

HOW DO ART LOVERS PERCEIVE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' GENIALITY NOWADAYS?

Student Name: Zoi Gatsapostoli

Student Number: 451557

Supervisor: Dr. Daniela Stocco Ferreira

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Arts, Culture and Society

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore if there is a “shift of worth” (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999, p.15) in the notion of the geniality of contemporary artist. Modern culture is based on a system of distinct orders of worth (*grandeur*) and criticisms are based on a discourse over criteria of justification (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999). According to Boltanski’s and Thevenot’s “world of inspiration”, the audience admires artists when its work has qualities of inspiration. In relation to the sphere of inspiration, Heinich recognizes that contemporary art is being dominated by the value of individuality. She compares the moral “register of artistic singularity” with the “system of communality” (Laermans, 2000, p.4) based on a value of conformity that strengthens the social, the collective, the public (Heinich 1998c, p.11).

In this journey, my theoretical lens was pragmatic sociology and sociology of arts through the work of Nathalie Heinich’s and her neutral, descriptive and interpretive perspective.

The research data was collected by thirteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with Dutch art lovers, men and women between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five. Using thematic analysis in order to observe the perspectives of different interviewees, both highlighting similarities and differences and unraveling unanticipated insights. It is described as a “presentation of an auditable decision trail, guiding interpreting and representing textual data” (Nowell, Norris, White, Moules, 2017, p.1). it was a useful method for systematically identifying, organizing and summarizing key features of a large data. Since my research was about collective perception and idiosyncratic nuances and experiences this method seemed the right one whilst focusing on meaning across the data set.

The findings showed that participants validate and acknowledge geniality bestowing values such as innovation, originality, cleverness, excellence and clarity in the concepts and the composition of the artworks. What came up also as a tendency was a strong connection between moral and ethical elements of the artist’s personality.

Keywords: contemporary art, geniality, excellence, singularity, art worlds.

Foreword

I would like to thank all the people that inspired me to be a better version of myself and not to lose faith in the humanity.

I would like to thank Daniela Stocco for all her help, support and patience through this challenging project. I am grateful for the whole Master experience at Erasmus University, it was a dream coming true.

I believe as Alice Miller argues in her book "Prisoners of childhood: The drama of the gifted child and the search for the true self" that art and creative expression is a "healthy" way of living our lives and confront with our traumas and suffering.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my memory of my brother Nicolaos Gatsapostolis who was one of the most creative and kind people that I have the privilege to meet in my life.

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1. Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate how the audiences nowadays perceive the notion of geniality in contemporary art. Which traits, values, skills, and concepts that people who love contemporary art attribute to the geniality of the contemporary visual artist. Using pragmatic sociology and sociology of arts as my reference and methodological model I would like to explore whether the singularity vocation regime, as proposed by Nathalie Heinich as a term of singularity and excellence (Danko, 2008) are still valid notions that define the artist's geniality, or whether there is a "shift of worth" developed over the last years (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999, p.15), of the artists profile as a genius.

Modern culture is based on a system of distinct orders of worth (*grandeur*) and criticisms are based on a discourse over criteria of justification (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999). According to Boltanski's and Thevenot's "world of inspiration" and the audience admires artists when its work has qualities of inspiration. In relation to the sphere of inspiration, Heinich recognizes that contemporary art is being dominated by the value of individuality.

Contemporary art has become more hermeneutical and interpretative reflecting and assessing a critical mirroring of the society (Zembylas, 2014). Artists, one of the main actors of the art system, are the observers that delineate social issues through innovating themselves and externalising their interiority (Henich, Jefferson, 2015). In return they receive appreciation and grace from the audience as the reward of their worth and quality of work based on the "word of opinion" ((Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999). It is of great interest to investigate and interpret the audience's beliefs and perceptions about contemporary artist's geniality as understanding of those values can provide us with data about moral attitudes and ethical systems within contemporary culture.

The paradoxical schema in many cases from the 19th century onwards in western societies as described by Heinich is that the artist is marginalized although at the same time they might be considered a genius, formulating the theory of "singularity regime" (Danko, 2008). In this system of values governing modern and contemporary arts the main value is innovation. "It fosters uniqueness, originality or even abnormality" (Heinich, 2009 p.4). In this vein, the term singularity started to

have a positive impact, rather than a negative one, as in the past. Consequently, the regime of artistic vocation referring to the structures and rules that this profession is operating, is not only the product of studies, academy, professional, and artisan but is a creator of personal inclination with unique, original, innovative and outstanding performance. Excellence defined by singularity, an individual who is both exceptional and socially marginal. Geniality though has an intrinsic notion and encapsulates values that change through the years according to the socio-economic and cultural milieu.

Having in mind that geniality is a social construction as described above is very intriguing to discover what people perceive as genius nowadays and unravel which are the values and qualities of this high exemplary appreciation. As human species, we have a tendency to learn by emulating other people that inspire us and connect us with our values. We look out in the society for connections to people that can inspire us, fuel our motivation, give us courage and use as an example for accomplishing a better version of ourselves. Role models, a term coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton, and in this case the reference is to the artists, can play that role in people's lives. Through their critical statements and by mirroring society artists can remind us that what we want to become is real and we can also make it if we try. Hence, through artists' inspiring work people could be motivated to live by their example and have them as a cultural anchor or beacon of light of shared values.

Art is a tool for human beings to learn and understand each other; thus an essential situation for the democratic functioning of society claims the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1998). In French sociologist Nathalie Heinich's (1998c: 8) longitudinal study it is evident that art more than any other field generates people to rethink and sometime to reassess and change established beliefs, normative behaviors and mental habits.

For me, it was the example of Marina Abramovic, the Serbian performance artist's work, which has been a strong impact of inspiration in my life. I used art as a means to forge the belief in me that even pain and misfortune can lead to something positive in life. This awareness came after seeing Marina Abramovic's work, while I was learning more about her I felt empowered and motivated to use the existing

challenges of my life as a fuel for growth. I was inspired by her to push my mental and physical boundaries and find the core strengths in me to be hopeful and willing to try again in my life. As Abramovic states, "I believe art is the oxygen of society, which means artists have to work hard to keep it alive. To really change the way society thinks, you have to give your entire being to it until there's nothing left." (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/oct/10/antony-hegarty-marina-abramovic-opera>).

This thesis has aimed to understand how Dutch art lovers perceive the visual artist as a genius in contemporary art. For this reason thirteen Dutch people, seven women and six men between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five were interviewed. They were defined for this research as people who consider themselves as art lovers. More analytically, they visit museums or other cultural events once or twice per month and they are strongly interested in contemporary art. These people were interviewed for the purposes of this research and shared their beliefs and thoughts about the geniality of the contemporary visual artists today. Through semi-structured interviews, respondents and researcher had interesting conversations about contemporary art, the profile of the artist and the value of art for the society today.

After this, the main theoretical framework section is introduced where the views of philosophers and sociologists about the topic, contemporary art milieu and its connections with the profile of the contemporary artist and the intermediaries were examined. The methodology chapter follows, combining the research design and the method practiced with the research results.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Geniality through the lens of philosophy and sociology

Overarching, the artist as a genius exists only if there is an audience that can recognize her/him as such, and the artist is part of a collaborative system sustained by galleries, museums, collectors, critics, curators and the audience. Thus, the artist is a product of social construction and more specifically as Howard Becker claims (1982) of a collective social activity. Becker's sociological approach to understanding the arts leads to what he has coined as "art worlds" and "consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of characteristic works which that

world, and perhaps others as well, define as art” (Becker, 1982a, p.34). Hence, the audience is an inseparable part of the art equation. Moreover, together with the other actors of the art world they reaffirm the authenticity and the quality of the artist and its creation. This is not only important for the artist, but also for all the members of the world, to confirm that the artist is talented, the art production is good and is related to other artworks from the same style/classification. Becker (1982) identifies a division of labour where all the components of the process play a vital and intertwined role of constructing the work as being art. The essential element of this theory is that art is shaped and formed by the collective and holistic activity of the overall system that produces it instead of those merely considered as artists.

But what defines an artist as a genius? It is a word carefully used in the art world but what qualities and values encompass this term used for this high level of praise and judgment? The role and profile of the artist in the society have changed throughout the history of humanity. It is of great interest to examine and analyse what philosophers and scholars wrote about the axiological conditions of this exceptional term.

German philosopher, Immanuel Kant’s belief in “The Critique of Judgment” about geniality was that it is something innate, an inborn talent a mental predisposition [ingenium] that leads to the charismatic production of sublime artworks through nature (Kant, 1790). Moreover, he describes genius at the heart of autonomy as “conferred directly... by the hand of nature” (<https://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest/#SH2d>) and transcends into a naturalist metaphysics. According to him, the artist had to elaborate the “form” of the artwork without given a determinate rule and thus originality is a core value of genius. Although, originality is the identifiable mark of a genius, the dexterity to produce something singular without following any given rules and instructions is also a prerequisite. Other added qualities were the radical original and forbidden imitation of previous art. Imagination is celebrated and is presented as an essential aesthetic idea. The notion of expression is vital in the aesthetic process and the cognitive part of understanding must work in harmony (Haworth 2014).

On the other hand, French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues, “genius is what happens. Geniusness is the uniqueness of an impossible arrivance to which one addresses oneself, which is only to the improbable destination of the address.” For Derrida genius is not an object or a subject nor the giver or the given but actually the improbable event itself (Haworth, 2014, p.14). He is also in favor of free imitation, where everything derives from a self-reflexive nature which “produces what produces, it produces freedom for itself” (Haworth, 2014, p.3). Genius is kind of an “outlier” In a more open interpretation or in Derrida’s words, “the genius of the genius, if there is any, enjoins, from the genericness of the genre and thus from the shareable” (Derrida, 2008). In that way, genius must come to an interruption in the principles of rules and legislation.

Both Kant and Derrida agree that genius is the gap or space that gives the opportunity to something new to emerge, that which has not been launched or invented before (Haworth, 2014). Thus, they both insist on the essential requirement on groundbreaking rules for a creative intention to exist and so genius is “what makes possible this impossible leap beyond the space of the possible” (Haworth 2014, p.6).

