den Berg, Boorsma en Van Maanen 1994, 29). There is the product-approach, which, in our case, focuses on the desired outcome of the seller, and in the case of performing arts might be selling as many tickets as possible. Second, there is the user-approach, which focuses on the alignment of the product with the desires of the consumer. This might be the case, for example, with the highly popular recent Dutch theatre production *De Verleiders - door de bank genomen* (2015)<sup>5</sup>, which deals with the banking crisis that started in 2008, received a lot of media attention, and includes some of The Netherlands’ top actors in the cast. Lastly, there is the social-approach, which focuses on how well the product fits into current social developments. *De Verleiders* might very well fit into this category as well. These three approaches are interrelated and cannot function without each other. For example, the social-approach can only be realized if something has been created from the user-approach (Boorsma 1998b, 164). Stereotypically, a commercial marketer tends to emphasize the user-

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<sup>4</sup> There are multiple techniques which a marketer can employ to pressure someone into saying yes. Emotional manipulation, limited time offers, and freebies are only a few ways of pressuring people. Combine multiple of these techniques in a live setting (telemarketing or face-to-face) and you create a high pressure sales situation.

<sup>5</sup> The title of this play roughly translates to: The deceivers, taken by the bank.

approach: the more we align the product with (latent) desires of a market the better it will sell. Of course, every commercial marketer (or entrepreneur) will have a vision, but it comes second to the needs of the market. To my knowledge and experience I have only seen commercial marketers incorporate a social-approach either as a ‘marketing line’<sup>6</sup> or when they were actual do-gooders.

An always present factor to these quality dimensions - or art in general - is, according to Miranda Boorsma, that there are roughly three kinds of art in relation to markets: 1. There is art that can instantly be absorbed by the audience; the art can speak to a relatively broad audience; 2. There is art that serves a more “infrastructural function” (ibid.), which usually means it speaks to a specific audience; 3. There is art that does not reach beyond the involved artists, and potentially a very small group of interested audience members (1998b, 167). To summarize, the quality and kind of art allow it to either have value for a bigger or a smaller audience. This summary, however, is a very commercial approach according to Butler (2000), who notes “in the arts, ‘value’ or ‘worth’ is not at all as clear-cut as in business, since there is no consensus on criteria” (354). In commercial marketing we tend to only speak to a smaller audience when we are working on selling exclusive products to niche markets; otherwise we usually focus our efforts on getting our product to as many people as we can.

Before we delve deeper into the value of art, we must focus on the measurable act of experiencing art to perhaps find an intrinsic quality. Once we do this we instantly find ourselves in the field of neuroscience. This is problematic for a marketer because neuromarketing is a field that is still being defined (Fisher, Chin and Klitzman 2010). If we ignore the still highly developing field of neuromarketing, and focus on the findings of neuroscience in general, we logically find that a person’s art knowledge and expertise influences the perceived quality of art, but also find something as basic as eye-movement influences the experience of art (Pihko et al. 2011). The reason why such a small physical act is relevant for this discussion on intrinsic quality of art is because if the mere, often subconscious, act of moving one’s eye has an impact on the experience of art, such a small act could then, logically extrapolating, also influence the intrinsic quality of art. As a mental exercise, imagine the following: marketers are known to influence where people look (steering online traffic, outdoor advertisements, products in supermarkets), if a marketer could steer where an audience member looks when there is a performance on stage and knows the effect that has on an audience, a marketer could, hypothetically, steer an audience’s intrinsic quality. If we are to believe that the purpose of philosophy is to test the boundaries of logic, then perhaps this one simple exercise has shown us the apocalypse of art, but not as death, but as rebirth as the Greeks belief<sup>7</sup>. Alternatively, it could merely be a marketer’s way of telling artists to evolve.

Continuing on Butler’s previously mentioned remark on the semantic fluidity of the term ‘value’ brings up another important way in which commercial and arts marketing differ: how can

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<sup>6</sup> A story, slogan, or something similar, that is solely there to make everything else look ‘pretty’, or in this case, socially responsible.

<sup>7</sup> Apocalypse, from ancient Greek apocalypsis, means to lift a veil - a revelation.

we define value in arts marketing? Clearly defining value seems to be a complex matter (Butler 2000; Hume and Mort 2008; Kotler and Scheff 1997) because of the many factors and their potential influence that determine value for the arts. Similar to the main differences between commercial and arts marketing, Butler has also segmented and discussed value more specifically than other authors. From a commercial marketing point of view, I have spent most of my time concerned with ‘end-users’, which in this case could be equated with the audience (the buyers). Butler, on the other hand, states that in defining the value of the product it depends “whether the value is defined by the market or the artist” (2000, 354). This again shows that arts marketing needs to play into the hands of various parties: those of the artist and of the audience, and in some cases also funders and volunteers (*ibid.*). This is what Butler calls “value-defining processes” (*ibid.*). Butler also delves into “value-developing processes” (2000, 355) which are about educating the artists and the audience so that art and its reception can both evolve, and “value-delivering processes” (2000, 356) which are about access and pricing (getting the art in front of people who pay). Butler concludes that the value is often defined by the artist, which again emphasises the product-oriented approach the arts maintain.

For a commercial marketer this is very problematic, but for an arts marketer this seems to be his preferred territory, although it seems clear that quality for a marketer always has to do with how well a product sells or can be brought to market. The quest for an understanding of quality brings us to the philosophical debate of what quality is for an artist, or a critic for that matter. Nicholas Wolterstorff, distinguished professor at Yale University, states that “it is not evident that the philosopher committed to conceptual analysis has much of anything to do when it comes to art” (1987, 154). In other words, there is no clear role for philosophers when it comes to defining art, and its quality. Monroe Beardsley adopted a different strategy: he suggested we do not discuss the philosophy of art, but the philosophy of art criticism.

There would be no problems of aesthetics, in the sense in which I propose to mark out this field of study, if no one ever talked about works of art. So long as we enjoy a movie, a story, or a song, in silence - except perhaps for occasional grunts or groans, murmurs of annoyance or satisfaction - there is no call for philosophy. But as soon as we utter a statement about the work, various questions can arise. (Beardsley 1958, 1)

Pierre Bourdieu goes deeper into this issue of speaking about art when he discusses the fact that because expressions of art

are inscribed in ordinary language and that they are generally used beyond the aesthetic sphere, these categories of judgments of taste which are common to all speakers of a shared language do allow an apparent form of communication. Yet, despite that, such terms always remain marked - even when used by professionals - by an extreme vagueness and flexibility which, makes them completely resistant to essentialist definition. (Bourdieu 1987, 205)

This gets further complicated because, according to John Dewey, art “is not only the outcome of imagination, but operates imaginatively rather than in the realm of physical existences” (2005, 285). Of course we could speak of high art and low art (Varnedoe 1990), and thus also high audiences and low audiences (Cohen 1999), but what really matters to our discussion is what a marketer is left with as a product; approached from the creator’s and critic’s side: a highly subjective product of which the success is dependent on the consumption and reception by equally subjective people.

A final interesting factor in the discussion on quality and value is price. In this case, I believe Kotler and Scheff discuss it best when they aptly state that “in the business sector, a good or service must be worth to the consumer at least the same as the producer value, or it will not be produced” (1997, 226). This is logical, because without it you are guaranteed to make a loss. Personally I decided the price of my services based on my own lifestyle. I only wanted to work a certain amount of time and make a certain amount of money, which resulted in me often asking higher prices for my services than most of my competitors. This is a choice that came more from an entrepreneurial standpoint than from a commercial marketer's perspective. It automatically forced me towards more niche marketing fields, where the profit margins were higher. However, this cannot work in most of the performing arts for the simple reason that the ticket price is often significantly lower than its producer value, thus creating a “gap that must be filled by other funding sources” (ibid.). Although there are other authors (e.g., Hume and Mort 2008) who discuss “risk” and “willingness to buy” in relation to quality and value, these are aspects that do not differ that much from commercial marketing and, therefore, they have not been discussed here.

The triangular forces of quality, value, and pricing clearly show us that a marketer in the arts is still someone who is solely focused on the market; the arts marketer just has more markets to deal with than just a potential audience - the artists, volunteers, funding bodies, and critics are also markets an arts marketer has to consider. These forces also give us insight into how value and pricing strategies are significantly different for an arts marketer; financial gaps create a need for financing from other angles. This provides us with a start of what an arts marketer is. With the next subchapter we will gain insight into what his actual role is.

## 2.4 Tension

According to Kim Joostens, one of the biggest issues with marketing the arts has always been the fear and resistance it provokes in artists. According to her, artists are not only afraid and resist marketing because they are not ready for it; they also associate marketing with an unnecessary expense (reducing their income) and commercial entertainment (2012, 46). Because most marketing departments in the cultural sector tend to restrict themselves to promotion and public relations it is evident that this fear has spread beyond just the artists. Joostens delves deeper into this problem quoting Hans Van Maanen, who stated that “one of the fears of theatre makers concerning marketing thinking, is that in exchange for what is offered and what is asked the art will suffer. This fear stems from the realization that one of the features of the art is precisely that it does not meet expectations and disrupts needs” (1997, 306). With this remark, Van Maanen puts the finger on the sore spot with regards to art marketing: he detects a fundamental tension that is seemingly inevitable when combining the arts and marketing.

According to Joosten, this fundamental tension stems from the time of Romanticism, which roughly spanned the 19th century (2012, 135). She explains that during this period it was generally believed that art could only fully function if it was autonomous. This vision rests on the idea that the true value of art is intrinsic and can be determined without knowing anything of the context in which it was created. Although today art is no longer exclusively regarded in that way, the basic principle that the value of art is intrinsically contained in the product is still supported by most marketers. Clearly, different ways of observing art exist. However, for this thesis only the beginning of when and how, and the here and now, are relevant.

