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**From outside to inside: Changing strategies and practices of  
institutional critique 1960-2014**

by

**Victoria Preston**

Doctoral Thesis

Supervised by Dr. Fiona Candlin and Dr. Ben Cranfield

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Birkbeck College, University of London 2014

## **Abstract**

Established accounts of institutional critique either turn it into an art historical genre that is past and finished, or suggest that it is pointless because it is always co-opted by the institution. This thesis contests the canonisation of institutional critique by positing that there has been a change in the agents of critique from the academic critic, to the artist, to the curator. The research also argues against the supposed futility of institutional critique by drawing on Foucault to consider critique in particular instances rather than in general. Thus each case study considers whether or not a particular artwork or project was understood as critical at the time and, if so, in what capacity. In the course of examining the shifts in the critical agent from artist to curator, I also identify a sequence of correlative changes. First there is an expansion in the location of critique from mainstream USA museums to a wide range of art institutions globally, including biennials. Second there is a change of focus in the objects of critique, from the physical attributes of the exhibition spaces to modes of display, museum processes, and the politicisation of content. Third there are different strategies of critique, as artists and curators variously pursue mimetic, subversive and symbolic strategies in their institutional investigations, and develop new ones. Overall, the research demonstrates that institutional critique moves progressively inside the institution, and becomes an embedded activity, particularly when independent curators take up positions as directors of experimental institutions. The thesis concludes that institutional critique has become more politicised and more complex and that some of its strategies and practices have helped to re-function institutions.

## **Signed declaration**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed

Dated

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Edwin Standing, whose words, “It is important to become an expert in something”, are still with me.

I am grateful for the support of my husband Chris, particularly for his uncharacteristic patience, and for the encouragement of my daughter Esty, whose cartoon of a professor, admonishing me to “study hard”, has accompanied me throughout my research.

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## Introduction

In September 2005 the artist Andrea Fraser published an article in *Artforum* on the subject of institutional critique. Although she made a nuanced argument inquiring into the possibilities of critique with respect to art institutions, her remarks have been misrepresented in conferences and discussions as a declaration of the futility of institutional critique. It has been maintained that as Fraser deemed critical distance to be impossible, then institutional critique must be obsolete.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, her comments on the early canonisation of institutional critique appeared to reaffirm the positions of other authors, such as the art historians Hal Foster (1986) and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (1990), who had already consigned practices associated with it to an art historical genre.

The airing of these points of view occurred just as I was embarking on my own research into institutional critique. I had already noted that writing on the subject had dwindled by the mid-1990s, and that this contrasted with the institutionally critical practices that I observed to be taking place.<sup>2</sup> This inconsistency, between what was being articulated and what I noticed to be happening in practice, raised questions in my mind about the nature and function of institutional critique. What was the nature of the institution to which it referred and what was the function of criticality? What forms could criticality take, what strategies might be employed, and how could critique be applied to particular art institutions in specific situations?

In addressing these questions, I considered several different approaches: for instance, whether an historical narrative that identified institutional critique as a series of waves might be productive, or whether criticality could be defined in terms of various models, that could then be used to categorise different types of critique. The problem with an historical narrative was that it might lead to the type of genre-isation that I was trying to avoid, whereas the difficulty with formulating models was that I might fail to take account of the specificities of particular practices. As I reflected on these approaches, I observed that institutional critique was typically regarded as an artistic practice, and I began to question what the implications might be for both the institution and criticality if institutional critique were viewed from a different angle. In

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1 "Curating Post-Nation Symposium", 15-16 September 2006, Arnolfini Gallery Bristol, and "Between Culture and Capital – Art, Institutions and Corporate Patronage", 10-11 October 2007, Courtauld Institute of Art London.

2 Institutionally critical practice is an expression I use to differentiate the "practice" of institutional critique from the "declarations" about it.

particular I noted that, increasingly, critical engagement with institutions involved various forms of curatorial practice, and this prompted the idea that the involvement of curators in institutionally critical activities would create the possibility for new interpretations of institutional critique.

My research took as its starting point the change that Buchloh observed in the agent of critique, from the so-called independent academic critic to the artist (1987). Building on this notion of shifts in the critical agent, my thesis identifies an expansion in the identity of the institutionally critical protagonists to include artist-curators, independent curators, curatorial collectives and the directors of experimental institutions. Significantly, the categories, “artist curator”, “independent curator”, “curatorial collective” and “director curator”, refer to the *role* of the critical agent, and are not intended to make a claim for the “genius” status of individual curators. Tracing the evolution of shifts in the critical agent is a non-linear process, as it is not a question of one agent “handing over the baton” of critique to another, rather my research is concerned with the complex inter-subject, inter-institutional and inter-agent positions of institutional critique beyond its established modes of portrayal as artistic practice.

The recognition of these shifts has defined the chapter structure of my thesis. Chapter 1 entitled “I(i)nstitutional C(c)ritique: genre versus practice” examines traditional understandings of the expression.<sup>3</sup> The main body of the thesis makes a distinction between the specific usage of the term within historical and critical discourse and the diversity of curatorial practices that have critical engagement with institutions. Specifically, Chapter 2 discusses “Artist-curators”, Chapter 3 explores “Collective practitioners and independent curators”, and Chapter 4 investigates “Directors of experimental institutions”. As specificity is necessary for critique to function (a point I shall expand upon below), I have used case studies to demonstrate the particular actions taken by the various agents, examining how the different critical strategies they pursued, investigated the missions, policies and approaches to programming of the institutions they addressed.

My research is situated in the fields of post-conceptual art, curatorial discourse, museology and institutional practice. It builds on the considerable body of literature on the early practitioners of institutional critique, including monographs and exhibition catalogues about Marcel Broodthaers, Michel Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I capitalise Institutional Critique to indicate when it is being viewed as an historical genre, and I employ the lower case to denote institutional critique as a practice.

Haacke and others. It extends the discourse on institutional critique, as expounded in the anthologies by Welshman, whose contributors questioned the validity of critique (2006), and Möntmann whose collection of essays described the problematics of institutionally critical practice in Scandinavia and elsewhere (2006). Alberro and Stimson's anthology of artists' writings on institutional critique (2009), drew the attention of scholars to little known texts, such as Art & Language member Mel Ramsden's "On Practice" (1975), and widened the sphere of debate in what had previously been a purely occidental discourse, to include writings from activist practitioners from Latin America. Alberro and Stimson were following an earlier tradition of collections of artists' writings on institutional critique, such as those compiled by Bronson and Gale (1983) and Kravagna (2001). Raunig and Ray's collection of writings mainly from theorists (2009), which drew on the work of the "european institute of progressive cultural policies" (eipcp), introduced the notion of instituting into discussions on institutional critique, suggesting that the institution was in a constant state of flux and could be re-functioned along different lines<sup>4</sup>. These anthologies focused on artists and theorists as the main exponents of institutional critique, but did not examine institutional critique from a curatorial perspective. The absence of discussion about curating in accounts of institutional critique is curious, considering its latent presence (a point I discuss in the next chapter). If such publications were to include commentaries about curatorial practice, what would the possible implications for criticality be with respect to art institutions?

Similarly institutional critique is nascent, and only occasionally referred to, in the literature on curatorial practice. The curator Jens Hoffmann has described the indebtedness of many curators to the legacies of institutional critique (2006). According to the curator Paul O'Neill, in the late 1960s and 1970s, art criticism moved away from its primary focus on the artwork towards curatorial criticism, a critique of the artwork within the context of its institutional framing conditions (2012). He has argued that the curator was "capable of instituting new alignments and providing the conditions and institutional context for art's display" (ibid 28). My thesis builds on this notion of a reorientation of criticism from the autonomous art object to a critique of its institutional frame. Thus I examine different types of curatorial practice, such as curatorial work performed by artists, the institutional engagement of independent

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4 I use the term "re-function" (with a hyphen) in discussing the re-adaptation of an institution to accommodate new strategies.

curators, and an analysis of the role played by directors of experimental institutions in critical practice.

### 1. The problems of Institutional Critique

Institutional Critique has been treated as finite by its authorities, owing to their reading of the subject as artistic practice alone, and this has led to its canonisation and the associated labels of “anachronistic”, “obsolete” and “institutionalised” (Fraser 2005). However, the process of critiquing institutions is complex, involving different types of criticality and is manifested in various institutional concerns. If institutional critique were to be envisaged in terms of changing agents, strategies, locations, and focus, it could be regarded as a set of ongoing practices. My research asks what the value of this designation could be, and also what additional possibilities for institutional critique could be generated, if it were to be viewed differently from the existing authors. By expanding the purview of institutional critique it might be possible to consider institutional critique not as a genre, but to re-imagine it as an evolving set of practices that are in a perpetual state of revision in terms of their ability to critique the institution of art.

In this thesis, I argue that to speak of critique in general terms, as some of its authorities such as Buchloh (1990) and Fraser (2005) do, is to misconstrue the nature of critique. It follows therefore that institutional critique is to be viewed in terms of specificity with respect to who is performing the critique, what is being criticised, and how the critical enquiry is being carried out; similar points were made by Ramsden (1975). For Foucault critique was meaningless without specificity, and he arrived at this position from a detailed study of particular situations. In “What is Critique?” he contended that critique was only possible when it was directed towards specific practices, discourses and institutions (1978). He posited that it was not feasible to conceive of critique unless it was in relation to the objects of its attention, as critique lost its character as soon as it was abstracted from its function and made to stand alone as a purely generalisable practice. By its nature, critique is “condemned to dispersion, dependency and pure heteronomy.... It only exists in relation to something other than itself” (ibid 42). The argument that critique depends on something external to itself relates the activity of criticising to the object that is being criticised.

The perceived failure of critique, as described by several of the authorities on institutional critique, such as Foster (1986) and Buchloh 1990), was linked to the

challenge to art's autonomy. However, if art's power were not vested in its autonomy, but was rather connected to its institutional positioning and its relevance to the life-world, criticality might take on a different form and function. It could be possible to consider critique and its objects existing in a state of co-dependence, so that the institution could be in a constant state of instituting – reforming, re-inventing and re-functioning itself. This notion of heteronomy, namely critique being immanent to the subject, prompts the question of how might an understanding of critique's interdependence with its critical object contest existing narratives about the failure of institutional critique?

For Foucault, critique also entailed the development of a “critical attitude”, a resistance to the imposition of power relations, or “how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them... the art of not being governed quite so much” (op. cit. 44-45). Foucault called critique into action against rules that were respected simply because they had been in existence for a long time, and against following the dictums of authorities only because they emanated from those occupying positions of power (ibid). In “What is Enlightenment”, Foucault reaffirmed these points, arguing in favour of “sapere aude”, the idea that individuals should have the courage to use their own minds (1984). Foucault's position, focused on the specificity of critique, thinking independently and developing a critical attitude vis-à-vis existing authorities, is instrumental in contesting those writers who insist on the futility of institutional critique.

The issue of critique as being specific, rather than generalisable was not the only problematic. Some commentators, including Ramsden (1975), Foster (1986), Buchloh (1990) and later Fraser (2005), contended that the critique of art institutions was not possible as there was no longer an “outside” to the institution of art. Whereas academic critics had conducted their critique situated on the exterior of art institutions, artists as critical practitioners were often already implicated in the museums and galleries that they were investigating. According to these writers, the lack of distance between the agent performing the criticism and the object of critical investigation invalidated the critique. Whereas previously critique had been associated with the academic critic and art's autonomy, the shift in the activity of criticism to investigating the institutional frame, might require a different form of critique, and raised questions about whether alternative strategies of critique, that were inter-dependent, reformist and specific, could be generated *inside* the

institution. As institutional critique evolved from being an artistic to a curatorial practice, the processes of critique arguably moved further inside the institution. This involved a different type of criticality from that practiced by artists, who were often invited to perform a single intervention in the museum or gallery, so that later forms of critical practice were predicated on a state of co-existence between the agents of critique and the institutions that they were investigating. The theorist Irit Rogoff developed new understandings of criticality to characterise these emerging forms of embedded critical practice, which are investigated in the first chapter of this thesis (2003 and 2006).

The existing authorities regarded institutional critique as problematic not only because of the difficulties in achieving critical distance, but also owing to the fact that critical projects were often co-opted. According to Ramsden (1975) and Fraser (2005), institutionally critical projects were pointless, as the institutions they targeted frequently appropriated them. It was argued that such projects would simply be absorbed by the museums and galleries they addressed that were driven either by institutional cynicism or by the desire for institutional self-improvement. Buchloh (1990) and Fraser (2005) wrote about institutions as if they were homogeneous entities, but my research views institutions as heterogeneous. By investigating the specifics of particular projects, I differentiate between positive and negative forms of co-option, questioning whether some appropriated projects might be able to influence institutional thinking in certain circumstances. By investigating the way in which specific museums and art centres reacted to the various critical strategies being employed, it is possible to demonstrate the heterogeneity of art institutions – points that had also been made by Haacke (1974).

## 2. Structuring my research

In conducting my research, I used sources from art practice, art criticism, museology, art history and theory, employing archival material, such as exhibition catalogues, press reports and fictional and documentary films. In most cases, I have written about projects that I have not actually seen, but I have visited retrospective exhibitions of institutionally critical practitioners and attended and participated in conferences and seminars on subjects related to institutional criticism and critical art practice.<sup>5</sup> I have

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<sup>5</sup> Paper, "Deconstructing Art History, Constructing Visual Culture" in the academic session, "Museums and the Construction of Art Histories" at the Association of Art Historians Conference in Belfast (2007). Paper, "Kunsthallen and Art Historical Discourse" in the academic session, "Museums, the Academy and the Studio" at the Association of Art Historians Conference in London (2008). Paper, "Interdisciplinary approaches to institutional critique: In search of critical disciplines" in "Crossing the Boundaries - A

also engaged in informal conversations with selected individuals to obtain additional background information on specific subjects where necessary.

I explore the ambiguity of the terms “institution” and “critique”, as “institution” can mean art-world/art system, or refer to a particular organisation, and “critique” may be independent, distanced or embedded. In assessing criticality I explore what makes an act a critical act, and what types of criticality have been tried and are available. Assessing a critical strategy requires several steps, such as, identifying who performs the critique, how a particular museum or art centre, on which the critique is being enacted, is understood, specifying what exactly is being criticised, and which approaches to critique are being used. It requires examining where the critique is taking place, namely inside or outside the institution, which necessitates a recognition of the institutional boundaries, as far as this is possible. Assessing a project’s criticality involves a process comprising several stages. In the instance of an artist’s work, it requires investigating his/her intentions, taking account of the opinion of critics, exploring the museum or art centre’s perspective – all of which inform my own analysis of what it means to be critical.

### 3. Scope of the thesis

Whereas art criticism was mainly produced by academic critics in the mid-twentieth century (and earlier), and artists primarily made the putative neutrality of museums the subject of their practice from the 1960s onwards, by the late 1980s artists were beginning to adopt approaches that were closely allied to curating, and from the 1990s curators instigated projects that were critical of the institutions with which they worked. In the late 1960s and 1970s artists associated with institutional critique were largely US-focused, and much of the writing on institutional critique has been US-centric. I have observed recent changes in the subject matter included in anthologies of institutional critique that expand the geographical coverage of practice and I continue this approach. Since the 1990s art and curatorial practices have become global, expanding the remit of institutionally critical investigations, and my thesis reflects this.

The first chapter begins with an explanation of how Institutional Critique was canonised by its authorities. This is followed by alternative views of institutional critique “as practice”, as described by the artists, (Art & Language) member Mel

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Conference on Interdisciplinarity and Research”, Birkbeck College (2008). Chair of the panel discussion “Institutional critique: can the institution ever criticise?” in the talks series at the ICA, “60 Years of Curating” (2008).

Ramsden (1975), Daniel Buren (1968 and 1972), and Hans Haacke (1971 and 1974). A discussion of Buchloh's position on changes in the agent of critique from academic critic to critical artist (1987) is extended by an analysis of his understanding of the evolution of institutional critique in the 1960s and 1970s (1990), his accounts of specific artists associated with institutional critique (2000), and his reflections on institutionally critical practice (2012). I then examine the commentaries that Fraser (1985 and 2005) and the art historians James Meyer (1993) and Fraser Ward (1995) have produced on the various critical strategies that were used by artists in their institutional investigations. As the nature of criticality is determined by whether it is being employed "outside" or "inside" the institution, I examine debates on the location of critique by comparing Fraser's changing viewpoints between 1985 and 2005. I then consider her suggestion that the individual and the institution should assume responsibility for critique (2005), and I discuss Rogoff's argument that critique has evolved on the inside of the institution, and now exists in an embedded form (2003 and 2006).

The three core chapters of my thesis examine nine case studies, an approach chosen to facilitate a detailed and specific examination of particular institutionally critical projects and practices. The second chapter explores the conflation of critical artistic and curatorial practices, and I analyse the work of artists, who investigated the framing conditions of art from different curatorial perspectives, assessing to what extent artist-curators adopted the mimetic, subversive, symbolic and activist critical strategies identified by various commentators on institutional critique, and whether new ones were developed. I examine Fred Wilson, whose work is already viewed as part of the canon of Institutional Critique, but whose projects can nevertheless be regarded as a set of critical practices. He employed new curatorial methodologies in an ethnographic museum to critique an existing singular narrative and create alternative narratives. Then, I investigate Thomas Hirschhorn, who used traditional methods of curating in relocating canonical artworks from an established museum to a makeshift viewing-space in an economically underprivileged area. Finally, I discuss Robert Jacoby, who created a hybrid work, part art installation, and part curatorial process, to critique the mission statement of an international biennial.

In the third chapter, I examine a further shift in the agent of institutionally critical practice in the recent work of collectives and independent curators. I investigate Chto Delat?'s criticism of practices and processes in a museum of modern art. I explore a project by What How and for Whom (WWH), an independent

curatorial collective, who employed subversive methodologies to critique an international art biennial. I discuss the collaboration between Khaled Hourani, an independent curator, and Charles Esche, a museum director, to transport an iconic work of Modernism from an established museum to be exhibited in a precarious viewing-site. I examine whether collectives and independent curators used the same critical strategies as artists and artist curators, or whether new ones evolved, appropriate to the changing locations and circumstances for displaying art.

In the final chapter, I examine how the directors of three experimental institutions and their teams assumed responsibility for critique in their respective institutions. I discuss what is meant by Charles Esche's strategy of "democratic deviance" at the Rooseum in Malmö. I then investigate Maria Lind's concept of "constructive institutional critique" and her curatorial work at the Kunstverein München. Finally, I discuss "radical museology", a term applied to the "MACBA experiment" at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, as conceived by Manuel Borja-Villel.

In this thesis I contribute to new understandings of institutional critique by examining the recent past, and I show that institutionally critical practices continue to be useful, despite the fact that the term institutional critique is rarely employed today. Art institutions have altered substantially in the last fifty years and some of the changes can be attributed to the critical strategies employed by artists and curators, while other changes are more likely to have been brought about by economic imperatives and policy initiatives. I assess the implications of the changes in agents of critique, and the expansion of the critical strategies for various museums and galleries in different countries. Although it is hard to prove (and to disprove) the nature and scope of these respective influences, a discussion of these issues, points to the partial agency of institutionally critical projects.

I refute the purported canonisation of Institutional Critique as an art historical genre by addressing changing strategies that elucidate alternative ways of thinking about it, namely as a constantly engaged reformatory process, and an on-going approach to institutional investigation. I therefore examine the subject as practice, with both potential agency and limits, constructing an argument for an understanding of institutional critique as "institutionally critical practice". In my thesis critique is viewed as something possible, desirable and to be aspired to, even in situations where it is difficult carry out. My understanding of critique is that it sets out to question established procedures and it takes the view that "authority" must be

earned, justified and rational, not merely imposed. I address the problems of criticism being theorised as a generality, provide alternative forms of critique to widely adopted ideas about “independent criticism”, and contest dominant narratives of co-option and perceived institutional homogeneity. My contribution to the research is to be specific, and I investigate institutionally critical practice through a detailed consideration of case studies, which have been selected owing to the way in which they clarify the shifts in the critical agent, how they demonstrate the application of particular critical strategies to specific situations, and their ability to point to an expansion in the universe of possible institutions that might be the objects of critique. Some authors have discussed particular critical strategies, but did not give evidence of illustrative projects, whereas I make the connection between critical strategies and critical projects, matching projects to strategies where no evidence has been cited. I also identify new critical strategies by analysing projects that have been developed by the different agents of critique, appropriate to the changing location and circumstances of displaying art. Thus I expand the coverage of the field of institutional critique by documenting practices, particularly curatorial practices that are not in the mainstream literature. The research leads to conclusions about institutional critique as an increasingly complex and politicised activity, and the implications of its strategies and practices with respect to “re-functioning” institutions.

## Chapter 1 – I(i)nstitutional C(c)ritique: genre versus practice

Institutional Critique was the name given in the 1980s to a disparate set of artistic practices taking place in the late 1960s and 1970s that investigated art institutions. Most accounts of the subject focused on the work of the “foundational practitioners”, a term conceived by the art historian Kirsi Peltomaki to characterise the work of Broodthaers, Asher, Buren and Haacke (2002). These artists, who were discussed in numerous monographs and exhibition catalogues, and also by Buchloh (2000), Osborne (2002) and in a joint publication by Foster et al (2004), did not, however, constitute a discrete group of practitioners. The homogenisation of their work by the various authorities of Institutional Critique contributed to its genre-isation, foreclosing it in the manner of the historical avant-garde, and inhibiting understandings of institutional critique as an evolving practice. Viewing institutional critique as a set of practices, rather than consigning it to genre-status as Institutional Critique is one of the main purposes of this thesis, particularly as regarding it as different kinds of practice, rather than as artistic practice alone, confers an expansion of possibilities for the concept.

The artists cited as Institutional Critique’s foundational practitioners, who were by no means the only artists having a critical interest in art institutions at that time, were concerned with notions of the museum, the politics of space, and the economic relations around the display of art. The approaches they adopted were varied both in terms of form and content: Broodthaers was primarily concerned with extra-museal investigations and fabricated fictitious museums that mimicked and parodied the processes of established ones. Asher deconstructed viewing spaces for art by pointing to the way in which the organisation of space by the art institutions guided the visitors and fixed their subject positions. In another aspect of his practice, Asher worked on issues of context and what happened to the viewers’ perception of objects when those objects were relocated to a different space, an example of an artist adopting curatorial practices as a critical method “avant la lettre”. Buren was interested in the interconnectedness of the gallery space and the space outside, leading to a recognition that the boundaries between artworld space and life-world space might be breaking down. Haacke was committed to expanding the type of acceptable content to be displayed in museums and galleries and sought particularly to bring works that reflected contemporary socio-economic and political issues into

the display space. He was also concerned with the museum's relationship with its financial sponsors and the instrumentalisation of such relationships.

The works of the early practitioners were sited in, or in the vicinity of, viewing spaces for art and had as their subject the investigation of the framing conditions of art in an expanded and comprehensive sense. However, the way in which they situated their practice was not always the same. Broodthaers and Buren worked inside and outside physical art institutions, while Asher and Haacke primarily responded to invitations from museums and galleries to conduct investigatory projects. They examined aspects of museums and galleries that would afterwards preoccupy curators: Broodthaers' deconstruction of taxonomies was reflected later in an approach to arranging objects that referenced the subject-positions of individual curators rather than established historical trajectories. Asher and Buren's interest in the politics of space were echoed in the site-specific work of many future curators. Concerns that Haacke evinced for the socio-economic and political relationships in which art institutions were positioned, were extended in the increased importance that mediation and publicity would play in the curator's role. These artists produced artworks at a time when the curator's function was different from today in that, despite a few notable exceptions, a curator was understood to be a carer of objects employed by the museum. Although certain institutional curators, such as Edward Fry and Kynaston McShine, were sympathetic to the work of institutionally critical artists, other curators and museum directors such as Dianne Waldman (Buren 2002) and Thomas Messer (Haacke 1971), together with a large number of "anonymous" institutional curators, were less accommodating and defended the institution's position in contestations with artists.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, artists had increasingly adopted a critical function in their practice, displacing the so-called independent academic critic. This shift in the critical agent from the academic critic to the artist was brought about by two interrelated factors, the retreat of the critic, and an expansion in the artist's role. Art critics, schooled in Modernist discourses on the autonomy of the artwork, found it difficult to adapt themselves to the "new art", a term coined by the art historian Geoffrey Battock (1965), that was site-specific, situationally contingent and concerned above all with the institutional frame (Buchloh 1987). The adoption of a leading role in the critique of institutions by artists owed much to changes in art practice, as the production of artworks migrated from the studio to the site of display. As the focus of critique moved from the autonomous art object to the situated art

institution, artists used different critical strategies from those employed by academic critics. On the one hand, it was argued that the artists' ability to be critical was impaired by their proximity to, and vested interest in, what they were investigating. On the other hand, their intimate knowledge of the processes of museums and galleries gave them different insights into the possibilities for critique. Buchloh explained that this meant that artists were becoming more responsive to the context in which their work could be shown, and that increasing sensitivity to situation, and a decline in notions of the autonomous nature of the artwork, had provided opportunities for artists to investigate and critique the institutional frame (1987 and 1990).