According to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) social theory of cultural capital, genius is an outcome of a cognitive process with prerequisites and certain conditions such as breeding in the “right” environment and cultivation. This cultural capital “considered symbolically as an object of knowledge” (Maanen, 2009, p.59) forms the foundation of social life and with that establishes one’s position within the social order. Social assets such as education and habitus described as “a set of dispositions, and dispositions as permanent structures of perception and evaluation which govern how people act” (Maanen, 2009, p.58). All the aforementioned create the cultural capital that can be exchanged in a stratified society. Artists compete to prove their exemplary skills within the “field” as described by Bourdieu the social arrangements in which art is created and developed. A “space” of forces, using a metaphor from physics, refers to the various kinds of power for control of the specific limited resources belonging to that field, such as esteem, recognition, money etc. The dominant people of the field evaluate the newcomers whether they are allowed to enter the “circle of the powerful” or not. Actors relation forces cultivate strategies to

excel in this competition while conflict and friction may arise. As eloquently described by Becker imagining this space like a square or a “box” shooting with rays creating all kind of structures.

<http://www.howardsbecker.com/articles/world.html>).

On the other hand, German sociologist Norbert Elias (1993) with great empathy seeks to “make explicit” Mozart’s conditions and the effects of his talent as a genius, the outcome of a social construction far from innate or high-class social upbringing (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015). Mozart as a genius (Elias, 1993) considers the concept of genius, which he sees as a complex marriage of fantasy, inspiration, and convention. In exploring the tension between personal creativity and the tastes of an era, he gives us a book of outstanding insight and discovery. His genius was based on discipline, tenacity, constant practice, struggles, perseverance and insecurities. “Transforming interiority into exteriority, the particular into the general, the private into the public” was the definition of talent for Norbert Elias (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015, p.11). Singularity is the ability of the artist to innovate themselves, to externalize their interiority and “to emerge within limits and forms that are acceptable to others.” (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015, p.11). In Mozart’s era though the social canon had no legitimate place for the highly individualized “freelance” artist of genius. (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015 p.7). The same effect also was coined by his name has happened during the Renaissance to Benvenuto Cellini. Being a freelancer was ahead of what the society could accept institutionally. This unfortunate disposition of not fitting to the general system of the society caused a sense of injustice and generated anger. Mozart suffered at the end of his life from depression while his need for love and acceptance was not met by his Viennese audience “... the withholding of favor and love by other people had deepened his doubt in the value and meaning of his life” (Elias, 1993 p.4). His traumatic childhood with his father caused him a disparity of worth, doubting his own value and the meaning of life. Although this discomfort that he felt made him question the old canon and led him to the transitional phase, “channeling of the flux of fantasy into an artistic form” that composed his masterpieces (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015 p.14). As Norbert Elias portrays Mozart “he

made the musical resolution of his contradictions the condition of his genius, and his genius the condition of the unlivable ambivalence (Heinich, Jefferson, 2015 p.15).

The most well known example of posthumous recognition though is that of Van Gogh's. In Heinich's book about Van Gogh's posthumous recognition (*The Glory of Van Gogh: Anthropology of Admiration*, Princeton University Press, 1996) unveils the profile of the dominant paradigm of the "accursed artist", a singular figure that accumulates high admiration. "The singularity of creation may end up being attributed to the deranged mind of an isolated eccentric, instead of the genius of an artistic precursor (Heinich, 1996, p.78). Heinich explains, this group of "marginalized elite" exists in a heterogeneous value system, especially in the case of Van Gogh artistic and religious traditions, that is at the same time "excellent", "democratic" and "singular" (Danko, 2008, p.8). Van Gogh's innovation and originality although a heroic figure in his singularity was considered mad in his era. Heinich argues that every singularity confronts this "watershed" while making integration into established categories, "nonconformity can slide at any moment either into the greatness of a necessary renewal or into the insignificance of contingent deviation" (Heinich, 1996 p.76).

Although using different theories, geniality appears to be a social construction according to Becker, Bourdieu, Elias and Heinich and it can be examined in a background of well-specified cultural expectations. Thus, is an equation formed among "culturally defined opportunities for action and personal skills or capacities to act" (Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson, 1986 p.50).

Consequently, being a genius cannot be evaluated as a permanent trait and sufficiently create a value for, because personal ability changes through the lifespan alongside with the cultural expectations for performance (Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson, 1986). There are many examples of child prodigies that could not keep up with their skills and performance, as they grew older.

2.2. Contemporary art – the systematic transgression of artistic criteria

How though is contemporary art defined and how does geniality connect to it? It is essential to make an effort to unravel this ambiguous term while there have been many attempts and discourses since the 1970s. Heinich claims that the world of contemporary art is not a chronological category but a generic one with specific

characteristics, which make a notable diversification from modern art. Although in many cases is not very clear and people get confused in understanding the boundaries and distinction between modern and contemporary art (<http://en.artmediaagency.com/81548/the-transgressive-nature-of-contemporary-art-interview-with-nathalie-heinich/>).

Another example delineating this vague and dynamic notion of the term is through the definition of the book “The Tate guide to modern art terms” that claims, “Contemporary art: A term loosely used to denote art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovatory or avant-garde nature.” (Wilson, Lack, 2008, p.76). While the definition continues it refers to contemporary established art museums where the date of origin for the term contemporary varies. For example, the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, founded in 1947, promotes art from that year onwards. On the other hand, the case of The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York selects the date of 1977. “In the 1980s, Tate planned a Museum of Contemporary Art in which contemporary art was defined as art of the past ten years on a rolling basis.” (Wilson, Lack, 2008, p.76). What is noticed in this definition is how the perspective of different established museums in the art scene varies about the chronological boundaries of contemporary art. It is another evidence of the fluidity of this term.

The boundaries and the distinctions of contemporary art are perplexing. There has been a long time perceived as “the modern art produced by our contemporaries.” (Danto & Goehr, p.5). Hence, it can be described as a period of information disorder, a condition characterized by “perfect aesthetic entropy”. At the same time “it is equally a period of quite perfect freedom.” (Danto & Goehr, p.5).

There is a constant open dialogue amongst art world actors trying to figure out what is it and how they can evaluate contemporary art and especially where an actual object is not the only criteria of assessment. A whole set of operations, actions; narrations are part of the artwork (Zembylas, 2014). Having in mind the transgressive character of contemporary art, audience and art professionals often question their cognitive beliefs and judgment about the value of a work of art.

Though in some cases contemporary art is met with an extensive reaction as indifference, which is visible through a palpable silence (Heinich 1998b, p.177). Heinich's (1999a, p.17) definition of contemporary art as "the systematic transgression of artistic criteria" portrays the core characteristic of contemporary art's genre which all the forms have preceded. Heinich's sociological methodology of the dispute of the value judgments of contemporary was trying to understand the value systems amongst the social actors and find a way of resolving a dead-end. Her intention was to connect people and to comprehend a general "sociology of values" (Danko, 2018 p.13).

2.3. Deconstructing geniality through the system of Individuality

Heinich is more interested in observing how actors observe in the world of art. She cultivated a descriptive, pragmatic and analytical sociological oeuvre that led to a new value-neutral thinking that weaves theory and empirical research (Danko, 2008). Heinich's studies how people perceive and react to contemporary art in order to understand symbolic frames as representations and values (Zembylas, 2014). For example the case of the Pont-Neuf by Christo and Buren's marble pillars in the courtyard of Palais-Royal has resulted in fruitful outcomes for the sociology of the arts. On the one hand, Heinich's sociological approach implies the observation of operations referring to actions of artists and on the other hand studies the public comments of critics, experts and the general public. She analyses the various strategies applied by contemporary artists in order to achieve the aesthetic transgression of moral and established norms. Then she studies from collected texts, interviews and discourses the reactions on works of art of the public and the art professionals.

Moreover, negative and positive reactions of the audiences combined with the influence of Boltanski's and Thevenot's orders of worth (*grandeur*) led Heinich to make a strong correlation between contemporary art and "a sociology of values" (Laermans, 2000). Modern art encapsulates originality, individuality and inventiveness, which resulted in a "cult of authenticity". In contemporary art "the system of individuality" through the values of originality, innovation and uniqueness emphasizes the concept of transgression – reaction – integration.

Modern culture is based on a system of distinct orders of worth known also as grandeur and criticisms are based on a discourse over criteria of justification (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999). According to Boltanski's and Thevenot's "world of inspiration", the audience admires artists when their work has qualities of inspiration, grace, nonconformity and creativeness. In relation to the sphere of inspiration, Heinich recognises that contemporary art is dominated by the value of individuality. She compares the moral "register of artistic singularity" with the "system of communality" (Laermans, 2000, p.4) based on a value of conformity that strengthens the social, the collective, the public (Heinich 1998c, p.11).

Innovation and individuality are values related to modern and contemporary arts belonging to the system of "regime of singularity" whereas the "regime of communality" is correlated to scientific activity and religion. On the one hand "originality, unicity and abnormality" are values nurturing the system of singularity and on the other hand "shared references, respect of conventions and transmission of traditions" foster the system of communality (Heinich 2009, p.6).

However, with the notion of communality actions and events are interpreted with relevance to internalized social norms and rules (Laermans, 2000) and have a moral register and an ethical preference, as Heinich claims. She argues that if a sociologist examines the arts based on the system of communality, referring to the social interaction of shared norms and symbols of collective institutions the system of individuality is consequently understated in the name of the social value. Individuality within arts is usually correlated with prodigious alterations of a "stylistic communality" than with an authentic specification (Laermans, 2000 p.2). Heinich vindicates an "actor-oriented" (Laermans, 2000, p.6) sociological approach ruled by the value of individuality" (Laermans, 2000, p.4) in the contemporary art. She argues sociologically to recognise the initial moral belief in the specification of the genius artist or an outstanding artwork (Laermans, 2000).

Accordingly the singularity realm or regime of singularity in contemporary art addresses the values of originality, innovation and uniqueness, which are used as criteria in competition amongst artists and also amongst actors in the art world (Zempylas, 2014). This system of assessment yields and praises anything – artist and work – that is unique; innovative and defies triviality that is encompassed within the

rules, and conventions. The artist that gathers the aforementioned values can be characterized as genius under this system of singularity in contemporary art.