Today, the product can be a range of things, one of which is the process of creation, for example in participatory artworks where the experience of creating the artwork is the main focus and not so much the artwork itself (Jackson 2011). This expanded focus on product (where even the entire process including its outcome can be regarded as the overall product) complicates the tension between art and its market even more, because in the example of participatory artworks terminology of art and market hardly apply anymore. Selling and marketing something that mainly has intrinsic value is a lot easier than selling a product to someone who has become part of the production process. Selling something solely on intrinsic value is no longer possible because it hardly exists anymore. As a result, the process of how art is appreciated is shifting and this influences how marketers engage markets.

A shift in marketing strategy forces us to take a fresh look at the products marketers engage potential audiences with. Art is often created independently of market forces, and therefore product-focused. Marketing, on the other hand, relies on knowing and playing into market forces. These are exact opposites: either you focus on product or you focus on market; a balance is often not an option (Lee 2006, 290). However, it seems that this romantic vision of art has been losing ground since the 1990's (Joostens 2012, 139). Joostens states that earlier the artwork was centred entirely around the artist and his relationship to art, but that it has now begun to shift to the reception of the art (*ibid.*). This of course means that the artistic value is no longer intrinsically contained in the artwork itself, but constructed during the experience of the

art by someone who interacts with it (Bourriaud 2002, 52). In other words, value can only exist when someone comes into contact with it and shapes an opinion about it (validates it). Which brings us to an interesting crossroads, namely the point where art now needs an audience to gather value, because without someone interacting with it, the art does not generate an experience and thus has no value. And this brings us once again into the realm of marketing because it is the marketer who brings the audience to the art.

Many authors have addressed this tension. We have already seen how Butler speaks of “the clash between commerce and culture” (2000, 350). Boorsma calls it the “arts marketing pitfall” (2006, 74) and Ian Fillis locates the gap between “art for art’s sake” and “art for business sake” (2006, 29). I prefer to follow Joostens (2012, 134), who speaks of using different terminology, referring to Elisabeth Hill et al., to explain the tension as follows:

Marketing authors have explored the tension implicit in marketing cultural goods, in an attempt to reconcile giving customers what they want with the artist’s need to find an outlet for creative expression independent of market forces. The quality and value of cultural goods frequently depend on their originality or radical nature. Features such as familiarity, which might increase appeal to consumers, or political expediency, which might help access external resources, are not necessarily to be found in good art. (Hill, O’Sullivan and O’Sullivan 2003, 2)

Whether we maintain a more romantic or a more pragmatic view on art, the fact of the matter remains that there is a tension between the artist and marketer that needs to be resolved. When we approach this tension in the world of programming theatre, the problems remain the same. Joostens only touches superficially on festival programming in her dissertation, but she does mention that although festivals have more room to program lesser known artists, they are not always too happy about it because it does not bring in a larger audience (2012, 197). Joostens remark obviously suggests that festivals have to think about audiences and ticket sales. However, it does not show that a marketer is often consulted in this process. According to Joosten, only 13.3% of arts institutions in the Netherlands try to bring programming and marketing closer together, but they do so mostly by stating that the program itself is the most important marketing tool (Joostens 2012, 198).

This tension between the artistic department and marketing department, unfortunately, leaves arts marketing not much more than an empty shell of a department. It seems that the only role marketing has is sales, which is a marketing tool at best. It is similar to saying a carpenter is a hammer, although he is much more than one tool. A carpenter has a strategy (a design) to turn a few wooden planks into a beautiful piece of furniture. Similarly, marketers have a strategy to combine different tools to successfully sell a product while at the same time strengthening the organization. If we were to fully accept Hill’s idea that marketing features are not *necessarily* found in good art, it means it is not impossible to find it in good art. From a commercial marketer’s perspective Hill leaves open the door to different strategies which could actively involve more marketing on a strategic level, and not just restrict marketing to an instrumental

application. In any case, even Hill emphasizes that the struggle between marketing and the arts lies in the previously mentioned tension between being focused on product versus market.

The only time I had an artistic client with whom I encountered the tension between an artist and marketer occurred in 2011. I was asked to join Stacey Zegers, a Canadian country music artist, on her cross-Canada tour from Toronto to Vancouver to help her with her marketing and branding. Throughout her tour we had repeated discussions whenever I noticed that when she sang covers the audience responded with more enthusiasm than when she performed her own songs. She knew that if she would ‘just’ be a cover artist she would become a bigger success, but she did not want to sacrifice her own original creativity for that. It seems this case is not an exception. Arts marketing authors have shown me that this is the standard for artists of any kind.

Solutions to solve this tension, as Joostens calls it, have been offered by Hye-Kyung Lee. Lee offers five different approaches to solve, what he calls, “the orientational dilemma” (2006, 295). Lee suggests a generic marketing communication, meaning that the language used is so broad and generic that it no longer seems as if the arts are identifying and satisfying customer needs, a popular generic phrase is ‘value exchange’. Secondly, Lee suggests a relationship marketing approach that focuses on audience retention instead of continuously seeking new audiences. Thirdly, Lee suggests an extended definition of the customer with the goal of making the organisation appear as market-oriented “even if it is more concerned with the constituencies other than actual and potential paying audiences” (2006, 297). Fourthly, Lee suggests an extended definition of the product that is about broadening “the total package of experience” (ibid.), in other words, by influencing peripheral products a marketer can influence the product and be more customer oriented. Lastly, Lee suggests a (re)reduction of marketing to function which is really just dumbing down a department to the status of a tool, for as far as this is not already the case. Unfortunately, to me these five solutions do not seem like effective ways out of the dilemma, these solutions only provide a fix for the artists, not the marketers. The only ‘real’ option Lee gives is for the marketer to focus on relationships because “such an approach is assumed to be more economical than transactional marketing: to retain an existing customer costs less than to win a new one” (2006, 296). This logic is of course not confined to only this dilemma and almost always applicable, whether we discuss non-profit or for-profit.

A better suggestion that is also appreciated by Lee (ibid.) is provided by Paul O’Sullivan.

If the relationship marketing approach is to be adopted as a strategic option by an arts organisation, it is important that the marketing officer involved bears in mind the kind of qualities that are associated with everyday human relationships - mutuality, emotional investment, trust, concern for the other’s long-term interest, giving priority to the other’s needs - and the endeavour to apply those values in the planning, creation and implementation of effective marketing programmes. (O’Sullivan 1997, 145)

Sullivan's remark brings us back to the sensitivity we briefly hinted at in paragraph 2.1 and that Butler regarded as crucial to the arts marketer’s work. Clearly these authors have the idea that marketers in general are not focused on the client’s long-term interests. This might be due to a



lingering stereotype of a marketer who in the 1970's was associated with soulless people with "a set of techniques" (Lee 2006, 292). I realize, however, it could also be due to the fact that there are still marketers like me around.

By delving deeper into the tension that exists between the artist (or artistic department) and the marketer (or marketing department), we have gained insight into how small the role of the arts marketer actually is. Where in the commercial world a great marketer is revered and given control over everything needed to come from A (an idea of a product) to Z (success in the market), an arts marketer is rarely more than someone who deals with publicity, and perhaps public relations.

## 2.5 Evolved speaking position

This chapter now concludes with a preliminary answer to what an arts marketer is and what his role could be. Throughout this chapter it has become clear that a commercial marketer like me cannot ‘just’ swoop in to save the day in the arts world. There are many sensitivities to consider. The arts marketer is a professional who has to spread his attention to multiple markets, of which the audience and funding bodies are only two. An arts marketer also has to stay away from the product, something a commercial marketer could never do. This leaves the role of an arts marketer to ‘merely’ sell and promote a product, over which he has no control, to the ‘appropriate’ markets.

This brings us to the dilemmas that are exclusive to marketing the arts. Because a marketer has to maintain a ‘hands-off’ policy towards the product, a few things occur. One is a different approach to quality and the other is a tension between marketing and the arts. As mentioned in 2.2 there are more distinct differences between arts and commercial marketing. However, the question of quality and the tension were the most interesting ones for me. Delving into quality has shown me a more balanced (product, user, and social) approach to marketing that I was not familiar with. And reading up on the tension between marketing and the arts has shown me that the core problem lies within different points of focus, namely product versus market.

The final question that remains is: how have my views on marketing changed? In confronting myself with art as the context for marketing I knew it was going to be a challenge to stay open to new ideas. Fundamentally, I have reached an understanding of how arts marketing differs from commercial marketing. On the one hand, artists are the ultimate insult to marketers because they solely focus on their product. On the other hand, this attitude could also be explained as not necessarily being anti-marketing, but rather as a long-term respect for the market; the artist adapts his work through time to discuss or question the current state of affairs. If I were to approach it like this then I fully understand why the arts marketer has to be more sensitive towards the artist when ‘handling’ his work, because without a sensitive approach the marketer would lose connection with the artists, and therefore his work, and ultimately have nothing to sell. This means that the key to being an effective arts marketer is, in line with Fillis (2002) and Lee (2006), no longer focusing solely on transaction-based activities, but on long-term relationship building.

On a last personal note, by reading about arts marketing specifically I have gained a more thorough perspective on ethical dilemmas concerning a sales oriented marketer. My experience comes from personal mentorship from great entrepreneurs who never taught me right from wrong. Reading more closely about the sensitivities involved in arts marketing, I find myself looking for loopholes and ways around complex matters simply because it is easier to convince people to buy something they might not want than to deal with the reality that some products are just not a great match with certain people. I am now re-evaluating certain choices I have made in the past concerning rather shady deals.

With this new perspective on marketing I will, in the following chapter, approach performing arts programming and delve explicitly into three approaches to programming and the aspects of those approaches a marketer has trouble understanding.