In this chapter I explore the tension between accepted notions of Institutional Critique as an art historical genre and institutional critique as an evolving practice by investigating the subject from different angles. I begin by examining how viewing institutional critique as a purely artistic practice led to its early canonisation. Then I trace the development of institutionally critical practices as discussed by various artists and examine the particular features of the shift in the agent of critique from the art critic to the critical practitioner. In the second half of this chapter, I build the foundations for my contribution to the field of study by investigating the different critical strategies and approaches of the early practitioners of institutional critique as elucidated by the main authorities on the subject. I explain what exactly is being criticised, whether the criticism is taking place on the outside or inside of art institutions, and the precise location of the critique. The relocation of critical practice to the inside leads to the possibility of critique being co-opted by the institution, and the evolution of new concepts of critique, such as embeddedness, which are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### 1.1 The canonisation of Institutional Critique

Existing readings of Institutional Critique as artistic practice alone have led to its early canonisation. In a co-authored publication with Asher, entitled *Michael Asher Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979* (1983), Buchloh argued that Institutional Critique had not only been prematurely historicised and canonised, but also marginalised before it could reach its critical potential. He contended that, “[t]he radical practices of Asher’s generation could be marginalized to the extent that the work was made to appear historical before it had even properly entered the culture” (1983: VII). The “radical practices” to which Buchloh was referring were the institutionally critical artworks

produced by the early practitioners of institutional critique. For these to have “entered the culture”, they needed to be widely circulated, and acknowledged as practices that adopted a critical attitude towards institutions. However, according to Buchloh, Institutional Critique was declared to be part of the art historical canon by art historians, critics and even some artists long before the work had exerted any agency on institutional architectures, processes or relations, or on viewers’ subjectivities.

However, Buchloh not only commented on, but also contributed himself to the canonisation process of Institutional Critique. In “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” (1990), he traced the emergence of institutional critique from Minimalism, post-Minimalism and Conceptualism, thereby inscribing Institutional Critique into the history of Conceptual Art. Buchloh ended his discussion of the critique of institutions in 1969, when it had hardly begun, suggesting he was primarily interested in what he perceived to be Institutional Critique’s point of origin, the moment at which it emerged from the discourses on Conceptual Art. He implied that Institutional Critique was part of an historical process of Conceptualism that was now closed. This interpretation of Institutional Critique as an art historical genre relegated it to history, suggesting that the critique of art institutions as a viable on-going avant-garde practice was not possible.

Foster also regarded Institutional Critique as a specific moment in art history. In “Subversive Signs” (1986), he observed that by the mid-1980s, there was a “rejection of all institutional critique” on the grounds that it was either “exhausted” or “academic” (ibid 100). Foster described how the early practitioners explored the institutional frame and the economic logic of the artwork, pointing to ways in which “the production and reception of art are institutionally determined, recuperated and used” (ibid 101). He explained that the early practitioners had set out first to expose the false idealism of the museum, second to refute the aims purported by avant-garde practice that it was necessary “to *destroy* the institution of art”, and third to demonstrate that many artists had failed to understand the institution of art and were locked into an antiquated mode of operating by accepting “the exhibition framework as self-evident” (ibid). Foster argued that the work of the early practitioners was prone to misinterpretation, that Buren’s work was sometimes misread as “painting”, and Asher’s work was misconstrued as “sculpture”, so that the integral critical meanings were missed. In examining the practices of these artists, Foster was doubtful of their critical effects. Rather than being read as “an act of subversion”, such artworks

became “a form of exposition”, and instead of being “the deconstructive delineator of the institution”, the artist simply affirmed it (ibid 103). Noting Asher and Buren’s preoccupation with unpicking institutional frameworks, and Broodthaers and Haacke’s activities in exposing institutional alibis, Foster questioned whether these early practitioners were anything more than “guardians of the demystified myths of the art museum” (ibid 106). This implied that in addition to exposing the fiction of the museum’s neutrality, the artists were so invested in the process of demystification that they created their own myths, so that demystification became a tenet of faith in its own right, something that could not be challenged. Foster claimed that their contribution was limited to raising awareness about the museum’s false claim of objectivity, and that these artists were unable to produce artworks capable of exerting any further agency. Importantly, his article raised questions about the utility, efficacy and relevance of institutionally critical practice within the context of the increasingly commodified art system of the 1980s.

Fraser’s article on institutional critique (2005) reaffirmed the claim that Institutional Critique had itself become institutionalised. She described her involvement in discourses about Institutional Critique through her participation in the Whitney Independent Study Program, where together with her teachers and peers, who included the art historians Buchloh, Douglas Crimp and Joshua Decter, the art critic Craig Owen, and the artists Asher, Buren, Haacke, Gregg Bordowitz, Martha Rosler and Mark Dion, she experienced the almost immediate canon formation of Institutional Critique, saying, “the established canon we thought we were receiving may have just been forming at the time”, and “our perception of those works and texts as canonical, was a central moment in institutional critique’s so-called institutionalization” (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 410).<sup>6</sup> Fraser inserted herself into the centre of the debate about Institutional Critique, claiming possibly to have been the first to put it into print, but also to seal its demise by reducing it to “a pithy catchphrase, packaged for co-option” (ibid).

Fraser contended that practices, which had been labelled Institutional Critique were “for many” regarded as “institutionalized” (a term which she did not define precisely). She observed a canonisation of institutionally critical practice to be taking place and noted that Institutional Critique was being “accorded the unquestioning respect often granted to artistic phenomena that have achieved a certain historical

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<sup>6</sup> References are dated the first year of publication, for example, Fraser (2005). Citations are dated from the publication from which they are taken, for example Fraser’s remarks were reprinted in Alberro and Stimson (2009: 410).

status” (ibid 408). As evidence of this canonisation process, Fraser noted that critical artists were being invited by major museums to create site-specific installations, that discussions on Institutional Critique were appearing in mainstream art journals, and that Institutional Critique was becoming the subject of academic and museological conferences.

The acquisition of genre-status has often been associated with a disavowal of the critical claims linked to institutional critique. For Fraser the canonisation of Institutional Critique provided an opportunity “to dismiss the critical claims associated with it” (ibid 408). For her, the reification of Institutional Critique through its identification as a subject for conferences and articles, and the extension of invitations to celebrated artists to perform critical interventions in museums, negated institutional critique’s agency as a critical practice. She emphasised her point, citing the specific instance of Buren, who was called “an official artist of France” by the art critic, Michael Kimmelman, questioning whether artists, who had become “art-historical institutions themselves”, could “claim to critique the institutions of art?” (ibid 408-409). Fraser observed that Institutional Critique was considered by some of her peer group (whom she did not cite by name) to be obsolete. She identified nostalgic sentiments amongst them which consigned Institutional Critique to the status of an “anachronistic artifact”, belonging to a different period when artists were able take up a critical position either against the museum from within, or from a position outside it (ibid 409). The canonisation of Institutional Critique appears to have been related to statements about its reification and declarations about its obsolescence. However, if institutional critique were to be regarded differently, namely as a practice, what new interpretations might be possible?

### 1.2 The practice of institutional critique

Much of the commentary on institutional critique has concentrated on the objects produced and situations created by its early practitioners, but less importance has been ascribed to their critical writings. The fact that the artists were critics as well as critical practitioners indicated their level of awareness about the implicated nature of their position vis-à-vis art institutions, and several artists wrote about critical practices that investigated art institutions before such practices had been designated as institutional critique. Mel Ramsden explained what it meant to be critical with respect to the system of art and scoped out some limits to criticality (1975). He particularly identified many of the concerns that were to preoccupy subsequent authors: namely

the bureaucratisation of the art market, the expansive nature of the institution of art, the problem of defining its boundaries, the internalisation of the values of the art system by its participants, the claimed futility of critique and the failure of critical practice. Buren (1969) and Haacke (1974) both investigated relationships of power in the artworld, focusing respectively on the economic might of leading art galleries and the financial clout of large corporations that sponsored art. Buren also took issue with the tendency of museum architecture to dominate the artworks it contained (1968), a point that Fraser would raise later in her artistic practice in her critique of the Guggenheim Bilbao, *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001). These artists critiqued both art institutions and the art system, with differing points of emphasis, and all questioned the museum's putative claim to neutrality, a position also adopted by the critic Brian O'Doherty in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976).

Ramsden's article "On Practice", first published in the Art & Language journal *The Fox* 1 (1975) was the most comprehensive piece of writing on the critique of institutions to be crafted before the term was officially coined. Pre-empting Foucault, he directly addressed art that critiqued art institutions, asserting that to "dwell perennially on an institutional critique without addressing specific problems within the institutions is to generalize and sloganize" and "may have the unfortunate consequence of affirming that which you set out to criticize" (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 176). Ramsden argued in favour of creating a context for the "recognition of the possibility of *practice*" and outlined, but did not give details of, a wide-ranging agenda for critical practice that emphasised the need for precision with respect to what exactly was being criticised in which particular institution. He alluded to the fine line that existed between criticism and affirmation, implying that a critical intention on the part of an artist might be transformed into an affirmative interpretation in the minds and eyes of critics and spectators.

Many of the subjects discussed by Ramsden were integral to a later understanding of institutional critique as a recognised approach to questioning the institution of art and the way in which art institutions have become entangled with the art market. However, Ramsden's primary interest was not in art institutions, but rather with the workings of the art market, and the power of its agents, such as art galleries and art dealers. He expressed concerns about the "bureaucratisation of the art market", noting that agents, such as the art administrators, the art dealers and the art critics, that once seemed to be the "neutral servants" of art, have now become art's "masters" (ibid 171). He observed that artists were mere "prices on the media

market” and that they were treated as “commodities” (ibid). So the monetary value of art was deemed to be more important than its symbolic value by those agents who occupied higher positions in the art market hierarchy than the artists. For Ramsden, the bureaucracy in the art world was just like bureaucracy everywhere else – “[i]t is fundamentally a method of centralising power and control” (ibid 188).

Ramsden’s notion of “bureaucracy” did not refer to “a massive centralized organization” but rather to the fact that the way in which people interrelated with each other was “directed through the impersonal operation of market institutions and private administrative control” (ibid 177). The key to the hegemony of these institutions “lies in the ease with which they perpetuate and control roles” (ibid 188). He argued that artworld bureaucrats claimed falsely to be “impartial administrators”, and made decisions that although they appeared to be “rational and universal”, were often “whimsical” and “biased” (ibid). He contended that “official culture”, through the operation of market institutions, disguised the specificity and “instrumentality” of language and used a “constructed language” resembling “universality” to ensure that the cultural establishment maintained control of the interpretative influences of the art system (ibid 187).

Observing the on-going, permanent nature of institutions, Ramsden observed that institutions have existences that are independent of art practice, and that rather than nurturing art practice, they alienated it. He contended that art institutions “constitute a bureaucratic tyranny” and that institutional agendas were “*logically separate*” from art practice. He maintained that, “[t]he inability to really bring about change...is because our mode of operation is ‘professionalised’, specialized, autonomous and essentially quaintly harmless (but essential to) the mode of operation of the market structures” (ibid 198). Voicing his concerns about the co-option of critical practice by art institutions, he further argued that “[t]he bureaucracy will subsume even the most persistent iconoclasm unless we begin to act on the realization that its real source of control lies in our very concept of our own ‘private’ individual selves” (ibid). According to Ramsden “the ruling market” defined the “standards of intelligibility” (ibid 171). He did not define precisely what he meant by this, but the phrase implied the criteria of quality and acceptability that qualified a work to be accepted as art and named as art. The problem according to Ramsden was that these criteria were never sufficiently challenged by artists, and therefore their attempts at critique were bound to fail. The core of the problem, he contended, was that artists were an integral part of the market system they sought to criticise, and as

they had internalised its values, the work they produced was affirmative of that system.

Ramsden asserted that artists had accepted a commercial validation of their talents and were ready to submit to the mechanism of monetary value as the determinant of aesthetic value: “I know, for example, that rapid ambition and careerism – almost the New York art world’s *raison d’être* – are present in myself...there are others like me...we now practice with the market in mind” (ibid 171-172). Ramsden said, “we don't just create freely and only afterwards get bulldozed by the market” – artists intentionally produce work that is suitable to be acquired by private collectors and public institutions (ibid 172). In other words, art encountered capitalism not just at the point of distribution, but at the point of production as well.

For Ramsden, the principle problem was the readiness of individuals to internalise not only capitalism but also institutional hegemony and he pointed to the importance of the role of the subject in this context. He observed “there is an *internalization* of capitalist rule within the very concept of the self” in that “[p]eople *do* equate happiness with the ethic of consumption” (ibid 180). In addition, he acknowledged that the individual was situated in a set of “political, economic and administrative processes” which constituted “a massive, overarching apparatus of control over all aspects of everyday life” (ibid 180). He argued that the “key to the power of these institutions (of art) lies in the ease with which they perpetuate and control *roles*” (ibid 189). In other words “the whole art world bureaucracy is a smoothly functioning part of imperialist capitalism” (ibid 198). Ramsden viewed the existing audience-artist relation as one between a producer and a consumer rather than what was, in his view, more desirable, namely “a dialogical exchange between two or more persons with the potentiality for transformation and (re) socialization (learning) of that encounter” (ibid 187). Thus for Ramsden, the artist became an “administered functionary”, anxious to sell himself/herself to the market, to the extent that success for artists was not derived from community praxis, but from their socio-economic role within the bureaucratic system (ibid 189).

Ramsden’s critique of art’s participation in the art system was directed against a particular genre of art which, he did not define precisely, but which he variously called “seventies Modernism” or “adventurist Modernism”. He described this type of art as “anachronistic”, lacking in “theoretical self-consciousness” and without “practical-social awareness” (ibid 174). For Ramsden the fatal error of “adventurist

Modernism” was to consider art market relations to be merely an incidental problem operating in the background, rather than regarding the power and control exercised by the market and epitomised by the “corporate-international museum” as the primary problem for art (ibid 175). He was concerned about the way in which this “haute adventurist style” of art became conflated and confused with the “espousal of radical politics”, creating the conditions for the production of a critical art that was “harmless”, namely without any real critical effect (ibid 192). He observed that although art and politics had become inextricably intertwined within the complexities of “Modern Art”, “they lack any *trenchancy*” and simply “seem to drift indigestibly about in the *Kunstwelt* glamour-careerist-empty-media” (ibid 174). This implied that even when art was intended to be critical, it became instrumentalised by the art market.

Speaking against the “specious neutrality” of criticism, Ramsden argued that criticism, as it was generally practiced, had neither a clear strategy nor a set of objectives. Criticism, in Ramsden’s opinion, simply derived its legitimacy from being part of the bureaucratic machinery of institutionalised art. He held the art critics accountable for the flaws and failings that he found in “adventurist Modernism” and claimed that the critics were responsible for constructing a false reality about art. According to Ramsden, art criticism provided “a paradigm case of what art world bureaucracy really is”, as criticism treated art as a “neutral spectacle” that was “bourgeois” in its orientation and celebratory in its effects (ibid 177-178). He observed that the existing approach to criticism was a limited process of “assessing and grading”. Criticism was compromised, being identified with the “commodity treatment of persons” and the “unreflexive, unproblematic, and entrenched commodity use of language” (ibid 178). Rather than revealing ideology, Ramsden argued that the critic buried it and served the market, acting not as its liberator, but as its “police force” (ibid).

According to Ramsden, the function of criticism as then practiced was simply to keep order by creating hierarchies of individuals, and to classify artworks by “judging the worthiness of things” (ibid). For him, criticism had only a superficial plausibility, as “it has no program, no method, and makes no declaration of principles and commitments” (ibid). Moreover Ramsden attested that the critic was assumed to be rational and objective, with an “authoritarian significance”, and possessed a “God-given” right to appraise artworks (ibid). As far as Ramsden was concerned, almost all-existing art criticism was unable to acknowledge the market function as

epistemologically and morally problematic. Art critics of the “hack trade journal kind”, “the privileged civilization-touting secure academic” and “the hip young movement-dubber” were, in his opinion, all role-serving assessors disconnected from practice (ibid). Their use of language affirmed market hierarchies through the adoption of viewpoints that claimed objectivity, rather than acknowledging the existing subject positions that they themselves held.

Ramsden was equally concerned about the failure of critical practice as performed by artists. He claimed that the activity of artists was arbitrary, suggesting that their critical practices were ineffective and served to affirm the art system rather than to contest it. Despite producing an on-going critique using a variety of different practices and methods, for Ramsden such modifications to practice simply produced “an endless spectacle”, leaving the status quo intact. The problem with positing oppositional alternatives, he contended, was that frequently all they produced was an “alternate bureaucracy”, rather than an “alternative to bureaucracy” (ibid 177). He found that many artists who considered themselves to be critical practitioners were self-delusional, in that despite being politically aware, they failed to make the necessary connections between the work they produced and the way in which it was appropriated by the market.

To provide evidence of his position, Ramsden examined some of the early histories of critical practice, observing the practitioners’ attempts to deal with the “hegemony of market relations” (ibid 193). He criticised the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC) for accepting the status quo, for thinking that everything would be “just fine” if only the institutions would “*behave*” (ibid 194). The AWC thought that art institutions were simply a “neutral background temporarily needing knocking into shape” (ibid 196) and that the institutions were perfectly acceptable as they were, provided those “in administrative power” were replaced with individuals compliant with the AWC (ibid). Ramsden criticised the AWC for its inherent lack of radicalism, contending that the real problem with the coalition was its failure to deal with the issue of work or art practice. He argued that the AWC's refusal to discuss the very concept of “work”, whilst privileging the “individual” artist, left “the present controlling power roots undisturbed” and drove “an *exceptionally effective wedge* between ourselves [the artists] and possible social action” (ibid). In other words, Ramsden argued that the art institution's power lay in its ability to define an artwork as the original work of an artist-auteur. So long as representation in the institution remained the artist’s primary goal, institutional hegemony over the artwork would be maintained. It was up to

critical artists to continually ensure that their work was controversial, even though institutions might totally ignore this strategy.

Ramsden was also disappointed with the failure of Conceptual Artists to provide a radical alternative to “Adventurist Modernism”. For him Conceptual Art was only “serious” around 1968-1970, and raised some useful questions about the nature of the artwork as a marketable commodity (ibid 197). Subsequently, this artistic approach failed to assail market relations in a convincing way, and much of it was simply “empty stylistics”, ignoring its “material-practice problem world” (ibid 197), and becoming part of the “pseudo-pluralistic spectacle of the seventies” (ibid 193). Referring to the production of conceptual work that questioned the nature of an artwork as a marketable commodity, Ramsden argued that this was merely a diversification away from the way in which art was usually made, rather than a challenge to the art system as a whole. Maintaining that change took place only when the internal contradictions of a socio-political system created the conditions for its own breakdown, Ramsden asserted that Conceptual Art’s potentiality for engendering a radical change in the art system was limited given that it only suggested a diversification in the way in which art could function, rather than exposing and challenging the contradictions under which art actually functioned (ibid).

Importantly, however, Ramsden did speculate on where the opportunities for oppositional alternatives to the “tenacity” of institutions might lie (ibid 180). He acknowledged that although “part of the drive for disassembling institutions is to escape from the institutions’ topicalizations and sanctioned problems”, the other impetus came at the personal level in that institutional deconstruction involved dismantling the self (ibid 179). Ramsden articulated, “my concept of myself, my role (practice), is the biggest problem of all” (ibid: 181). For Ramsden it was important that people acknowledged that they had internalised the market system and that any attempt to disturb its relations could also mean going against one’s material self-interests. This meant acknowledging that any subversive or critical activity undertaken did not leave an individual, “pure, unscathed and free”; in other words Ramsden argued that even critical artists were implicated in the institutions they addressed (ibid).

Having elaborated on his scepticism about critical practice, Ramsden imagined a radical alternative to the “official culture”, which was tantamount to defining critical practice as a form of criticism with limitations. He contended that any

opposition to the art establishment that might be effective in bringing about change, needed to be conceived in a way that “does not embody a commodity mode of existence” (ibid 172). He sought an “oppositional alternative (or numerous such alternatives)” which were outside the exchange-driven apparatus of the market and which actively challenged its premises (ibid). He argued that artists should “de-professionalise” themselves by finding ways of working outside institutional structures, but also questioned to what effect. If a few artists succeeded in opting out of established systems of display, distribution and exchange, their “heroic” stance might attract a few supporters, but no lasting change would be brought about and the existing art market and institutional hegemonic structures would remain intact. Ramsden argued that it might be possible to achieve an “oppositional alternative” as collective practice of the type that Art & Language espoused, though he gave no details about how this might be achieved. He also considered other agents of critical practice in terms of their ability to bring about a radical alternative, noting that certain art practicing communities, feminist and activist groups fell outside the mainstream “market institutions”, but that their size and relatively rarity meant their contribution to the cultural sphere was largely insignificant. While such groups might offer some alternative to bureaucratic practice, he argued that they lacked power, saying “[i]sn’t it this power which enamours most of us with what we can call Official Culture?” (ibid 172).

As Ramsden situated his critique of art institutions and the art market system within an anti-capitalist framework, he directed the discussion towards notions of “disassembling” and superseding the existing nexus of power and knowledge. For him the majority of artists, commercial art galleries and museums epitomised the “haute adventurist style”, producing, delivering and displaying commoditised art for the purposes of ownership and self-affirmation. He attested that the art market system was entirely in charge of the ruling discourse, arguing that because existing art practice had adapted itself to market structures and institutional hegemonies, its ability to criticise had been neutralised. In calling for new standards of “intelligibility”, he emphasised the need to free language from the interpretative influences of the controlling institutions. He argued that artists were an integral part of the art market system and were primarily interested in the commercial validation of their work. However, claiming that artists arguably only produce work “with the market in mind”, as Ramsden did, categorised and homogenised practitioners in a way that did not reflect the realities of individual art practice, as some artists, as Battock explained,

sought the institutional validation and the critical legitimacy of their practices as their primary objective (1968). Ramsden, however, qualified this position by explaining that the challenge was to produce art that critiqued the existing nexus of influence and power in order to construct an “alternative” (ibid 192). He contended that some artists, working inside institutions, such as Buren and Haacke, were self-reflexively aware of the problems inherent in the existing system, with Buren’s practice drawing attention to “the Kunstwelt power matrix”, and Haacke as explaining the relationships between economic and cultural power.

The arguments that Ramsden posited, namely the way in which the institutions of art controlled the specific languages of art and the discourses about art, were concerns that preoccupied other artists and also art historians in their critique of institutions, as I analyse, in subsequent sections of this chapter. *The Fox* and information about the activities of its contributing circle were not widely distributed, and so Ramsden’s analysis of the hegemony of cultural institutions and the power of the art system was only read by a few critics and artists at the time. This made it possible for other artists and art historians emerging later to acquire more recognition as instigators of the approach known as Institutional Critique than might have otherwise been the case. *The Fox* had nevertheless set out a list of issues – regarding the inherent dependency of art on its institutions, the call for a broad-base opposition to the official culture, the critique of representation, the issue of private taste being used as a public legitimator of art and the strained relationship between artistic and activist practices – that were to recur in many different guises in the future.

Despite the fact that Ramsden produced the most thorough and wide-ranging critique of the art system, other artists have played a more prominent and visible role as institutional critics, possibly because they have combined art practice (the production of works) with art writing. Buren’s texts echoed many of Ramsden’s concerns about the mechanisms of the art system and he focused on an analysis of the power held by celebrated artists and opinion-forming museums and galleries (1969). Buren identified who controlled representation, display and circulation in the art market, maintaining that, power resided “with a certain artistic avant-garde, allied with certain powerful groups”, which together applied a literal censorship across a broadly understood cultural field, and that “[t]his can be detected in the information which they distort, and in the history which they write and can afford to circulate” (2005: IB-6). However, he was more optimistic than Ramsden about the agency of art

practice, contending that it was necessary to “maintain the struggle in the artistic field against all forms of power from which both the work and the artist suffer”, and that there was a “need to recapture the discussion which certain usurpers have tried to monopolize” (ibid 8).

Buren, like Ramsden, challenged the museum’s claimed neutrality, but was less concerned than him about the museum’s participation in the capitalist art system, and more interested in the way in which the museum asserted its hegemony over the artworks it contained. In Buren’s view the museum was “the single viewpoint where a work is seen and in the final analysis the single viewpoint from which the work is produced” - this could mean that the work was physically produced in the museum, and that it was also “produced” in a discursive sense, in that the viewer’s engagement and interpretation were required to complete the artwork (ibid). Buren argued that, “the Museum/Gallery becomes the mythical framework, distorting everything that goes into it” (ibid 6). He explained how the museum framed artworks and irrespective of their original context or subject matter, inscribed them with a universal timelessness, conveying the impression that they were precious autonomous objects. By collecting work, the museum selected what was of value – in both economic as well as aesthetic terms – and by implication deselected works that were deemed to be of little value. According to Buren (1968) the museum became the dominant position from which works could be considered, and its imposing “physical presence” and “cultural weight”, confirmed it as the legitimating authority for art (Bronson and Gale 1983: 58).

In addition, Buren investigated the unsuitability of museum architecture in which some artworks were located, arguing that the architecture existed for itself, rather than being an appropriate place of display for artworks. He contended that art and architecture existed in a reciprocal relationship with one another, namely “neither is it a question of art submitting to architecture, nor of architecture wedding art” (ibid 72). Buren observed how, for example, the Guggenheim Museum acted as “the overbearing mother”, given the way in which it “excludes what is exhibited” in favour of “its own exhibition” (ibid 73). He argued that, “the questioning work of art has an obligation to employ all possible means, including subversion, to reveal the false discretion of these depersonalised architectures” (ibid).