Heinich posits that contemporary art is characterized by a transgressive nature of no longer representing the object made by an artist but instead of a “platform” from which are produced a great range of concepts. Debate, stories, problems, actions and experiences all feature within this bracket (<http://en.artmediaagency.com/81548/the-transgressive-nature-of-contemporary-art-interview-with-nathalie-heinich/>). A contradictory phenomenon in the contemporary art is that the physical presence of the artist becomes less important in the creation of the artwork, which differs from the modern art though it is essential for the distribution and the promotion of it (Heinich, 2014). The presentation of the artwork by the artist is mandatory and it is also identified as part of the artwork process. Moreover by meeting the artist you can feel their inspiration and you can understand if he/she is committed with their art. Also in this context the character of the artist is very important especially for the collectors that want to invest their money and seek to feel proximity to the artist. A collector, in answering a question to Sarah Thornton, described how he and his wife spend evenings dining with and getting to know the artist before buying their artwork as a method of assessing their work, especially in the case of young artists where you cannot evaluate only their artwork but also their character (Heinich, 2014).

The profile of the visual contemporary artist surpasses the bohemian notion of the Romantic artist and resembles more that of an entrepreneur combining a creative character with the practice of a creative director. Artists go freelance more than other professionals; they are self-managed and open to a precarious milieu. As Damien Hirst points out the style of the contemporary artist does not anymore look like the guy with long hair and stains of paint on his clothes, he is someone that wears a three-piece suit or in some occasions lab coats and earns lots of money. They are usually distinctive amongst the crowd in an exhibition for their unique style either by a casual wear, like jeans and a t-shirt or an elegant version with an extraordinary detail, for example red shoes or an unusual haircut (Heinich, 2014). What appears to change in the profile of the contemporary visual artist by Heinich’s

description is that they consists of skills, values and image that resemble more of a celebrity i.e. a rock star accompanied with traits of an entrepreneur.

While presenting their work during an opening of an exhibition, contemporary artists have multiple identities such as producer, distributor, director even that of an actor. Identity management and dramaturgical perspective in presenting oneself play a key role in the career of a contemporary artist while they have to present themselves, verbally and contextually in order to promote their image. As Goffman (1959) explains in his work "Presentation of self in everyday life" people live and understand the world through "sign-vehicles", through inferences. We deconstruct concepts and we make assumptions from the expressions – theatrical and contextual - given or given off. An eloquent metaphor describing the procedure of how a contemporary artist is behaving in the art world is like playing a game of chess. This procedure depicts the planning, predicting, strategizing or the patience that sometimes the artist has to show for their artwork integration (Zembylas, 2014). Readymades by Marcel Duchamp epitomized contemporary art while he was well known for his strong network and his excellent public relations skills (Compertz, 2015).

There is a shift in the division of labour from modern art where the creation of the artwork is done by other people designated by the artist a process that Andy Warhol systematized it through his Factory members, by the artist or by anyone. The artwork in many cases is created in multiple reproductions, sold at a low price, for example, the products of Kaikai Kiki Co. by Takashi Murakami. In this context, the economy of art reaches the economy of the cinema where the artist is the director and the leader of the whole creative crew (Heinich, 2014).

2.4. Art world

However, the visual artist exists as part of a more complex and intertwined system. The art world consists of various actors such as peers, critics, curators, institutions, merchants, collectors and the general public. All these are engaging to "circles of recognition" as the British art historian Alan Bowness (1989) explains and are responsible for the selection, circulation and valuation of artworks (Zembylas, 2014). Bowness model considers a combination of temporal and spatial articulation of the creation of reputations in the art world. The first circle refers to the peers

whose opinions are vital especially when confronted by innovative art works that do not match the ongoing canon. The second circle consists of collectors and merchants, having immediate contacts with artists and becoming involved into private transactions. The third circle pertains art specialists such as art critics, museum directors, curators, etc. who are in a pertinent distance from artists. Finally the fourth circle involves the general public (Heinich, 2009).

In the same context, there is a division of labor in the “art worlds” which also includes many other parts of the production and distribution process as described “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of artworks that the art world is noted for” (Becker, 1982).

Consequently, artists are constrained by this system and have to make conventions in order to fit in and reach an audience. For Becker, an artist is not an individual genius, because artistic creation depends on a collaborative relationship with fellow artists who influence them, the relationship with performers and lastly with the audience. Thus, “mediations, the series of operations which enable an artwork to be perceived and appropriated by others than its creator” (Hennion, 1993) are an inevitable necessity in the art world.

In Heinich’s book “The paradigm of contemporary art structures on an artistic revolution” (2014) she outlines the ability of contemporary art to transgress structural barriers. This transgression sometimes generates discomfort and negative reactions by the audience. It is the role of intermediaries and art professionals to create a smooth integration of unconventional and provocative artworks into the society. Furthermore, this theory of Triple Game or else “The Threefold Play of Contemporary Art” unveils the production of contemporary art as a transgression with an obligatory and mandatory stage where the artist is rejected, before being accepted. The so-called permissive paradox has a prerequisite stage of a transgressive moment of rejection before accepting the integration of established intermediary institutions such as museums (Danko, 2008).

The role of the artist is to transgress the conventional rules of established institutions in terms of authenticity or morality. They use different strategies and operations to transcend aesthetic and moral boundaries (Laermans, 2000). This

«marginalized elite» is defined as singular, excellent and democratic (Danko, 2008).

I have covered the most essential theoretical points on geniality including previous literature from the perspective of sociologists and philosophers; but also through the reference of contemporary art and its connections to the profile of the artist and the art world. I will use these as a reference in the next methodology chapter.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

In this thesis I examined how do art lovers nowadays perceive the geniality of the contemporary visual artist. I adopted the method of qualitative research and conducted thirteen semi-structured in-depth interviews. The reason why I have chosen this method is that it shares common ground with pragmatic sociology approach to arts that tends to examine the close intertwining of human actions and objects for understanding symbolic frames and values to art (Heinich, 2012). Another fundamental reason is that it matches with Heinich's methodologically neutral observations of possible plurality in actor interpretations (Laermans 2000, p.6). Moreover, it supports my effort to describe, analyze and consequently elucidate nuances, patterns and frames regarding the beliefs of the audience about geniality (Zembylas, 2014).

More analytically, qualitative analysis helped me to gain fruitful insight and detailed information of the interviewees and dive into their personal feelings, beliefs, perceptions and opinions about the subject of study. Furthermore, the findings of the data unraveled which traits, values, skills, and concepts the audience attributes to the geniality of the contemporary visual artist.

Another advantage was that it provided me with a creative process of breaking up and dismantling the data into units, themes, codes and then reassembling it whilst looking for patterns and finding explanations for the research question through the theoretical lens that is being observed (Boeije, 2010).

The use also of the semi-structured method in the interviewing process also led to a rich and detailed accumulation of answers (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide (Appendices 7.1.) was structured in such a way that the flow of questions

covered a variety of categories in order to gain data about the social and cultural backgrounds of the interviewees and to build up a conversation with all the concepts that needed to be addressed such as contemporary art, the description of the contemporary visual artist regarding geniality and the role of art for the society.

The major constraint of this method is the risk of bias or subjective interpretations, critical analysis vs. subjectivism, from the researcher. I tried to articulate the interview guide questions in such a way as to avoid potential influence and to grasp the thoughts of the respondents as openly and spontaneous as possible. I also tried not to feel anxious about the silent moments and give the interviewees the time needed to think and reflect on the questions. A perspective of a careful contextualization and a subtle theoretical argumentation was engaged throughout the whole process of my research (Boeije, 2010).

More specifically I applied thematic analysis in order to observe the perspectives of different interviewees, both highlighting similarities and differences and unraveling unanticipated insights. It is described as a “presentation of an auditable decision trail, guiding interpreting and representing textual data” (Nowell, Norris, White, Moules, 2017, p.1). It is a useful method for systematically identifying, organizing and summarizing key features of a large data. Since my research is about collective perception and idiosyncratic nuances and experiences this method seemed the right one whilst focusing on meaning across the data set. A plurality of patterns could be identified across the data gathered but the aim of the analysis is to select the ones relevant to answering the research question. Consequently, flexibility and accessibility, especially for people that are new to qualitative research, were also another reason for choosing thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, Terry, 2014). Thematic analysis is suitable for analyzing meaning across the data or examining one specific aspect in depth. During the analysis, the researcher can inquire elicit meanings from the data or find underlying ideas and assumptions. The themes become the categories of analysis and the coding process derives from them.

3.2. Operationalisation

At the beginning coding seemed like a risky and confusing process since there was no single method for doing that. However, when started I realised that it can elevate intuition to logic when searching for frequency or sequence or in some cases where

unanticipated responses were observed. In order to achieve a thorough, honest and transparent coding process I kept writing memos and constantly referred back to my research question. Checking against my theoretical framework also helped me throughout the process of the analysis analysis.

A six-phase examination (Braun, Clarke, 2006) was conducted in order to achieve trustworthiness and transparency in the results. Although described linearly, it actually was developed moving back and forth between phases (Nowell, Norris, White, Moules, 2017).

The first phase was a thorough familiarization with the transcripts. Then breaking up chunks of data such as words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. The second stage was generating the initial codes by giving one or two-word summaries in order for the code to describe the meaning of the text segment. The third phase was searching for themes and gathering all relevant data to a potential theme. Phase four was reviewing the potential themes in relation to the coded and the overall data. Then defining and naming the themes was phase five and the final step was writing the analysis report and using in vivo quotations to support the conclusions. My intention was to bring the reader to the reality of the research studied (Braun, Clarke, 2006). The information that has been collected and organized into codes was going to be interpreted taking into account Heinich (1996, 2009, 2012, 2014) theoretical framework and its most important concepts.

Consequently, the initial coding started with the theoretical concepts of contemporary art, geniality, singularity, excellence and art worlds. In this stage of the research the main theoretical concepts (see the following table) were reverberated with the relevant values from the orders of worth or worlds by Heinich (1996, 1998a, 2005, 2009, 2014) and Boltanski & Thevenot (1999).