## 3.

## Programming

As briefly mentioned in the introduction chapter, the curator and the programmer fulfil similar roles, and because the discourse on curating is vast and the discourse on programming very limited, it is only logical to use the curating discourse to explore the role of the programmer of performing arts festivals. However,

Curating is a contested word. As traditionally used, it referred to the act of caring for a collection, and the Latin root *curare* (to care) is reflected in the usage of the noun *curate* in the United Kingdom for someone who assists a priest in caring for the needs of a congregation. So the basic definition is “caring for objects,” but the curator of contemporary art is just as likely to be selecting artworks; directing how they are displayed in an exhibition; and wiring labels, interpretational material, catalogs, and press releases. The curator is basically in this case acting as a kind of interface between artist, institution, and audience in the development of critical meaning in partnership and discussion with artists and publics. (Graham 2010, 10)

In the above quotation, Beryl Graham indicates that curating is a very broad field and that, therefore, the role of the curator is as hard to define as the activity itself. For every museum, exhibition, and - in our case - performing arts festival, there is a different curator, and thus a different role. Graham discusses a seemingly never-ending list of different roles a curator could fulfil: “Curator as producer, curator as collaborator, curator as champion of objects and/or interactivity, curator as outside the dictionary, curator as curate, curator as quoter of experts.” (2010, 156) This list does not end there, but if we can imagine every curator having his or her own style of curating, or as Graham calls it a “curatorial model” (*ibid.*), then delving into Hans Obrist’s (2003; 2006; 2008; 2014) exhaustive archive of interviews with curators, philosophers, and theorists reveals dozens - if not hundreds - of curatorial models. This brings us to our first obstacle in trying to understand the performing arts programmer from a marketer’s point of view: there is not one single way of working to understand this arts professional; there are as many ways of working as there are programmers. Consequently, this requires us to further restrict our approach.

To be able to properly understand the performing arts programmer from a marketer’s point of view and to be able to say something about programming performing arts festivals, I have chosen to base my analysis on the 55th issue of the Croatian theatre magazine *Frakcija* (2010). This special issue dealt exclusively with curating contemporary performing arts. *Frakcija*’s intention with this issue was to “investigate and define the unique particularities of curating in the various forms of time-based art - theatre, dance, performance” (2010, 2). The contributions to this edition cover a wide range of subjects: it includes the ‘job’ of a programmer who does not have a clear profile, the roots of ‘liveness’ in live art and ‘curate’ in curating, and three new approaches to dealing with curating contemporary performance.

In order to avoid having to discuss all imaginable curatorial models, I have chosen to restrict my attention to the three new types that Elke van Campenhout, Christine Peters, and Mårten Spångberg discuss in *Frakcija*. I chose these three authors because together they cover the product, process, and context of the job a programmer fulfils in a performing arts festival, while at the same time they have their specific origin in curating discourse. Van Campenhout, Peters, and Spångberg show us three fundamental and recent angles - environmental, transparent, and entrepreneurial - to look at the world of the performing arts festival programmer. Together, they should provide me with insight into a few aspects of the world of the programmer through the eyes of a marketer. However, before we start the analysis of these three models, a quick overview of the history of curating, which originated in the field of visual arts (O'Neill 2007, 13), is necessary to understand where these three models come from and show the relevance of their place in this thesis. With increased knowledge concerning the history of curating we should be able to better understand these different ways of programming.

Curating as we know it today started in the twentieth century. Before that, the curator was known as a care provider, as explained by Graham above. In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Christophe Cherix indicates that at the beginning of the twentieth century it was hard for an artist to be curated: museums had their permanent collections and travelling expositions were controlled by artists doing each other favors and thereby maintaining a status quo (Obrist 2008, 6). This all changed with the arrival of modern art forms such as abstract art, impressionism, and expressionism. These new forms of art could no longer 'function autonomously' and needed a curator to do more than solely care for the art. This change, which occurred around the 1960's, has been defined as the curatorial turn by Paul O'Neill (2007). Ever since this period, the role of the curator, and ways of curating, have been topics of debate amongst curators and theorists (Obrist 2008). Rispens has shown, through an analysis of the interviews Obrist conducted in his book *A brief history of curating*, how curating in the 1960's became responsible for creating laboratories (2012, 18). In other words, curators developed the ambition to experiment by, for example, changing the museums into places where the public could participate. As will be shown in chapter 3.1, this notion of laboratories was essential to the later development of environmentalist programming.

O'Neill continues his discussion of the curatorial turn by discussing the next big change to the curatorial debate, which according to him took place in the 1980's. Whereas in the 1960's the debate was centered on the process of curating and the role of the curator, the 1980's showed a change in where that debate took place. No longer were art magazines the main place for discussion; catalogs of expositions and public debates became the primary focus (O'Neill 2007, 13). However, one of the biggest changes that accompanied this shift was the organization of biennials: high profile, large-scale international events that combine art, discussions, conferences, music and film. According to O'Neill, this change made the curators "sell their curatorial concepts as artistic concepts and themselves as artists" (2007, 23). This trend that placed the curator center stage provoked criticism, which in the 1990's resulted in a renewed focus on the artist (Miller 1996, 270). However, the foregrounding of the curator's work in the

1980's did bring about a stronger emphasis on transparency of curatorial selection, insight into artistic processes and thematic discussions that continues to this very day. As will be shown in chapter 3.2, this development could very well be considered the origin of what I have defined as transparent programming.

In an article that critically looks at curators now, Beatrice von Bismarck quotes Paul Kaiser who stated that "the success of curators as a social figure in recent years derives from the old-dilemma of art in the (post-)modern age, i.e. the need for art to assert its supposed autonomy in a market heavily regulated by economic factors" (2007, 63). Von Bismarck interprets Kaiser as putting the curator in "service of the art as a 'marketing manager', 'artistic intellectual' or 'amateur trend scout'" (2007, 64). Although it almost seems Von Bismarck mocks the curator by quoting Kaiser, nothing could be further from the truth. What both Von Bismarck and Kaiser want to communicate is the more economically focused mindset of curators nowadays.

As should be clear by now, the three articles that I have chosen to discuss in this thesis all have their roots in the curatorial turn. The choice for choosing three seemingly different models lies in the ambition to provide both a broad overview of present discussions (all articles were published in 2010), and at the same time cover the most important discussions throughout history (product, process, and context). Seen in this light, environmentalist programming has its origin in the 1960's when curators started playing more emphatic and visible roles, transparent programming has its roots in the early 1980's when the dynamics and locations of art discussions changed, and entrepreneurial programming is the product of more recent developments related to a perceived need to change the art context by attitude.

### 3.1 Environmentalist programming

Elke van Campenhout suggests a new approach to curating, which she calls “environmentalist programming” (2010, 38). In it, the role of the programmer and artist start to intertwine. Van Campenhout wants to “redefine the boundaries put up by the institutions that were built for production modes and logic of a generation of autonomous artists” (ibid.) through a “translation of the relational aesthetics of the visual arts towards a more ecological phrasing of time and space” (ibid.). The way Van Campenhout has structured her argument for environmentalist programming is by discussing four aspects that are most important to her views: laboratory, empty space, organized meetings, and a lasting relationship with the makers.

To illustrate her viewpoint, Van Campenhout analyzes the project ‘BSBbis’ organized by Thomas Plischke and friends (as a spectator), that in 2001 ran for 10 days, 24 hours a day in Brussels. The project invited everyone, both artists and audience members, to share the space, not just for performance and workshops, but also all the time in between. The project team even wanted people to spend the night at the venue, to maximize the potential of the “unexpected, of the informal encounter, of experiencing the changing atmosphere of the space-at-work/at-leisure” (Van Campenhout 2010, 39). This project allowed for makers to experiment and try-out different formats, similar to a laboratory. The idea behind giving away control and creating a laboratory actually grew out of Plischke’s inability to lead people and thus give away control, and his ability to stage a frame and time a situation and thus provide the context (Laermans 2001).

Concerning empty space, Van Campenhout believes that curating should no longer be based on fixed points in space. Van Campenhout believes that “the real curating is the non-curating part of the interstices, of the places in-between, of the potential of the situation for changing one’s attitude, one’s mind or one’s sense of belonging” (2010, 42). In other words, the empty space literally functions as a time in-between to think and reflect, not as a time to present concrete work. The result is that “curation [is] not so much about creating an agenda for discussion but in negotiating the format of the agenda in the first place” (Van Campenhout 2010, 39). Less poetically phrased: the curator is no longer concerned with content, but only shapes the timing and situation of the event.

Thirdly, with respect to meetings between the artists and the audience beyond the performance, Van Campenhout believes that organized discussions, brainstorm sessions, and workshops allow for the roles between artist and audience to blend. Initially this seems contrary to her idea on empty space, but it is in line with Van Campenhout’s overall vision to use environmentalist programming to build a community (2010, 40).

Lastly, although Van Campenhout suggests that programmers focus more on the makers and less on the artwork, she goes even further to suggest a way of curating that focuses on “the curation of a space, of a social body, shared by the artists, audience members, and ‘art objects’” (2010, 41).

Van Campenhout’s approach has two major ‘challenges’: one is the role of the spectator that is no longer a spectator and the other is the market value of a product that is no longer a

product in the conventional sense. Van Campenhout discusses the spectator by stating that because this curatorial attitude creates “a space in which anyone could feel empowered to start creating or changing it by their input, the spectator is confronted with a serious challenge here, albeit possibly in the guise of a somewhat obscure invitation” (2010, 42). In other words, although the spectator is not forced into any unwanted interactive dynamics, it does allow him or her to rethink what it means to be a spectator, and even become co-creators of the experience - which seems to be the challenge Van Campenhout refers to.

Environmental programming, as Van Campenhout puts it, changes the conventional forces at work in arts events. This new way of programming keeps “distance from the power and control strategies of the regular performing arts field, allowing risk to enter into the project set-up, and putting into question not only the authorship of the artist/curator, but also the market value of the artistic product” (Van Campenhout 2010, 39-40). Although Van Campenhout does not actually discuss market value in her article, what I believe she is pointing towards is that because the programmer’s role, and thus the programmer’s product, is changing - so is the end product the audience engages with.