Haacke, like Ramsden and Buren, observed how the museum failed in its claim to neutrality, elaborating on these points in “Provisional Remarks” (1971). He discussed the reasons behind the cancellation of his exhibition by Thomas Messer,

the then director of the Guggenheim Museum, owing to the controversial nature of his project investigating Manhattan real estate, entitled *Shapolsky et al* (1971). Haacke contested the decision, claiming that it violated the museum's stated policy of being actively engaged in social and political issues. For his part the director argued that although he personally approved of socio-political art when it was generalised in its orientation, symbolically significant, and of aesthetic merit, in his opinion, Haacke's work, given its factual specificity, had introduced "alien substances" into the museum (Kravagna 2001: 47). By censoring these works, the museum as a major validating instrument for culture, discriminated against challenging artworks in favour of less controversial ones. However, the cancellation of the exhibition also drew attention to the fact that Haacke was trying to gain recognition for the representation of social, economic and political issues in the museum.

Haacke was also critical of the financial relationships that existed between the museum and its sponsors, a point he discussed in "All the "art" that's fit to show" (1974), describing the institution of art as "politicised" from the outset in that its ideological persuasions were influenced by the type of funding it received. Haacke explained that whereas publicly financed institutions were "subject to the approval of the supervising governmental agency", privately sponsored museums "naturally reflect the predilections and interests of their supporters" (op cit 2001: 73). In "Museums Manager of Consciousness" (1984), Haacke referred to a brochure issued by the Metropolitan Museum in 1984, entitled "The Business Behind Art Knows the Art of Good Business", arguing that this publication revealed the instrumentality behind the corporate sponsorship of art exhibitions. Haacke, whose views on the financialisation of art were similar to Ramsden, commented on how this text was likely to seduce many prospective corporate sponsors with the enticement that "[m]any public relations opportunities are available through the sponsorships of programs, special exhibitions and services", and "[t]hese can often provide a creative and cost-effective answer to a specific marketing objective, particularly where international, governmental or consumer relations may be a fundamental concern" (op cit 121).

Haacke elaborated on the instrumentality of funding, pointing out that exhibitions which failed to fulfil the required criteria, as defined by corporate sponsorship policies, would not receive adequate financing. For instance, exhibitions that "promote critical awareness, present products of consciousness dialectically and in relation to the social world, or question relations of power, have a slim chance of

being approved” (ibid 121-122). According to him, museums and public galleries made changes to programming strategies to satisfy their corporate sponsors and private funders. In order that corporate strategies of persuasion were convincing, the myths of the neutrality of the museum, namely that art was above partisan interests and ideological disagreements, had to be maintained. He viewed the museum as a locus of vested interests, arguing that, “[a]n institution’s intellectual and moral position becomes tenuous only if it claims to be free of ideological bias”. He contended that, “such an institution should be challenged if it refuses to acknowledge that it operates under constraints deriving from its sources of funding and from the authority to which it reports” (ibid 118).

The artists discussed in this section had set up various positions in relation to criticality and the institution, which were useful in explaining the notion of institutionally critical practice versus a canonised version of Institutional Critique. This would lead to the idea that institutional critique was ongoing and relevant, even if its authorities had canonised some of the artists and artworks associated with it.

### 1.3 From the art critic to the critical artist

As well as contributing to the canonisation of Institutional Critique, art critics also used their recognition of the shift in the critical agent to reassert their authority over institutionally critical discourses. It was an important reaffirmation of their voice, given the tension between traditional Modernist criticism, whose function it was to pass judgements on works of art, and the emerging critical artistic practice that threatened to “dethrone” traditional art critics from their position as art’s leading validators. The shifts in the critical agent addressed the changes in who was performing the critique, what it meant to be critical, and what kinds of criticality were appropriate for different types of art institutions. Although the first shift from the art critic to the critical artist, had led to the co-option of critical artistic practices and the canonisation of Institutional Critique, further shifts might have the potential to generate different kinds of critical strategies, thus enabling institutional critique to evolve beyond its narrow categorisation as an art historical genre.

In documenting the first shift in the agent of critique, Buchloh had explained the traditional role of the academic critic as the guardian of the art historical canon (1987). The critic decided what constituted art and where a particular work belonged in the genealogy of art history. It was this ability to independently assess aesthetic quality and art historical significance that qualified the critic to canonise artworks.

Buchloh observed, however, that the conditions of criticism in the 1980s, the period during which institutional critique became a recognised term, were very different from the 1960s and 1970s, and proclaimed the critic as *the* authority able to perceive changes in approaches to criticism. He observed that criticism had become remote from contemporary art practice and that it had become “disenfranchised, especially in regard to its capacity to legitimate” (Foster 1987: 68). Buchloh contended that with the fusion of high art production into the culture industry, the traditional functions of the critic to identify new tendencies, to validate innovation and to contain rupture and contestation, were also becoming obsolete, arguing that “the critic as fourth voice among author, market and institution” had been silenced and that “the defeat of the critic’s function seems complete” (ibid 69).

Clarifying that the positions adopted by academic critics were “depoliticized”, he asserted that it had been the traditional function of the critic to transcend specific political issues. He described this work as “apolitical”, owing to “a self-imposed condition of passivity and complacency”, so that attention to “discursive detail” and “scholarly exactitude” superseded an “activist and interventionist” approach to criticism (ibid 67). However, he considered the attitude of the academic critics to be surprising, given that the artists with which they were concerned, “programmatically foreground the conflict between high and mass culture and insist on the transformation of its historical dialectic” (ibid 67). Buchloh suggested that there was a dichotomy between the supposedly autonomous art that these critics normally commented on, and the socially- and politically-engaged art that was emerging in post-minimalism and post-conceptualism. He identified tensions between the conservative, academic positions associated with the traditional role of critics charged with the canonisation of artists and artworks, versus the changing practices of the contemporary artists, and the attributes of the artworks in terms of site-specificity, institutional interrogations and politically engaged work, with which contemporary critical practice was actually concerned.

Buchloh contended that the academic critic had not entirely disappeared, it was simply that academic criticism had no place outside the universities, and this “once-independent force” had become irrelevant in the “management of aesthetic consciousness” (ibid). Stating that, “a ghettoised contemporary critic today poses little threat to the already confirmed institutional and economic consent regarding high cultural production” (ibid 68), he noted that the criteria of artistic evaluation had been relocated outside of the academy into the realm of institutional and economic

power, severing “all links with the reality principle of history”, so that meaning and art history, namely the artistic canon could be (re)-constructed according to the “needs of the moment” (ibid 69).

Buchloh observed that the decline in the importance of the critic from the apogee of Greenbergian formalism had created a void into which a different type of critique, one generated by artists, might have a role to play. The academic critic was mostly unwilling to accommodate the prevailing new art forms of site-specific and politically engaged practice and gradually ceded the critical function to artists, which led to a loss of critical distance. Although academic critics were far from neutral, as they claimed, given that their positions were formed by the institutional subjectivities in the universities in which they worked, nevertheless as non-practitioners, they were at least more distant than the artists, from the institutionally critical art practices that they evaluated. Artists, on the contrary, were often deeply embedded in the institution that was both the subject and locus of their critique.

Buchloh maintained that artists had assumed the role of legitimators, but instead of contesting the dominant cultural and ideological apparatus in the way that academic critics had done, artists were in the process of delivering “valorization” and “institutional affirmation” (ibid 68). The participation of neo-avant-garde artists in the culture industry and the fact that validation and affirmation could be performed from within the art system, provided a different perspective than the previous regime of academic critics. It was within this constellation of mutual interests that art practice provided institutional and discursive critique – with the possibility, however, that the critical inquiry was then embedded and potentially affirmative of the institution it intended to critique.

With artists acknowledged as being responsible for critique, not only was the process of academic canon formation becoming redundant, but it also became easier for institutions, given their close contact with artists, to absorb critical projects. According to Buchloh, artists associated with institutional critique were complicit from the outset. He argued that, in the process of becoming institutional critics, the artists had abandoned the radical premises for which they once stood, and that these practices were being appropriated by the very market that these artists had previously sought to avoid, or were being interpreted in a way in which the artist may not have originally intended. As evidence of this, Buchloh cited the example of an installation by Buren at the Royal Opera House in Brussels, which although conceived by the artist as a critique of formalist aesthetics, was received as “mere architectural

decoration” (ibid 69), indicating a divergence between the artist’s intention and the critical reception of the work.

Buchloh was concerned about artists taking over the role of the critic because artists, by dint of being implicated in the institution, could not, unlike academic critics, perform objective, detached criticism. Buchloh had a particular investment in so-called objective, independent, academic criticism by virtue of his own profession, but his writings did not consider the institutional ideologies of the universities. Although Buchloh claimed that academic criticism was non-partisan, the evidence suggests that this type of criticism was subject to various influences, such as power relations, institutional hierarchies, state intervention and peer pressure. However, although art critics were ideologically entrenched in the universities, they were at least critically distant from the art market.

Buchloh was aware of the evolution in critical practices that was taking place, observing that “art after minimalism and pop”, provided visual high culture with “models of a rigorous and systematic institutional and discursive critique”, and that although this form of critique had been prevalent for some time in critical theory, it was new to art criticism (ibid 67). The fact that many artists who worked within the institutional frame were at the same time engaged in institutionally critical practices, required that critics reconfigured their role from that of supporting the hegemonic stance of high visual culture, to embracing new forms of practice that were concerned with collaboration, mass culture, the empowerment of viewers and the ideological formations of institutions. However, there was a hesitation, verging on reluctance, on the part of academic critics to shift their positions, so that the arrival of a more critically engaged heterogeneous art practice subsumed their traditional role.

#### 1.4 Institutionally critical art practice

Despite the fact that Buchloh had participated in the genre-isation of Institutional Critique, he was also an exponent of understandings of institutional critique as critical practice, and similar dichotomies appear in the writings of other authors. In “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” (1990), Buchloh traced the evolution of institutionally critical art practices by exploring changes in the role of artists from producers of objects to critical practitioners. In charting the transformation of the “aesthetics of administration” to the “critique of institutions”, Buchloh examined the lineage of art practice via the preoccupation with framing, and the creation of new modes of distribution and

reception during the 1960s. He argued that institutional dialectics, aesthetic withdrawal, the critique of painting and the interrogation of the readymade, created the conditions for a new function for the artist – no longer the author of singular objects, but an administrative aesthetician, a bureaucrat concerned with the issues of ideological control and cultural legitimation.

Buchloh recognised that “materials and procedures, surfaces and textures, locations and placement”, were not simply visual, phenomenological and linguistic, but were also vested with institutional power and ideological meaning” (ibid 136). He noted that the “aesthetic of industrial production and consumption” was being replaced with “an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation”, implying that institutional critique acquired recognition, as connections were established by artists between documentary material, legal function and the institutional frame (ibid 119). By dismantling the discourses and the inherent conventions of visibility of both the studio and the exhibition space, art practices, according to Buchloh, “firmly established an aesthetic of administration” (ibid 133). These works inscribed a phenomenological experience for visitors rather than a traditionally visual one, and engendered an institutional discourse in addition to an aesthetic one.

Buchloh, as did other authors, disputed the idea that museums constituted a neutral frame for art. He contended that the works of Broodthaers, Buren and Haacke, challenged the “false neutrality of vision” that had underpinned the existence, logic and meaning of those institutions (ibid 137). However, Buchloh’s opinion, that museums should be devoted to “a private aesthetic of contemplative experience”, devoid of “any systematic reflection on the social functions of artistic production”, would be contradicted by the practice of these artists (ibid 119). Buchloh also observed that Broodthaers gave “the most pointed critique of the Conceptual movement to be articulated by one of the artists whom art history has already relegated to that movement” (ibid 109). This statement implied that institutional critique, understood as a practice, could have agency even though some artworks and artists associated with it had been consigned to genre-status as Institutional Critique. It also re-affirmed that the authorities articulated both positions – institutional critique as a set of practices and Institutional Critique as a genre.

Buchloh also commented on the individual practice of institutionally critical artists during the 1980s, and these texts were published in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry – Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (2000). In

“Marcel Broodthaers: Open Letters and Industrial Poems” (1987), Buchloh explained the artist’s critical attitude towards the instrumentalisation of art by the culture industry, the hegemonic approach of the institutions of art, and the perceived failure of the historical avant-garde and Conceptual artists to provide an adequate critique either of art or its institutions. His account of *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, (1968-1971), discussed the way in which Broodthaers questioned mainstream display practices by creating a fictional museum, in which he imitated familiar institutional territory. Broodthaers’ approach was to abstract from the museal process, some of the contested elements of the institutional apparatus, such as the taxonomy of objects and the labelling of art, and to present them as objects of display to engender different meanings. Engaging with Adorno’s notion of the “totally administered world”, Broodthaers reworked the Conceptualist notion of the “aestheticisation of bureaucracy” into the “bureaucratisation of the aesthetic” (Buchloh 2000: 97). Buchloh described how the artist called for “the revolutionary critique of mass-cultural and ideological domination”, while at the same time presenting the *Musée d’Art Moderne* as a parody of Modernism (ibid 103).

Buchloh explained that, for Broodthaers, the possibilities for criticality were limited, because in the artist’s view, art practice has been subjugated to the commodity form and was in itself “inherently fraudulent” and “insincere” (ibid 69). According to Broodthaers, aesthetic production was just one industry among many in “the society of the spectacle”, as explained by the theorist Guy Debord (1967), and the refusal of art practitioners to realise that the aesthetic had been instrumentalised in the service of the cultural industry was what marked the “profound insincerity of the work of art” (ibid 70). Buchloh commented on how Broodthaers predicted the incorporation of the avant-garde into the culture industry, making him “appear a cynical pessimist in contrast to his peers of the late sixties and early seventies who apparently produced a progressive art” (ibid 70). However, in what was typical of Broodthaers’ strategy of publicly reversing positions previously adopted, either contradicting, correcting or updating himself, he also appeared to take a positive view of criticality, stating in an open letter, “I would hope that definitions of art would support a critical vision both of society and of art as well as of art criticism itself” (ibid 95).

Buchloh did not discuss the curatorial methods present in Broodthaers’ practice – the development of the exhibition concept, the arrangement of objects in the exhibition space to convey the intended curatorial messages, and the promotion,

publicity and mediation that made up the curatorial process. Other authors also appeared not to have acknowledged the curatorial elements in the work of the early practitioners. Although the practices of institutional critique foregrounded curating with respect to the institutional context, the staging of exhibitions and approaches to display, they were not recognised as so doing, because at the time curating was regarded as being an institutionally bound activity.

Commenting on other institutionally critical practitioners, in “Daniel Buren: Les Couleurs/Les Formes”, Buchloh expressed his concerns about the validity of criticism within the cultural context of Paris at the beginning of the 1980s (1981). He argued that whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, art practice was encouraged to be critical of the socio-economic and political establishment, by the 1980s, “the last vestige of artistic “freedom” – to simulate critical reflexivity, autonomy and transgression” had vanished (Buchloh 2000: 120). Instead art was required to play a supportive and affirmative role and “remain within a traditional definition and ideology of *culture*” (ibid 121). He argued that as the public authorities and private enterprises had taken control of artistic production and distribution, formal opposition to, and conceptual negation of, art institutions were no longer possible, supporting points on the affirmative role of art that Ramsden had made earlier.

Buchloh further elaborated his position on the role of the artist in institutional critique in “Farewell to an Identity” (2012), in which he discussed a series of dilemmas that critical art practice faced with respect to the audiences it addressed. He questioned particularly whether such practices could avoid the spectacularisation and fetishisation to which they had become subjected, and asked whether it was possible to collaborate with peripheral cultures to assist them in building an “historical identity” appropriate to their role in the global art system, rather than reasserting “the vanishing basis of cultural legitimation defining Western societies” (ibid 261).

Buchloh observed that, “the emergence of institutional critique” - as articulated by the early practitioners, Asher, Broodthaers, Buren and Haacke, and by artists critiquing ideological hegemonies such as Lawler - was a precursor to Andy Warhol’s “Art Business vs. Business Art” in the *Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1975). Earlier Buchloh had left open the possibility of institutionally critical practice, but had not cited many instances of this approach (1990). By 2012 Buchloh recalled institutional critique as a far more effective force than he had previously acknowledged, arguing that “[a]rmed with an Enlightenment

belief in the unstoppable progress of institutional critique and artistic critiques of the discourse of power” (ibid: 253), he used to consider Warhol’s work to be a parody of the consequences of an ever expanding artworld at the time. However, it was only with the benefit of hindsight, that it was clear to him that Warhol’s preoccupation with the commodity fetishisation of the artwork, and the increasing hegemonic power of the institution of art, were far from being an amusing parody, and were in fact highly critical and prescient of what was to follow.

Buchloh noted that during the period 1860-1960, the critique of art practice and the imagination of a “different order” seemed feasible (ibid 253), and that “bourgeois discourses” could be challenged by counter-discourses emanating from a variety of fields, including “utopian politics” (ibid 254). Post-1960 he argued that criticality was disavowed, as avant-garde practices were constrained by exclusion, marginalisation and co-option (ibid). Recently, artistic transgression had, according to Buchloh, been tolerated within the “bourgeois, capitalist order”, provided it did not cross the “boundaries of discursive and institutional containment”, namely the conventions of the museum (ibid). He identified the museum as the site where certain forms of critical art practice were accepted by a process of canonisation and acculturation.

In Buchloh’s view artists had succumbed to integrating their projects into the ideological and economic structures with which they collaborated. They were subsumed into “an ever-expanding structure of cultural control”, mimicking in their work “the apparatuses of industrialized culture itself” (ibid 257), and they were being simultaneously, co-opted into the established semiotic institutional systems of representation such as advertising and corporate design. For Buchloh, this spelled the foreclosure of “avant-garde practices as agencies of actual transformation”, and the disavowal of the “dialectical capacities of critical negativity and utopian anticipation” of art practice that had formerly been possible (ibid 257). In other words, with respect to the historical avant-garde, and by implication, the neo avant-garde and practitioners of institutional critique, the “radicality of their critiques”, “the plentitude of their anticipatory visions” and their continuing “redefinition of aesthetic experience” were, according to Buchloh, turned into “pseudodemocratic claims for universally accessible artistic competence” in the spheres of production and reception, rather than questioning the institutional forms and processes that sought to assimilate them (ibid 257).

Buchloh returned to the position of Broodthaers, who, in his view, “perpetually posed the question of whether memory could ever be enacted aesthetically, without contributing to an acceleration of the fetishization of culture and an expansion of the spectacle itself” (ibid). Raising questions about the role of aesthetic memory, the failure of avant-garde practice and the demise of the critic, Buchloh saw little potential for critical practice in “Western societies”, unless the “forces of the anti aesthetic” could be intensified, implying that it was necessary to seek methods of critique that were effective against the hegemonic power of cultural institutions and the commodified art system (ibid).

However, Buchloh did not specify how the critical power of the anti-aesthetic might be marshalled to challenge mainstream museums and galleries. In his introduction to the anthology, *The Anti-Aesthetic – Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983), Foster defined the anti-aesthetic as, “a critique which destructures the order of representations in order to reinscribe them” (1998: xvi). Foster contended that the aesthetic was linked to the “modernist project”, namely the idea of the “emancipatory effect” or the “utopian dream” (ibid). He stated that it was hard to renounce the notion of the aesthetic “as subversive, a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world”, but implied, nevertheless, that this needed to be done (ibid xvii). He argued, but without saying what this should entail, that as aesthetic space had been “eclipsed” and that “its criticality is now largely illusory”, a different “practice of resistance is needed” (ibid).

Institutionally critical art practice had by the mid-1990s adopted a wide variety of forms. Buchloh had set up a conceptual framework to characterise the migration of art practice from the studio towards the artist’s preoccupation with the institutional framing conditions of art’s display. He had also recorded a growing recognition of the limitations of critical practice, which was shared by some of the artists whose specific practices he discussed. Other commentators, such as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, posited more positive assessments of the agency of critical practice, evidenced in his discussions with Haacke, which were documented in *Free Exchange* (1995). These diverging points of view raised questions about the efficacy and limitations of practices associated with institutional critique.

### 1.5 Critical strategies

An examination of the different critical strategies that were being developed by artists was made by the various authorities documenting their practices. Fraser was one of the main commentators appraising institutional critique, her opinions have often been cited, and she did more than any other artist-critic to “publicise” its implications. In her article, “In and out of place” (1985), she identified two possible critical strategies: “symbolic” critique, occurring inside the institution of art, and “subversive” critique, enacted outside the institution. In her discussions, Fraser focused on Lawler’s work, and she noted that those practices occurring *inside* galleries, such as Lawler’s exhibition at Metro Pictures in New York in 1982, in which she experimented with curating her own show, had “symbolic value”; a term Fraser used to indicate that the project might raise awareness about specific issues on the part of the viewers.

Many of Lawler’s projects took place *outside* museums and galleries. In the “matchbook” and “invitation” projects, Lawler created parodies of promotional material for art events, which she circulated within the art system. In one instance she adopted the role of a public relations specialist, parodying the media hype around a lecture by the artist Julian Schnabel by creating a “matchbook” inscribed with the words, “An Evening with Julian Schnabel”, which she distributed in the auditorium. In another example, a so-called “invitation project”, Lawler produced and distributed gift certificates that could supposedly be used towards the purchase of Warhol or Rauschenberg works at an exhibition in the Leo Castelli gallery (1983), thereby elaborating her views about the commodity nature of artworks.

In those instances where Lawler’s practice took place outside the gallery, Fraser argued that such projects might “subvert the mechanisms of institutional production”, and constitute a “counter-practice” (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 295). Fraser considered such critical strategies as subversive, because although they were concerned with aspects of the art system, they were not dependent on art institutions for their critical effects. She implied that such subversive critique was more disturbing and counter-hegemonic than critique that was formed within the institution, suggesting that it was more effective. She pointed out that the activity of criticising institutions from a position on the outside, as well as from the inside, was what differentiated Lawler from earlier institutionally critical practitioners, who were mostly responding to institutional mandates. The dual-location and chameleon nature of Lawler’s critique, the fact that she was, “also somewhere/something else”, allowed

Lawler, according to Fraser, to avoid both marginalisation and co-option to which other practitioners were prone (ibid).

Fraser also briefly referred to Asher, Broodthaers, and Haacke, and her cursory summary of their different practices reinforced the canonisation of their work (1985). By setting Lawler's extra-institutional practice in juxtaposition to theirs, Fraser implied that they did not succeed in achieving anything more than a symbolic critique of the institutions with which they engaged. Asher's constructions of exhibition spaces within institutions were described as little more than situational (de)-constructions of institutional architectures that functioned as sculpture rather than as critique. Broodthaers' work was characterised as merely occupying fictional positions of institutional authority, as opposed to Lawler's practice of parodying institutional authority. Unlike Haacke's practice, which Fraser characterised as a pedestrian "documentation of high art's corporate affiliations", Lawler used ironic collaborative practices to reveal the place of art in the market economy and to reposition artists within it (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 294). For Fraser, the actions taken by Lawler to dilute concentrations of institutional authority by locating them in insidious publicity projects outside an institutional context were the most effective form of critique (1985).

Fraser later questioned the nature of critique being practiced inside the art institution. She argued that if artists continued to work within the established frames for production and display, irrespective of whether they performed direct criticism, parody, appropriation, or the uncovering of hidden agendas, the meaning integrated in the critical act would be institutionally conditioned and contained (2005). The views she expressed on institutionally critical practice, and the critical acknowledgement she gave Lawler for working outside the institutional frame, appeared, however, to contradict her own artistic practice which was, between 1985 and 2005, almost entirely located in institutions, and especially given that Fraser actively sought such institutional mandates. Is it possible that Fraser's art practice, documented in her video performances, such as *Museum Highlights: a Gallery Talk* (1989) and *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), which took place in museums, might be considered as potentially critical in ways she did not allow for in her writings.

Fraser had claimed that the institutionally critical practice that took place in museums was merely symbolic. Symbols, nevertheless, have a value and serve to draw attention to, and raise awareness about, issues that are in some way problematic. There may be instances of commissioned projects, where an artist might

interpret a given mandate expansively and imaginatively, thereby challenging the institution's expectations, so that subversive action could be possible, despite the official approval given to a project. There might be room within the sphere of institutionally critical practice for different types of critique that are not limited to the two strategies – subversive and symbolic – that Fraser specifically discussed (1985).

Buchloh viewed the critical strategies adopted by artists differently from Fraser. He noted that critique was possible outside the institution in a radicalised, but marginalised form, though he did not go into specific details (1987). Later he became interested in the strategies of critique that were being generated by the artists he was following, who were working inside museums. He observed that some artists used mimetic strategies to challenge institutional hegemonies: from the late 1960s onwards, Buren and Haacke's work parodied capitalism, turning the mimetic relationship between the work and capitalist practice “back onto the ideological apparatus itself”, in order to criticise the institution (1990: 142-143). By engineering this specular relationship, Buchloh argued that these artists were able to analyse and expose “the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place” (ibid).

In “The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity” (1995), Ward also discussed specific mimetic strategies, such as Haacke's projects, *The Chocolate Master* (1981) and *MetroMobiltan* (1985), which used specular strategies as instruments of critical publicity to investigate corporate involvement in museums. In his commentary on *The Chocolate Master*, Ward explained Haacke's representation of the way in which the German industrialist, Peter Ludwig used his art collection instrumentally to divert attention from his corporate malpractices. In his analysis of *MetroMobiltan*, Ward elucidated the way in which Haacke uncovered Mobil's purpose of sponsoring an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in order to deflect attention from its unsavoury business practices in Nigeria. Ward argued that Haacke's method of critique in portraying troubling images of exploited workers, juxtaposed with information about corporate support for the arts, which he then situated in the museum, created disjunctions that alerted the visitors to the disturbing meanings contained in the work. Given the structural transformation of the public sphere, metamorphosed by mass media and capital, which particularly Haacke demonstrated, Ward argued that these projects might be read as an attempt to claim a role for the museum as “an idealized oppositional public space” (ibid 88). Ward contended that the value of Haacke's work was that it was able to operate effectively

in institutional spaces in which often, contradictory forms of publicity co-existed. In this way, Haacke explored the museum as a compromised cultural space, which “performed” art’s function, and recognised that the museum was a place where controversial issues could be articulated. Infusions of private capital and invasive mass media have had many repercussions for the museum, and this has provided the material for critique, but always with the risk that the critique could be appropriated by the museum. However, according to Ward, there were occasions when the museum, even if only briefly, carried out its role as an institution of critical publicity, and it was this moment that Haacke sought to reclaim (ibid 89).