Theoretical Concepts	Values and codes from orders of worth or worlds Heinich, Boltanski and Thevenot
Contemporary art	Systematic transgression of artistic criteria, individuality, innovatory and avant-garde nature, dynamic, art of present day.
Singularity regime	Contemporary art, innovation, unicity, originality, abnormality. Marginalized, excellent, democratic, singular and genius.

Excellence	Inventiveness, singularity, individual both exceptional and marginal.
Geniality	Originality, singularity and excellence.
Art worlds	Transgression, reaction and integration.
Vocation regime	Personalization. Studies, academy, professional, artisan, creator of personal inclination. Unique, original, innovative, outstanding performance.
Communality regime	Scientific activity, religion, shared references, respect of conventions and transmission of traditions.

(Heinich 1996, 1998c, 1999, 2005, 2009), (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999) and (Danko 2008).

The interview guide (Appendices 7.1.) was structured with questions relevant to the concepts examined. It covers a variety of open questions in order to have a fruitful data collection about opinions, expectations, values, feelings, knowledge and demographic background. In the beginning an opening question asking information about the social and cultural background of the interviewee warms the atmosphere and subtly prepare them for the conversation to follow. The question sequence starts with the paradigm of contemporary art then it passes to the contemporary visual artist unraveling her/his profile and the connection with geniality. The closure consists of the role of art in the society and what adds up to people's lives. The interviews were conducted based on the guidelines, avoiding any invasion of privacy and any form of deception. A consent form (Appendices 7.2.) was sent to each interviewee by email in order to be read it and signed it before the interview. However, their oral consent was asked and was given at the beginning of each interview (Boeije, 2010).

The research data was collected by thirteen semi-structured in-depth interviews of an approximate duration of forty-five minutes each. Most of the interviews, nine out of thirteen, have been conducted individually and in person in order to achieve a direct contact between the participant and the researcher (Bryman, 2015). Four of them while experiencing practical obstacles such as having a busy schedule or not living in the same city, they have been interviewed through Skype. In the cases of face-to-face meeting, a more relaxed communication grew organically especially after the first introductory questions about their social and

cultural background. A good level of non-verbal communication was easier to be achieved throughout the conversation. A limitation was when the place of meeting was noisy and in some cases, we had to search for another spot. Skype sessions although saved a lot of time and were more convenient to be arranged also had some drawbacks. More analytically, in two cases we faced some technical problems during the Skype sessions and we lost some time whilst fixing it.

Although I started with a purposeful sampling strategy (Bryman, 2015) for the selection of my interviewees I had to change it to a snowball sampling approach. My sample was thirteen Dutch people, seven women and six men since I wanted to observe and grasp the thoughts of a balanced gender target audience. The age group of eighteen to thirty-five years old was chosen in order to attain the perception and mentality of the younger generation about the geniality of the contemporary visual artist. The interviewees are art lovers, which are defined for this research as the people that visit museums, galleries or other cultural venues and events once or twice per month. They are also all Dutch and by using a homogenous group an in-depth analysis can be achieved.

At the beginning of my search for this target group, I have started with the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen at Rotterdam. The selection of this specific cultural institute had been done because it is the most well known and popular in the city of Rotterdam with more than 300.000 visitors per year. The museum holds a world-famous permanent collection in conjunction with periodical inspiring and innovative exhibitions of world-class standards about contemporary art.

The limitations that I confronted were that at first a lot of people believed that they did not consider themselves as art lovers since their consumption of cultural events throughout the year was limited and secondly they were people that matched the criteria but were also artists. In the latter case and in order to prevent biased opinions I had to exclude them. Hence it was time-consuming. It took approximately two months (8th of May – 22nd of June 2018) to find the audience that had the characteristics that were needed for this research and I had to switch to snowballing sampling strategy where participants introduce me to other people from their social circle. As I mentioned earlier, I started by pursuing my sample from the Boijmans Museum where I found five interviewees that introduce me to the

other five people from their social network. Another source for finding people was Roodkapje where I have been a volunteer during the past months. Roodkapje as described in the official site, is a communal living room, project space and an underground laboratory for art, music and food. I interviewed three people working in the space that matched the sample criteria.

The element that was very important but also an obstacle since it took me a long of a time to find relevant people was that interviewees should be regular attenders of museums or other cultural venues visiting at least once per month. This reason was essential since the topic of research is about the perception of the audience about the genius of the contemporary artist and the people should be familiar and strongly interested in art in order to answer the questions. It is worth mentioning that even this group of people did not feel confident about their opinion in some questions and hesitated to answer. I had to remind them that there were neither right nor wrong answers and that I am interested in their spontaneous thoughts and ideas that they have for contemporary artist and art. Hence, I would like to emphasize and comment that contemporary art it is today so transformational and dynamic that people are not sure what is the norm or how they can define it.

As I have already mentioned although it was not a prerequisite while choosing my sample to belong to a specific social class or have a certain education what came up as a common ground was that all the interviewees engaged for this research and considered themselves as art lovers were all well-qualified connoisseurs of art through their education or their occupation endeavors. See analytically the following table with the list of all the interviewees.

Table of list of interviewees (time period: 8 th of May – 22 nd of June 2018)						
Interviewees all Dutch	Place of Residence	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Interests regarding art
1	Rotterdam	Female	24	MA in Arts, Culture	Gallery Consultant	Contemporary art, films
2	Groningen	Female	24	BA in International Communications	Looking for a job	Drawing, writing
3	Rotterdam	Male	27	BA in Theater Science	Sound technician	Art and culture
4	Rotterdam	Female	29	BA in Contemporary Theatre, MA in Arts, Culture and Society	Illustrator in production works for theaters, stage performer and creative writer	Contemporary art
5	London	Female	28	BA in Cultural and Social Education and MA in Cultural and Critical Studies	College Engagement Coordinator	The expression of freedom and identity through contemporary art
6	Rotterdam	Male	35	Art history and Architecture history	Art Director	Contemporary art
7	Amsterdam	Male	28	Graphic designer at arts	Graphic designer	Graphic design in arts
8	Rotterdam	Female	25	BA in art science and film and Installation and pre-master in Arts and Culture	Curator	Drawing, films, photography
9	Rotterdam	Female	25	BA Royal Academy of Art in The Hague	Volunteer and Photography coordinator	Photography
10	Rotterdam	Female	18	BA in Arts, Culture and Society	Student	Modern and contemporary visual art
11	Rotterdam	Male	29	Illustration in Art Academy	Teacher of arts	Contemporary art
12	Rotterdam	Male	25	MA in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship	Looking for a job	Performance, music
13	Amsterdam	Male	35	BA in Architecture	Graphic designer for books	Contemporary art, photography

4. Results

To aid comprehension I present the data divided into five themes. This cohesion was also followed during the semi-structured conversation with the research participants in the interview guide (Appendices 7.1.). Firstly, I present the views of art lovers regarding contemporary art, its central characteristics, what attracts them most in contemporary art and the concepts and values they connect with it. Secondly, I unravel data regarding the interviewees comments on the artists' labour and personality characteristics. Thirdly, how interviewees define the geniality of the contemporary visual artist nowadays and how intermediaries contribute to the artist's work. Finally, the last section refers to how the interviewees think about the value of art to society. In each section, I use tables with codes and sub-codes to depict and justify my findings and render the text more readable.

4.1. Contemporary Art

In the section on social and cultural backgrounds examining how the interviewees were first acquainted with contemporary art; the research showed that eleven out

of thirteen began to be interested in it during their studies and two of them were influenced in once case by her mother who had studied arts and the other by her eldest sister who was working in the cultural sector.

What it is often confusing in the case of contemporary art is capturing the chronological boundaries and having a clear definition of it. The majority of the interviewees perceive it as the current art, an umbrella term to describe the contemporary production of art today. From this finding is evident that the respondents do not focus on the chronological character of contemporary art as Heinich, Raymonde Moulin and Hans Belting claim. Heinich's approach defining it was by using Thomas Kuhn's epistemological term "paradigm". He argues that progress is not an outcome of a linear procedure but a "reorganization" of concepts and ideas the scientific domain consisted of. As a result, it is not recognized as a chronological category but rather as a generic one (<http://en.artmediaagency.com/81548/the-transgressive-nature-of-contemporary-art-interview-with-nathalie-heinich/>).

A comment emphasized throughout all the interviews was that the boundaries of contemporary art are blurred and the audience has to have some kind of knowledge in order to understand it. This is also the big difference from other movements such as modern art. This element arouses criticism that art that reinforces exclusion and it is only for an elite. As Interviewee 11 (p.2) stated: "Yeah again I think the outcome the visual result of it I think because there is such a broad you know it's a funny thing, however, art became more accessible for the maker to start making art however because of that I think it also became harder for the viewer to access this artistic world because it is so broad you can literally nowadays anything and everything is accepted so it's very hard to as viewer to... you don't know where to start looking or how to look at it you know... from what angle from what mindset...".

Innovation, uniqueness, boldness and a daring internalized drive (Table 1) from the artist's "gut feeling" (Interviewee 9, p. 3) are some of the common characteristics of contemporary art that emerged from the art lovers. The latter comment was referring to the intense urge and that inner drive of the artist to express their interiority and give form through their innovative ability. A creative dynamic sublimated expression that is articulated eloquently by Norbert Elias (1993,

p.59) in his book ‘Portrait of a Genius about Mozart’ as “the transforming, de-materialized, de-animalising, civilizing of the elemental fantasy-stream by the knowledge-stream and, if all goes well, the final merging of the two as the material is manipulated is, in part, the resolution of a conflict”.

Technology was commented on by all the respondents as a dominant influencer in the production of contemporary visual art nowadays alongside with the diversification of materials or mixed media. Emphasis was given on the digital movement and how artists use technology to portray how it has affected our society. As Interviewee 5 stated:

“... also the digital movement the technology and how it affects us as well. You see a lot of artists using the digital technology as a way to express their art or product in their artworks so yes it's just very big and currently, in this 4 years a lot of things have changed and art is working in that way as well.” (Interviewee 5, p.2)

Furthermore the enormous possibilities that technology has offered to artists’ work was point out by Interviewee 3:

“... there is so much technology coming into the world that a lot more things are possible more dimensions and stuff so...yeah I think that makes a really strong characteristic of it, just to have the technical in it.” (Interviewee 3, p.2).