Understanding environmental programming, as Van Campenhout imagines it, from an arts marketer point of view brings us to one fundamental question: how do we market and sell a program of which the main focus is not actually a traditional program but everything else? Selling a program or a performance is a rather straightforward task, selling an experience that is undefinable beforehand is not quite as simple.

Based on the idea of creating a social body, wanting roles to blend, letting the focus be on the experience in-between, and allowing for experiments - and thus failure - all lead me to believe that Van Campenhout wanted to create a community, or *communitas* as Thomas Plischke (Laermans 2001) calls it (a term originally coined by anthropologist Victor Turner). Although Plischke himself does not believe in the utopia Van Campenhout suggests - a time and place where people are incubated - he does agree with the approach stating that the most important thing for him is “to introduce the conviction that the system for which the public pays and that in fact is created by the performers and the public together, at the same time is not there at all.” (Quoted in Laermans 2001, under “Zwakheid als utopie?”) In other words, he seems to agree with the idea that exactly that which the performer and public create, which is not a tangible thing and thus ‘not there’, is the most important thing - which is also the essence of Van Campenhout’s approach to curating.

The desire to create a community is not new to marketers of any kind (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Schau, Muñoz Jr., and Arnould 2009; McKenzie-Mohr 2013). However, since the arts marketer is not supposed to ‘touch the product’, we must understand exactly what Van Campenhout means by curating the in-between, which is key to her argument and hence also to an arts marketer wishing to market environmental programming properly.

Van Campenhout uses the word ‘interstice’ to describe the in-between. It is a term she borrows from Nicolas Bourriaud, who in turn borrowed it from Karl Marx who used it to “describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from



the law of profit” (Bourriaud 2002, 16). Bourriaud himself defines an interstice as “a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system” (ibid.). Bourriaud emphasizes the power of an interstice which “encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the ‘communication zones’ that are imposed upon us” (ibid.). Bourriaud, in relation to the “social interstice” (2002, 14), ends his argument by stating that all “human activity [is] based on commerce, art is at once the object and the subject of an ethic. And this is all the more so because unlike other activities, its sole function is to be exposed to this commerce” (2002, 18). In Bourriaud’s case we can interpret commerce as a synonym for trading, similar to Marx, but in the overall interpretation of interstice not as confined as Marx. The reason why Van Campenhout might have been keen on using the term interstice to describe the in-between could have to do with Bourriaud’s view on the meaning of art. According to Bourriaud the meaning of art is constructed collaboratively in the interactive dynamics between art and the viewer. This is of course in line with Van Campenhout’s view on environmentalist programming.

By taking a closer look at the etymology of interstice, I instantly gain a broader appreciation for the wide application of the word, and thus Van Campenhout’s intention. From an entrepreneurial standpoint I understand and appreciate Marx, for the simple reason that trading and bartering - which is what eluding the capitalist economic context is - avoids having to pay taxes (whereas to Marx it meant less risk of alienating workers). From an arts marketing point of view, however, Bourriaud gives me more insight into what Van Campenhout could mean with interstice than Marx. By the mere fact that Bourriaud utters the word ‘commerce’ he instantly expands the understanding of ‘interstice’, although he approaches commerce more broadly than typically applicable in marketing (not everything is a trade). By believing everything people do is commerce, Bourriaud demonstrates a more balanced approach to the arts simply by acknowledging commerce. If I, as an arts marketer, were to define - based on Van Campenhout, Marx, and Bourriaud - what interstice in the context of environmentalist programming is, the definition would be as follows: an interstice is a moment between artworks that encourages but does not force inter-human communication and which has the intention to build a community - all to elude traditional commerce, while still being exposed to the world.

If a programmer would ask me to market an environmentalist program I would now have a better understanding of the actual intent of such a program and what exactly the programmer would look for. How exactly an arts marketer is supposed to market and sell an experience that is fleeting in its nature, but whose core is to build a temporary community, is still going to be a challenge. But more thoroughly grasping what an environmentalist minded programmer is asking from us is an indispensable first step.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the ambition of this thesis is to (carefully) engage with these curatorial models, and go beyond the current status quo (or stand-off) that exists between marketing and the arts. With this engagement I do not claim to provide the solution to any problem: I merely nudge and strive to rethink the status quo. Consequently, the question that remains is how can a marketer sell a fleeting experience? Ideally you could ask a marketer to ‘sell the dream’ and he should willfully oblige. The truth, however, presents us with

a few difficulties. Namely, as mentioned in chapter 2.1, what exactly differentiates this experience to the point that it enhances our chances of successful sales? In selling any experience-based product there is one important question that rises above all others: How is this experience different from any other? This question obviously does not require answers along the line of “our festival is 10 days instead of 7 and has more performances”.

Taking on the role of devil’s advocate, then, how does a performing arts festival stand out from other performing arts festivals? More often than not, each festival has their own ‘genre’ and therefore their own ‘audience’, where the take-away is the experience and nothing else. Any self-respecting commercial marketer would keep his name far away from such an event, because it lacks originality and creative thinking. Most festivals nowadays are all in the same red ocean<sup>8</sup> (Kim and Mauborgne 2005, 7), because fundamentally they all offer the same product: X days of festival, X performances, X pre/after talks, a bar and in some cases a final party. A great example of a performance company that changed their core product to find their blue ocean was Cirque du Soleil. They eliminated the biggest cost of circus (their animals) from the show, added a storyline and theme to their shows similar to theatre (multiple different shows), increased the comfort and elegance for the customers (no more wooden benches), and many more changes to create a new form of performance that sat in between circus and theatre to find their blue ocean (Kim and Mauborgne 2005, 16).

What could a festival look like after it has rethought a few aspects of its event to create a new, unique experience? The key to environmentalist programming is to create a laboratory, so as a marketer I would suggest building more on that aspect, and perhaps suggest something quite extreme just to get the ball rolling: e.g., a 3-day festival that starts on Friday night and ends on Sunday night and once you enter you are not allowed to leave or contact the outside world. There are scheduled performances/lectures throughout Saturday and Sunday, but only a few of these performers are there on Friday night. Friday night starts with the group creating something themselves, how/what/with whom we do not know. All we do know is something will be created. Smaller laboratories like this will be created on Saturday and Sunday, and with the infusion of the other performers the dynamic will keep changing. On Sunday, like camp in elementary school, the event will end with a presentation of the best spontaneous performances/art that was created in this bubble. This night will be open to the public and the performance that is voted most popular gets to perform in a theatre later that year.

This is just one rough (and relatively safe) idea, but contains performances, lectures, laboratories, community, ‘x-factor’, and a fusion of seeing art, co-creating art, and becoming art (in the sense that the participating, co-creating body becomes part of a composite collective creation of sorts, the sum total is the event). While at the same time being exclusive enough so people want in and yet big enough so it gets proper attention, it has a short enough time span that allows people to actually be part of it, is extreme in being fully removed from society, and has

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<sup>8</sup> Blue ocean strategy is a marketing mindset that asks a company to rethink their core proposition to the point where they are no longer in competition with other companies. This competition-free territory is referred to as ‘blue ocean’. If you are competing you are in a red ocean, an ocean coloured by the blood of battle created by competition. Both terms were coined by Kim and Mauborgne.

the potential take-away of becoming a programmed performer (co-creation between artists and audience allows for this). In short, it is a festival where everything is possible, all within the confines of art and marketing. By focusing more on environmentalist programming we instantly step away from the standard X days of festival with X performances and a grid schedule with separate tickets. On the surface, this idea seems similar to the BSBbis event Van Campenhout spoke of, but the reason why it is not the same - and thus in the blue rather than in the red ocean - are the marketing aspects of this rough idea: 3 days of being fully removed from society, infusion of new performers, and an actual take-away. By merely playing with environmentalist programming and blue ocean strategy, and allowing marketers to do more than promote, it already shows us a stronger performing arts festival that is easier to sell because it clearly differentiates itself.

### 3.2 Transparent programming

Christine Peters advocates a more “transparent” (2010, 80) starting point towards curating than what is the ‘normal’ course of events. Peters is of the belief that new ways of working are challenging the curator “as an individual author while global markets are becoming overwhelmingly differentiated and un-transparent” (2010, 79). According to Peters there is an urgent need for a “permanent confrontation of various ways of thinking and working in the professional field of art, if we want to use the existing institutions and resources for things that were not possible before” (2010, 80). Without such a confrontation Peters believes that new possibilities will remain inaccessible. Although she phrases her ideas a bit vaguely, she believes new curators should “expand the time and space for what we are doing” (ibid.). In other words, broaden and lengthen the context of the agenda. Relating her ideas to festivals, Peters states that such events only generate highlights and only temporarily vitalize their cultural environment. Peters gives a suggestion to solve this ‘problem’ through “nomadic platforms which cross-link a city’s existing creative resources in order to mark the cultural life all year round” (ibid.). According to Peters, the biggest obstacle to this new approach is that many institutions, festivals, and sponsors “find it difficult to imagine new artistic and curatorial approaches” (ibid.). This leaves us with, what Peters calls, “unprogressive curating that subjects itself to dry politics and voluntarily agrees to a service-based production and its commodification” (ibid.). According to Peters this problem especially affects festivals, because they cannot seem to overcome “their ambitious adherence to keywords and theses, and since the presented art cannot answer to these claims, it appears undeservedly deficient and small” (2010, 81), in other words, the keywords limit the perception of art and inhibit a presentation in all its complexity. As an alternative, Peters suggests festivals spend more time and energy in advance on artists and experts to find a way to present a topic in all its complexity. Extrapolating from that idea Peters believes that the first thing that needs to be done is to shed all “outdated profitability formulas a la ‘XX days of event = XX artists x XX projects from XX countries at XX locations = XX tickets’” (ibid.).