The art historian James Meyer identified a new critical strategy that had not been commented on by other authors. He sought to reposition institutional critique within the sphere of activist thought in his exhibition, *Whatever Happened to the Institutional Critique* (1993). The accompanying catalogue, criticised the Whitney Biennial of the same year for celebrating “political correctness” in contemporary art, for “generalising the political”, for validating the political as a “style”, and devaluing its critical potential by treating it as if it were the latest trend in cultural consumption. Meyer observed that whereas previously, “institutional analysis required the gallery site to launch its critique” in order to “question the epistemological and material situation of the art apparatus”, by “the mid 80’s this mode of critique had become institutionalized, had itself become a tradition” (ibid 14).

Meyer’s purpose was to declare that institutional critique, as interpreted by the early practitioners, had come to an end, and he wanted to draw attention to the new avenues of institutionally critical practice that were occurring by associating institutional critique with activism. He contended, “[w]hile I recognized the historical importance of these [the former] practices, I could not but feel their irrelevance to the concerns of the present” (ibid). Meyer’s approach was reinforced by the artist Gregg Bordowitz, who participated in the exhibition, contending that he had “no more questions about gallery walls”, and that the “kind of academic understanding” that he used to have about “institutional critique” ultimately “led to a dead end” and “ate its own tail in its formalism” (ibid 12). He argued that it was more productive “to go out and to do work that is directly engaged” and “to produce work that enables people to see what they are doing, that enables them to criticize what they are doing and move on” (ibid 12).

Meyer argued that political and cultural activism in the 1990s had both extended and displaced institutional critique as practiced in the 1970s and 1980s,

and he sought to make connections between institutional critique and other concepts that he considered to be important. Meyer explored the site as an expanded space beyond the confines of a museum or art gallery. He argued that institutional critique should include new artistic and curatorial practices that were developing in response to changing cultural circumstances, stating that, “institutional critique (both in its “classic” and expanded forms), along with activist work (in which it has become intertwined) remain, for me, at this time, the most convincing strategies for an art with claims to the political” (ibid 38). Meyer’s conflation of institutional critique and activism was connected to his interest in the activities of artists involved in direct action advocacy groups, such as ACT-UP. In the late 1960s the Argentinian artists Eduardo Favario and Graciela Carnevale had already explored links between activism and institutional critique. By arguing for art that was activist in its orientation and political in its intention, Meyer made a case for the agency of a new form of institutionally critical practice (1993).

By the mid 1990s artists had adopted various critical strategies with which to carry out their institutional investigations. Fraser had identified one appropriate for working inside the museum (symbolic) and the other more suited to critical activities outside the gallery (subversive); these two positions were predicated on a perception that there was a clear boundary defining what lay inside the art institution and what was beyond. Buchloh and Ward recognised critical strategies of mimesis being carried out by artists, some of which appeared to be specular of institutional processes and others that used a form of mimicry akin to parody. Meyer pointed to the role of activism in institutional criticism, but was unspecific about whether he viewed this as an extra-institutional activity, or an approach that could be marshalled within an institutional framework.

### 1.6 The location of critique

The identification of the different critical strategies employed by artists, showed that on-going critical practices were taking place, despite attempts to canonise Institutional Critique, however, there were differences of opinion about where these critical strategies were located with respect to the institution of art. In the 1960s and 1970s, academic art criticism took place outside art institutions in universities and in art journals, neither of which were considered at the time to be part of the institution of art, which was understood at the time in terms of the physical buildings. The

engagement of artists in critical practice meant, however, that there was no longer such a clear demarcation between what was inside and outside the institution of art.

Earlier Fraser had focused on Lawler, whom she portrayed as being in the act of moving in and out of various locations, which gave the impression that the cultural sphere was heterogeneous and that movement across institutional boundaries was possible. According to Fraser, Lawler's institutionally critical projects were concerned with the minutiae of the "supplements" of art, the way in which the framing attributes of artworks, such as captions, wall texts, installation shots, catalogues and other texts, revealed the way in which readings of artworks might be under the interpretative influences of the gallery. Fraser called these supplements the "marginal supports of art practice", which belied their importance as these objects that named, advertised, documented and historicised works of art, were often used by the gallery to condition viewers' responses to the artworks. Lawler investigated these supports, disentangling their meaning and their functions. Her approach was to situate "her own practice at the margins, in the production, elaboration and critique of the frame", (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 293) and she subverted the mechanisms of institutional presentation, neither depending on the institution for the distribution of her objects, nor even claiming for them the status of artworks.

Buchloh had argued against the efficacy of critique coming from inside the institution, and had postulated a version of critical practice, in support of "those artistic practices of resistance and opposition, which are currently developed by artists outside the view of the hegemonic market and of institutional attention" (1987: 70). He argued that although such practices only attracted marginal audiences and limited critical support, they were the only way of continuing "the radical oppositional potential that the work of the late '60s contained" (ibid 70). In making these comments, Buchloh was at variance with his own practice, as he wrote about artists, such as Asher, Buren and Haacke, whose focus of inquiry was located inside the institution of art.

Later Buchloh discussed the possibilities for critique emanating from within the institution, arguing that in some instances, internally produced criticism might be effective (1990). His realisation that the perceived boundaries between the inside and outside of the institution of art were being eroded, was determined by an acknowledgement that understandings about art were expanding to include: photography, architecture, the readymade – the dependence of art's meaning on its context, the boundaries defined by language, art as an idea, art as an analytic

proposition and speech-act aesthetics – “if someone says it’s art, it’s art” (ibid 126). Buchloh noted that the last residues of artistic aspiration toward transcendence by means of traditional studio skills were being replaced by “the rigorous order of the vernacular of administration”, and a focus on the “discursive and institutional limitations” within which the work was being produced (ibid 142). He claimed that Conceptual Art, by imitating “the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality”, became “the most significant paradigmatic change of post-war artistic production” (ibid 142-143). According to him, artists such as Buren and Haacke were able to analyse and expose “the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place” (ibid 143). By “social institutions”, Buchloh was referring to the opinion-forming institutions such as museums that shaped attitudes, dispositions and behaviours, which Bourdieu also discussed (1979). By “the laws of positivist instrumentality”, Buchloh implied that art institutions had adopted goal-focused, hierarchy-conscious and power-consolidating approaches, whilst the “logic of administration” concerned the institutionality of the museum, the fact that it was necessarily bureaucratized and corporatized.

Adopting a mimetic approach vis-à-vis the museum’s ideological apparatus, institutionally critical artists working on the inside were able to subvert institutional processes by appropriating the very tools and procedures that the institutions themselves employed. Buchloh argued that the institutions, which “determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation” (1987: 142-3), and Bourdieu (1987) made similar points, arguing that cultural producers were subordinate to “the controllers of production and diffusion media” (1993: 125). Buchloh attested to the hegemony of institutions to frame and shape interpretations of works, implying that the institutionalisation of artworks occurred in instances where the institution had the power to determine the meaning and terms of reception of the works. Like Ramsden he implied that museums were homogeneous (which is true in the sense that they all frame art), and hegemonic (which was largely the case at the time these commentators were writing). Buchloh, however, did not attend to the differences, between and within, art institutions. Museums and galleries are in fact heterogeneous, not only different from each other, but, as I discuss in this thesis, also incorporating different bodies of opinion and internal subjectivities.

Ward also located critical practice inside the institution of art and developed

understandings of institutional critique by grounding his analysis in a discussion of relationship between the museum and the historical and neo avant-gardes. Like others, he argued that the museum, despite its claims, had never been a neutral public forum where views could be articulated based on their own merits, rather the museum was always in control of the discourses about art. For Ward, the contribution of certain artists associated with institutional critique was that they were able to expose this hegemony and, as was evident in Buren and Haacke's writings, challenge the museum's claims of neutrality, revealing it instead to be a compromised space. Ward asked if it were possible to conceive a different model, which could be subject to "rational-critical analysis, rather than rationalist domination or mass media spectacularization", particularly as today, in the moment of the blockbuster show, the museum took its place as a public platform promoting a "spectacle culture" (ibid 79).

Ward contended that, it was necessary to reconfigure the art historian Peter Bürger's arguments, as expressed in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), namely that the failure of the historical avant-garde "renders gestures of the neo-avant-garde inauthentic" (1984: 72). Ward contended that both versions of the avant-garde – the "historical", understood as critical practices located outside the museum, and the "neo", which were critical practices located inside the broadly defined institution of art – needed to be viewed separately from the conventions of their perceived binary relationship with the museum. Ward rebutted arguments that the neo-avant-gardes simply re-affirmed institutions and that the historical avant-gardes sought either to undermine them or to render them obsolete, arguing that such positions were "too extreme for a measured analysis of the various practices of institutional critique" (ibid 84), though he gave no hint of what this "third" alternative might be.

Also with reference to Bürger, Fraser (2005) recounted how during the historical avant-garde, "art enters the stage of self criticism" (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 410). Her account of Bürger's analysis explained the way in which artists of the historical avant-garde adopted an adversarial position towards the institution of art, and intended "the abolition of autonomous art" and its integration "into the praxis of life" (Bürger 1984: 54). She observed that the early practitioners of institutional critique, in contrast to certain members of the historical avant-garde, such as the Dadaists, were more intent on defending the institution of art than destroying it. However, she did not clarify whether a "defence" of the museum involved a critical or an affirmatory approach.

Views on the existence of a boundary between the inside and the outside of the institution of art, however, changed over time, owing to an expanded view of what constituted art practice, and also because discourses about art became incorporated into an enlarged understanding of the institution of art. The art historian Miwon Kwon had investigated the expansion of these boundaries in “One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity” (1997). She argued that, “if the critique of cultural confinement of art (and artists) via its institutions was once the great issue”, this had been replaced by “a dominant drive of site-oriented practices” in “the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life”, developing “a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues (blurring the division of art and non-art, in fact)” (ibid 91).

Fraser also acknowledged that ideas about the existence of a perimeter around the institution of art were shifting, and by 2005 she was arguing that there was no longer a clear boundary separating the inside from the outside of the institution, which she no longer defined only in terms of physical buildings, but also included all the projects and discourses that surrounded them. According to Fraser, as art drew its existence from its institutional framing, art could not actually exist outside the institution of art, and moreover all art criticism was part of that same institution. She contended that from the late 1960s onwards, “a conception of the institutions of art begins to emerge that includes not just the museum, nor even only the sites of production, distribution and reception, but the entire field of art as a social universe” (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 412). Fraser elaborated that with respect to “the works of artists associated with institutional critique”, the understanding of the term art institution “came to encompass all the sites in which art is shown – from museums and galleries to corporate offices and collectors’ homes, and even public space when art is installed there”, and that moreover it also included “the sites of production of art, studio as well as office, and the sites of the production of art discourse: art magazines, catalogues, art columns in the popular press, symposia and lectures” (ibid). For Fraser institutional critique was an approach to art that exposed “the structure and logic of museums and galleries”, implying that the best place to be critical was from a position within the institution (ibid 411).

Fraser had contended in 1985 that artists working inside institutional structures might be compromised since critique that functioned within the institutional context, and left all the existing relationships intact, was merely symbolic. She noted that many institutionally critical projects were situated in the institutions

they criticised, in that the artists might be employed or funded by the institution, and given their lack of critical distance, she questioned the effectiveness of their critique. As far as Fraser was concerned, in so far as artists employed traditional modes of production (the studio) and places of functioning (the museum), “aesthetic signification will continue to be locked in an order of institutionalized subjectivity” (op cit 300). Fraser therefore argued, as did Ramsden, that as long as artists continued to accept institutional mandates, their work would be conditioned by the institution in which their work was situated, as the institution both shaped the creative impulses of its participating artists, and controlled the aesthetic meaning and the interpretative influences of the artworks.

Later Fraser claimed that the institution of art comprised not just the museum, nor even only the sites of production, distribution and reception of art, but the entire field of art and its associated discourses (2005). It was this broad definition of the institution of art that framed Fraser’s position on the impossibility of having critical distance from the institution, as the institution was everywhere, fashioning views, opinions and subjectivities. Fraser argued that by moving from an understanding of the institution as “specific places, organizations, and individuals to a conception of it as a social field, the question of what is inside and what is outside becomes much more complex” (op cit 413). Institutional critique insisted, according to Fraser, on “the inescapability of institutional determination” (ibid 414). Artists drove the expansion of the institution by attempting to evade it, but with each endeavour to escape the boundaries of institutional hegemony, and with each attempt to embrace the outside, art discourse proliferated into new areas and the institutional frame consequently expanded to encompass it. So even though museums and galleries might change, Fraser argued that “the underlying distributions of power” were reproduced (ibid 415).

Fraser discussed specific artworks that explored institutional boundaries and examined the location in which the critique was taking place (2005). She investigated Buren’s *travail in situ* (1969) at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp, explaining how the artist tested the physical boundaries of the gallery. This exhibition assumed its visual form by linking together the interior exhibition space and the exterior of the building in which the gallery was located. The work’s formal properties and spatial allocation drew on existing conditions of architectural detailing, enabling Buren to demonstrate that artworks could bridge the inside and the outside of physical sites. Although this project demonstrated differences between interior and exterior locations, it did not consider the institution of art as a discursive space.

In a discussion of Asher's work, Fraser acknowledged the discursive nature of the institution of art. She adduced, with reference to his practice, that the institution of art was not something exterior to the work of art but an a priori condition of its existence as art. She discussed his project *Installation Münster (Caravan)* (1977 and on-going), which consisted of an Eriba Familia BS caravan-car that changed its location in the city every week during Skulptur Projekt Münster<sup>7</sup>. In this work, Asher demonstrated that art "depends not on its location in the physical frame of an institution, but in conceptual or perceptual frames" (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 413).

Fraser argued that Buren's in situ works and Asher's site-specific practice, which studied the condition of institutionality, resisted, owing to their transitory nature, the forms of co-option on which they reflected. These works, she argued, "acknowledge the historical specificity of any critical intervention, whose effectiveness will always be limited to a particular time and place" (ibid 412). Similarly, Fraser viewed Broodthaers' decision to close his fictional museum just three years after its inception as evidence of the limited lifespan of institutionally critical projects. This suggests that Fraser thought that whilst permanent projects might be co-opted, ephemeral projects were less likely to be appropriated by the institution of art.

Fraser had portrayed Haacke unfavourably with Lawler in her earlier article, implying that the situating of his projects within institutions meant that they could only have symbolic value (1985). Later she adopted a different stance, arguing that Haacke personified "institutional critique as heroic challenger, fearlessly speaking truth to power" (op cit 415). This reading of his practice supported the notion of an artist intent on defending the institution of art from the instrumentalisation by political and economic interests. According to Fraser, Haacke understood and represented "the full extent of the interplay between what is inside and outside the fields of art", namely that there was a boundary between an expanded institution of art and the non-art or life world (ibid). These limits were identified as being situated within a network of social and economic relationships at the interfaces between art institutions and other institutions, such as state agencies and corporate sponsors, and similar points had also been made earlier by Bourdieu in his discussions with Haacke (1995).

This shift in the perception of critique as a practice that was internally generated, rather than enacted outside the institution, had implications for the

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<sup>7</sup> Skulptur Projekt Münster is an exhibition of site-specific sculpture held every 10 years in Münster since 1977.

subjectivities of the individuals concerned. Haacke contended that art institutions were able to mould the consciousness of their staff, and he explained that museum employees were quick to internalise the views of their superiors, so that there was a tendency for these positions to become pervasive throughout the institution. However, this influence operated on different people in different ways and the heterogeneity of the subjects implied different responses to the institution's tacit and formal rules (Haacke 1974). In such a controlled, but at the same time fluid environment, occasions presented themselves, where there was a "potential for confusion", as "new cultural manifestations are not always recognizable as to their suitability" (Kravagna 2001: 73-74). Haacke indicated that during these moments of uncertainty, artists were able to perform institutionally critical projects because such projects would not necessarily be recognised as such by the museum authorities. He observed that although artists "are being framed", by the institution, they also "work within that frame" and "set the frame" (ibid 74), suggesting that whilst artists sometimes succumbed to the interpretive influences of the museum, they were able to resist those influences from time to time. In later writings, he developed these points further (1984), observing that "political constellations" were in a constant state of flux and, "unincorporated zones exist in sufficient numbers to disturb the mainstream" (Kravagna 2001: 122).

Changing perceptions about the boundaries of the institution of art complicated understandings about the location of institutionally critical practice. Buchloh and Ward attested to the hegemony of institutions in shaping the interpretation of artworks. Artists from Haacke to Fraser acknowledged that having critical distance from institutions was becoming increasingly difficult and they revealed the ways in which institutions formed the subject positions of the protagonists. Such concerns raised questions about the continued possibility of critique, given that critical practices were increasingly taking place on the institutional inside, suggesting that different notions of critique, possibly ones that were embedded in the institution, might be inevitable.

Ward's text articulated many of the controversies and paradoxes this thesis seeks to address: on the one hand, the historical avant-garde had failed to change the institution of art from being a container for art objects, to being an experimental and radicalised platform. On the other hand, the neo-avant-garde had more modest objectives, namely its aims were more concerned with exposing the hypocrisy of the art world than changing it. Most of the time the institution re-appropriated and

therefore neutralised the critique, but every now and again, the museum functioned as an institution of critical publicity as some of the critical practices performed their functions effectively, efficacy being judged by the infiltration of the artwork's interpretative influences into the social fabric of the museum.

### 1.7 Co-option and embedded critique

The fact that many institutionally critical practices were co-opted by the very institutions of art that they investigated was one of the contributory factors leading to the canonisation of Institutional Critique. Whereas co-option might occur in instances where externally generated critique was appropriated by the institution, embedded critique is to be understood as internally generated criticism. Several authors remarked that institutionally critical practices had been co-opted by the institutions they sought to address, contending that critical works have sometimes been absorbed by institutions either intent on co-opting perceived opposition, or fortifying their positions by learning from the critique. Either the institutions accepted the criticism and were prepared to make changes, or alternatively, they wanted to give the appearance of being progressive by seeming to take the critique seriously. Initially Fraser (1985) had stated that certain "subversive" practices were unable to be co-opted, but by 2005, she argued that the institution "incorporates, co-opts, commodifies and otherwise misappropriates once-radical and uninstitutionalised-practices" (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 411). This implied that critical projects enacted on the outside once had critical purchase, but at some stage, the institution subsumed them, leading to the evacuation of critical potential. This view, however, contradicted Fraser's notion of an all-encompassing institution of art, where the only possible critique was generated internally, in other words the critique was embedded in the institution it purported to criticise.

Did the fact that critique was embedded mean that it risked becoming institutionalised? What was the process of institutionalisation, and at what point did a project or an artwork become institutionalised? Fraser argued that "institutional critique has *always* been institutionalized", that it could only have "emerged *within*" the institution of art and "can only function *within* the institution of art" (ibid 414). Accepting an all-encompassing art system meant that Fraser was obliged to concede that critique could only occur inside the institution, and then question the value of such critique. She argued that unlike other legacies of the historical avant-garde, institutional critique had not sought to destroy the institution of art, but rather had

recognised and acknowledged the expansion of the institution beyond its traditional boundaries, no longer simply a place of display but also a space for the production of objects, and a locus for mediation, performance and discourse. Fraser posited that institutional critique had never been opposed to the institution of art and that it was unreasonable to suppose “that radical artistic practices can or ever did exist outside the institution of art before being “institutionalized” by museums” (ibid 411). Instead, critical artists wanted to have some influence on the interpretative messages of the museum, leading to an activity of working and critiquing in parallel, in the form of an embedded critique.

Although, the term “institutionalisation” seemed to imply a lack of critical effect, it may also be interpreted positively. In his article “Institutionalism for All”, the artist Dave Beech provided a useful counter-argument to Fraser’s position on the institutionalisation of Institutional Critique (2006). Beech argued against viewing all aspects of institutionalisation in an antagonistic manner. He challenged the “taboo” of institutionalisation, namely the negativity attached to the term. Some forms of institutionalisation, he contended may be positive, therefore he called for “Institutionalism for All”. Beech argued that, “[i]nstitutionalisation occurs when the social system gets its grip on art, threatening art’s autonomy, independence and dissent” (ibid 8). According to him, it was not the institutionalisation of the avant-garde per se that was the problem, but the form that institutionalisation took and the way in which it was interpreted. Beech did not specify his understanding of the “avant-garde”, but he seemed to be using the expression in a general sense of being opposed to mainstream art practices. Beech argued that the almost universal “taboo” of institutionalisation should be done away with, and that institutionalisation was a normal process in which avant-garde projects penetrated the institution.

Beech contended that the avant-garde needed to be understood not in terms of its negation of the mainstream, but with respect to its own values, defined as notions associated with: “the death of the author” – namely the importance of collective practice as opposed to individual practice, “the attack on the primacy of the visual” – that is re-rating of other non-retinal art forms, and “the dematerialisation of the art object” – meaning that art did not necessarily have to be expressed as an object, but might be a performance, or an ephemeral event (ibid 9). Beech did not mention in this context the institutional dimension of neo-avant-garde practice, for example the problems that certain groups, such as the Art Workers’ Coalition, had in ensuring the representation of their work in museums. However, he discussed the

artists, Henriette and Jakob Jakobsen, the founders of the art-run space, Info Centre, who contended in, “Self-Institutionalisation: For Good and Ill the Process of Institutionalisation Has Become Internalized”, that art practice “is not exclusively related to the making of artworks, but also includes the establishing of institutions for the experience and use of art” (ibid 10).

Beech debated the utility of artist-run spaces and to what extent they could truly be regarded as non-institutionalised, and concluded that, although artist-run spaces might be funded and managed as independent concerns, they were in no way “ideologically or culturally independent of art’s institutions”, and that “the first condition of art’s independence is not art’s isolation but its contestation in the cultural field” (ibid). Beech’s article is useful in providing arguments against the reductivity of the institutionalisation of avant-garde to which several of the other authors were prone. Avant-garde art practices percolated through various channels of influence within the institution, which was not a homogeneous entity, as Ramsden had already indicated (1975).

According to Fraser, critique was not only subject to institutionalisation, but its validity was also contested by its lack distance from its objects of investigation. She argued that there was no longer an outside to the institution because the “museum and market had grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification” (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 409). Practitioners were unable to achieve critical distance because they were simultaneously caught up in both critiquing and defending the institutions that had moulded their opinions, informed their positions and provided them with opportunities to produce and display their work. In such instances, critical distance was contingent, according to Fraser, on the self knowledge and self-reflexivity of the participants, meaning that if artists were aware that their opinions had been formed by the institution, they might nevertheless be able to set themselves apart from established institutional ideologies. Although the attainment of full self-knowledge is unfeasible, it is theoretically possible for an individual to reflect critically on actions taken. In acts of self-reflexivity, people consciously shape their own opinions, tastes, desires and reactions to events, rather than being solely influenced by factors in their environment.

Fraser claimed that “we are the institution”, characterising the institution of art as internalised by participating individuals. She argued that the institution was not only institutionalised in organisations, such as museums and art galleries, it was also embodied in people. She contended that “the institution is inside of us”, and is

“internalised in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception which lie behind us producing art, writing about art, understanding art, and even recognising art as art” (ibid 413-414). In this context, Fraser introduced the notion of “habitus”, a concept Bourdieu detailed in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1987). Fraser used “habitus” to describe the embodiment of the social and the institution as a mental state, in explaining the way in which the institution of art moulded the competencies and dispositions that determined the institutionalisation of individuals within the field of art (ibid 414). Fraser argued that as the institution of art was internalised, embodied, and performed by individuals, this self-questioning disposition, more than the thematic of the institution, no matter how broadly conceived, was what ultimately defined institutional critique as a practice (2005).

Notions of embodiment with respect to criticality were discussed by the theorist Irit Rogoff in “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality” (2003) and “Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality” (2006). She provided an introduction to new ways of thinking about different forms that a critical attitude might take in situations where it was either possible or necessary to take a critical position on the “inside”, in being critical of the institution in which one was working. Rogoff used the term criticality to describe an extension of critique beyond what she perceived to be a distanced intellectual exercise, to developing a discerning way of engaging with institutions that was both participatory and critical. For Rogoff, criticality was non-binary, being critical did not mean the individual was necessarily in an adversarial position vis-à-vis the institution, indeed he/she might work on the inside to reform certain aspects of the institution. According to Rogoff, criticality required a leap of faith, it dealt in productive dualities and ambiguities, rather than “thinking through”, it involved “living out”, in such a way that it became embodied in the subject performing the critique. In adopting a position of criticality, the subject was both fully armed with the knowledge of critique, able to analyse and deconstruct, while at the same time living the very conditions he/she was exploring, namely there was a shift from purely investigative and analytical work to a performative and participatory practice. Rogoff’s version of criticality, as a form of critique embodied in individuals working inside the institution of art, provided a useful model for understanding critique in an embedded form. This extended understanding of critique, and the participation of a wider range of critical agents than before, opened up new possibilities for the practice of institutional critique.