Table 1: Central characteristics of contemporary art	
Code	Sub-codes
Innovation, bold, uniqueness	Bold, daring, shocking, innovation, uniqueness
Mirroring contemporary society’s issues	Depiction of current social issues
Technology	Technology
Individualistic artist as an entrepreneur or brand	Commercialised perception of art
Diversity of mediums	Individualistic artist, as a brand
	Identity of the person through art
	Global view through internet addressing same issues
	Merge of disciplines/mediums
	Individual, self-expression, reflect on self and society

From the interviewees point of view it also seems clear, since all of them have referred to this aspect, that it is an art that questions and mirrors contemporary society, makes people think differently, questions current beliefs, “hit a nerve in society” (Interviewee 12, p. 4). This feature of discourse that is mostly

generated through text is strongly associated with the practice of contemporary art and it has become part of the artistic proposal (Zembylas, 2014). From the following quote, it is also evident that another central characteristic of the nature of contemporary art is its dynamic notion and tendency of depicting the current situation of the society, often used as a “critical mirror” (Zembylas, 2014, p.37). Contemporary artists can take a societal issue from daily life look at it from a different critical angle and portray it through their work.

“(…), I think everything that is happening this moment but everything that is happening now and how that can be visually shown and I think also characteristics is that it's the now and the challenges that we are facing at this moment, I think that is very a big characteristic that I have seen and besides that also the identity of the person through art.” (Interviewee 5, p.2).

Thirteen respondents stressed that presentation and communication skills play a major role in the artist’s progress, longevity and sustainability. There was an interesting metaphor used by one of the interviewees describing the artist as a brand and their artworks as products to emphasize this individualistic notion.

“(…) and it's also more about the artist as an individual that is also central the artist almost is a brand, artworks are products of the brand and by collecting that you become affiliated.” (Interviewee 4, p.2).

Hence, artists are also described as entrepreneurs having to promoting and build their image. This finding encompasses Henich’s (2014) description that the profile of the visual contemporary artist resembles that of an entrepreneur. This closer disposition of the artist to the market raises skepticism with a potential risk of affecting their creativity and the process of the artwork. Although the interviewees resonate that artists should make a sustainable living they were also concerned about the impact that this has on their work or the tactics and strategies they have to follow. The respondents did not elaborate on this further to describe to which extent artists have to be aware and active to promote themselves as brands and not to be influenced at the same time by the market demands.

When the question came to what attracts you the most in contemporary art

(Table 2) thirteen people mentioned the reflection on current social issues and the opportunity of interpretation. Twelve people referred to the innovation and dynamic character of this field accompanied by the notion that art is food for thought and raises discourse. The uniqueness of the visual language, the diversity of the medium woven with technology and its symbolic value were other intriguing elements mentioned by eleven respondents.

Table 2: What attracts you the most in contemporary art?	
Code	Sub-codes
Reflection on current social issues	Unique original language
Innovation, dynamic field	Diversity in materials/mediums
Makes you think	Search for new stuff
Technology, digital, diversity in mediums	Contemplative state
Unique language	Discover unique people, forerunners
Symbolic value	Flexible, boulder less, simplistic with symbolic value
	Thought process

When the interviewees were asked about which values and characteristics connect to contemporary art, autonomy, the individualistic perspective of the artist and questioning contemporary social issues were the most common values mentioned (Table 3).

There are many forms of artwork and an evolution of mixed media, a fusion of traditional media and technology. What was also emphasised from all the respondents is that in contemporary artworks there are strong underlying social messages, symbolic values and statements that the artist wants to communicate through their artwork from an ethical or moral perspective.

“I think that's also one of the values that it's personal but usually contemporary artists they find a way to connect it to people that maybe don't think that way or don't know anything about the subject so besides like having an opinion making a statement it's also teaching so teaching like knowledge, sharing this knowledge. So I think that's the core value is the freedom, the knowledge and yeah and connecting people.” (Interviewee 9, p.2).

Two out of thirteen were also skeptical about the moral of values of contemporary art. As Interviewee 4 said:

“I would associate it mainly with conceptual art that is for me starting for the Damien Hirst generation, the increase so of the commercialized way of perceiving art... for me

immediately think of art fairs that I have visited, they are completely filled or some of them are completely filled with contemporary art, very much refrained from traditional craftsmanship so the concept is central the materials can be basically anything and everything um and it's also more about the artist as an individual that is also central the artist almost is a brand, artworks are products of the brand and by collecting that you become affiliated. Not in all the cases but that was sort of first associations..." (p.2).

In the same vein Interviewee 13 had an acute quote regarding the morality of contemporary art:

"I think it's an art with very low values like in term of morals and the characteristic is very functional, it's functional in terms of how it is made to work, that's my opinion and I don't know..." (p.3).

I asked him to elaborate on his thoughts in order to have an in depth understanding he continued by saying that:

"Ok so my thoughts is that it has no really a lot of values in terms of morals and it's an art meant to work for a gallery and for a museum, you know it's like a strategy to get into that place that elevates you and gives you visibility and accepts or legitimates it gives you yeah I am an artist, it's more like this strategy to go better than actually doing something for real that's my opinion. That's why I say it's functional." (Interviewee 13, p.3).

From his saying there is a critical judgment upon the motives of the artist and the way she/he promotes itself. He questions whether the artist's artwork is created from its honest intention to express its self or whether it was done intentionally in a certain way to be liked by the intermediaries.

Even though the majority of respondents - eleven out of thirteen - have a more optimistic and maybe romantic view of art values the latter two comments express significant criticism and skepticism on it.

As Henich claims (2014) this way of self promotion for the artists raises suspicions that is a part of a marketing strategy that aims to achieve commercial goals rather than artistic ones. In this game of recognition it is advised other people

handle the promotion of artists and not themselves and through this process become acknowledged by experts.

Table 3: What are the values and characteristics you connect with contemporary art?	
Code	Sub-codes
Autonomy Individualization Innovation Current social issues Diversification of materials Technology	Autonomy, Individualization, freedom Current Mixed media Statement of social issues, ethical Questioning social issues (environment, economics, politics, gender equality) Technology Innovation Commercialised art, the artist as a brand Sharing knowledge and connecting people Originality and simplistic composition without lacking message (balance) Functional, low moral values

4.2. Profile of the contemporary visual artist nowadays

“The romantic notion of the artist working in a studio no longer exists.” said Interviewee 1 (p. 3) and other ten respondents agree with this point of view. Artists work through their computer so spatial surroundings are flexible and mobile.

The majority of interviewees agreed that artists are thinkers; they are observers and researchers questioning things in the society aesthetically and ethically. Networking, creating a collaborative environment with other artists and art world experts was also commented by the majority of the respondents as a vital prerequisite for the well being of the contemporary visual artist. The art world is a precarious milieu, as an artist, you have to be prepared for hardships and challenges. In order to sustain themselves, artists will be more entrepreneurial in the future this was a perception that the majority of the interviewees had.

In the question how do you imagine contemporary artists work there was a fruitful accumulation of data and it was stressed by all the respondents that this is a matter that depends on the artist’s personality. There was some common ground on the answers (Table 4). The respondents pointed out that the artists in the contemporary era experience spatial mobility as a change in their work environment while they are no longer using a studio or an atelier for their creative endeavors. Eleven out of thirteen interviewees believe that artists are autonomous in working

up their ideas without the constraints and the guidance of religion or commissioned work. From the descriptions of the respondents, artists are educated people; they are also researching topics of study using a mixture of disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, sociology and technology to approach their inspiration. Although as mentioned in the section 4.2. describing the central characteristics about contemporary art technology plays a profound role in artists work. What is also emphasised by the interviewees was that they also weave traditional mediums, which enrich their artworks. In the same context as Zembylas (2014) wrote in his book about the practices of contemporary art the diversification of materials, using new kinds or modifications of existing ones, is a key characteristic of contemporary art production.

The power of social media and how strongly it affects the artist’s outcome but also enhances the proximity between the artist and their audience was emphasised with the following quote where the artist is taking into consideration how the audience is going to take a photograph of it. The interviewee also commented that this phenomenon is totally different than the past and has a lot of new nuances to offer for the future of art. Artists can have more instant recognition although that does not guarantee the longevity of their popularity.

“...I think actually at this time where we are more and more aware of the audience I think actually. I think that's also a thing of now and also I think we are more aware of this, the way that your work is spread through social media and everything so like for example some artists like when they make art they already thinking about how other people are going to photograph it” (Interviewee 7, p.3).

Table 4: How do you imagine contemporary artists work?	
Code	Sub-codes
No specific spatial surroundings	Use of technology – no studio
Educated using multi-disciplines	Diverse techniques
Research	Multi-disciplinary (scientist + activist + artist)
Diversity in mediums and techniques	Research
Technology	Technology, digital
Autonomous	Innovation
Innovation	Openness
More connected to their audience via social media	Autonomous
	Internal drive, guided by emotions, obsessive
	Know what is happening and to question reality

	Self-critical Be aware of the past – present – future More aware of their audience and more connected with them via social media
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Twelve interviewees think that artists are different from other people especially because of the way they think. They have a different way of living and thinking, “they always search for the unknown factor which keeps them healthy” (Interviewee 2, p.5), questioning the world. Two of the interviewees mentioned the biological aspect that artists use another part of their brain when they work in comparison to other occupations. I used the following excerpt because this specific interviewee portrayed a variety of reasons why contemporary visual artists are different from other people. It is a challenging job considering the precarious milieu of sustainability and the constant exposure to different actors for assessment including artist’s self.

“Yes, I do think very much. Ah just artists in general but they definitely think out of the box, they see life... sometimes I think as if artists see life in a different lens just like they put glasses on and they see everything that people just overlook or don’t want to think about or... and I think also they live more critical and just being an artist itself it’s kind of like the anti conformist you know they are not conforming to the society where they are going to go to an office job from 9 to 5 they are ready to commit to something that is a potentially unstable, not predictable, you don’t know what your future is, financially very unstable um so you kind of commit to that, so you must have a love for having that freedom that’s already a big difference.” (Interviewee 1, p.5).