Bringing this all together Peters suggests we learn from thinkers and doers who “keep augmenting their expert knowledge through their interdisciplinary permeability and by practicing tireless permanence” (2010, 83), so that we can create a “starting point and contact surface for an in-depth curatorial debate” (2010, 81). With this remark, Peters seems to suggest that only through permanently updated expert knowledge and long-term relations with, in this case, artists we can start to understand curatorial challenges in all their complexity. Peters even goes so far as to suggest that curators become fully transparent about their selection criteria. Let it be clear that Peters wants to conceive a different culture of seeing, reflecting, and producing.

From a marketing point of view there are two main issues I have with Peters’ ideas. Firstly, her idea to shed traditional profitability formulas seems short-sighted and possibly naive given today’s realities in the cultural sector. Secondly, bringing transparency into any process forces marketers to deal with ethics, which is not something that we all enjoy. In order to work with her concept I will therefore need a more thorough understanding of her arguments.

Although Peters seems critical of the obsession of festivals with selling tickets, she fails to incorporate actual money in her equation. Without money her formula only shows how many tickets could potentially be available, and by available I do not mean for sale, but simply how many people can be accommodated in one single festival. An artist forgetting to account for money in her criticism of marketing does not shock me, although times definitely are changing. After all, according to Donald Kuspit “art has never been independent of money, but now it has become a dependency of money” (2011, 15). Because of subsidies and free tickets for performers, critics, and VIP's, a festival in the Netherlands is considered financially successful if one third of the audience actually buys a ticket (Rapport Visitatiecommissie Cultuurnota 2013-2016, 2014). This new standard results in a new model which Peters might not like but which actually covers all the angles:  $XX \text{ days of event} = XX \text{ artists} \times XX \text{ projects from } XX \text{ countries at } XX \text{ locations} = XX \text{ available seats} - \frac{2}{3} \text{ non available seats} = \frac{1}{3} XX \text{ available seats for } XX \text{ price} = XX \text{ income generated by the festival}$ ; this model excludes external financing. Whether this is the best way to make money is debatable. It is covering all the bases, and not taking any risk. Stereotypically, marketers are not known for their risk taking abilities; “Art is adventurous, marketing safe” (Brown and Patterson 2003, 21; Originally from Tusa 1999, 120). What I can tell from personal experience is that there are other, more ‘dangerous’, ways of making money on an event that do not require a consumer to buy a ticket beforehand - for instance a pay what you want scheme<sup>9</sup>. Whether the performing arts festival scene in the Netherlands is ready for this is doubtful.

The second aspect of Peters’ idea is the key to her success and lies in transparency. As before, let us experiment and engage with transparent programming. Transparency is typically not a mindset a marketer enjoys (Christensen 2002), because it often forces us to deal with ethics (Murphy, Lacznik and Wood 2002). Academically, transparency has played a role in relationship marketing for years (Stern 1997; Grönroos 1999, 2004; Gamble 2006). However, in more recent years, since the introduction of social media as a marketing tool, many non-academic authors have also shown the value of relationship marketing in different fields (Kawasaki 2014; Stratten 2012; Vaynerchuk 2013). What their argument boils down to is that transparency is a key aspect to building the trust that is needed for strong relationship marketing. I believe this is what Peters is aiming at with her suggestion of transparency: to become more transparent to open up dialogue and start building stronger relationships between artists, audiences and the event. The downside of her discussion is that she confines this dialogue to curators and artists only and does not even mention the audience. Once we explore the consequences of opening up curatorial choices - i.e. transparency - that includes the audience, we will unexpectedly see a potential upside, namely an increased audience understanding and involvement which will translate into increased attendance.

The main reasons for not wanting to be transparent is that it could allow any person to copy the idea and use it for themselves, or it could open yourself up to an unnecessary amount of

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<sup>9</sup> A pay what you want scheme is more typically known as the hat that goes around a room after a singer/songwriter has performed. More recently it has also become the way to make money for consultants and other professionals.

criticism. From an arts marketing point of view, in the case of a performing arts festival I can imagine that opening up the curatorial practice would not just engage curators to improve their expertise - as Peters suggests - but would also invite the audience's irritation or imagination. During informal discussions about marketing matters in the theatre world I have heard people argue countless times that marketing would ruin 'the mystery of theatre'. This might be completely true, but what would happen if, from an arts marketing point of view, we decide to open up the curatorial practice for the audience? If done right, I can imagine that opening up and becoming more transparent will allow the audience to better understand the 'why' of the performance in the festival, and perhaps even the 'why' of the entire festival, an understanding that will - I believe - motivate them to answer their own question of 'why' they want to go back for another performance. Although initially I might have been hesitant as a marketer to open up the most crucial aspect of a festival, when I put my arts marketing glasses on I realized that giving people insight will not take away the mystery; it will rather open up the mystery a tantalizingly tiny bit by provisionally answering the question we all need answering - why? (Sinek 2011). If framed effectively this invitation to the audience might actually lure them into coming back for more.

For all this to be a success, however, requires a programmer who fully understands his own curatorial model and be able to verbalize his or her selection criteria as part of a larger strategy. For this, he or she needs to go beyond 'intuition' and be able to articulate the idea of taste, quality, and power. This could potentially be a challenge as will be demonstrated in the next subchapter, because not all mission/vision statements actually provide us a clear idea of what a particular festival is trying to be.

### 3.3 Entrepreneurial programming

Mårten Spångberg preaches for a more entrepreneurial mindset in artists and programmers; more entrepreneurial, but not more marketing-oriented. Spångberg quite radically advises artists to “be foolish and fuck balance” (2010, 71), “raise your voice and judge” (2010, 72), and most importantly “stop pretending to emancipate yourself when what you want most of all is to belong” (ibid). For programmers, Spångberg suggests they “stop using budget cuts as an argument [for a mediocre program]” (2010, 71) and “stop using local audience as an argument [for a generic program] when what it means is serving local politicians” (ibid.). Spångberg cannot seem to recall “a single festival that has elaborated a strong proposal, or even more rarely a proposal that is controversial or excluding” (2010, 75). This leads him to the conclusion that “programmers as well as artists happily bend over and offer themselves to the whims of the market” (2010, 74).

Although this might sound like a person who claims marketing is the problem, what Spångberg actually does is claim the problem lies within the attitude of theatre managers, artists and curators: “consider that there are approximately 250 conventional black box theatres spread over Europe. How does it come that they all utilize the same marketing strategy and stick to it year after year when the lack of audience is always a central problem?” (2010, 75) Although this comes across as a marketing shortcoming, he also approaches the problem the other way around when he asks “how is it possible that the dance artist spends three months on rehearsing a new piece and twenty minutes on producing the press image when the performance is often seen by less than 300 people, and the program is printed in 25,000 copies?” (ibid.)

Throughout his argument Spångberg makes a few sensible entrepreneurial suggestions, but he clearly exaggerates when he states that “festival and season programs are children of a certain time and context, we can work to make them a little bit better, a little bit more open, a little bit this or that, but there will be no major changes as long as the economy doesn’t simply collapse.” (2010, 76) Spångberg similarly overstates his case when writing about the need of the discourse to grow. Thus he believes that for dance “to have a future it is imperative that we develop our own discourses around programming or curating. We must certainly not invite curators etc. from visual art to inform us about how it is to be done” (ibid.). Just in time, Spångberg tones down to make a beautiful astute observation about, the ‘why’ of making art:

Why are you making art, why are you programming a festival or season? To please everyman, the general population or audience? I hope not, because if that is our ambition there are certainly businesses that offer much better salaries and fancier parties. Have you forgotten why you are making art or why you set out to realize that first festival? Those pieces, festivals and seasons that we created even though we knew it would cost and would interfere with our personal economies? We did it because we couldn’t find strong arguments enough not to, because we had no smaller ambitions than to change the world, because dance, choreography and performance were synonymous with life and death. Pathetic, oh yes, but pathetic enough to forget? Have we forgotten our mission

statements, did we change them from ‘until death’ to ‘until budget cuts’? (Spångberg 2010, 77)

Of course Spångberg acknowledges the exceptions to the rule (like himself) - which he does not discuss, but he really emphasizes the issue by once again, clearly, asking programmers and artists if they “are willing to sell out specificity in favour of fitting in?” (2010, 78)

What Spångberg seems to do, in his own unique and outspoken way, is urge artists and programmers to no longer conform and instead step into adventurous entrepreneurialism. Unfortunately, a consequence of his suggestions is the reinforcement of the tension mentioned in chapter 2.4 by saying ‘fuck you’ to existing systems (including marketing) and focusing more on the programmer’s own success.

If we want to understand the artist and programmer as cultural entrepreneurs, does that mean they no longer have to consider market forces? Innovation is never easy, mostly because people do not understand what it is you are doing. Ignoring the basic logic of market research, however, is not the way to go. Even Spångberg concludes this when he states that he has “never heard about a dance festival or season that invests more than 0% on R&D of the revenue.” (2010, 73) The research part almost always includes understanding the needs of the market and according to Spångberg currently no one is successfully doing this. It might seem as though Spångberg wants to leave any marketing mindset behind, but he acknowledges that in order to innovate we need money.

Where does this leave us? An entrepreneurial attitude that makes sure artists and programmers no longer bend over to the whims of the market, but also not lose touch with it completely. This brings us to two issues, one concerning artists and one concerning programmers. For the artist to gain this entrepreneurial mindset we bump into the problem that, according to Spångberg, “in dance and performance it is rather understood as a big mistake to articulate a position also concerning the artist. Better not to say anything, and you will not be kept responsible.” (2010, 74) A position, in this case, referring to any kind of opinion. With this Spångberg states people are shy to speak out concerning quality, because it could influence their future negatively. From an organisational point of view this is problematic, without responsibility you cannot run a great organisation (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991, 54); not taking a position means stagnating where you are.