When Fraser (2005) argued that the institution of art should take up the mantle of critique, she did not specify whether she viewed the institution or its director as the critical agent. Fraser located the institution's self-reflexive criticism in the failure of the avant-garde to dismantle the institution of art (ibid). Given the institutionalisation of the avant-garde's criticism, she argued that a new approach to defending the institution was emerging that meant the institution taking an active role in critical practice. She called this type of institution "an institution of critique" and in so doing conceptualised a new approach to institutional critique. In explaining her concept Fraser laid down some criteria by which museums and galleries could qualify as institutions of critique. First, she argued that newly construed institutional critique would judge the institution of art "against the critical claims of its legitimizing discourses" (ibid: 417). She did not explain what the legitimising discourses were, as they would be specific to each institution. It is possible, however, that she meant that there needed to be an on-going process of critique to ensure that museums and galleries constantly questioned whether they were fulfilling their stated mission and the expectations of the publics they addressed. Second, she contended that institutional critique would judge the institution of art "against its self-representation as a site of resistance and contestation", which implied that although some institutions claimed to be progressive, their actions might belie these claims (ibid). Finally, she explained that institutional critique needed to judge the institution of art "against its mythologies of radicality and symbolic revolution", which suggested that although institutions might propagate an image of radicality, there were in fact few instances of this, and a symbolic revolution might be no more than a useful awareness-raising gesture (ibid). In speaking of "mythologies of radicality", Fraser appeared to be arguing that museums and galleries might claim that their policies were radical even when this was not actually the case (ibid). By constructing an argument for a pivotal role for the institution, Fraser was being explicit that the only possible critique would be internally generated.

Fraser had contended that individuals internalised the institution of art, whilst also arguing in favour of an institution of critique, and in so doing, she recognised the need for individuals to take action as agents. The evolution of changes in the critical agent had implications for the type of critical strategies being employed and the location in which the critique was taking place. The progressive movement of critique inside the institution meant that some critical projects were co-opted while others were generated internally to the extent that they were institutionally embedded. Both

co-opted and embedded projects risked being institutionalised, and potentially rendered ineffective. However, Beech defended institutionalisation, arguing that in certain circumstances, it could be positive as a conduit by which radical practices could enter the museum.

### Conclusion

Ramsden's arguments about the futility of criticising the art system were made even before "Institutional Critique" became a recognised term. Of the writers cited, he was the most sceptical about the way in which critique was practiced, viewing the critical process as part of the bureaucratic machinery of institutionalised art. According to him the majority of artists had internalised the art market and its values, and were merely trying to secure a position within the art system rather than reform the system itself. He pointed out that for many artists their work often involved actively colluding with museums, implying that their practice was more affirmative than critical. Even though radical artists, working outside the exchange-driven apparatus of the market place existed, and employed oppositional strategies that challenged the established institutions, such groups, Ramsden contended were likely to be insignificant.

Several of the authors mentioned questioned whether artists could be legitimate critics. Buchloh argued that criticism should reside with academic critics, opining that they were more independent. He nevertheless accepted that because academic critics had failed to keep up with new practices, such as, the inclusion of subjects from the life-world in the museum, the fusing of high and low culture, and the conflation of roles in the field of art, they had therefore consigned themselves to an academic ghetto, bringing about their own redundancy as critics, thereby leaving a gap which artists were able to fill (1987). Despite his disapproval of the artist performing the critic's role, Buchloh acknowledged that it was taking place, and he charted the transformation of the artist's function from fabricator of objects to administrative aesthete, concerned with issues of ideological control and cultural legitimisation. Although Buchloh did not address the subjectivity of academic criticism, he expounded on the inherent subjectivities of artist-critics. Ramsden (1975) and Fraser (1985) also debated the issue of internally versus externally generated criticism and agreed that criticism produced inside the institution was collusive up to a certain point, whereas criticism produced outside was quickly marginalised. In other words the perfect conditions for critique did not exist.

The discussion about the location of critique was made more complex, when

Fraser redrew the frontiers of the institution of art. Initially she had recognised the existence of a boundary between the institution and the outside, and this led her to argue that critique operating on the outside of the institution, which she called subversive critique, was more effective in pointing out the problems with the institution of art, than critique emanating from the inside, which she deemed to be purely symbolic (1985). Later she contended that the institution was everywhere, namely that art practice had expanded beyond the walls of the museum, and the ethos of the institution had infiltrated the mind of the subject, so that critical distance was hard to achieve (2005). In such cases Fraser contended that critique was only possible when individuals were able to maintain a self-questioning attitude towards their own roles vis-à-vis the institution, and she suggested that a critical attitude towards the institution might develop in co-existence with working inside it.

The fact that institutions had routinely appropriated critical projects, either out of genuine desire to reform themselves or more cynically to ward off criticism, led Fraser to argue that in the pursuit of better institutions, the institutions themselves needed to take the initiative to question their attitudes and reform their policies and programmes. Although Fraser did not elaborate on who the institutional agents of critique might be, her arguments in favour of an “institution of critique” implied a different kind of critique from the one discussed so far, as it potentially shifted the responsibility of criticism to those who managed institutions, namely the directors-curators.

Despite their frequent disavowal of the possibility of critique, several authors suggested potential ways of using institutional criticism in a positive manner, positions on which my thesis builds. Ramsden argued in favour of contesting market hierarchies and of creating a utopian dialogical relationship between artists and audiences, offering the potentiality for learning and the transformation of viewpoints (1975). He also identified possibilities for mimetic critique, pointing to the way in which Buren’s practice revealed the nexus of power and influence in the artworld, and Haacke’s work unveiled the economic relations and social relationships that encircled it. Both these artists expanded their work beyond interventions in physical spaces and the fabrication of objects, to include discursive incursions into institutionally critical practice.

According to Buchloh, there were instances when institutionally generated criticism might be effective, particularly, where artists were able to mimic and parody institutional practice (1990). He argued that the main contribution of the early

practitioners was to expose the false neutrality of art institutions. Earlier he favoured practices of resistance developed by artists outside the institution of art (1987). Later he shifted his position, to acknowledge the contribution that could be played by artists operating within the museum (1990). He noted that by adopting a mimetic approach to the ideological apparatus of the museum, these artists were able to subvert institutional processes by appropriating the very tools and procedures that the institutions themselves employed. By 2012, Buchloh was concerned that many critical practices had been absorbed by “the spectacle”. However, despite having a critical attitude towards the viability of institutional criticism, he left open several possibilities for institutional critique, provided that artists operated self-reflexively, adopted practices rooted in the anti-aesthetic, and avoided spectacularisation.

At some point practices associated with institutional critique risked either being canonised by art historians, or co-opted by the very institutions they were attempting to critique. Foster argued that critique performed by artists affirmed the institution (1985), Buchloh contributed to the canonisation of Institutional Critique by tracing its genealogy as the epilogue of Conceptualism (1990), and Fraser explained her own role in its canonisation (2005). Despite this, some opportunities were left open for critique to exert agency on the institutions it purported to address. Ward observed that although the institution usually absorbed institutionally critical practice, there were some specific instances in which the critique could be successful, judged in terms of a work’s ability to determine the interpretative influences of the museum (1995). Beech posited a refutation of the problematics of institutionalisation, arguing that it was a process whereby critical practices became embedded in the social fabric of the museum (2006). Several authors argued that practices associated with institutional critique needed to seek new directions to maintain their relevance. Some saw a future for such practices provided they joined forces with art activism (Alberro and Stimson 2009), or exercised some direct agency on institutional reform (Raunig and Ray 2009).

Between Buchloh’s observation that the agent of critique was shifting from the academic critic to the artist, to Fraser’s contention that the institution and individuals should take on the responsibility for critique, there were a series of further shifts that have not been commented on by mainstream authors, which this thesis addresses. It would appear that today criticism can only take place within the institution in an embedded form, and arguably practitioners have recognised that to have any agency, criticism must be performed from within. This poses questions about which critical

strategies could be appropriate for institutionally generated criticism. Would they be the same as those used by artists or would they be different? If an institution of critique is the most suitable critical vehicle, how would it function? In the following chapters, I pinpoint further shifts in the agent of critique, and I identify new critical strategies, examining the way in which curators have addressed the problems elucidated by Ramsden and other authors. Artists' ability to be critical was determined by their proximity to and close involvement with the institutions they were investigating, and their intimate knowledge of the processes of museums and galleries gave them in-depth insights into the possibilities for critique. However, the early artistic practitioners were usually engaged by museum directors and institutional curators and conducted projects of short duration. In later instances where artist-curators and independent curators were engaged in critical projects, they worked for extended periods, and their greater degree of institutional embeddedness had implications for the types of critical strategies that were employed. In subsequent chapters, I examine the way in which various types of artists and curators become actively engaged in institutionally critical practice. The evolution of the changes in the critical agent was non-linear, as it was not a question of one type of agent assuming the mantle of critique from another. The migration of critique inside the institution was initially propelled by artists whose practices were closely aligned to curatorial work, and this process is examined in detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2 - Artist-curators

Institutional critique, viewed as a set of practices, rather than as an art historical genre, is discussed in this thesis in a series of case studies occurring over two decades from 1992 to 2011. Building on Buchloh's identification of the shift in the critical function from the academic critic to the artist, this chapter investigates the role of the artist-curator in institutionally critical practice. I foreground the case studies, with a broader discussion of the emergence of artist-curators, and comment on the convergence that was taking place between art practice and curatorial practice.

The figure of the institutionally critical artist-curator had a number of historical precedents. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Broodthaers had created a fictitious museum, which investigated the idea of the museum by replicating its functions. In *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles*, Broodthaers criticised the decontextualizing power of the museum and the way in which traditional taxonomies were used to create hierarchies of knowledge (Borgemeister 1987). He performed the critique by mimicking various curatorial functions, such as the conception of the exhibition idea, the choice of locations for display, the selection of the objects to be exhibited, the manner of displaying and labelling them, and the mediation and publicity tasks associated with the promotion of his museum. The *Musée d'Art Moderne* was initially shown in the artist's apartment in Brussels, and later it was exhibited in institutional venues, such as at the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf (1972) and at *documenta 5* (1972). Although the display of Broodthaers' project in art institutions gave it a profile and longevity that it would not otherwise have had, such exposure raised questions about the implications of the co-option of critical projects by institutions.

The incursion of artists into curatorial territory is related to Buchloh's commentary about the changing role of artists, as becoming less focused on producing objects, and more concerned with the institutional conditions in which art was situated and presented (1990). As Buchloh explained, and later O'Neill expanded upon in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (2012), the shift that took place from creating objects in the studio, to producing work in site-specific situations, meant a change in the substance and form of artistic practice. It involved moving away from object-based practices, to displaying artworks, non-artworks and ready-mades to reflect curatorial concepts, creating installations that referenced particular sites, and organising performances in context. The merging of artistic and curatorial

practice was also articulated by the artist Gavin Wade, who made the distinction between an artist, using curatorial strategies and processes in his/her work, and an artist, who simply arranged artworks by other artists in an exhibition. In his text “Artist + Curator =”, he explained the evolving understandings of the term “artist-curator”, contending that although earlier it applied to artists who curated exhibitions, later the designation was used to describe artists who employed exhibition design, architectural structures, and curatorial strategies in their practice (2000). Wade’s point of view was supported by the art historian, Hans Dieter Huber, in an article entitled, “Artists as Curators - Curators as Artists?”, where he argued that from the late 1960s onwards, artists used curatorial selection and gallery arrangements in their work (Tannert et al 2004).

O’Neill noted that from the late 1960s onwards, artists migrated from purely studio practice and took on functions previously associated with the critic and the curator, such as writing and exhibition organising, so that “the traditional roles of artist, curator and critic were being collapsed and deliberately conflated” (ibid 19). He also investigated curating as a medium of artistic practice, and the convergence of art and curatorial practice, pointing out that in some respects curatorial practice and artistic practice appeared to be similar, and that particularly by the 1990s, curators and artists had begun to imitate each others’ positions both conceptually and in formal terms. O’Neill discussed the way in which both artists and curators were involved in making and organising work that was being produced for a specific site or exhibition, rather than handling “pre-existing, fixed, autonomous works ready for selection and display” (ibid 16). The gallerist-curator, Seth Siegelaub, whom O’Neill quoted, confirmed this, arguing that the place of exhibition and the situation of the work of art became inextricably linked, and that artists’ fascination with the framing conditions and conventions of art extended to “the object and its relation to its physical context (walls, floors, ceilings, and the room itself)” (ibid 21). According to the artist Irene Calderoni, whom O’Neill also cited; during this period, the curatorial role was redefined in a way that affected all aspects of practice from, “display techniques to catalogue design and from advertising strategies to the artist-institution relationship”. The growing preoccupation with site-specificity meant “the spatial and temporal context of artistic production would coincide with the context of the exhibition” (ibid 18). O’Neill attested that discursive, pedagogical and dialogical approaches to exhibition production were becoming the norm and that they constituted varying “forms of negotiation, relationality, adaptation, and collaboration

between subjects and objects, across space and time”, an approach which, according to him, could be equally applied to artists as well as to curators (ibid 129).

The interstices between artistic and curatorial work in the 1980s and 1990s meant that institutionally critical artists and independent curators were using many of the same approaches. These included a focus on the site and its context, a conflation of the place of production with the space of display, and an interest in the discursive elements of artistic and curatorial projects. According to the artist John Miller, the momentum of the convergence of artistic and curatorial practice had been building up throughout the 1980s, notably with artists linked to institutional critique, such as Louise Lawler and Fred Wilson. In his article “Arbeit Macht Spass? (Hoffmann 2004: 58-61), Miller contended that “[w]hat began as critique evolved into a curatorial practice” (ibid 60), arguing that even those artists who “only” presented the work of others actually produced its meaning within specific institutional frameworks, such as art centres and museums. Miller was making the point here about the re-contextualisation of artworks as a result of them being exhibited in a new location or displayed in a different way.

The convergence of art practice and curating exhibitions provoked a debate about artistic versus curatorial authorship. *Documenta 5* (1972) was one of the first major exhibitions where installation works by artists were assembled by a single independent curator (Szeemann 1972). Some of the artists criticised the approach adopted by Szeemann in *Individual Mythologies*, insisting that artists should make their own decisions about their contributions to an exhibition, and how their works were displayed. Buren (1972) accused Szeemann of usurping the authorial position of the artist, presenting the exhibition as a “Gesamtkunstwerk” (total work of art), arguing that, “[t]he works presented are carefully chosen touches of color in the tableau that composes each section (room) as a whole” (Hoffmann 2004: 26). As far as Buren was concerned, Szeemann had turned this section of *documenta* into an artwork, whose author was none other than the exhibition organiser, the authorship of the curator having displaced the “primary” authorship of the artist. At the core of Buren’s criticism was the artist’s loss of freedom when the curator became the author of the exhibition. He argued that this did not mean that exhibitions did not require an organiser, but that it was important to differentiate between an organiser-interpreter and an organiser-author, as in the latter case it was the curator who was being exhibited, rather than the works of art (ibid). In other words, the curator was adopting an authorial, rather than an interpretative position, and substituting the artists for the

artworks.

In this debate on authorship, the art historian Claire Bishop claimed in “What is a Curator?” (2007), that artistic authorship was paramount. She discussed the differences between creating site-specific installations (artistic practice) and arranging exhibitions (curatorial practice), arguing that while artists created a singular unit of meaning, curators managed and organised multiple units of meaning. She explained the way in which the histories of installation art and curating were intertwined, citing the art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski’s publication, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (1998), which “presents exhibition installation as a precursor to installation art” (ibid 13). Bishop also noted a “similar convergence of exhibition design and installation design” taking place in Europe, referring to projects initiated by the gallerist Konrad Fischer in the late 1960s and 1970s, and Buren’s participation in *Prospect 68*. In these instances, according to Bishop, “the installation artist brings about a diversification of the curatorial role (ibid: 13), and “[a]lthough there is a clear point of overlap between curatorial and artistic authorship, it is unwise to conflate the two” (ibid: 12).

Equally the expansion of artistic practice into domains also occupied by emergent independent curators created tensions with respect to who controlled the meaning and interpretive influences of projects. An understanding of authorship issues appertaining to artists and curators is important in the recognition of the role of the artist-curator in the evolution of institutionally critical practice. It signified a movement away from institutional curators commissioning artists to create works for an exhibition, to artists playing a more proactive role in defining the parameters of a project in collaboration with independent and institutional curators and museum directors.

By the 1990s, the notion of the artist-curator was well established and during this decade artist-curators expanded and refined the medium of exhibition curating as one of the preferred instruments in institutionally critical practice. Joseph Kosuth’s project for the Brooklyn Museum, entitled, *Play of the Unmentionable* (1990) re-arranged the museum’s collection, according to the perspective of the artist, emphasising issues of censorship. Haacke curated *Viewing Matters* (1999) at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, where by exhibiting artworks alongside merchandise from the museum’s shop, he explored the economic conditions of making and exhibiting art, thus revealing the relationship between art and commerce. Dion addressed many aspects of the museum, including collecting

strategies and taxonomies, but in ways that were more affirmative than critical of museum practice (Corrin et al 1997).

The case studies that follow examine particular instances of institutionally critical practice where artists use a mixture of conventional and innovative curatorial tools in the production of their work. In all cases the artists are interested in the art system and the institution of art, and these issues permeate their projects. Whereas canonical Institutional Critique concerned artists working primarily in the USA, the scope of institutional critique, when it is viewed as an artistic and a curatorial practice, took place in a wider geographical area, and in this chapter, artists from Europe and Latin America are included in the analysis.

Of the artist-curators examined in this chapter, only Fred Wilson has been accepted into the canon of Institutional Critique. Wilson's practice has been acknowledged by Meyer (1993), Osborne (2002), Foster, Krauss, Bois and Buchloh (2008) and others, as being part of an evolution of the historical narrative of Institutional Critique. Despite its canonisation, Wilson's approach to institutional critique can nevertheless still be viewed as practice. This discussion anchors my research in an existing body of knowledge, showing that although some institutionally critical practices have been historicised, institutional criticism can also be viewed as an evolving on-going process, adopting different forms. The other case studies build on this foundation to investigate various forms of artistic-curatorial work that explored the framing conditions of art in ways that were different from the artists in previous decades. The adoption of curatorial approaches led these artists into a deeper engagement with institutions than before and often involved projects of long-term engagement, signs that critical practice was becoming embedded in the institutions it sought to address.

The specific projects carried out by artists who investigated the framing conditions of art from different curatorial perspectives focused on particular aspects of various art institutions. Wilson worked in an ethnographic museum, employing new curatorial methodologies to critique an existing singular narrative, and created alternative narratives. The Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn used traditional methods of curating to relocate canonical artworks from an established museum to a makeshift viewing-space. The Argentinian artist Robert Jacoby created a hybrid work, part art installation, and part curatorial process, to critique the mission statement of an international biennial. In investigating these case studies, I explore whether the various critical strategies discussed in the previous chapter continued to be utilised

and whether new ones evolved.

## 2.1 Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993): A critique of singular narratives in an ethnographic museum

This section explores Fred Wilson's mid-career project, *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993). His earlier work consisted mostly of the creation of fictitious museums. In such projects, he typically positioned artefacts and the ideologically encoded devices of exhibition display and mediation in ironic dialogue with one another, simulating how art institutions produced their ideologies and manufactured their legitimacy. In a project created in an artist-run space in the Bronx, entitled *Rooms with a View: the Struggle Between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art* (1987), Wilson investigated ways in which the meaning of artworks changed according to being placed in different contexts. He created three different interiors: a white cube, an ethnographic museum and a 19<sup>th</sup> century salon. In each space, works of art were presented differently, namely as fine art in the white cube, as artefacts in the ethnographic museum, and as decorative art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century salon. By adopting these approaches, Wilson sought to expose the artifice of an exhibition's visual and spatial rhetoric.

As an artist of African American and Caribbean descent, Wilson was interested in investigating, and creating new readings of the African American socio-historical and cultural past, and this is the main subject of his varied practice. Wilson's works conveyed the message that the subordination of African Americans was rooted in a long history of cultural domination, and that during the 1990s museums in the USA perpetuated and reinforced this tendency. Wilson explored collecting and display practices, by creating a fictitious museum, which exposed the typical colonialist tendencies of narrating the "conqueror's" view of history, rather than that of the "subaltern". In *The Other Museum*, presented at the not-for-profit space White Columns in New York in 1990, and at the Washington Project for the Arts in Washington DC in 1991, Wilson simulated an ethnographic display, presenting objects in vitrines, creating wall texts and labels, as well as showing photographic documentation and artefacts that parodied traditional museum displays of so-called "primitive" works. The leading figure in post-colonial studies Homi K. Bhabha contended that western connoisseurship located "other" cultures in a universal, imaginary frame, acknowledging cultural diversity, but at the same time producing the conditions for its cultural containment (1993). The critical history of anthropological and ethnographic discourses and their attendant museum displays invoked in

Wilson's project, investigated both the "otherness" of cultural or racial difference, as well as the alterity of the new ideological perspectives that Wilson was endeavouring to create. In these projects, Wilson used curating as a medium in a similar way to Broodthaers' employment of curating in the *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles*, mimicking and parodying existing museum procedures despite the very different curatorial concepts and museological messages that were inscribed in these works (Berger et al 2001).

Wilson's landmark exhibition, *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993) was a collaborative project with the independent curator Lisa Corrin. At the time Corrin was working for The Contemporary, an art centre, which neither had a collection, nor a permanent location. Together they conceived a critical intervention in a traditional ethnographic museum, the Maryland Historical Society (the Society) in Baltimore. First, Corrin negotiated access to the museum and its collection, including the works in storage, and agreed the parameters of the project with the museum director, Charles Lyle. Second Wilson "mined" the objects in storage and juxtaposed them with artefacts already on display, making atypical arrangements, thereby creating new narratives around the objects exhibited. This was not the first time that an artist had sourced objects from storage and put them on display. In the exhibition, *Raid the Icebox* (1969) at the Rhode Island School of Design, Andy Warhol had also "mined" the storage facilities, selecting ordinary objects such as shoes, jars, parasols and chairs, to show the arbitrary nature of curatorial decision-making with respect to artefacts on display in typical exhibition spaces.

In her catalogue essay, "*Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves*", Corrin provided details of the curatorial methods used by Wilson in the execution of his project (1994). First, Wilson brought his curatorial subjectivities to the fore, arguing that "curators bring who they are to the creation of exhibitions" (ibid 13). He prepared the visitors to re-experience the museum in its re-functioned version as a testament to an African American reading of Maryland's colonial past, rather than its traditional reading of the history of the white settlers. At the entrance to the exhibition he hung a banner beside the museum's official signage, announcing to "other" audiences that "another" history was about to be told, and he played a videotape, which challenged spectators to question what they were about to see and to ask themselves whether anything had changed as a result of the experience. As Corrin clarified, "Wilson's fear of imposing a personal moral statement on others led him to use the questioning process as the organising

principle of his work” (ibid 13). Wilson’s desire to leave interpretations open to the visitors, and to invite them to question their position vis-à-vis that of the artist-curator, was very different from this museum’s usual didactic approach of instructing visitors on the meaning of its exhibitions. As illustrated in Figure 1, the first object presented was a globe inscribed with the words “truth”, flanked by three white pedestals bearing white marble busts of Napoleon Bonaparte, Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson (none of whom had a significant impact on Maryland history), and three black vacant pedestals labelled, Harriet Tubman, Benjamin Banneker and Frederick Douglass (all well-known African American abolitionist activists and writers). In this way the viewer was confronted immediately with the indexical present, the here and nowness of the issue of white supremacy that Wilson was about to address as a recurring theme throughout his exhibition (Hayt-Atkins 2003).



Figure 1

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, empty pedestals, labeled Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Benjamin Banneker; *Globe* c.1913, silver-plated copper designed by Mr. Thoman, manufactured by Stieff Company, surrounded by acrylic mounts, c.1960, maker unknown; Sobal Vail Clevenger, *Henry Clay*, c.1870; artist unknown, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, c.1850; C. Hennecke & Co, *Andrew Jackson* c.1870

Wilson adopted a curatorial approach in that he did not make new objects, but selected and re-arranged existing objects for exhibition in a manner conceived to convey certain pre-determined messages. As was characteristic of critical practice employing curatorial methods, the artist was embedded in the institution: he had received an official invitation to carry out the work, and he was in residency for an extended period, so that he could research the works on display and in storage, and discuss aspects of the museum’s history, mission, and processes with the staff.

Using a variety of curatorial techniques, Wilson rendered visible aspects of Maryland history that had previously been invisible to audiences. When the viewer stepped forward to view some dimly lit paintings, his/her action triggered spotlights and hidden sound effects which highlighted the presence of African American children in the artwork (as Figures 2 and 3 illustrate), who would otherwise probably go unrecognised as they were not the work's primary subject. Another of Wilson's techniques was to cover paintings with glassine, a special acid-free paper used for protecting works of art, and then cut circular holes in the paper to reveal only the African American figures depicted in the work. Wilson also sought to gain more recognition for these subjects, by positioning magnifying glasses so that audiences would focus on them, rather than on any other aspects of the work.