In the same context and emphasising how committed and willing to face the aforementioned obstacles and adversity of the precarious milieu another Interviewee 6 (p.7) used the word “brave” to describe them.

Although when the question was if they think that artists are special there was a diversity of opinions. Three of them think that artists are special, one of them emphasised that they are special in that they are recognizable people and they make their image via social media. Two of them believe that all people are special in a way, artists also. Two of them think that some of them are talented. Three also believe that everyone in some way is special. Finally five of them are negatively triggered with the word “special” and below are some in vivo comments to supporting the interpretation. The last one uses an ironic example to emphasise his disapproval.

“No ah that word I mean I have more issues with the word itself I think that they are different but different doesn't automatically mean special or less special it just means that they are different. Special... no but I think that everybody is ordinary in the end so no...” (Interviewee 5, p. 4).

Also Interviewee 4 stated that:

“No I think they are made special by people they want to sell their work.” (p. 5).

Interviewee 12 used his sense of humor to accentuate that the term special is kind of fictional when he said that:

“Yeah we all like to think we are Harry Potter but yeah in a romantic way yeah in a pragmatic way there is no one special I guess.” (p. 4).

4.3. Deconstructing Geniality – Singularity and Excellence

What makes an artist be a genius for art lovers was the question with the most long-lasting pauses and contemplation for all the participants during the interviews. I interpreted it was hard and difficult to decide and to take the responsibility to come to a final explanation or a description of the term. It seemed that geniality carried an extra weight; it was a heavily loaded word in the perception of people interviewed.

Innovation, originality, consistency, commitment and perseverance (Table 5) are values that encapsulate a genius contemporary visual artist for the Dutch art lovers interviewed for this research. Understanding complex things, giving creative solutions in combination with clarity, mental speed and creating and communicating a concrete message: these values resonate with the system of individuality or the singularity realm stated by Heinich (2014) favouring originality, individuality and inventiveness by the strategy of artistic transgression so resembling a cult of authenticity (Laermans, 2000).

“I think passion, I think devotion, I think extremity but not necessarily I think what makes them a genius is like probably with everything that makes a genius also outside the art is the kind of absolute conviction in what are you doing...” (Interviewee 12, p.4).

Moreover cleverness, patience and thinking outside of the box are the main characteristics that have been bestowed by the respondents on contemporary genius.

Table 5: What makes an artist a genius in your opinion?	
Codes	Sub-codes
Innovation, cleverness, originality Perseverance, commitment Entrepreneurial skills Observer, researcher Make people question societal issues Legitimized by society and experts Diversification of materials Like the personality	Understands complex things very quickly, innovative solutions. Think outside the box. Capitalise skills, gain money, be sustainable. Clarity in message. Emotion, make art that touches people. Discover, explore, put their soul in the art scene. No ego. A concrete concept, balanced artwork presentation gives the audience the freedom to reflect. Going out of the norm challenge the current social order. Be vulnerable and question things. Find your personal style and address issues to a large audience. Make the audience see things differently. Good observers and researchers. Very smart, put time and effort, research. Perseverance, tenacity, the urge to learn more. Commitment, genuine creativity. Courage, brave. Passion, ultimate devotion and extremity. Genius must be legitimised by society, academia and elite. Something that is given in your DNA (talent) but you have to work.

Ten out of thirteen interviewees criticised arrogance and egocentric issues in artist's personality. A healthy balance of ego and self-awareness, authenticity and vulnerability were suggested as preferable personality traits. Although respondents did not elaborate if they had a personal experience justifying their opinion, they persisted that they appreciate artists who are humble, work hard and be self-critical. "... I think it takes a lot of practice and critique and self-criticism and yeah I do think that the artist should say that they never know enough, that they are never smart enough and also that they always be self critical on their own work and never think that their work is amazing or um you know that there is nothing to improve and always have this feeling that there is always something better, that you can always do something better." (Interviewee 1, p.4).

As Interviewee 11 said, may be it also has to do with the Dutch culture, while Dutch people are allergic to arrogance.

" Also that they have the courage that they use their intellectual perception to create something but there is also a border which... I think there is a thin line between the courage

that you are using this intellectuality to create artwork for the sake of communicating some kind of philosophy and becoming arrogant I think there is a very thin line also and as a Dutch person, I generally believe that Dutch people are very allergic to arrogance.” (Interviewee 11, p.6).

As Heinich (2014) depicts in her book “The paradigm of Contemporary Art” about the correlation of the art world with the artist’s character. Furthermore, is very important for the audience to be acquainted with the artist in order to feel the things that want to express, understand the level of commitment to their work and conviction with their art and also if they can communicate with the artist well.

Emphasis was given on the emotions that artists’ creations provoke within the audience and the impact of inspiration, motivation and awareness that they generate in their audience. Vulnerability, bravery and courage of expression of the authentic self were mentioned as key personality components of appreciation. It has been acknowledged that it is a hard occupation with a precarious financial milieu. There is a constant struggle for creation whilst having to be open to exposure and criticism that requires from the artist to have perseverance, patience and mental resilience.

As pointed out by two interviewees the most important role in becoming a genius is to be assessed by experts, critics, galleries and museums and to be legitimized:

“It has to be legitimized so in order to become a genius I think you have to be acknowledged as a genius by mainstream society or at least the academia or the elite so that means that this is something not really in control first of all of the...” (Interviewee 12, p.4).

Twelve interviewees posit that not all artists are geniuses and one of them believes that “In one-way or another yeah I think they are there is like a difference in how brave they are...”(Interviewee 11, p.6). He was the one that connected geniality with bravery; his favorite artist was Christo.

“I like him a lot because he is super brave and crazy and he does whatever you know the hell he wants to do and he does it. And this is what I really appreciate.” (Interviewee 11, p.6).

In the question if geniality is something that can be learned and developed or if it is an inborn characteristic, eleven of the art lovers agreed that it is partly both.

More analytically you can be born with a gift or a talent but you definitely have to practice and nurture it through education and personal dedication to cultivation. Maintaining “giftedness” or “talent” which were the most synonymous words to geniality through hard work combines with perseverance and by being a good observer of the era’s changes. “You only learn drawing by drawing” (p.5) Interviewee 9 uses a Dutch phrase to emphasize her belief that through practicing and maintaining the effort you can enhance your talent.

These findings resonate with the studies by sociologists Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, (2014) who argue that “talent cannot be a stable trait” (p.50) because a person’s ability changes over the years and so cultural requests for performance vary over time and also within each domain of performance. Hence, in order for geniality to be attained and acknowledged by experts and society an intertwined system of factors should be synchronized. Excellence in performance is characterized by accuracy. Excellence can acknowledge the artist as having a “gift” but they need constant nurturing and tenacity to overcome demanding challenges through their career. Especially in the case of contemporary art where it is less clearly defined and the dynamic notion of its boundaries makes the rules of the game fluid. As a result, it is difficult to concede the forerunners of excellence and they have to persevere in the beginning without any support.

“So there is the gift and then comes the skill so to sing to practice and then you have the talent when you nurture the gift you nurture it by practicing it then it becomes a talent because a talent then again is something ascribed on us (...) the feedback we need to be acknowledged as talented...”(Interviewee 12, p.5).

Contrastingly, one interviewee thinks that it is only an inborn biological trait stating:

“I think it's something inborn you can develop your own skills but yeah, I think that this geniality is given to you and it's a responsibility...” (Interviewee 13, p.5).

In the question, which is your favorite artist, there was some skepticism again. It was hard for them to decide which one to choose and in some cases, they clarified that they do not really agree with the distinction of “favourite”. However they referred to some artists whose work they admire. It was interesting that none

of the thirteen interviewees shared the same favourite artist (Table 6a). Although in many cases reasons for appraisal overlapped (Table 6b).

Jeff Koons was mentioned as an example of a successful and smart artist entrepreneur that invests in his art and he accomplished a state of sustainability and autonomy. Oliver Laric and Austin Lee were praised for accomplishing a fusion in aesthetics while mixing traditional techniques with contemporary issues and mediums, which led them to a distinct personal trace. David LaChapelle for his boldness and his unconventional way of criticising religious beliefs and “sensitive” societal issues. He makes you think and questions social issues in a different way as Interviewee 2 claimed. Edward Jones for his innovation and thorough execution combining unconventional venues with contemporary techniques like video mapping. Christian Boltanski for his clever and innovative idea/concept to record visitors’ heartbeats and make a kind of a sanctuary on a Japanese island. Jean Michel Basquiat for his bluntness, vulnerability and radical expression talking about social issues such as racism in his era. Lubaina Himid also for her radical spirit regarding the racial issues in the 1970s in Britain in a softer way. Oscar Murillo using innovative ways of presenting cultural differences between Colombia and the UK. Berlinde de Bruyckere for generating emotion through her expressive sculptures of human bodies. Agnes Momorksi and Nicky Assmann were admired for their innovative ways of weaving technology and art. For Momorksi was using technology and empathy as a wellness tool and for Assmann it was her project with interactive wearable technology combining art with fashion. Martin Creed was the reason for Interviewee 9 to find comfort while being in a stressful period of her life and through his creation “Say Cheese” to experience art in a playful and funny way. This also is a trait of contemporary art where irony or play becomes more important than seriousness (Zembylas, 2014 p.34). Marcel Duchamp was praised for using simple ideas to erupt discourse, which led to a new category with the readymades with the “fountain”. Kandinsky was admired because his theory of form shaped Interviewee’s 11 opinion about the creation process. The same interviewee admired Christo for his boldness and bravery to think and execute big projects and making the impossible possible. Michael Kvium for his exhibition “Circus Europa” communicating strong political issues in a straightforward and blunt style “every message that he has he shoots it

like he fires his bullets and they hit you” (Interviewee 12, p. 5). Joseph Kudelka for his long-lasting project living more than twenty-five years with the Gypsies and portraying human nature in a profound and deep perspective.