According to Spångberg, programmers on the other hand do not have the room to take a stand, they have the issue of budget cuts and local politicians. Seen from a marketing point of view, to give programmers the room to take a stand new ways of managing the money must be found. I specifically do not mean making money, because that is only one way of managing money. Other options can also be explored, for instance: buy-in<sup>10</sup> by artists and dividing the

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<sup>10</sup> Buy- in typically involves someone paying the organization a large sum of money to become a partner and enjoy the potential profits. More recently organizations are also built from the ground up with a simple percentage based division of income.



profits - similar to corporate law (Gilson and Mnookin 1985), product placement<sup>11</sup> - similar to film (Russell 1998), or perhaps even just doing things for free just to have freedom. Perhaps these ideas are bad, perhaps they will revolutionize the future of performance festival programming, I do not know. What I do know is that if programmers stick to the current status quo concerning money and programming everything will remain as it is and nothing will change.

As Hill mentioned earlier in chapter 2.4, marketing influences do not necessarily make good art. At the time I suggested it *could* be found in good art, but with the outspoken influence of Spångberg I might be more inclined to think that perhaps the problem with the current pressure on the contemporary arts world, because of subsidy cuts, has less to do with marketing and more to do with an overall lack of entrepreneurial ‘balls’ in the artists and programmers. Artists are known to be creative in nature and come up with great ideas on a daily basis (Styhre and Eriksson 2008), why then are they not using that creative power to think up a few new ways of making money? To make sure that being part of the art world is no longer about being able to survive, but that it becomes about the ability to thrive.

Similar to the previous two sub-chapters it could be useful to see what could happen when a marketer starts engaging with this problem. Three small marketing ideas were offered above for the festival programmer (buy-in, product placement, free). However, similarly we can think about ideas for the artist, that could potentially reshape the need for artists to be paid for their performances by the festival, and thus reshaping the entire business model of the performing arts festival.

The Netherlands is known as a knowledge-based country. This means that we have a large amount of consultants selling their knowledge, often for an hourly rate. However, for them the only means to making more money comes down to increasing their hourly rate, because at a certain time you will reach the limit of hours available to work in a week. Of course there are many small ways to change this a little, but no significant shift will come from this. Business experts like Anthony Robbins, Brendon Burchard, and Maria Forleo are all teaching professionals across the globe that the key to financial success lies in productization. For consultants in The Netherlands this often comes down to writing books, creating e-courses, webinars, and other (often online) products. With these products the consultants are no longer bound to an hourly rate but can now create passive income with their products.

What would it look like if an artist is no longer an artist, but a cultural entrepreneur who makes most of his money from additional products that his art facilitates, but not the art itself? Every person in this world has at least one experience that could potentially help others. This also applies to artists: they could put their knowledge and experience into a book that could help others. If they can create a book, they can also create an e-course, webinar and other online products. These online products might be a bit too far from an average artist's bed, however, it does go to show there is a world of possibilities out there that goes beyond merely selling your core business (artworks).

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<sup>11</sup> Product placement means an artist gets paid to feature certain products in his work. Big blockbuster movies get paid by brand like Apple, Coca-Cola, Audi, and such to feature their products.

### 3.4 Interview with Rainer Hofmann

In this subchapter I report on a ‘field test’ of some of the results the literature survey has brought me. I conducted an interview with Rainer Hofmann, artistic and general director of SPRING performing arts festival in Utrecht, to verify some of the insights I have gained about programmers and to discuss the three ideas of environmentalist, transparent, and entrepreneurial programming. All the information about SPRING in this subchapter has been filtered through Hofmann’s eyes. A full transcription of the interview can be found in Appendix 1.

SPRING is a ten-day festival that takes place once a year in May. SPRING is an international performing arts festival, that focuses on new developments on an international level. It gets international work to perform in the Netherlands, but also provides a stage for Dutch performers to profile themselves internationally. SPRING is a relatively new festival, since it is the merger of SPRING Dance festival and Festival aan de Werf, two festival which both existed for more than 25 years. This was not an entirely voluntary merger might I add, SPRING Dance festival’s funding was cut, and thus they started conversations with Festival aan de Werf who still had funding. With an eye on the future they submitted a proposal for funding for a new festival, which would feature the best of both festivals. The proposal was approved and a new performing arts festival was born. The first SPRING performing arts festival was held in 2013, and since 2014 the festival has been in the hands of Hofmann.

The core team of SPRING consists of Hofmann, as artistic and general director, along with a head of marketing and communications, a business director, and an event coordinator. Together with the business director, Hofmann decides on long-term strategy goals. When we discussed their initial goal of 2016 (attracting 1/3 paying customers from a total of 30.000 audience members), he mentioned that when they first started in 2014 they had been too optimistic, but that the visitation commission did not seem too bothered by their lack of success in that area.

From the start of the interview, I was almost immediately struck by the clear product orientation of Hofmann. He mentioned that at SPRING they “look for an audience” and he elaborated on this by mentioning that the starting point of any performing arts festival should be a content-based profile. According to Hofmann, having a consistent profile is *the* most important aspect of programming. Although SPRING can sometimes program very diverse performances, Hofmann believes that the audience should still be able to understand the idea of the festival as a whole. Hoffmann’s concise description of the festival: “SPRING presents new developments in the international performing arts with a focus on crossover between dance and theatre.”

When our conversation turned to environmentalist programming we zoomed in on two aspects: communities and the in-between moments of Van Campenhout. By listening to Hofmann talk about how they aim to build a community over the next few years I realized that this festival, or perhaps most performing arts festivals in the Netherlands, are not really designed to accommodate the utopian sense of community Van Campenhout envisioned. Instead, Hofmann brought up an interesting statistic: a typical spectator only sees 1.5 performances per festival and as a result there is not a large group of people to build something with, let alone

build something of the moments in between. However, to start building a community and to actually create a moment in between SPRING decided last year to implement double tickets; buy the ticket for the performance you want to see, and for only a few more euros you can also see the other performance programmed that night. Although Hofmann called this “building a community”, this is really more a marketing strategy and does not come close to Van Campenhout’s ideal concerning environmentalist programming.

Concerning transparent programming Hofmann also had some experience with this approach. Although Peters discusses a transparency between curators, Hofmann has experience with transparency towards the audience of SPRING. Hofmann mentioned that there are many ways in which a programmer can be transparent with an audience. One way of doing this is by scheduling pre-talks (or introductions) before the performances. Instead of giving information about the performance and performers in question, Hoffmann provides information about why he has programmed a performance and how it fits into the festival. He has received very positive responses from audience members about his approach. Interestingly, when I asked for an example he provided one with the side note that these introductions are ‘officially scheduled’ and are mostly ad-hoc: “Julian Hetzel, with whom we receive the Nieuwe Maker Subsidy from FPK, is a young artist between visual arts and visual theatre, who is developing his own, very unique artistic handwriting and who is at the beginning of an international career.” Going on this example, I do not see any useful transparency in this introduction. This example shows us how the performance came to be (the subsidy), and what it is (visual arts/visual theatre), but it does not show us the ‘why’ of the programming choice. Unless Hofmann considers the shared subsidy as the ‘why’, then I do not think it is a very artistic and inspiring choice, but one out of convenience. Obviously, when I asked Hofmann about any potential dangers of this transparency he only discussed audience members that did not agree with him, but he did not mention the danger of ‘stealing trade secrets’, so to speak.

The part of the interview concerning entrepreneurial programming was the most interesting because it veered far away from what Spångberg advocates in his article. Hofmann does not at all agree with the idea that he has to make sacrifices or alter his plans to suit the needs of any funding bodies, but this is because his approach to those funding bodies is different from what Spångberg discusses. Spångberg focuses his article on artists and programmers that want funding no matter what, whereas Hofmann focuses his efforts on finding exactly those funding bodies that share his mission. What it really comes down to is the idea that Hofmann does not solely look for financing; he looks for partners to support his plans. SPRING works in different European networks, which connects SPRING to more than 20 festivals, theatres and production houses in more than 10 European countries. Partners are, for example, LIFT London, Spielart Munich or Le Maillon Strasbourg. These networks (co)produce and present work all over Europe, but offer also residencies, education and research programs. Only with projects that have similar goals, Hofmann states, do they apply together for “support from the Cultural Program of the EU.” From my perspective, on the surface, this really illustrates an even more evolved view on entrepreneurship than what Spångberg preaches: Hofmann is able to stay calm

in rather extreme circumstances in the cultural field and stand his ground to the point where he actually finds partners, rather than 'mere' financiers.

A final aspect of the interview, relevant to me as a marketer - either commercial or arts oriented - was the fact that although Hofmann has a non-hierarchical organisation and open communication between the team that makes all the decisions, he was still stubborn enough (or perhaps visionary?) to say that even if the whole team disagrees on a certain performance and he loves it, he will - and in the future will probably again - program that performance. Asking Hofmann why he works like this, he responded with: "I am responsible and I choose based on my artistic expertise. But of course this does not mean, that I do not make mistakes, if there are anything like mistakes." For a marketer, a performance that does not bring in an audience is usually considered a mistake, however well it might fit into an artistic vision. The moment we discussed his head of marketing and communication, he confirmed what my initial journey through arts marketing was about. Hofmann does not like to work with marketers who can 'sell anything'. Instead, he likes to work with marketers who have (or are prepared to develop) a feeling for art.