Figure 2

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, Justus Engelhardt Kuhn, *Henry Darnall III*, c.1710, oil on canvas

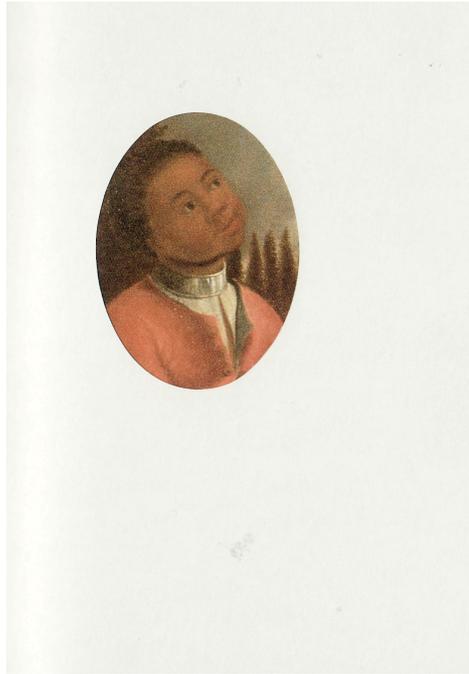


Figure 3

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, unknown figure from the work by Justus Engelhardt Kuhn, *Henry Darnall III*, c.1710, oil on canvas

Wilson's curatorial strategy for *Mining the Museum* involved a re-reading of the colonial history of Maryland, by means of a reinterpretation of the artefacts in its collection. He used a strategy of mimetic critique in that he sought not to produce an exact replication of existing museum procedures, but rather to use similar approaches to create shifts in emphasis and interpretation, by displaying, labelling and lighting objects differently. He used similar curatorial methods to those employed by the Society's existing exhibition-making staff, but made minor changes that would create significantly different narratives and facilitate diverse possible interpretations of the material at hand. Understanding that changing the context in which objects were situated and presented provoked shifts in the possible meanings inscribed in those objects, he experimented with techniques to focus on the representation of African American individuals in paintings, such as placing objects in unfamiliar situations and developing novel labelling strategies.

Wilson's unusual juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated objects – such as displaying slave manacles beside silver household objects in a vitrine, entitled *Metal Work 1793 – 1880*, (1992), or situating a whipping post before an array of upholstered chairs, entitled *Cabinet Making 1820 – 1960* (1992) – threw into relief the cruelty and forgotten histories of slavery in the USA. By placing a Klu-Klux Klan hood in a pram,

he indicated that racial hatred was inculcated in the young from a very early age. The reinstallation of hundreds of objects, many never previously publicly exhibited, narrated the history of slavery and white oppression in the State of Maryland; a very different story from the refined rendering of colonial life that the Society habitually portrayed. Through the unusual combinations of objects that were presented, very different meanings could be elicited, which were unexpected by the museum's docents and its audiences. We know this from the statements from the docents, which have been recorded by the curator in a catalogue article entitled, "Mining the Project Experiences: A discussion with the docents of the Maryland Historical Society", and the written commentaries that visitors made on exiting the exhibition, a selection of which were published in the catalogue under the rubric, "The Audience Responds" (Corrin 1994).



Figure 4

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum, Metalwork 1793-1880*. Silver vessels in Baltimore repoussé style 1830-80 and slave shackles, maker unknown, made in Baltimore, c. 1793-1872



Figure 5

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum, Cabinetmaking 1820-1960*. Armchair, maker unknown, probably Baltimore) c. 1896, wood, mother of pearl, brocade and whipping post platform and post, gift of the Baltimore City Jail Board

One of the main challenges that Wilson faced was that, unlike the white subjects, whose names were known to the museum and whose titles were inscribed on wall labels adjacent to the works bearing their images, the identity of the African American subjects was frequently unknown, as they were typically regarded as the property of their white owners. Wilson discovered an inventory of slave names when excavating the Society's archives and in order to "recover" the histories of the individuals represented in the paintings, he added their names to the wall labels. Despite this, there remained a paucity of information about the African Americans and an inability to name them all. At this point Wilson invited the audience to use conjecture and pose questions about what the identity of the unnamed slaves might be. Corrin noted "Wilson's process of 'naming' was linked to his astute consciousness of the ways texts frame our vision of museum objects and in the process elide the identities of those its ideological boundary does not contain" (ibid 15).

Wilson argued that the Maryland Historical Society had created a singular narrative and sought to control the interpretative influences of the artefacts on view.

By proposing new and different interpretations of the history and memories that the museum claimed to represent, his project showed that history was more complex than the usual chronicle posited by the museum. Intervening in the permanent collection of historical and ethnographic artefacts, he explored a wide range of curatorial concerns, such as issues of selection, display practices and labelling, to produce alternate readings of American history, giving greater prominence to African American history than was usual in such museums. At the time, Corrin was in the process of developing a new museological model, which criticised the limitations of decision-making and processes of interpretation within museums. She put Wilson in contact with a wide range of independent scholars and researchers, thereby facilitating a multi-layered reading of the region's colonial history and museological practice. By inviting Wilson to explore the diverse and more culturally open ways that collections could be made intelligible when viewed from different subject positions, she sought to produce a greater degree of accessibility for the museum and address new audiences, particularly African Americans, who had felt excluded by the museum's traditional policy of representing the culture of the white settlers (Corrin 1994).

In her critical reception of Wilson's work, the art historian Jennifer González presented his critique as a strategy designed to subvert institutional authority by tampering with the mechanisms of museal process. She focused on the way in which the artist contested the hegemony of the museum, particularly its ideological control of the subject (2011a). González contextualised Wilson's practice with reference to those of Lawler and Haacke, contending that all these practitioners were concerned with drawing attention to museums as "institutions that produce ideologies of cultural containment, cultural hierarchy and cultural legitimacy" (2011b 328). In support of her argument, she cited Douglas Crimp, who explained in "On the Museum's Ruins" (1993), how the de-legitimisation of absolute authenticity, originality, and aesthetic authority, found in institutional representations of truth, history and beauty, encouraged the development of new methodologies of critical practice. Wilson's critique of art institutions, curatorial practices and discourses of alterity was to be understood as a way of unravelling institutional authority and opening up opportunities for other subjectivities. It was not the issue of race per se that Wilson was concerned with, rather he was interested in investigating how race became a force of domination that operated through the institutions that collect, preserve and exhibit objects (op cit 340). Wilson showed how this was manifested in the way in

which the museum embraced certain racial groups, privileging some, while de-privileging others. His works demonstrated how the museum manipulated its audiences into imagined subject positions, in order to define social membership, legitimate historical narratives and determine access to cultural knowledge.

Wilson's curatorial intention was to re-function the institution away from narrating the usual history of the white settlers, to instead relating stories about the former slaves. By his method of juxtaposing objects, which would not normally be placed together, he aimed to create a different set of interpretative influences, messages and meanings, to produce uncomfortable narratives and reveal new "truths". His purpose was to address a wider audience than the museum usually solicited; and in this he succeeded, given the large number of visitors to his exhibition – at 60,000, a record number for the Maryland Historical Society. Appreciative comments were recorded from many African Americans, who reported that Wilson addressed their concerns for the very first time; and positive remarks were also forthcoming from museologically-informed visitors (Corrin 1994).

*Mining the Museum* had received positive endorsement from George Ciscle, the Director of the Contemporary; and Charles Lyle, the Director of the Maryland Historical Society, indicating that the museum was willing to reflect critically on its history and practices. Wilson interpreted the Contemporary's invitation to investigate the museum in a critical manner, directing his attention towards the unexplored histories behind its collection and creating an exhibition whose outcome was unexpected by the Board of Trustees and the museum's members. Wilson's critique of the museum's traditional approach to narrating colonial history caused discomfort, and although no causal link may be established, the commissioning director Charles Lyle resigned from his post shortly after the exhibition ended. One implication of this might have been that the Trustees had not fully anticipated the scope and depth of Wilson's project, nor the degree of positive public and critical comment that it elicited. In any event this type of exhibition proved to be unsustainable, as thereafter the Maryland Historical Society reverted to its previous programme of representing the traditions and mores of the white settlers.

*Mining the Museum* marked a shift in Wilson's practice from creating fictitious museums, or producing narratives about museums outside their physical structures, to collaborating with real museums and performing a particular form of subversive mimetic critique. For his museum-based projects, Wilson selected those institutions, as his object of critique, best suited to exploring the meta-narratives of colonialism,

post-colonial theory and subaltern cultures. For Wilson it was a significant step to move from curating a discursive exhibition about race in an alternate or artist-run space, to addressing these issues in an established museum, using their own collection to comment on their specific histories. Until *Mining the Museum* was conceived, museums had typically avoided an investigation of racial issues, despite the debate on such subjects in wider society. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Corrin cited Maurice Berger, who pointed out that “most art museums offer little more than lip service to the issue of racial inclusion”, and that “art that demonstrates its ‘difference’ from the mainstream or that challenges dominant values is rarely acceptable to white curators, administrators and patrons” (1994: 149), points he had also made in an earlier article, “Are Art Museums Racist?” (1992).

According to González, in providing alternative cultural readings of the museum, several of Wilson’s projects, including *Mining the Museum*, drew on the work of the anthropologist George Stocking, who argued that the emergence of a post-colonial consciousness called into question the existing relationship between objects in the museum environment (2011b). Whereas, traditionally, museums had affirmed the cultural patrimony of colonial privilege – including the ownership of cultural artefacts, the right to interpret their meaning and assign them a place in the history of art, or the museum archive – this process had become contested among multiple constituencies with conflicting interests. Wilson’s projects raised questions about why ethnographic museums celebrated the achievements of the “white oppressors”, often ignoring the parallel histories of the “black subaltern class”. He offered a critical perspective on the history of museums, and what they represented in terms of cultural difference, colonialism and race. *Mining the Museum* was significant both in terms of the questions raised at the time, and the ensuing dialogue it provoked (ibid). The exhibition drew attention to the way in which museums used artefacts and art to construct a unilateral view of history or knowledge, and it showed that other interpretations could be gleaned from the same objects when juxtaposed with other objects and correspondingly mediated, and that new perspectives and new histories could be constituted as a result.

Buchloh had already noted that by adopting a mimetic approach to the ideological apparatus of the museum, artists were able to subvert institutional processes by appropriating the very tools and procedures that the institutions themselves employed (1990). This method of working was used by Wilson, who mimicked, but at the same time slightly shifted, ways of working typical of institutional

curators with respect to displaying objects in a given exhibition space, thereby disturbing the museum's usual narrative. Wilson created ambivalent installations, which emulated conventional museological practices while equally problematising them. In an interview with Berger, Wilson elucidated his strategy of mimicry as one of shifting the information sources given by the museum in order "to show how a slight adjustment in emphasis or subject, can expose the museum's point of view" (Berger and Wilson 2011: 155). His intention was to "unlock the meanings of objects by juxtaposing and eliciting a conversation between them", so as to create unexpected associations and new lines of thought. Wilson described his work as a form of meta-criticism, itemising a critique of the museum's usual subject matter, the notion of the exhibition, the museum as an institution and by extension the society in which the museum existed, as viable subjects for his critical practice. Wilson contended that he was neither aiming to create a revisionist history, nor to construct an avant-garde exhibition, but rather was using the existing institutional context and the museum's collection, "shifting it slightly to bring out certain inherent ironies and incongruities in the subject of the traditional display, or in the museum itself" (ibid 161).

In "Subtle and Subversive: Fred Wilson's Museum Interventions", the art historian Rachel Kent contended that Wilson created environments in museums that introduced subtly subversive elements, though she did not detail precisely what these were (2011). Similarly González discussed Wilson's approach to institutional critique as a "devious" one, based on the subversion of "the familiar passive receptive viewing behaviours" of visitors, who treated "these architectural interiors as silent, sacred spaces where unquestioned truths and aesthetic wonders are presented" (2011b: 367). She argued that Wilson disrupted this viewing pleasure in a Brechtian manner (a concept I discuss in the next chapter), "by drawing the frame to the fore" and creating a "theatrical farce" (ibid 368). According to González, Wilson's works "unravel authoritative frameworks" and establish other subjectivities, creating "a different vision of museum discourse" (ibid 329-330). Wilson transformed the passive viewing subject into the active spectator and made it impossible for him/her to participate in an aesthetic experience without also having an affective response to the works displayed. Wilson's intention was not only that the viewers' pre-conceived ideas about the colonial past were challenged, but also that they would carry these transformed perspectives into their everyday lives beyond the museum experience. In this way, the refunctioned institution could be capable of not only inducing a change of mind, but also catalyse the will to act (Ray 2010).

Although Wilson's mimetic approach to critique was interruptive of museological processes, it was not antagonistic towards them. His projects engaged subjects from the past so as to comment on the present, and they provoked a process of retrospective association, characteristic of the allegory. The art critic Craig Owens rethought the allegory as a radical force in contemporary art, defining it as the process of isolating what is culturally significant from the past and interpreting it in a way that makes it relevant to the present (1980). Rather than create binary diatribes against the prejudices of museum culture that marginalised minorities, Wilson understood the underlying prejudices inherent in museums to be ambiguous and complex. He contended that if viewers subtracted from his work the idea of the museum's inherent subjectivity, namely "that the institution is not entirely objective", as "it is made up of various people's desires, biases and assumptions about the world", then it was possible to rethink their relationship towards the museum (Berger and Wilson 2011: 167). In other words, Wilson's works exposed viewers to the contradictions and fallacies of institutions without resolving them, constructing memorials to lost elements in their histories that were at the same time a cipher of the reforming tendencies that might be taking place within their walls (ibid).

Not all art historians have responded positively to Wilson's institutionally critical practice. Foster argued that not only were Wilson's projects frequently unintelligible to audiences, but because they took place in the very institutions they were designed to critique, their critical power could be subsumed within the ideological framework of the museum (1986). In other words, Wilson's critical projects might be appropriated for public relations purposes or for other ends. Likewise Kwon (2002) argued that critical artworks that have been commissioned by museums might become extensions of the museum's own self-promotional apparatus, and she observed that such artworks could fall into a repetitive pattern, of "reflecting what has become a familiar museological practice – the commissioning of artists to rehang permanent collections" (2004: 47).

González contended that despite the validity of these concerns, these assessments "also miss the critical potential of the *détournement* provided by the artist" (2011b: 354-355). "Détournement" was a technique originally developed by the Letterist International, and was first discussed by the theorist Guy Debord and the artist Gil J. Wolman in "Mode d'emploi du détournement", published in the Belgian surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues* (1956). It suggested the notion of a detour and involved the deflection, diversion, misappropriation or re-routing of an object or

process from its original or formal aim or purpose. Wilson used strategies of *détournement* in his unconventional juxtapositions of familiar and unfamiliar objects to create alternative readings of the subject matter at hand.

The exhibition *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993) has been recognised as an important milestone in the history of Institutional Critique and has been inscribed in its canon. Its importance lay not only in its novel critical curatorial strategies and its commitment to multiple and alternate readings of the displayed works, but also because it addressed issues of race, and by implication, civil rights – matters, which had also been of concern to early practitioners of institutional critique, such as the AWC and the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), who had campaigned for the wider representation of artists, including black artists, in mainstream museums. Discussions about the project extended beyond the museum's walls, becoming part of a discursive forum on issues of art, race and “white supremacy”, as Wilson had exposed the way in which the established narratives of the museum served to reinforce many of the attitudes that existed in “real life”.

Whereas Wilson's early installations took place in project spaces and involved the creation of fictitious museums, after the recognition that he achieved with *Mining the Museum*, several of his later projects were carried out in mainstream public art galleries and involved his active intervention in museums, using their collections to reinterpret the habitual sign-systems and encoded meanings that were in place. Wilson explained that directors and curators invited him into their museums because they were ready to confront long-standing institutional indifference and prejudice to race, class and community. “I'm brought in because there's a genuine desire to self-reflect and even to change attitudes and policies”, Wilson observed (Berger and Wilson 2011: 158). Much of his work involved “mining the museum”, working as a curator, reviewing artefacts and objects, perusing archives and interviewing staff, to uncover the hidden histories and the internal workings and ideological paradigms of the museum.

Given the pivotal role that Wilson's practice plays in my thesis as an anchor in the art historical canon of Institutional Critique, and at the same time owing to its function as launch-pad for other forms of institutionally critical practice, I include a brief review of his work post *Mining the Museum*. In *The Museum – Mixed Metaphors* (1993), at the Seattle Art Museum in Washington, Wilson applied the universalising and condescending discourses often used in the description of African artefacts, to European and American objects, and he exhibited Western artworks in the same

“crowded” idiosyncratic manner, typical of the presentation and display of African and Native American Paintings. In *Speaking in Tongues: A Look at the Language of Display* at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco (1998), Wilson deliberately made generalisations about cultural diversity, conjuring up cultural myths about the anonymous status of the creators of the artefacts, such as porcelain figurines and personal souvenirs on view, emphasising the paternalistic and overly didactic rhetoric of ethnographic displays as typically curated by Western museum professionals. In *Viewing the Invisible* at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne (1998), Wilson returned to readings of forgotten histories revealing the other side of Australian colonial history, revealing the atrocities that were perpetrated by the white settlers against the indigenous population. Popular myths of a primordial Australian landscape, awaiting European civilising influences were disabused by Wilson’s intervention, revealing a counter-history of colonial exploitation. Wilson used infrared analysis, typically employed in the conservation and scientific authentication of paintings as a metaphor for peeling back the pictorial surface to reveal untold stories. Adjacent to the colonial period paintings, he placed a series of panels with computer-generated images of the works, designed to simulate an overlain imagery of a pre-colonial past, which appeared as though revealed under the infra-red light (Berger et al 2001). Although these three projects differed from *Mining the Museum* with respect to the details, they were strategically similar in that they addressed the analogous issues of subaltern culture; and methodologically alike, using mimetic approaches and novel display practices to convey their critique.

Wilson did not, however, consider his own practice to be a curatorial one. In an interview with the art historian Martha Buskirk, he differentiated curatorial practice as providing “some form of universal truth or knowledge”, from artistic practice, which employed a full array of tools, such as the utilisation of irony and the exploitation of artistic subjectivities (Buskirk and Nixon: 1996: 187). This assumed objectivity on the part of curators was surprising and redolent of arguments about the claimed neutrality of museums. Several commentators contended that while Wilson explored curatorial practice, he did not actually use curating as a tool to investigate museums. In this vein the curator Barbara Thompson argued that Wilson drew upon familiar curatorial practices to refashion and rearrange; and the critic, Glen Helfand also characterised Wilson’s work as a practice of creative re-arrangement (Helfand 2003). In Wilson’s retrospective exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art, *Fred Wilson Works: 2004-2011* (2013), the un-named institutional curators organising his

display did not view him as a curator, and presented him as using artistic practice to pose critical questions about museum policy and processes, possibly because as institutional curators themselves they had a different notion of curatorial practice compared to the emergent forms of hybrid artistic-curatorial practice. Such comments do not give credit to Wilson's subtle re-contextualisation of objects to elicit new meanings. Nor did they acknowledge the subversive re-arrangement of collections and the associated functions of critical mediation and education that were constants in Wilson's practice.

Drawing on his previous career as a mediator and educator in mainstream museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, Wilson had an informed interest in the relationships between artworks, artefacts and institutions, and an acute awareness of the way in which museums construct systems of knowledge and present seemingly authoritative histories of art and culture. Such experience informed his practice as an artist-curator, and he developed a curatorial method of working which was different from the artistic practices of Buren and Haacke. Comparisons with Broodthaers aside, only Asher, among the early practitioners of institutional critique re-contextualised an artwork in a single project. In 1979 he removed Jean-Antoine Houdon's sculpture of George Washington (1788) from its location outside the Art Institute of Chicago to a gallery dedicated to European 18<sup>th</sup> century painting, sculpture and decorative arts, inside the museum.

One of the important differences between an artist versus an artist-curator, engaged in institutionally critical practice is that the latter was likely to be more closely embedded in the museum or art gallery in which he/she was working. Arguably a higher degree of embeddedness meant a greater potential to influence practices and processes in the museum, rather than be subject to co-option. As the purpose of this thesis is to explore institutional critique as a practice, rather than as a genre, the remainder of this chapter focuses on two artists whose work has not been included in the historical canon of Institutional Critique. These artist-curators interpreted institutionally critical practice differently from Wilson, showed evidence of distinctive approaches to curating, and chose alternate venues for their projects to the mainstream and ethnographic museums discussed so far.

## 2.2 Thomas Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004): Relocating canonical artworks from a museum to a makeshift viewing-space

In an interview with Buchloh, Hirschhorn contended that he had “never even considered the issue of institutional critique at all” (2005: 79), and more recently he affirmed publically that he “love[s] museums and learns from them” (ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne, 18.3.2011). I examine Hirschhorn’s practice as that of an artist working curatorially, and although he endorsed museal practices and processes, arguably there are aspects of unintentional criticality in his work. Whereas Wilson adopted innovative modes of curatorial practice, Hirschhorn’s understanding of the role of the curator was as a “carer” of valuable objects, and the curatorial practices in the project *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004) reflected this. Like Wilson, he was deeply embedded in the institutions in which he worked, evidenced by his detailed research-based approach to the institutions with which he was collaborating and his long term commitment to his projects.

Many of Hirschhorn’s structures were temporary, and his preferred artistic media consisted of materials, such as pinewood, paper, polythene and duct-tape. Rather than describe his projects as ephemeral, he preferred to characterise them as “précaire” (precarious), owing to the wider meaning that this term has in the French language. As Foster remarked, “[t]he French *précaire* indicates a socioeconomic insecurity that is not evident in the English ‘precarious’” (Egenhofer 2011: 164). He explained that the notion of precarity had been employed by Hirschhorn on numerous occasions, to describe artworks such as *Travaux abandonnées* (Abandoned works) (1992), and *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit* (No-one takes care of my work) (1992). Hirschhorn had also constructed several precarious structures that he called “monuments”, which were in fact “anti-monuments”, constructed from simple materials and assembled by the inhabitants of the areas where they were being situated. The *Spinoza Monument* (1999), in the red-light district of Amsterdam; the *Deleuze Monument* (2000), located in the immigrant quarter of Avignon; and the *Bataille Monument* (2002), constructed in the Turkish neighbourhood of Kassel – all explored “precarity” as a condition of a society at risk in which various forms of under-class co-existed with neoliberal capitalism. Foster contended “the precarious came to figure less as a characteristic of his work than as a predicament of many people addressed by it” (ibid 163-164).

*Musée Précaire* was, and is, the only project by Hirschhorn to date that directly engaged with museum collections. However, two of his earlier projects also investigated issues relating to art institutions. *Kunsthalle Prekär* (1996), constructed from aluminum foil, plexi-glass and pinewood was a transparent and illuminated structure, which was closed to visitors, who were obliged to view from the outside the exhibited objects made by the artist. The term *prekär* (the German for precarious) applied not only to the materials used to construct the *Kunsthalle*, but also to its location in Langenhagen, an area known for its high crime rate. Despite being part of an ongoing series of public sculpture projects in Lower Saxony, the *Kunsthalle Prekär* drew attention to the absence of physical art institutions on the “periphery”. *Bataille Monument* (2002) was a simple wooden construction, built with the participation of local collaborators in a Turkish community in Kassel during *documenta 11*. It was not part of the official programme and provided a detailed study of the philosopher Georges Bataille, conflating non-art-going and art-going publics, and informing the unsuspecting locals as well as the visiting *documenta* cognoscenti about Bataille. It was the first of Hirschhorn’s “anti-monuments” to be located at a major art event, and following the acts of vandalism perpetrated on the earlier *Deleuze Monument* in Avignon, the first time the artist was constantly present throughout the duration of the project (Buchloh et al 2004).

Hirschhorn’s concept for *Musée Précaire* was to exhibit iconic Modernist artworks on loan from the Centre Georges Pompidou (Pompidou Centre) in Landy, an underprivileged Parisian suburb that was inhabited predominately by immigrants from North Africa. In collaboration with the local inhabitants (as illustrated in Figures 6-8), who were remunerated financially for their work, he built a temporary structure to exhibit the art, whose makeshift aesthetic resembled that of his earlier projects. Hirschhorn was concerned about the absence of opportunities for people living in the “periphery” to engage with art, and intended to show that by providing alternatives to the architecturally imposing structures that typically contained art, it would be possible to provide a less intimidating environment for these “new” viewers.



Figure 6

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, view of rue Albinet



Figure 7

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, Hirschhorn discussing the project with the participants

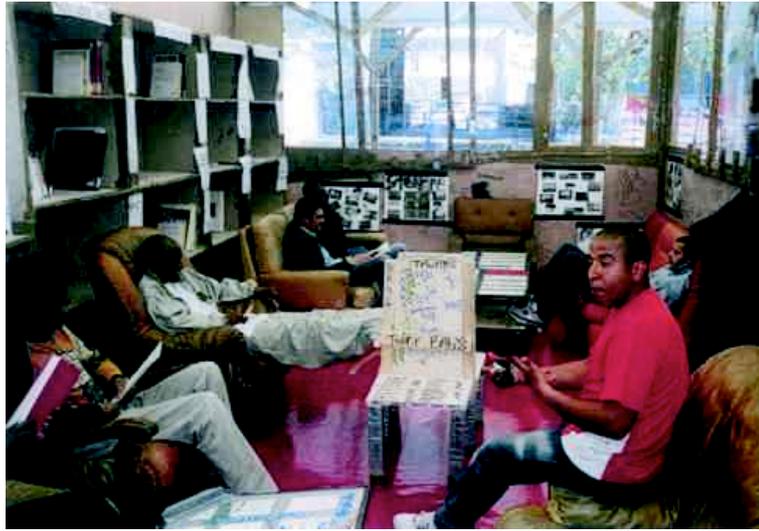


Figure 8

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, view of the library

During his conduct of this project, Hirschhorn was embedded in an established museum, the Pompidou Centre, not by dint of working within its physical walls, but owing to the agreement he had personally negotiated with the lending institutions to borrow major Modernist artworks, by artists such as Duchamp, Léger and Malevitch. Employing a mimetic strategy, he replicated many traditional museum processes, conceiving a parallel museum outside the traditional institution's walls. As the instigator and collaborator with the donating museum, he created a new context for the display of works and instructed the *Musée Précaire's* participants in formal museum processes and how to perform the functions of an established museum's staff.