Table 6a: Who is your favorite artist and why?			
Interviewees	Favorite Artist	Why do you like her/him?	Characteristics praised
Interviewee 1	Jeff Koons Oliver Laric Austin Lee	Pioneer, smart, entrepreneur Fuse traditional skills with contemporary issues and techniques	Sustainable, autonomous Personal trace, Individuality, autonomy
Interviewee 2	Not into favorites she likes David LaChapelle	Boldness Questions social issues	Unconventional Makes you think
Interviewee 3	Not into favorites he likes Edward Jones	Effort and work and he is doing it for free Complexity of work and composition	Commitment Idea and execution
Interviewee 4	Christian Boltanski	Interplay between strong visual language and space reflection for the audience. Clever way of transmitting his message	Inspiring Innovative idea
Interviewee 5	Jean Michel Basquiat Lubaina Himid	Radical, changed the way we see art. She felt connected with their work, helped her with identity and self-discovery	Radical, blunt, questions the social order Connection
Interviewee 6	Oscar Murillo	Mixed media and cultural elements	Innovation
Interviewee 7	Berlinde de Bruyckere	Expressive, generates emotion, aesthetic reasons	Emotion Aesthetics
Interviewee 8	Not a favorite, but she likes Agnes Momorksi and Nicky Assmann	Very contemporary and innovative using technology and appropriating different things	Innovation, dynamic, unraveling new techniques
Interviewee 9	Martin Creed	Fun and happiness in making art, making art from the heart and not what other people tell you to make or do. Connected to a stressful period of her life with the artists' work	He was an example to her in a stressful period of her life and made her breathe again. Art can be easy and funny it does not have to be heavy
Interviewee 10	Not a favorite but she likes Marcel Duchamp	Sense some kind of geniality, erupts so much discourse through something super simple	Simplicity, longevity
Interviewee 11	Not a favorite but he likes Kandinsky and Christo	Christo is brave, crazy, cool. He shows with his work that values that if you really want to do something you can do it. Makes the impossible possible.	Brave, daring, inspiring
Interviewee 12	Not a favorite but likes Michael Kvium	Strong, extremely absurd, disgusting art, in the face and clear “it is like he fires his bullets”.	Straightforward and strong message
Interviewee 13	Joseph Kudelka	Extremely deep into human nature	Portrays gypsies (society's outcasts) in a humane way, passing the message that we all go through the similar struggles and path in life

Table 6b: Mutual reasons of all the interviewees for appraisal
Sustainable
Autonomous
Connection to social issues
Unconventional – questioning society
Innovative
Inspiring
Diversification of materials
Connection, emotion
Clarity of the message

Regarding the question whether the artists' reputation affect their opinion about the artwork twelve out of thirteen replied positively that they are all affected by the artist's reputation. What was of interest though is that they perceived the term reputation in two ways. The one was referring to if an artist was famous and established which raised positive reaction and the other one was addressing to the personality and character of the artist. What was observed was the understanding of the artwork is not a separated process from also understanding the artist. Respondents were very conscious about the quality of the artists' personality except for their reputation as creators. "Reputation does automatically play a role..." (p.6) as Interviewee 5 said while expressing her view about the topic. She also remembered an incident during her studies where her teacher showed the class a picture of Hitler's paintings without them knowing that he was the creator and when afterwards his name was revealed it did affect and change their perception. Interviewee 9 agreed that as viewers we connect our values with the artist "... because as she continued her narration "we always like to see something that we understand and that we connect..." (p.7). Another comment by interviewee 13 arguing that it is only human to be affected by the reputation of the artist also at the same time to correlate their artwork with the personality and character. As he stated:

"Yeah I mean you can also see the character of the person in the work like I mean it's part of it. Like everybody more or less say the same things but we say it in a different way depending on how we are." (Interviewee 13, p.6).

All the aforementioned results resonate with the characteristic of contemporary art that the audience wants to know if the artists' character aligns with his work and her/his values (Heinich, 2014). Using a quote from Interviewee 4 to justify how strong is the affiliation of the ethical and moral aspect of the artist's personality with the audience. However the interviewee criticises her own attitude she cannot deny that is not happening.

"I would like to say it doesn't but it really does so if right now I would learn that he is a child molester Christian Boltanski I would be really annoyed so apparently I link the personality with the art I don't find the most professional attitude I can have, it does happen." (p.7).

The same interviewee although posits the extra weight that carries the personality and the values that encapsulate a good artist. I use the in vivo quote because she was very expressive and I do not want to paraphrase her.

"With all professional people I think in any discipline I have a personal value that I esteem very high and that is to reframe from operating from ego, vanity, ego and narcissism are the things in my opinion that kill innovation that said I know that is not widely supported idea because I think a person like Damien Hirst is very ego-driven and very much concerned with his status and prestige but also he is considered to be a ground breaking contemporary artist so apparently there is a difference between the values that I have when it comes to being a good artist and the values are part of yeah how to say it the construct of an art world um and there is an obviously also still a debate going on whether the personality of an artist is influencing the way artists perceived so for me a good artwork when it comes to contemporary art so when it's more or less separate from procedures or craftsmanship it needs to be very clever and very thought through and I think if he did not put all that hours and care in training years to do something then hours and care have definitely gone into developing yourself, to really be aware of what you are as an artist or what you represent and that would be at least for me the starting point where I would consider you a professional and chance higher that the artworks you make are... good, well it's a tricky word but yeah..." (p.4).

Closing the chapter of deconstructing geniality innovation, originality, consistency, commitment and perseverance are the most popular values that appreciate Dutch art lovers. Furthermore, also addressed to geniality was acute understanding of complex things, mental speed and giving creative solutions in

combination with clarity and mental speed. Cleverness, patience and thinking outside of the box also bestowed by the respondents on contemporary genius. Creating and communicating a concrete message, originality, individuality and inventiveness are complementary findings of this section.

4.4. Intermediaries – Art worlds

In this intertwined system of contemporary art, the artist's aim is to transgress the expression of its interiority – to reinvent herself/himself - to break all the modern conventions and to create something original, innovative and unique, this is the gauge for her/his geniality (Heinich, 2014). History has shown that there is a stage where the audience hesitates to accept or understand the artwork. There is a stage of transgression, a form of rejection before the reception and the final part is the integration (Danko, 2008). In this phase intermediaries are critics, curators, galleries and museums provide the necessary interpretation for the symbolic value of the art in order to be integrated by the audience. Moreover, galleries offer a stage to expose their art and have a reciprocal influence on their work.

As Interviewee 12 stresses in the following excerpt galleries offer a stage to artists but they also influence art by selecting specific artists to expose. This dynamic works for both sides being in a constant interrelated exchange.

“I mean of course they contribute in a way they offering a stage to expose art so that it could be a contribution at the same time they are influencing the art because they are not going and knocking at the artists door and say expose your work here but the artist has to seek usually of course not always when the artist's get bigger then the artist is being sought, artist look for galleries to expose his art or the galleries get interested in this artist and they want his artwork in gallery so there is this interrelation, a situation that we have there the gallery has an interest in exposing art and the artist has to show his art and then the influence is the so the curators they have to be aware of what is happening in art scene and try to make it into a coherent story but at the same time the artist if there is a renowned gallery it has to be maybe adopting a bit his art to the gallery or to the art market so there is a mutual influence I would say...” (Interviewee 12,p.5).

There was unanimous agreement amongst respondents that critics, curators, collectors, galleries and museums contribute substantially to the artists' work although not overtly as legitimising artists as genius. What was more obvious from

their answers to the question “Do you think critics, collectors, curators, galleries and museums can contribute to artists work and why?” (Appendices 7.1.) was that they believe intermediaries play the role of interlocutors which derives from the Latin *interloqui*, meaning "to speak between" in the art world (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interlocutor>). This role encompasses exchanging ideas, opinions, giving feedback to the artists’ work so that they think in other perspectives. They generate a collaborative climate by elaborating and discussing the artists’ concepts which prolong a fruitful outcome.

“I think so because all jobs also the job that I do it's always nice to get critical feedback and to talk about ideas without the people also can convince you which path to chose or like yeah it's very worthwhile to keep contact with other people and talk about your ideas and also be open for other people.” (Interviewee 6, p.8).

It has been emphasized by the majority of the participants that artistic mediation is done by the intermediaries, who are responsible for connecting the artist with a bigger audience. Although “autonomisation” of art (Bourdieu, 1992) is growing for example the internet has given artists the freedom to promote their work and keep in contact directly with their audience they still need the support of all the other actors of the intertwined art world, especially when they are at the beginning of their career. Another issue mentioned was the financial contribution and support of the collectors and galleries, which assist the artists’ sustainability.

“Yeah, I think they can because I think that is mostly how artists find their connection to their audience. Well, It's like a previous process of trying to connect to the audience for nowadays there's also putting your portfolio online and using technology but I think it's still the ongoing process of connecting to your audience and I think it's a platform for them to actually evolve and to create publicity and exposure for themselves as well. I do believe sometimes they are taking advantage for... I've read so many articles of how museums don't actually pay the artists that they display their work for. They don't pay them. But they get all the ticket money and everything but the artist gets the exposure. That's how they're paid. Which I see is a bit of an unbalanced but they do it though for exposure and publicity so yeah...” (Interviewee 10, p.4).

As mentioned by Interviewee 10 there is a flipside when sometimes

institutions offer artists exposure and publicity for their artwork instead of paying them, which she found a bit unfair.

Intermediaries contribute to artists being seen as genius from two essential perspectives. Firstly, by being an interlocutor whilst enhancing and improving their talent, thinking outside the box and developing innovative concepts. Secondly, by promoting artists and making them noticed and recognised as good artists and eventually as geniuses.

4.5. Value of art for the society

All thirteen art lovers were unanimous in their conviction that art plays an important role in the society with the most unambiguous reason being that it provokes people to have discourse about societal issues that otherwise are overlooked; to question things and generate a different perspective in norms and beliefs (Table 8). Art can educate people and stimulate creativity. However, sometimes an artwork can be too conceptually oriented and thus difficult for the majority of people to understand. The latter comment actually was repeated by more than half of the interviewees as a limitation and exclusion for an uninitiated audience.