This interview has confirmed most of the ideas, especially the existing status quo, that theory had shown me, but it has also shown other ways - for instance, partners for finance - of working around a problem. However, the moment Hofmann stated that a consistent profile is the most important thing, and that the marketer's job is to find an audience, he confirmed that SPRING is part of the 13.3% of arts organisation that is working to better meld marketing and programming, but with the belief that the program is the most important marketing tool (Joostens 2012, 198). On the surface of it Hofmann might come across as the ideal performing arts festival programmer: pure vision and willing to stick to it. The fact that his partners with similar goals also seem to provide situations where the answer to why something gets programmed is simply shared subsidy, makes me doubt the practicality of his ideals. Another example of why a programmer and marketer should work closer together: let a programmer provide vision, and let the marketer figure out the practicalities of it. Letting a programmer do both seems hypocritical.

An important element of SPRING that is considered side-programming and is not directly led by Hofmann, but one he does consider a partnership platform, is 'SPRING academy'. SPRING academy features programs for students of several educational institutions (Utrecht University, Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, ArtEZ and De Montfort University). In addition to special session for students, there are also masterclasses for young artists, theorists, dramaturgs, playwrights and other professionals. Participants of these activities in 2015 got the opportunity to engage intensely with the subject 'post-humanity'. SPRING academy fits more into Van Campenhout's idea of environmentalist programming as these sessions constitute an intellectual laboratory of sorts: participants really get to play with a concept beyond its surface. Also, from personal experience, I can say that sharing all this time and intellect with a small group of people connects you. Even though I was part of a group of students I already 'knew', I can only imagine what these sessions would do to a group of people who are not weighed down by existing social relations within a group.

I believe these academy sessions are a smart addition to the performance program of SPRING. They can create something that is (statistically) hard to achieve with only a program made up of performances.

## 4.

## Conclusion

This thesis started with the hypothesis that if a marketer and programmer were to understand each other's work processes better, they would be able set up a performing arts festival that can better tackle the new requirements forced on the cultural sector by the government. This hypothesis led me to the overall question of this thesis: '*How can a marketer understand a performing arts festival programmer in the Netherlands?*' The short answer to this complicated question was provided by Rainer Hofmann when he said: "All a marketer has to do is be curious towards the programmer, and be open in his communications." The longer answer to this question can be constructed by responding to the sub questions I also formulated in the beginning of my research.

The journey of the thesis started by first attempting to understand arts marketing to be able to answer the question what, in the context of the arts, a marketer is and what his role entails. Through the exploration of arts marketing theories I confronted myself, with my roots in commercial marketing, with some different ideas surrounding product, organisation, and market. After creating a clear overview of the differences I decided to focus on two aspects in the arts marketing discourse that struck me as distinct dilemmas pertaining to arts marketing, namely quality and the tension between the arts and marketing.

Quality was discussed from a triangle of forces of quality (triangle of product-user-society), value (market vs. artist), and pricing (value gap). It brought me to the conclusion that an arts marketer is still a marketer, but one who speaks to multiple markets (artist, audience, funders, volunteers, critics) instead of just one - namely, the buyer.

The tension between art and market, defined as an orientational dilemma, was thoroughly discussed and showed that the main difficulty lies in the fact that artists and programmers are focused on the product (which could include a cultural experience, a process, or an event), whereas marketers as their name implies, focus on markets. This discussion led to the conclusion that marketing is often reduced to the limited function of sales and/or publicity. It is particularly this position that requires shifting from both sides if the tension is to be reduced to make a more productive collaboration possible.

In order to answer the sub question of what an arts marketer and his role defines I conducted a study that revealed that an arts marketer, in comparison to a commercial marketer, is someone who focuses on multiple markets, appreciates all the sensitivities associated with marketing the arts, and is mainly just a tool to be wielded by artists and programmers.

With an expanded understanding of arts marketing I subsequently approached the world of the curator / programmer. I specifically looked at three new ways of looking at programming which I believe could help enhance festivals; namely, environmentalist programming, transparent programming, and entrepreneurial programming. I approached all three modes solely from the perspective of 'what is needed for a marketer to understand this?'

The key to understanding Van Campenhout's discussion on environmentalist programming was to understand what it means to program moments in between. With the use of Bourriaud and Marx I gained insight into how Van Campenhout imagines the moments in between to be the starting point of building a community. I finally decided to create my own definition of the moment in between (interstice) and its purpose. An interstice is a moment between artworks: one that encourages but does not force inter-human communication, that has the intention to facilitate the building process of a community - all to elude traditional commerce, but still be exposed to the world. The practical engagement with Van Campenhout's concept played with the idea of a marketer having influence over the environmental program itself by applying the blue ocean strategy (i.e., creating a unique niche and thereby reducing competition with other events), this experiment showed us a strong artistic product by letting a marketer be involved.

Finding the value in transparent programming came down to understanding the view that being transparent as a curator does not threaten the festival. The practical engagement actually showed that a marketer who opens up the program helps the audience to better understand it - and thus potentially motivate them to return for more performances.

Exploring the idea of entrepreneurial programming confronted me with an even bigger clash than mentioned before in chapter 2.4. This way of looking at programming ended up asking us what innovative ways of financing could be developed to create more freedom as a programmer, and what the consequences of that increased freedom could be. The practical engagement gave no clear answers to problems, but this subchapter did demonstrate what happens when an artist or programmer moves out-of-the-box and approaches art more as a business, with a multitude of products to sell beyond the art itself.

Lastly, the interview with Hofmann showed us that these three ways of looking at programming are not mutually exclusive. Although this might seem obvious, it requires mentioning, for instance, that an environmentalist programming intention can still be transparent and entrepreneurial at the same time. Hofmann also shared his more commercial ways of motivating people to buy more tickets to create moments in-between, and therefore the opportunity to build a community, although he uses this term differently from how Van Campenhout understands it. He also confirmed that the idea of transparency towards an audience helps them to connect to his festival. Concerning entrepreneurship, he actually managed to find a better way of working with funding bodies so that he does not have to compromise his vision. Finally, he mentioned that he likes working with marketers, as long as they have a feeling for the arts (and do not interfere with the product). Although I appreciate Hofmann for taking the time and effort to answer my questions, I do not agree with how he works with his marketer.

Both the literature I consulted and the interview with Hoffman provided useful information for answering the subquestion of what defines a performing arts festival programmer and his role. The main task of a performing arts festival programmer is to bring together different works of performance that all fit into one consistent mission. We can add to this, from an environmental/transparent/entrepreneurial angle, that a performing arts festival programmer also

thinks about more than just the works of art. He or she looks at how to best bring program elements together in a single day so an interstice can be created. The programmer tries to bring people into the world of the festival by being transparent about why performances have been chosen, and the programmer works with funding partners to create something that is bigger than just a festival - something that fits into our culture.

This thesis did not set out to provide one single answer to the question how a marketer can understand the perspective of performing arts festival programmer. What it has done, hopefully, is demonstrate the complexities of understanding the context of art for a marketer. In my opinion, from a commercial marketer's point of view, an arts marketer should rebrand himself to have a different name; although an arts marketer dabbles in markets, his job description is more in line with sales, publicity, or PR. Alternatively, marketers could actually step up, confront the art world with endless more possibilities beyond simple sales. This could very well be the time where the marketer might finally have strategic input on the product, but not if we do not show what the potential upsides could be. Simply put: I believe marketers should get involved more actively beyond sales, publicity, and PR.

This being said, the core of this thesis has been a quest to understand a performing arts festival programmer. Through studying environmentalist programming, transparent programming, and entrepreneurial programming, and specifically what aspects of programming a marketer has 'issues' with, we have gained a preliminary answer to the broad question at the heart of this thesis.

Of course there are other modes, other issues, and other people to interview, which together would have created a different thesis altogether. Nevertheless, by focusing on these three programming approaches and by including the perspective of Rainer Hofmann, I believe this limited study has opened up a new area of interdisciplinary research by combining seemingly opposing fields.

For those inclined to build on this thesis I would suggest a bigger portion devoted to interviews and field research, but also more desk research on curating and programming. Only by actually confronting the theories and assumptions in the literature with actual curatorial and programming practices can we further enhance the relationship between a marketer and a performing arts festival programmer. Another aspect that needs to be considered is the fact that the choices in this thesis have been made based on my previous experience as a commercial marketer. A marketer with another experience will most likely discuss other differences of importance in 2.3 and 2.4.

Personally I find the core observation in 2.4 the most interesting. Marketers ask themselves what the value of the product is, and for whom. The interesting thing, discourse wise, is that this question can also be asked of artists and programmers from a marketing point of view. The answer to the question 'what is value, and for whom' may well reveal that artists and programmers are every bit as afraid to look themselves in the mirror as marketers are and to acknowledge the possibility that they may be turned down. At the end of this exploration, I have to conclude that the gap between the marketer and the artist/programmer still remains wide and



that at both ends it is difficult to adjust attitudes and perspectives. Considered in marketing terms, I still see a marketer working with a market, and the (latent) needs of a potential buyer (also known as pull-marketing), whereas an artist/programmer creates something for which there is a (latent) need (push-marketing), a successful collaboration between these two is often a seeming coincidence. Meanwhile, the reality is that the government wants to influence the cultural sector with an increasing return-on-investment attitude. In other words, it is transitioning from acting as a maecenas to becoming more of a result constituent investor. As a result, 'l'art pour l'art' is a luxury position that has seen its best days and marketers, artists, and programmers are well advised to find more effective and creative ways to work together. This thesis has been an attempt to make a first step in that direction.

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## Appendix 1. Interview Rainer Hofmann

This is the interview with Rainer Hofmann, artistic and general director of SPRING performing arts festival in Utrecht. There were a few questions that were set in stone, but there was also room for the interview to ‘go with the flow’, so to speak. This interview was done in Dutch, but for an overall consistent use of language in this thesis I have chosen to translate it.

Unfortunately technology failed without us noticing, so I am only able to write out what has been said verbatim for the first half of the interview. After that the recording device stopped working. The second part of the interview will be noted down here, based of my memory and notes.