The initial impetus behind *Musée Précaire* came in August 2000, when Hirschhorn received an invitation from Yvonne Chapuis, the co-director of the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, a centre for research in art practice, to construct a "monument" in Landy, a suburb north of the Boulevard Périphérique in Paris. Following the initial field research, Hirschhorn identified an absence of opportunities for the inhabitants of Landy to view and engage with art and he resolved to conceive a project that would bring, "des oeuvres majeures de l'histoire de l'art du XXe siècle" ("major 20<sup>th</sup> century artworks") for exhibition in the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. Chapuis, who authored the extensive diary-like catalogue on the project, argued that, the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers represented "une alternative aux institutions muséales" ("an alternative art institution"), and "une alternative avant tout géographique" ("above all an alternative geographical location"), implicating the local

communities in an active and meaningful way (2004: 13 novembre 2002).<sup>8</sup> According to the art historian Rachel Haidu, Hirschhorn suggested constructing a “museum” project that would be different to the monuments, altars, and pavilions that he had been erecting in public spaces since the 1990s. Usually dedicated to a single philosopher, some of these prior public art projects had been constructed and manned collaboratively with the paid help of local communities. However, none of them had served as a site for the exhibition of art, nor had any aimed so clearly to address the community in which they were situated (2004).

In January 2003, Chapuis, whose role in the project was that of facilitator and fund-raiser, reserving the curatorial role for Hirschhorn, wrote to Alfred Pacquement, the Director of the National Museum of Modern Art (NMAM), outlining the parameters of the intended project, which involved borrowing artworks by Duchamp, Malevitch, Mondrian, Dali, Beuys, Le Corbusier, Warhol and Léger for display in a temporary structure in the Quartier Landy. A meeting between Chapuis, Hirschhorn and Pacquement followed, which resulted in an agreement in principle to lend the artworks, subject to providing adequate insurance and security measures. The majority of the works owned by the NMAM were physically located in the Pompidou Centre, while others were sourced from the storage facilities of National Fonds national d’art contemporain (a contemporary art collection belonging to the French State). Alison Gingeras was the curator at the Pompidou Centre, responsible for the collaboration with Hirschhorn and the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, and her support helped to overcome many of the practical difficulties that beset the implementation of the project.

Pacquement contacted Bruno Racine, the President of the NMAM in April 2003, explaining, Hirschhorn’s request to borrow major Modernist artworks for relocation outside the museum, and also making the point that the artist wished to employ sixteen volunteers from Quartier Landy to handle the artworks, rather than use the Pompidou Centre’s professional staff. Pacquement clarified that it would be necessary to find a solution, “qui permettrait une collaboration entre les équipes d’Aubervilliers et celles du Centre sans compromettre les exigences de notre assureur ou la vision ‘utopique’ de l’artiste” (“which would facilitate a collaboration between the teams of d’Aubervilliers and the Centre, without compromising the demands of our insurer nor the utopian vision of the artist”) (2004: 25 avril 2003).

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<sup>8</sup> As the exhibition catalogue of *Musée Précaire* is unpaginated, the citations are reported by date. The translations are my own.

Pacquement met Hirschhorn with Hayet Zeggar, the Director of Education and Public Programmes at the Pompidou Centre, where Zeggar pointed out that participating in *Musée Précaire* would be advantageous for the Pompidou Centre as it would oblige the institution “sortir de ses réseaux habituels et va à la rencontre d’un autre public” (“to go beyond its usual network to engage with a different public”) (ibid). Pacquement was aware that collaborating with Hirschhorn, although relatively easy to agree in principle, would be difficult to implement in practice. In his communication to Racine, he explained that it would be necessary to involve a number of different departments from the Pompidou Centre, such as, the Régie des Oeuvres (Registry of Works) and the Atelier des Moyens Techniques (Technical Workshop) in the organisation of the project, despite Hirschhorn’s wish to minimise the involvement of the institution and to optimise the engagement of the local community in Landy.

Pacquement secured agreement for Hirschhorn’s other request, namely the provision of a training programme in museum processes and handling artworks for the locals from Landy. Chapuis specifically commented on the importance of involving the locals in mounting exhibitions, welcoming the visitors, and invigilating the artworks. This approach proved contentious for the Pompidou Centre as the professional standards by which it operated typically required five to six different specialists to move an artwork in order to protect it against changes in humidity, temperature, vibration, light, and environmental acidity, and the specialists viewed sceptically any productive involvement of non-professionals.

Hirschhorn’s intention was to create a project that went beyond the simple acts of borrowing and displaying artworks, to facilitating participation and ensuring the inclusion of locals inhabitants in every aspect of a project; so as to demonstrate the “universality of art”, and the relevance of these “icons of Modernism” to the underprivileged community of Landy (ibid). Hirschhorn viewed the *Musée Précaire* as an exercise in sharing and inclusion: “faire partager l’amour de l’art à des personnes, qui pour les raisons essentiellement, sociales, économiques et culturelles, n’y ont pas accès” (“to share the love of art with people, who for basically social, economic and cultural reasons, had no access to it”); as well as the ability of art to make a difference: “transformer la vie” (“to be life-changing”) (ibid). Hirschhorn’s point was that individuals neither had to be educated in culture, nor from “cultured” backgrounds to appreciate “masterpieces”. He seemed to be arguing for a decontextualized view of art, which by reason of some mystical aura could have a

resonance with individuals that had no obvious connection with it. His position on the civilising effects of “bourgeois” culture would appear to affirm the viewpoints of the “enlightened” patrons of culture of the 19<sup>th</sup>, as described in *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* by the art historian Carol Duncan (1995).

The Pompidou Centre’s aims were different to Hirschhorn’s, as Pacquement viewed placing artworks in the public realm in terms of enlarging public access: “toucher le public souvent laissé en marges de nos activités” (“to reach a public which was frequently on the margins of our activities”) (ibid). The views of the Pompidou Centre were divided both in terms of the concept and the implementation of *Musée Précaire*, evidence of the heterogeneous nature of the institution. The project’s implementation was stalled for several months by the Pompidou Centre’s Legal Department, which imposed a number of restrictions. An exasperated Gingeras sent Hirschhorn an email, complaining that the Centre “peut être super-compliqué” (“can be really complicated”), and that she was doing her best “pour battre sur l’avancement” (“to fight to keep up the momentum”) of the project (June 3 2003). The following day Gingeras addressed the Centre’s concerns in an email to Hirschhorn, Chapuis and Guillaume Désanges, (the Secretary-General of the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers) (June 4 2003). She cited three specific problems that threatened to delay and possibly derail the project. First, the Legal Department insisted on a detailed study of the risks involved for insurance purposes, and this was estimated to take three to six months to complete. Second, the presence of security professionals at all times for the duration of the exhibition would be required, which was contrary to the artistic concept of the project, as Hirschhorn had intended that such functions would be carried out by the locals. Third, permission to lend the artworks had to be requested from the Ministry of Culture, as the works belonged to the French State, and the Centre was only their “legal guardian”. Given these objections, Gingeras doubted that the project could meet the target date of October 2003, and concluded that *Musée Précaire* constituted “un véritable défi pour le Centre” (“a real challenge for the Centre”) (ibid 4 juin 2003). The fact that so many obstacles were raised by the Pompidou Centre’s staff during the preparation stage indicated that *Musée Précaire* was neither conceived nor initially instrumentalised by them.

To counter the deadlock, Chapuis contacted the insurers of the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, but it proved impossible to draw up a contract despite their agreement in principle, as the Pompidou Centre had neither confirmed the exact list of works to be loaned nor their value. At this point, Hirschhorn explored the possibility

of replacing the original works with copies, but rejected this approach on the grounds that the reproductions would lack the “energy” to catalyse the life-changing experiences that were his utopian aims for *Musée Précaire*. Thus there was no other solution than to postpone the project. During this period, Chapuis and Gingeras entered into detailed discussions about which works would be lent once agreement had been reached on the appropriate insurance and handling provisions.

A further impediment to the project’s resolution was raised by Anne Boucher, who worked in the Pompidou Centre’s Registry. Chapuis described the meeting with her on June 24 2003 as being particularly tense: “Nous ferons face au service qui, au sein du Centre Pompidou, émettait le plus de résistance du project”, (“We were up against the service at the heart of the Centre Pompidou, which was showing the greatest resistance to the project”). Chapuis recounted how *Musée Précaire* was a source of disagreement within the Pompidou Centre. Although Racine and Pacquement were in favour in principle, the issue of lending “patrimoine national” (“national treasure”) remained problematic, and Boucher continued to insist that the Pompidou Centre had no right to lend artworks that it did not actually own. The discrepancy in approaches between Pacquement and Gingeras, who were concerned with advancing the project, on the one hand, and resistance from the Centre Registry and Legal Department, on the other hand, is evidence of the heterogeneous nature of the Pompidou Centre, and the conflicting inter-subject positions.

Chapuis next put her efforts into fund-raising, contacting the Département de Paris, the Île-de-France, the Fonds Georges P. Vanier, the Swiss Cultural Funds, Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Arts Council), and the European Union’s Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund). Application for funding proved difficult given that the Pompidou Centre had not signed all the requisite documents, as its detailed study on the insurance provisions was still pending. At this point Hirschhorn intervened to put pressure on the Fonds national d’art contemporain, which together with the Pompidou Centre were the lenders of the artworks. Hirschhorn’s letter stated with underlined text, the urgency of completing the required paperwork: “Nous aurions urgemment besoin d’un courrier officiel mentionnant votre accord pour nous aider dans la recherche de financements” (“We urgently require an official letter of agreement to facilitate the fund raising process”) (31 juillet 2003). At this low point in the implementation process, some positive news emerged as Lucien Marest, responsible for Culture in the Municipal Government of Aubervilliers, announced his support for the project, made a financial contribution,

and offered a plot of land on which the *Musée Précaire* could be constructed.

Over the next six months, the outstanding impediments to the realisation of the project were solved. First, the Ministry of Culture acquiesced to the Pompidou Centre lending the artworks. Second, Lloyds of London agreed to issue an all-risks “nail-to-nail” insurance policy. Third, a compromise was reached on security, with professional guards on site at all times, while the volunteers would assist by patrolling the site during the day, and invigilate exhibitions. The terms of the agreement between the Centre Pompidou and Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers were laid down in a contract, entitled the “Convention de prêt” (“Loan Agreement”) (OM/2003/01), April 9, 2004, signed by Racine for the Centre, and Xavier Le Roy, President of Les Laboratoires. Adequate funding, details of which were published on the final pages of the exhibition catalogue, was obtained from a variety of public and private sources, including the French Ministry of Culture, the town of Aubervilliers, the European Union’s Economic and Social Fund, Pro-Helvetia, the galleries Arndt & Partner and Chantal Crousel, and the retailer Agnès b. Thus the *Musée Précaire* was realised, and the inaugural exhibition, featuring Marcel Duchamp’s work opened 19 April 2004.



Figure 9

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, opening of the Marcel Duchamp exhibition, 20 April 2004

Hirschhorn’s project may be viewed as both affirmatory and critical of the museum. Affirmatory elements included: the strict adherence to the formal conventions of museum processes, the inculcation of bourgeois cultural values into the immigrant population located in the suburbs of Paris, and the later co-option of the project by the Pompidou Centre. The critical parts comprised: the alternative form

of museum architecture, the relocation of masterpieces to the periphery, and the approach of de-professionalisation, thereby including participants and audiences, who would otherwise be excluded in such a project.

Although the structure of the building and its location were precarious, the attention to correct museum processes evident in *Musée Précaire* appeared to, and arguably did, affirm the museum's values. By adopting traditional approaches to curating in the sense of "caring" for canonical artworks, Hirschhorn reinforced the status of the museum. Under his supervision, museum conventions for handling artworks were strictly adhered to and correct museum procedures were scrupulously observed (Chapuis 2004). This included the organisation of climate-controlled transportation, the provision of adequate insurance, sufficient security, and the correct conditions for displaying and taking care of the works, including the wearing of white gloves just like museum staff, so that this makeshift institution mimicked the processes of an established museum. This professionalised approach was possible as a group of young people from Aubervilliers had experienced a full immersion programme in various departments of the Centre Pompidou, in order to acquire knowledge of security procedures, art handling, framing, installing and methods of disseminating information to the public, as illustrated in Figure 10.

Hirschhorn's project implied that correct processes were important in the functioning of the museum, and many typical museum activities and programmes were able to take place in a precarious structure. The importance of carrying out these procedures in the right way suggested that for Hirschhorn the artworks continued to be of cultural significance, irrespective of the conditions, formal or informal, of their institutional framing. This was important because much of the discussion by art critics and art historians on how to define and legitimate art had concerned its location in an art institution, drawing on the theorist George Dickie's "Institutional Theory of Art" (1971). However, Hirschhorn demonstrated that how an object was handled, namely whether it was treated as an artwork, was what defined it as art. For Hirschhorn, the cultural legitimacy of artworks was conferred less by where they were exhibited, and more by the "art-like" way in which they were considered and treated, and similar points were made by de Duve "This is Art: Anatomy of a Sentence" (2014).

Broodthaers had already shown in *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles* (1968-1972), that the existence of a building was not necessary to make a museological statement. Whereas Broodthaers' approach was to parody

museological processes in order to undermine their authority, Hirschhorn's scrupulous compliance with correct museum procedures was evidence of a different attitude towards them. For Hirschhorn the issue was less about the way in which the museum categorised artworks, but more about public access to them. Hirschhorn and Broodthaers both changed the context of the museum, creating temporary structures that altered the ways in which the works on display were contextualised. However, whereas Broodthaers demonstrated that works of art were only recognised as such because of their institutional framing conditions – and for this reason he exhibited artworks together with other objects so as to demonstrate their equal cultural legitimacy (Borgemeister 1987), for Hirschhorn the cultural legitimacy of artworks was determined by the way in which they were cared for (Chapuis 2004). Given the quality and importance of the works, Hirschhorn insisted on a high standard of curatorial professionalism and the observance of appropriate museum processes from all the participants. In this respect, Hirschhorn reinforced the procedures that were typical of mainstream museums, and in acting as an advocate for this approach, he affirmed the values of the museum whilst transposing them to a makeshift structure.

According to the exhibition catalogue, a productive relationship developed between Hirschhorn and his local collaborators. They engaged with the artworks in a professional manner, installing and de-installing shows, attending openings, organising events and official visits, and supervising art workshops for children (Chapuis 2004). Documentary evidence of the project from the same source also showed an activated sense of collective participation on the part of the viewers. The energy and potentiality achieved by the *Musée Précaire* in terms of its rapid turnaround of artworks and daily events, such as the children's workshop illustrated in Figure 11, and the involvement of new participating audiences – in which the boundaries between staff and spectators were often indistinguishable – could be read as an implied critique by Hirschhorn of the exclusive nature, and less intensive commitment to its publics of formal art institutions, in that museums typically only invite privileged audiences to their openings, and limit the artist and curator's contact with viewers to a few brief meetings.



Figure 10

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, installing the Piet Mondrian, exhibition, 3-9 May 2004

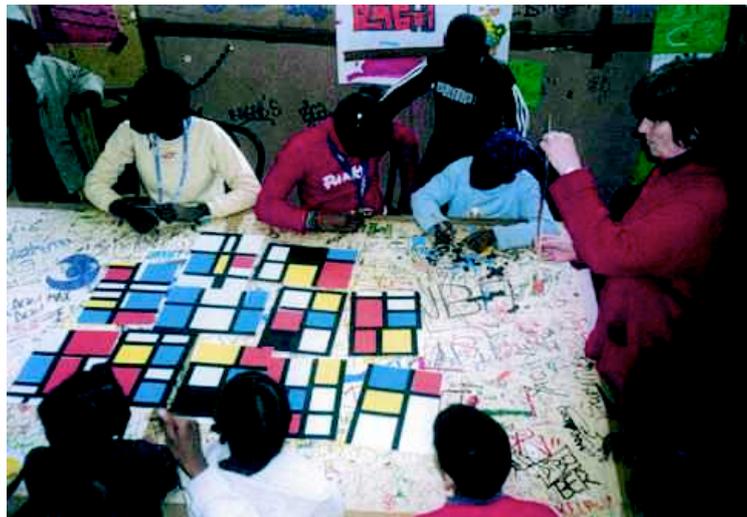


Figure 11

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, children's workshop, Piet Mondrian Week, 5 May 2004

The hands-on involvement of the residents of Aubervilliers was always at the core of Hirschhorn's concept and there was a strong sense among the participants that the *Musée Précaire* belonged to them. Their activity arguably enlarged the definition of what it meant to be an audience, extending it to the notion of participatory spectatorship, as opposed to the passive appreciation of artworks that was sometimes considered to be a habitual mode of institutional viewing. Haidu contended that working with these culturally significant artworks had a "profound effect" on the local volunteers and, although not culturally educated in the traditional

sense, but clearly informed by Hirschhorn, a “dialogue ensued between the works, the helpers and the spectators that was meaningful, if not utopic” (Haidu 2004 n.p.).

As far as the critical reception of the work was concerned, the project has been viewed as both affirmatory and critical of the museum. The art historian Fabien Danesi observed that *Musée Précaire* was constructed with the assistance of the “local housing project’s residents so that they might be given access to a culture that is often alien to them”, and that despite the “transgression” evoked by Hirschhorn, his project seems to be “situated more on the side of reconciliation” (2009: n.p.). In her critical commentary on Hirschhorn’s work Haidu argued that the *Musée Précaire* “seeks to *demonstrate* art’s transcendental values”, that his project “has an enormous stake in art’s retention of its ‘meaningfulness’” (ibid n.p.). She viewed Hirschhorn as wanting to “set up the artwork to prescribe its own framing”, something that had historically been prescribed “from above”, namely by the museum. Hirschhorn considered the works borrowed from the Centre Pompidou as “icons of Modernism” capable of universal appeal, and in this sense *Musée Précaire* attempted to instil bourgeois norms into the minds of the participating Landy public, thereby endorsing earlier understandings of the role of the museum as explained by the sociologist Tony Bennett (1995). The inculcation of occidental Modernism and institutionalised cultural mores into the minds of a potential audience living on the periphery of Paris resonated with the type of philanthropic intent redolent of 19<sup>th</sup> century museum practice. An alternative strategy might have been to carry out a project that referenced African Modernism, as the majority of the Landy inhabitants had originated from North Africa. Despite this, the project appears to have been sustainable up to some point, as Alberro noted that some of *Musée Précaire*’s activities “have taken on a life of their own” and the fact that they “continue to this day testifies to the effectiveness of the project” (2012: n.p.).

Hirschhorn also addressed concerns that had been voiced by Bourdieu in his landmark publication *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), and in his equally significant joint publication with the sociologists Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (1997). Bourdieu argued that a pre-existing cultural education and a cultivated background were necessary elements in the appreciation of art. Hirschhorn’s project refuted Bourdieu’s position, showing that the underprivileged could be acculturated and educated to engage with major works of art. Similar issues of social class, cultural education and taste were parodied by Fraser, in her video performance work,

*Museum Highlights: a Gallery Talk* (1989), where, referencing Bourdieu, she explained with considerable irony, that a cultured taste was something that must be acquired and cultivated over time as a necessary prerequisite for appreciating art. She contended that the museum “gives an opportunity for enjoying the highest privileges of wealth and leisure to all those people who have cultivated tastes but not the means of gratifying them”, and for those who have not yet cultivated taste, the museum would provide “training in taste” (Dwiezior 2003: 246, fn 13). According to Fraser, the encounter with art was designed to ensure the gentrification process of working class audiences in which the public “must be forced to raise their standards of taste by seeing the masterpieces of other civilisations and other centuries” (ibid 246 fn 21). Hirschhorn, who was probably fully conversant with the irony contained in Fraser’s remarks, criticised the idea that only individuals who possessed a superior social and educational background could appreciate culture, and showed that by developing a personal relationship with the local inhabitants and winning their trust, they would engage with art.

Although Hirschhorn and Chapuis initiated the project, *Musée Précaire* was later co-opted by the Centre Pompidou, as the initiative fitted aptly into its extensive outreach programme. The Pompidou Centre had insufficient space in Paris to house its entire collection of 60,000 modern and contemporary artworks and sought opportunities to disseminate the works. Laurent Le Bon, the then Director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz explained the initiation of the “Centre Pompidou mobile”, an itinerant museum of the collection that toured throughout France, and also the establishment of a new branch of the museum, the Centre Pompidou Metz, inaugurated 12 May 2010 (2013).<sup>9</sup> *Musée Précaire* could, therefore, be interpreted as providing an alternative viewing space for the Pompidou Centre’s collection, and Hirschhorn’s project could be regarded as implementing the Pompidou Centre’s mediation strategy, thus re-affirming its role. In this way, Hirschhorn and his collaborators could be seen as being instrumentalised by the lending institution, in that they were being used as promotional tools to publicise its collection. The first evidence of this was apparent in the preamble of the contract between the Pompidou Centre and the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, which stated that, “Le Centre Pompidou a notamment pour sa mission la diffusion des collections du Musée national d’art

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9 Le Bon, L. (2013). “Quel Musée d’art contemporain pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> Siècle” (What type of Contemporary Art Museum in the 21st century?). Lecture at Mamco (Musée d’art moderne et contemporain) in Geneva 29.1.2013.

modern (MNAM), notamment, à travers des expositions temporaires. Dans ce cadre, le Centre Pompidou prête aux Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers des oeuvres". ("The Pompidou Centre's mission is to disseminate the collections of the MNAM, particularly by means of temporary exhibitions. Within this framework, the Pompidou Centre undertakes to lend artworks to the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers") (9 avril 2004). Thus, Hirschhorn's project appeared to be more affirmative than critical when analysed within the broader context of the Pompidou Centre's strategy of enhancing viewing opportunities for its collection. Indeed the *Musée Précaire* seemed to support the Pompidou Centre's objectives, acting as the "art system's advocate" rather than its "deconstructive delineator" (Foster 1986: 103).

Throughout the project, Pacquement ensured that the Pompidou Centre shared in the public relations benefits of being involved in what was widely reported in the press to be a philanthropic and socially engaged exercise, contending "the Centre Pompidou's ambition is continually to develop new audiences and to take modern art and culture to a wider public" (Pacquement 2004: n.p.). Reporting on the experience, Pacquement related that the project engendered an atmosphere of relaxation contending that, "[u]nder usual circumstances, people tend to act differently in a museum – such as lowering their voices as they walk around the space". In Aubervilliers, however, the residents did not change their "everyday behaviour". Children hung out in the Musée Précaire's café, "playing and running around in front of the exhibition space" (ibid).

*Musée Précaire* directly addressed the nature of the physical materiality and the formality of established museums, and explored the possibility of creating alternative locations for viewing art. Hirschhorn created an alternative museum, constructed from simple materials, using traditional curating methods and established museological processes to display valuable canonised artworks inside its makeshift walls. Furthermore, he showed in this project that the presence of a permanent physical structure, as expressed in a typical imposing museum building was not the only important element in the process of exhibiting art. The *Musée Précaire* was constructed from a modular structure, manufactured by Algeco – an enterprise specialising in customised portable buildings and providing modular space and secure storage facilities. The Pompidou Centre understandably insisted on a higher level of physical robustness than was usual in Hirschhorn's projects and attention was paid to reinforcing the floor, using non-flammable materials, installing an alarm system, and providing only one entrance/exit door to increase security.

Hirschhorn showed that a simple container could be a suitable place to show art, and could be more advantageous than a traditional edifice, that might actually discourage certain visitors, owing to its imposing nature. He implied that established institutions might be out of reach of, or intimidating to, certain communities, and sought to create a link between those communities and canonised culture (Chapuis 2004). He questioned whether a formal museum structure, as represented by an intimidating building where the visitor was made to feel miniscule, was the best way of displaying art. The precarious notion of institutionalism, as manifested in the relatively modest materiality of the building, prescribed by Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire*, contrasted with the very values of permanence and continuity, on which museums are usually built. According to Haidu, whereas the purpose of the museum's imposing physical structure was to defend the universal nature (autonomy) of art, *Musée Précaire*, manifested transparency and contingency, and created a network of institutions and a community of involved spectators (2004). The implications of this atypical architecture were far-reaching, as alterations to the institutional infrastructure changed the behaviour of the visitors. Normally museum visitors moved around the building silently, but at *Musée Précaire* the audiences carried on behaving as they did in the life-world (Chapuis 2004). Removing the physical characteristics of the museum that inculcated seriousness, such as the formal building, changed the way in which viewers were directed to behave in relation to the artworks, and by implication, altered the status of those artworks.

Haidu noted that in *Reflections*, the theorist and critic Walter Benjamin maintained that "[c]ertain works ought no longer to be individual experiences (have the character of works) but should, rather, concern the use (transformation) of certain institutes and institutions" (2004 n.p.). The transformational potential of the canonical works was possible owing to the context in which they were exhibited in *Musée Précaire*. Hirschhorn opened up the notion of the museum, conceiving it differently and making it accessible to new audiences. Traditionally a museum's architecture and the conception and contextualisation of "the hang" controlled the meaning and interpretative influences of the artworks it contained. Mapped on to these material infrastructures were understandings about the way in which the museum determined the legitimacy and cultural value of the objects it housed. As the art historian Philip Fisher explained, the museum was "a script, that makes certain acts possible and other unthinkable" (1991:18). Hirschhorn's project challenged these conventions by reconceptualising, redesigning and relocating the container for the artworks. It was,

and still is, normal practice to locate artworks in the public realm; but it was, and still is, unusual that works of such value and historical significance would be loaned under such circumstances.