“... that’s art for those art lovers and not art for everybody” (Interviewee 1, p.9).

Table 8: Do you think that art has a role or is it just done for its own sake? Do you think that art adds up something in people’s lives and what is it?	
Codes	Sub-codes
Innovation Connects people Discourse for societal issues – confronts you with new ideas Humanitarian value – self discovery Colors life Mirror of the world Art therapy	Different perspective makes you think. Art as a language to communicate things that are overlooked. Innovation Generate discourses Colors society, good for connections, stimuli for discourses, catharsis

Another element that was referred to by almost all the respondents is the amount of innovation. Innovation is the core value of geniality and contemporary art which relates to the singularity regime (Henich, 2014). Strongly stated was that art connects people and builds bridges. A nice metaphor given by interviewee 3 was: “... art that colors society (...), I think a society without arts will be a very black society,

dark...”(Interviewee 3, p.8).

A valuable tool for self-discovery, art therapy and humanitarian value for society are also popular answers. As the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1998) posits, as referred in my introduction, art is a tool for human beings to learn and understand each other; and is thus an essential situation for the democratic functioning of society. As human species, we learn by emulating and we have this cognitive tendency to look to role models that connect us with our values. Hence, artists and especially geniuses, through their work communicate values which can inspire people to be a better version of themselves and consequently enhance the betterment of society and the understanding of humanity. A mirror of the world, reflecting the current issues in the society and it enriches people’s lives.

The aforementioned arguments match Zembylas (2014) writings stating that contemporary art has become more hermeneutical and interpretative reflecting and assessing a critical mirroring of the society.

“... I think art can be a great tool for self-reflection. Art contains values or portrays values and in the case as we as a society appreciate these values then that's a good thing. If we as a society want to embrace for example the value of being open and tolerant and diverse or something like that then I think art because if it is produced by people that share this belief they will in a way deal with these values or embed them in their art and this is brought to the public or to the society or at least to a part of the society and then is something good for the society.” (Interviewee 12, p.7).

As vigorously emphasised all the interviewees society needs art to “brighten up” our lives and consequently society needs genius artists to connect people, to build bridges, to show new ways of perspectives through their innovative abilities. They are the creative agents of critical thinking, communication enhancing individual and emotional development.

Finally, I will close this theme with a powerful quote from Interviewee 13 who said, “It has a role absolutely, it is an indicator of the health of society” (p.6). As Heinich eloquently portrays the “democratic shift” where artists replaced aristocrats and elite status is not assigned by birth but instead by merit, talents and personal abilities. Individuality defined by singularity, is a notion that the individual is exceptional and socially marginal. So the artist is a creator by vocation and by

personal inclination. Their artwork is expected to be innovative, original, unique and exceptional is the person that mirrors the society and pokes the audience to think differently (Danko, 2008).

5. Conclusion

The idea for the research question began after pondering what establishes something as art in our contemporary society. This led me to contemplate which contemporary visual artist is considered a genius today and more specifically how the audience interested in contemporary art perceives this exemplary term.

In this journey my theoretical lens was pragmatic sociology and sociology of arts through the work of Nathalie Heinich's and her neutral, descriptive and interpretive perspective. I believe that it was the right choice to choose Heinich's framework that observes value systems. Her pluralistic epistemological disposition reminds us that there is never one "truth" (Danko, 2008, p.14).

Qualitative research and especially thematic analysis were suitable to grasp the insights for this examination of beliefs, values and opinions of many participants giving the opportunity to highlight differences, similarities and recurrent themes (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Examining a homogenous group from a new generation with a balanced gender was a sampling method that had fruitful outcomes in the results. I mentioned in the methodology it was not a prerequisite criteria of all participants that considered themselves as art lovers to have had higher education.

The initial hypothesis was to explore whether the singularity vocation regime, as proposed by Nathalie Heinich as a term of singularity and excellence (Danko, 2008) are still valid notions that define artist's geniality nowadays or if there is a shift of worth.

In the following table the main theoretical concepts are depicted reverberated with the relevant values from the orders of worth or worlds by Heinich (1996, 1998a, 2005, 2009, 2014) and Boltanski & Thevenot (1999) as mentioned in the methodology chapter. A column was added with the codes generated by the answers of the thirteen interviewees in order to have an overall view of the main findings.

Theoretical Concepts	Values and codes from orders of worth or worlds Heinich, Boltanski and Thevenot	Codes from Respondents
Contemporary art	Systematic transgression of artistic criteria, individuality, innovatory and avant-garde nature, dynamic, art of present day.	Individualisation Innovation Current social issues Symbolic value Diversification of materials Technology
Singularity regime	Contemporary art, innovation, unicity, originality, abnormality. Marginalised, excellent, democratic, singular and genius.	Innovation, originality, consistency, commitment, perseverance.
Excellence	Inventiveness, singularity, individual both exceptional and marginal.	Innovative, inspiring, sustainable, autonomous, unconventional, questioning society and connection to social issues
Geniality	Originality, singularity and excellence.	Innovation, cleverness, originality Perseverance, commitment Entrepreneurial skills Observer, researcher Make people question societal issues
Art worlds	Transgression, reaction and integration.	Mediators as Interlocutors, and promoters of artists recognition
Vocation regime	Personalization. Studies, academy, professional, artisan, creator of personal inclination. Unique, original, innovative, outstanding performance.	No specific spatial surroundings for example a studio. Educated, using multi-disciplines, their outcome based on research Diversity in mediums and techniques Technology Autonomous Innovation More connected to their audience via social media.

(Heinich 1996, 1998c, 1999, 2005, 2009), (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999) and (Danko 2008).

Geniality

The findings showed that participants validate and acknowledge geniality bestowing values such as innovation, originality, cleverness, excellence in

performance and clarity in the concepts and the composition of the artworks. What came up also as a tendency was a strong connection between moral and ethical elements of the artist's personality. Character, reputation, personality traits and values as a human being of the artist seem to play a major role to the perception of the audience.

"Yeah I mean you can also see the character of the person in the work like I mean it's part of it. Like everybody more or less say the same things but we say it in a different way depending on how we are." (Interviewee 13, p.6).

Perseverance, tenacity, courage and conviction in their work are some of the artists' personality traits praised by art lovers. Life-long learning, researching and observing social issues in order to afterwards reflect critically through their work also feature. Artists being vulnerable and generating emotion through their creations that touch and connects people's souls was also another strong element of geniality.

Singularity

Innovation, originality and unicity are values agreed both by the respondents and the scholars. Perseverance, commitment and consistency are added values by the respondents.

Vocation regime

Contemporary visual artists are autonomous, sustainable and produce the work they believe in. Hence, have to practice entrepreneurial skills and capitalise on their innovative abilities. Finding their unique personal style and inclination, using diversification of materials and addressing societal issues to a large audience are other indicators of the vocation regime of the genius. They are educated and use multi-disciplinary studies for their research. They use diversity in materials and mixed media. Technology and digital use are also strongly connected to contemporary art production and social media minimise the proximity between the artist and the audience.

Finally, an overall comment by all art lovers is that an official legitimization by experts such as art critics, institutions, academia and the audience are vital for the assessment of geniality of the contemporary artist.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The investigation was limited and had restrictions regarding the findings of

the role of intermediaries in the process of validating and legitimising of artists' genality. There was only one question in the interview guide which asked whether critics, collectors, curators, galleries and museums can contribute to artists' work and why. From the participants' answers, there was no correlation or contribution to suggest that intermediaries play a role in legitimising artists as a genius.

Furthermore, how the reputation of the artist, referring to their personality and character affects the artist's genality could be another aspect open to future research. More analytically, an interesting research could be what kind of reputation is expected or rejected from the perception of the audience.

Finally, another topic raised but not answered in this research which is open for future investigation is to which extent artists have to be aware and active to promote themselves as brands and, at the same time, not be influenced by the market demands?

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7. Appendices

7.1. Interview guide

Social Cultural Background

Could you please briefly introduce yourself?

- Age
- Educational background
- Occupation
- Main interests regarding art

Contemporary Art

1. Is contemporary art your favorite visual art movement?

When did your interest in it begin?

Why?

What attracts you the most today in the contemporary art?

2. What are the central characteristics of contemporary art?

What do you expect to see in it?

How it differs from other art movements?

What are the values and characteristics you connect to contemporary art?

Artist & Geniality

3. How do you imagine contemporary artists work?

How are they?

What do they need to do or be to produce good contemporary art?

4. Do you think that artists are different?

Do you think that artists are special?

What makes an artist a genius in your opinion?

Do you think that all artists are genius?

Is geniality something that can be learned and developed or is it an innate an inborn characteristic?

Influence of intermediaries – Art worlds

Do you think that critics, collectors, curators, galleries and museums can contribute to artists work and why?

Singularity and excellence

5. Do you have a favorite visual contemporary artist?

Why do you like her/him?

What do you admire most in their work?

6. Does the artist's reputation affect your opinion about their artwork? How?

Which elements do you appreciate in a contemporary visual artwork?

Value of art for the society

7. Do you think that art has a role or is it just done for its own sake?

Do you think that art adds up something in people's lives and what is it?

Closure

Do you have any other comments, thoughts that you would like to share?

7.2. CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Student's name: Zoi Gatsapostoli

Address: Burgemeester Oudlaan 896, 3062PA Rotterdam

Email address: zoe.gatsa@gmail.com

Mobile number: +306974647486

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about the perception on the geniality of the contemporary artist nowadays. The purpose of the study is to understand how art lovers/enthusiasts perceive the term "genius" of the contemporary visual artist today. Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to the main research question about How do art lovers perceive the geniality of the visual contemporary artist nowadays? Which traits, values, skills, and concepts the audience attributes to geniality of the contemporary artist. What are their expectations from the contemporary art world, for example from intermediaries (dealers, collectors, curators,) and institutions (museums, galleries) etc?

Unless you prefer that no recording is made, I will use a phone recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by [measures that will be taken: pseudonym, general identification only mentioning age and gender, etc.].

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximate 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish– [Daniela Stocco in the department of Arts and Culture in School of History, Culture and Communication at Erasmus University of Rotterdam].

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name Signature Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name Signature Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.