*You’re both artistic and general director, how do you balance these two tasks?*

I’m not of the belief that these are two distinctly different jobs, we also have a business director, and we work together - not as a hierarchy - but more as partners. We take decisions together when they go beyond programming, anything relating to long-term strategy and such. I don’t think they’re opposites. The festival as a goal is more than just an artistic program.

*What exactly is the goal of the business director?*

He is responsible for the finances, under my leadership, but we do it together. If things were to fail, in the end I’m the one who’s responsible. Together with the head of marketing and festival coordinator, we decide the overall strategy. And above us there is board who decide on what we do. But, the business director is not just a man who runs the money, he is a partner.

*What is SPRING in your eyes, as programmer?*

International performing arts festival which focuses on new developments on an international level that gets international work to perform here, but also gives a stage for Dutch performers to profile themselves internationally. In other words, SPRING is an institution between public and artists. We are in a way building bridges between people. An artist from Indonesia won’t have an audience here in the Netherlands, unless someone creates a context and finds an audience - this is what we do.

*You say ‘we find an audience’, instead of ‘there is an audience and we play those forces’?*

The starting point should be a content based profile of an organisation. Our mission is not to show the best comedians of the country, there are city theatres who do that, or other places. Our mission is, as an international performing arts festival, to focus on innovation, crosses between dance and theatre. For this an audience has to be found, that isn’t just ‘there’. The main question



is: “how do you let an audience know it’s also for them?” We don’t bring Ivo van Hove to the stage, everybody knows him, he has his fans and audience. We usually bring something that people don’t already know, and then we say: “This is also for you, even though you don’t know yet.”

*What is the most important aspect of programming here?*

I believe having a consistent profile is the most important thing. We do a lot of things, but people should understand what it is as a whole. It can be diverse, but together it should be something of which people can say: “This is something I expect, even though I might have been unexpected.” Probably they won’t know what they’ll see, but it might be something to which they can relate. It can be good or bad, but it’s different from Theater Kikker, or the city theatre; it has nothing to do with quality, but with what kind of work is shown by different organisations.

On the other hand of having a connection with the audience, is the connection with the artist. We create a context of the work of the artist in which the work is presented well, and creates an interesting tension with other works. We also try and co-produce works of art, this has become more of a challenge recently. We used to have Festival aan de Werf, but because of less funding things have changed. We try to co-produce art over a longer time.

*For whom did you define the mission, and profile?*

In the past we had two festivals, Festival aan de Werf and SPRING dance, these two have joined forces. We have made a few choices on what is the focus of our content. Festival aan de Werf had a focus of location based theatre, this is not who we are but we still show some of it, but it’s not longer our focus. Our question was: “What do we think is important in the context of the Netherlands and Utrecht?” We decided on work that plays between the conventions of theatre and dance. The city theatre has a big stage and often programs bigger names, Theater Kikker is a black box theatre and has a focus on ex HKU students [performing arts students] and is very local. We are oriented more international, but also only program Dutch artists that we believe have a shot internationally.

*How did SPRING dance and Festival aan de Werf come together exactly?*

The local politicians made clear that if both festivals were to apply for funding, odds are that only one would get it. Instead of starting a fight we decided to apply for a grant together as one festival.

*To what extent does this merger still influence your role as a programmer now?*

Not explicitly on my role as a programmer, but the artistic profile has its roots in both festivals. The one festival came more from theatre, and the other came more from dance. But, there were

some artists on both festivals with different productions. The festivals in that sense started growing towards each other. It wasn't that hard to do, the first festival was with two artistic directors, although that went really well, this festival is too small for two programmers. I still have an artistic advisor, who only consults one day a week.

*What are the core aspects of a successful program?*

I don't know how to make a successful program. I can only tell you how to make a program of which we think that it has a clear message. If I were to read the press from last year, words as radical, innovative, and experimental were mentioned often. It seems that our message has become clear. This can be a result of publicity, or programming, or a combination of both. On the other hand we have a big stage in the city theatre that holds 600 people, you can't fill all these seats with experimental theatre. But we do have the ambition to show innovative work on the big stage. Maybe there are about 200 people seated, but the city theatre says to me: "If we were to program it we might have about 50 people there." Because of the profile of the festival the audience probably walks in with the idea 'we can't see this every day'. But in programming I do consider the 'normal' city theatre audience members, we [the city theatre and Rainer] work together to see if there are some people who visit the city theatre could now visit the festival. We also try to build bridges here. It can even be a bit further away from the rest of the program, as long as we don't lose touch with our identity.

*Why do you do this?*

We are trying to build an audience. The first year we lost a lot of audience due to the merger. I was a little shocked by the fact we couldn't just 'take over' the audiences of the two festivals. I understand afterwards, but I didn't see it coming. I think with the second year people now understand what it is, and now it's our task to grow that core audience. We are not looking to diversify to, for example 'young immigrants from Kanaleneiland' [area of Utrecht, removed from city centre where the festival takes place], because it's too far. We want to grow like an onion, layer by layer. We want to focus on building trust with our audience so that people trust us to the point where they'll say 'I'm confident that I'll get what I don't know'.

*What do you consider when you're programming?*

Artistic quality, which is of course a soft factor, this can be different for everybody. What isn't here yet? Which is mostly work from abroad, we hardly show work that has already been here. Of course there are exceptions, but then we all have to be very convinced or think something is fantastic. This way every rule has an exception with me. But also, how can we accompany artists over time. And sometimes we do program artists that have already been part of the festival, because people remember this. Because the artist has already done good work, and will hopefully do that again, we want to give back to the audience. In that sense we sometimes program known

artists with new work. A balance between established artists that are experimenting, and new artists that haven't been here before.

*To what extent do you feel the core audience you have now is a community?*

It's not yet a community, if everything goes well we might have a community in about three to four years. We are starting out with an ambassador project, and we're trying to stay visible throughout the year more. This is the time to start building a community, it's an interesting thought; how can we keep people engaged? For a festival that only takes place once a year for ten days this is more of a challenge than a city theatre that has an audience year round.

*What would a community be for you?*

It has to do with building knowledge, along the lines of 'I saw something similar here', similar to what I do on a daily basis, we all have to keep learning. The best thing would be if people were to not only understand certain connections, but bring that knowledge out into the world. In other words, spread the message.

[This is where the recording stopped]

The moment we started talking about communities, we started talking about environmentalist programming. I chose to ask Hofmann about interstices, without using the actual term, and figure out what he has in mind for the moments in between artworks. He responded by telling me that he wants people to talk about the night and the performances, but that when it comes down to it, a normal theatre festival goer only goes to 1.5 performance. To encourage more performances, to actually create moments in between, they started working with double tickets. In other words, if you bought a ticket for a performance last year, but only a little bit more you could see another performance that same night. People tended to give back that the second performance was actually better than the one they initially wanted to see. He also mentioned that last year they had a big public festival heart, with seating, bar, and music stage, while this year this is not possible.

When I asked Hofmann to what extent he believes programmers should communicate their message to the world, he said that he has experimented with this last year and it will be more present this year. He noted that there are many ways a programmer can communicate why he has programmed certain performances, but he chooses to do it before the performances. Instead of giving details or insight into a performance, which is done often in theatres, Hofmann gives the audience insight into why the performance is part of the festival. I continued to ask Hofmann about any potential dangers he saw in opening up his way of working to the public. The only potential danger he saw was that people could not agree with his choices, but that is of course always the case.

Concerning subsidy cuts, local politicians, and other funding bodies Hofmann said that he doesn't look for money just for the money. He specifically looks for funding bodies that have the same vision as he does, so that he does not have to compromise his mission and can actually work together instead of - in a way - working for someone.

The moment we started discussing the team and how Hofmann comes to his program he told me that at SPRING they have an open floor for communication, and people often disagree with him. But the way he makes his program is by listening to all the parties and then making a decision himself, which sometimes - again with the exception to his rules - means he chooses something no one agrees with.

When we discussed the working relationship with the marketer specifically Hofmann mentions that he likes working with marketers, but not the kind that can 'sell anything'. He likes working with the kind of marketer that has a feeling for art. And even then he asks of them that they should be curious to understand Hofman, and have great and open communicative skills. Because he still disagrees with them.

[A few additional questions were answered through email]

*You said that 'having a consistent profile is the most important aspect of programming', how would you describe the profile of SPRING?*

Here it comes in a few words: SPRING presents new developments in the international performing arts with a focus on crossover between dance and theatre. More info you find at <https://www.springutrecht.nl/artikel/what-spring>.

Find attached also a document, which includes mission statement and aims and explains who we do. It is written in a more official language.

*In line with this, you also said that 'although SPRING programs diverse performances, the audience should still be able to understand the idea of the festival'. What is this idea? Is it the same as the profile, or something different?*

Yes it is the same.

*You stated that in some of your pre-talks you now tell the audience why you programmed a performance and how it fits into the festival. Do you have an example?*

No, these are ad hoc introductions. One easy example in very short: Julian Hetzel, with whom we receive the Nieuwe Maker Subsidy from FPK, is a young artist between visual arts and visual theatre, who is developing his own, very unique artistic handwriting and who is at the beginning of an international career.

*Concerning financing you mentioned that you don't just look for money, but you look for partners to help realize your plans. How does this work? And do you have an example?*

For instance in European networks. We work in several of them: Festivals in Transition, Second Cities – Performing Cities, DNA. Google the websites. With common projects we apply for support from the Cultural Program of the EU.

Other example: We realize SPRING Academy in close co-operation with Theatre Studies from UU.

*There was a moment in the interview where we discussed how performances get programmed, and you mentioned that even if the whole team does not want a performance programmed, but you believe in it, you will still program it. Why do you insist on this even though you are the only one?*

Very simple: I am responsible and I choose based on my artistic expertise. But of course this does not mean, that I do not make mistakes, if there are anything like mistakes.