*Musée Précaire* framed the art it contained in an entirely different way to the Centre Pompidou and contrary to the norms of mainstream museum practice. As the framing of art is one of the principal tenets of institutional critique, the implications of shifting the frame were significant. No longer exhibited in a permanent edifice at the centre of Paris, but displayed in a pre-fabricated temporary structure located in its periphery, *Musée Précaire* arguably conferred on the artworks it contained, a loss in prestige, reduced cultural legitimisation and lesser historical importance. Changing the location of the artworks had important implications for their cultural significance in that the works lost some of their “auratic” symbolic status as icons of Modernism. By transposing the artworks to a different location, Hirschhorn altered their meaning in that they acquired an extended provenance and became part of the discursive environment outside the physical museum. In an interview with Gingeras, Hirschhorn contended that he wanted his work to have an existence outside the formal institutional context, and therefore he sought to balance the viewing possibilities for his artworks by exhibiting both in museums and public spaces, including “in alternative galleries, or in squats, in apartments, in the street” (2004: 21). In order to take responsibility for every aspect of his work, he clarified his intention of “working politically”, rather than “making political work”, meaning that he did not specifically engage in political subjects, but instead investigated issues in the “life-world” (de Blaaij and Roelandt 2011). As such, Hirschhorn claimed, somewhat disingenuously, no deliberate socio-political agency for his projects. He contended that “I am an artist, not a social worker. The “Musée Précaire Albinet” is a work of art, not a sociocultural project” (2004: 76), in contrast with Haacke, who consciously did, and still does, engage viewers in a dialogue about socio-political issues.

Hirschhorn’s intention was to show that relocating artworks from the centre to the periphery of Paris could make an important difference to the viewing experience of art for specific audiences. Displaying the artworks in this new location had significant implications for the viewers, and the artworks became instruments in a learning experience for people living in the area, who were involved in the project as “museum assistants”, replacing the usual trained staff. Haidu argued that *Musée Précaire* demonstrated “[a] collective spectator’s repossession of the means of production” (2004). The relocation of the “museum” and the artworks, and the

involvement of members of the local community, addressed audiences in a different way than if they had been simply taken to visit the Pompidou Centre in the centre of Paris. In bringing the artworks to a specific audience in their own locality, rather than taking this micro-public to view the art in the museum, Hirschhorn made the artworks part of their lives and their daily activities, and therefore more accessible and meaningful.

Hirschhorn's point was not to challenge the concept of the museum, but to create an alternative viewing experience available to underprivileged communities, who would not otherwise encounter the "masterpieces". He included a new type of audience into Modernism's viewing public, achieving this by de-professionalising the curatorial and art handling activities that were part of exhibition installation and the animation of the exhibition programme. Reports on the project showed that Hirschhorn effectively introduced a non-elite workforce into what was, and still is, an elite profession; he short-circuited the normal training procedures and empowered the project's participants by giving them a high level of responsibility for the artworks they handled (Chapuis 2004).

The intensity and velocity of the programme at *Musée Précaire*, and the involvement of the local community, went beyond the public programmes typical of museums and art centres. In an established museum the exhibited artist would usually be present at the opening of an exhibition and might return to give an art's talk or interview. In contrast Hirschhorn spent several years in Landy prior to the *Musée Précaire's* inauguration, and was present for all phases of the project's evolution, which comprised: the preparation period of 18 months, the three week period during which the museum was constructed, the exhibition cycle of eight weeks, and demolition of the temporary structure in seven days.

The *Musée Précaire* re-conceived the museum on different terms than it was usually understood. It addressed a non-museum-going public and judging by the number of visitors and the active participation of the collaborators, led to a greater degree of participation in the exhibitions than was usual in established museums. The programme offered by the *Musée Précaire* was particularly intense. Usually a temporary exhibition mounted in an art centre or a museum is on view for two to six months, but in this instance, over a period of eight weeks (April 19 – June 13 2004), Hirschhorn rotated the artists every week, exhibiting: Duchamp, Malevitch, Mondrian, Dali, Beuys, Le Corbusier, Warhol, and Léger. Art centres and museums typically put on several events to animate the exhibitions, such as VIP openings, curator's talks and

workshops for children. However, in the case of *Musée Précaire*, events took place on a *daily* basis, according to the following programme: on Monday, the artworks from the previous weeks were dismantled and the building was refurbished; on Tuesday, the new works were delivered and installed for the opening that evening. On Wednesday afternoons, mediators organised workshops in which the neighborhood's children learned about the artists' work by practical engagement, making puzzles for example inspired by Mondrian and sewing costumes which referenced motifs in Léger's paintings. On Thursday afternoons, invited authors led a writing studio for adults – all the authors were female to correct the Modernist gender imbalance, as all the artists exhibited were male. On Friday evenings there was a public debate on political subjects such as the Arab-Jewish question, led by an invited speaker, and on Saturdays, an art historian lectured on that week's featured artist, whilst on Sunday evenings a communal meal, prepared by the locals, who also ran the museum café, was offered to the community and visitors.

In an elucidation of Hirschhorn's strategy of inclusion, Buchloh argued that Hirschhorn's view of the "contextual constitution of artistic meaning and cultural value" differed from those of the "preceding generation of artists whose work had defined the projects of institutional critique" (2004: 63). Buchloh made a distinction between the early practitioners of institutional critique, who argued for a wider representation of artists in museums and Hirschhorn, who sought an expansion of audiences for art. Buchloh pointed out that earlier some artists felt excluded from the museum and therefore called upon it to expand its ideological horizons and include a wider range of *art practice*. He contended that in "manifest opposition" to the "claims of politically radical art of the 1960s and 1970s", which sought to dismantle the ideological agendas of art institutions, "Hirschhorn's work inhabits the spaces and the subject positions of those who have been excluded from the victories of modernity" (ibid 64). So rather than questioning the museum's policies on representation, Hirschhorn criticised the exclusion of underprivileged audiences from the museum. Similar concerns have been voiced by researchers examining the low attendance at museums of black and minority ethnic groups in the UK (Dewdney et al 2013). The issues and protocols with which Hirschhorn was confronted in the implementation of his project underlined the fact that museums primarily addressed privileged and educated visitors. According to Buchloh, Hirschhorn sought to abolish "traditional institutional boundaries", and "collapse socially and politically constructed boundaries in acts of spontaneous communication with a supposedly classless

audience” (op cit 64-65). Unlike the previous generation of institutionally critical practitioners, who sought to persuade museums and art galleries to extend the range of artists represented to include more women and non-western artists, Hirschhorn’s concern was to expand the workers in the museum and the visitors to the museum to a level of almost utopian inclusivity.

In *Musée Précaire*, the art institution was understood in various forms. First as an alternative space; second as forming part of, and falling within, a comprehensive system of art that included museological discourse, and third as part of an established museum’s outreach programme. Adopting Fraser’s earlier viewpoint that there is an outside to the institution of art, technically this project took place beyond the physical walls of the museum (1985). However, if the institution of art were to be understood to be an all-encompassing, comprehensive art discourse, as Fraser later argued, the project was carried out inside the institution of art, comprehended as an ideological space (2005). The two different positions on the existence, or not, of an outside to the institution of art led to different readings of this project. If *Musée Précaire* were regarded as a temporary alternative viewing space, it might be interpreted as a project of mimetic critique, implying a criticism of the permanence of museum structures as manifested in architecturally impressive buildings. Provided the correct museological procedures were followed, Hirschhorn made the point that an engagement with art was possible in a much simpler physical structure. If on the other hand, the institution of art was conceived as all-encompassing and without boundaries, then *Musée Précaire* was a constituent part of it, and the nature of the critique was symbolic, and the project had symbolic value in representing ways in which it was possible to render culture more accessible in the periphery.

Hirschhorn was not critical of museums per se, in fact he was complicit with many of the museum’s processes, procedures and conventions; but he was critical of their exclusivity and inaccessibility to certain audiences. *Musée Précaire* can therefore be read as steering the museum in a different direction, or altering its remit, making it and its activities more accessible to audiences it would not otherwise reach. Hirschhorn’s rationale for the museum’s intensive programme was that he wanted to produce a different activity every day. He contended that the artworks did not represent a passive “patrimoine”, rather the presence of the works was intended to catalyse other activities. According to Haidu (2004), the notion of “patrimoine culturel” was called into question by *Musée Précaire*, as the artworks were not kept at a distance from audiences – in vitrines or cordoned-off – as in a formal museum, but

rather the participants were permitted to handle and hang the works themselves. Arguably, the project created a transfer of symbolic ownership of the artworks from the State to the local community in Landy, in that the works were located in their own neighbourhood, and they thereby gained access to a cultural legacy normally out of their reach. Although Hirschhorn's project reaffirmed the civilising influences of culture, his intentions in *Musée Précaire* were more about promoting the appreciation of art by means of active participation, rather than through passive viewing in an awe-inspiring and potentially intimidating museum. Hirschhorn might be criticised for having an antiquated view of the museum, as arguably museum professionals today are conscious of involving viewers and actively engage in strategies intended to demystify art and make artworks more accessible to the public. Although public programmes in museums today focus on different modes of interpretation, few go as far as Hirschhorn did in terms of intensity and commitment, when a decade ago he brought the art from the Centre Pompidou to the viewers in Landy.

*Musée Précaire* succeeded in being both critical and affirmative of the museum. Despite his assertions that he had no interest in institutional critique, Hirschhorn expressed concerns about the authority of the museum, the ubiquity of the white cube, the importance of demystifying art, and the need to address as many spectators as possible in the interests of democracy and social inclusion – all key elements in institutionally critical discourses and critical curatorial practice (Buchloh 2005). Without entering into specifics, in an interview with Buchloh. He also asserted that he wanted to change the museum (ibid). Moreover, his more recent works have been concerned with the activities of advertising, design, branding and commodity culture, all of which are constituent elements in institutionally critical art and curatorial practice. Interviewed by Gingeras, Hirschhorn said that he had a “critical attitude towards the ‘white cube’ and towards glorified, mystified artworks and the means of displaying them”, and that he “always hated a certain way of presenting artworks that aims to intimidate the spectator” (2004: 14). *Musée Précaire*, despite its complicity with the conventions and practices of the museum, partially succeeds in fulfilling these intentions.

### 2.3 Roberto Jacoby's *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen* (2010): Critique of an international biennial's mission statement

Roberto Jacoby is an institutionally critical artist whose practice has its origins in activism. A study of the long and varied history of art activism is outside the scope of this research, however, Meyer (1993) and Alberro and Stimson (2009) had already linked institutional critique with activist practice. In their anthology Alberro and Stimson incorporated "Project for the Experimental Art Series" (1968), by the Argentinian artists Graciela Carnevale and Eduardo Favario, both of whom, like Jacoby, were members of the art activist collective, Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia de Rosario. Carnevale's work *Lock-Up Action* literally imprisoned visitors in the gallery. In *Closed Gallery Piece*, Favario invited viewers to migrate from the closed gallery to another venue, arguing that shutting the gallery signified that works of art "can no longer continue to evolve within the traditional environment" (op cit 74). Favario contended that art should be activated in a different location, such as in the street, and intended the work to function as a metaphorical critique of the frequent restrictions on political activities made by the then President of Argentina, General Juan Carlos Onganía Carballo and his regime (1966-1970).

Jacoby was instrumental in the much cited artistic and political "happening", *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán is Burning) in 1968, whose importance in the history of art activism has frequently been revisited at international art exhibitions, such as *documenta 12* (2007) and the 29<sup>th</sup> *São Paulo Biennial* (2010). In the 1960s Jacoby participated in the artists' collective that protested against the privatisation of agricultural land in the Tucumán area of northeastern Argentina, which had caused the impoverishment of local farm-workers. Following a period of research and advocacy, *Tucumán Arde* conceived an exhibition, entitled, the "1st Biennial of Avant-garde Art" (1968), which displayed a montage of audio-visual media and hosted talks by artists, theorists and activists, revealing the government's forced appropriation of its citizens' land. The participating artist Nicolas Guagnini noted that *Tucumán Arde* was called an "avant-garde art biennial" in order to distract the regime from its political objective, protecting the project by presenting it as an "artistic activity" (2011). Despite his activist background, Jacoby's practice is nevertheless firmly embedded in the institution of art, and his versatile activities were the subject of a retrospective exhibition, *Desire Rises from Collapse*, at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in Madrid in 2011, where the challenges of maintaining

the focus on activist practice and avoiding the institutionalisation of his work were discussed in a conversation with the critic Ana Longoni (Jacoby and Longoni 2012).

My interest in Jacoby's work focuses on his project *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images* (2010), which took place at the 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (2010). Although biennials have a long history, it is only since the 1990s that they have played a dominant role in the display of contemporary art. Recent research on biennialisation as discussed by Filipovic et al (2010), explained how the biennial, widely understood to include triennials, *documenta* and other global mega-exhibitions, complemented the museum as a platform for art, embracing the professionalisation of curating and the globalisation of art practice. As the locus of presenting art shifted to include biennials, they have also become a focal point for institutionally critical practice.



Figure 12

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images* (2010), installation

Jacoby was invited to participate in the 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (2010) by its official curators, Moacir dos Anjos and Agnaldo Farias, who chose as their theme the relationship between art and politics, and issued a mission statement that claimed that “art and politics are inextricably linked”, suggesting that the participating artists produced work to respond to this. Jacoby created a social space by transforming his allocated booth at the biennial into a meeting room, and provided a table and chairs, thereby producing a platform for the discussion of politics. On the walls he placed banner-sized photographs of the main candidates in the then forthcoming Brazilian

Presidential election (2010): a smiling reproduction of Dilma Roussef, a protégée of the outgoing President Lula, who represented the Partido dos Trabalhadores, and a surly-looking image of her main opponent, José Serra of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Guagnini 2011). Jacoby performed both the roles of artist; arranging a site-specific installation, and curator; developing the concept, managing the exhibition space, engaging the collaborators, organising the material, providing the publicity, devising performances and facilitating events.



Figure 13

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images, discussion platform*

On September 21 2010, the opening night of the biennial, as Figure 14 illustrates, Jacoby invited the Argentinian Brigade for Dilma, a group supporting Roussef's candidature, to occupy his exhibition space, where they mounted a political campaign to spread propaganda on her behalf. By converting the viewing space into a social space, and inviting political activity to take place within it, Jacoby created a platform for the promotion of a partisan political campaign. The subversive critical strategies inherent in his project became apparent when this group of political activists started a demonstration, and contrary to the assurances they had made to the biennial curators, Jacoby and the Argentinean Brigade for Dilma distributed pamphlets and showed videos in support of her campaign.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The activities in Jacoby's booth and the reactions of the visitors were documented in a video produced by Jacoby's collaborator Syd Krochmalny (2010).



Figure 14

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images,*  
Brigada Internacional from Argentina participating in the Sao Paolo Biennial September 2010

Guagnini explained that, ironically, Jacoby's gesture in support of the party already in power, underlined the fact that, "as a result of the new redistributive democracy ascendant across most of South America", there was no longer a "revolutionary political movement, nothing to the left of the Center-Left" (2011 n.p.). He observed that it was a "devastating commentary on the prevailing myopic, idealized notions of art's relationship to politics", that while the pioneers of the most radical art of 1960s were being canonised as heroic figures, at the same time, the political figures of the same period were being mythologised, overlooking the fact that some of the era's former militants were subsequently members of the government, engaging in all the compromises that this entailed (ibid). Although Jacoby's actions endorsed the status quo in Brazilian politics, this was not the main point of his project, which was rather a critique of dos Anjos and Farias, who claimed to encourage, but did not actually allow, real connections between art and politics to be made within the biennial.

In his early concepts for *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen*, Jacoby stated his intention to use a fictitious and hypothetical campaign as a platform for reflection on electoral processes in general, evidenced by the information supplied in his proposal, which was published in the both the exhibition catalogue and on the São Paulo Biennial website. Although he supplied photographs of the real presidential candidates, at this stage, no direct reference was made in the project proposal about the then forthcoming presidential elections in Brazil, planned for October 2010.

Jacoby delivered his images to dos Anjos and Farias just before the catalogue was ready for printing, and it was apparently understood by them that the submitted images of the actual presidential candidates merely represented the previously discussed fictitious and hypothetical campaign, and were in no way intended to particularise Jacoby's work. The curators, perhaps somewhat disingenuously, claimed after the fact, that for them to question these images would have incurred the artist's distrust (dos Anjos and Farias 2010).



Figure 15

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images, act of censorship*

In the production of the work, Jacoby managed every detail of the exhibition space and the entire “mise-en-scène” of his planned installation. To avoid incurring any suspicion from the biennial organisers, he had the banners of Rouseff and Serra produced offsite. However, during the preparation and execution of the project, Jacoby and his production team wore T-shirts in support of Rouseff, clearly indicating the partisan nature of his intervention. An article, based on an interview with Jacoby, was published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* speculating that the alleged intention of the artist's work was to establish a campaign for Rouseff under the banner of the “Argentinian Brigade for Dilma”, and controversially to situate it inside the *29th São Paulo Biennial*, apparently without the foreknowledge of the official biennial curators. Expecting Jacoby to create a critical arena for the general articulation of ideas about the role of democracy in society and pluralistic election processes, the biennial curators were taken by surprise by the specificity of *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen* (Jacoby 2010). Once they realised Jacoby's intentions to politicise the space by inviting the Argentinian Brigade, they accused him of having

misled them in the pursuit of his own objectives. Having understood the full implications of his critique, they objected to his work and censored the “offending” parts, seeing their function as defending the biennial as an institution and resisting initiatives that contested its approach (dos Anjos and Farias 2010).



Figure 16

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen/The soul never thinks without images, censorship*

Unsure of how to resolve this situation within the remit of the biennial, the President of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation, to whom dos Anjos and Farias had referred the problem of Jacoby’s work, consulted the Electoral Tribunal regarding the legality of the artist’s actions. The overt and specific politicisation of the work alarmed the electoral officials, who decreed that Jacoby’s project constituted two potential infringements of Brazilian electoral law: first, prohibiting political propaganda in public buildings during electoral campaigns, and second, barring the use of public funds for campaign purposes. The tribunal decreed that Jacoby’s artwork “constituted an electoral crime” that could, if prosecuted, lead to the disqualification of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation from receiving public funding in the future. Objecting to the specificity of the project, and not wishing to take any risks that might jeopardise the institution, the biennial curators took action against those aspects of the project that they deemed contravened the biennial’s regulations. They correspondingly censored the elements of Jacoby’s work that they considered to be specifically campaign-related, which took the form of evicting the Argentinian Brigade Brigade for Dilma, and literally papering over the photo-posters of the two presidential candidates, as

Figures 15 and 16 demonstrate (Jacoby 2010). The curator Octavio Zaya argued that it was unreasonable for a biennial curator to censor an artwork “by protecting himself behind the alleged decision of a tribunal”, and that the least that an artist could expect from a curator was “the total and unequivocal defense of the art space” as a locus for free expression. Instead of evaluating Jacoby’s politically confrontational work with aesthetic criteria, Zaya argued that the biennial curators allowed it to be judged by a set of rules formulated beyond the sphere of art.

In response to this act of censorship, the Argentinian Brigade for Dilma and a group of prominent Brazilian intellectuals signed a text authored by Jacoby, entitled “São Paulo Is Burning: The Spectre of Politics at the Biennial” (2010), which criticised the actions of the biennial curators and referenced Jacoby’s previous involvement in *Tucumán Arde*. Anxious to demonstrate their aesthetic tolerance, dos Anjos and Farias issued a public statement entitled, “São Paulo Is Burning: A Response” (2010), in which they insisted they had only censored those elements of the work that were deemed to be party-political propaganda. Contrary to the claims stated in Jacoby’s published text, dos Anjos and Farias argued they had left untouched all discursive and participative elements in Jacoby’s work, such as debates and workshops, including those aspects of the project that directly criticised the biennial curators themselves, this particular biennial, and the art system in general. This interference in the work by the biennial curators, however, contributed an additional dimension to the production, display, meaning and reception of the work. The measures taken by the biennial curators were no simple act of censorship, but rather a partial suppression of those aspects they were uncomfortable with. Their actions created controversy among other institutionally critical artists and curators, who mediated the project internationally. The incident attracted the attention of Chto Delat?, a collective of art activists, curators and writers in Russia, who published the explanatory texts written by Jacoby and the biennial curators’ response, on their online web portal, *Chtodelat News*, thereby creating an additional dynamic and relay mechanism for the work.

Jacoby’s project contested the validity of the biennial’s mission statement that, “art and politics are inextricably linked”, and he produced an intervention designed to test the robustness of the biennial’s claims. He adopted a curatorial approach to the conception and execution of the project, authoring a situation in which he conceived an idea, constructed a venue for exhibition and discussion, organised performances, invited participants, and mediated the project’s meaning.

O'Neill (2012) observed that in employing the exhibition site as a medium, artists produced spatial installations, which provided the setting for the staging of discussions, events, and visitor participation, as Jacoby did in *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen*. However, the curatorial elements in Jacoby's project, were different from the ways in which the practices of Wilson and Hirschhorn were to be understood. In *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen*, the exhibition site was not viewed as a space for the re-contextualisation of art objects, but as a locus for the staging of artistic performances in the form of a partisan activist event – evidencing points made by Bishop on the congruence between installation artists and curators in their manner of working (2007).

The focus of Jacoby's project was to criticise the discrepancy between the stated mission of the 29<sup>th</sup> *São Paulo Biennial*, that it was impossible to separate art and politics, and the degrees of freedom extended to the participating artists to conceive works congruent with this mission. According to Jacoby, political art was being disempowered within the institutional mainstream, and he sought to exploit his allocated biennial space in an act of détournement or subversion, by challenging the hypocrisy of the 29<sup>th</sup> *São Paulo Biennial*'s claimed objectives (Zaya 2010). Jacoby had been sceptical from the outset about the biennial organisers' claims to provide a forum where it could be demonstrated that art and politics were inextricably linked. The various protagonists interpreted the term "political" in different ways, and it is probable that the biennial curators were not thinking about partisan politics when they conceived this concept. From his position as a former art activist, Jacoby was doubtful of the stated intentions by individuals working in art institutions to promote a discussion of art and politics and viewed them as more likely to colonise "radical" discourses, and neutralise their political intent (ibid). Ramsden had also made the point that although art and politics were often interlinked, this relationship frequently lacked any force (1975). Guagnini, who contended that the biennial curators were in dereliction of their duties as artistic mediators, asked whether Jacoby's project was "a real electoral campaign or an artistic fiction" and suggested that the art institution conferred "the status of 'the ideal' on any image or process that develops within it" (2011 n.p.). He cited the Spanish artist Marcelo Exposito, who argued the biennial was unable to resolve the issue of an artist taking seriously "the need to render an artistic space a public space in order to produce political confrontation – as opposed to false consensus – in real time and at the very heart of the art system" (ibid).

Jacoby used a subversive method of critique with the intention of detouring

the biennial's aims. In his dealings with the biennial curators, he gave the impression that his work was concerned with the generality of democratic processes and not the specifics of a particular election. Throughout the preparation for the project, dos Anjos and Farias claimed to be neither aware of the project's specificity nor of its subversive nature. Jacoby provided images of the real candidates for election for the biennial catalogue, but the official curators assumed they were just examples and did not detect the political intention behind the artist's work. However, Jacoby deliberately misled the biennial curators by having the electioneering posters of the candidates produced offsite, rather than through the official biennial channels (Guagnini 2011).

Jacoby's familiarity with subversive methods was informed by his former practice as an art activist. According to Raunig and Ray, activism within art institutions can channel energies usefully towards instituting change (2009). Activists engage with institutions according to two different strategies; either they use guerrilla tactics as uninvited interventionists, such as the projects performed by Liberate Tate (2010 – ongoing); or they work are embedded in the institution which they are criticising, using gaps in the system to exploit the institution's heterogeneous qualities. Haacke has argued that there were opportunities for practitioners to subvert the rules, whilst working inside institutions, and that occasions presented themselves where there was a "potential for confusion", as "new cultural manifestations are not always recognizable as to their suitability" (Kravagna 2001: 73-74). He suggested that during these moments of uncertainty, artists were able to perform institutionally critical projects because they would not necessarily be recognised as such by the institutions with whom they were collaborating. This was the case with *El alma nunca piensa sin imagen*, evidenced by Jacoby's opaqueness regarding his intentions and his actions in detouring the biennial curators.

The objections to Jacoby's curated installation turned on the project's specificity. Recalling the then Guggenheim's director Thomas Messer's opposition to Haacke's work, *Shapolsky et al* (1971), it was not the socio-economic content of the work that was at issue, but rather the project's specificity, criticising as it did certain slum-landlords and their companies by name. Indeed, specificity of the subject matter was cited as the official reason for the cancellation of Haacke's Guggenheim exhibition in 1971. Reading objections to Jacoby's project in terms of their specificity, it can be seen that the biennial curators argued that it was not the treatment of the Brazilian Presidential Election that they objected to; indeed they welcomed a

discussion on democratic electoral processes in general, but rather they disagreed with the specific focus of Jacoby's project, dedicated as it was to supporting a particular candidate, and it was this that made aspects of his work unsuitable for a biennial exhibition (dos Anjos and Farias 2010).

The location of the critique was complex and turned on understandings about the existence (or not) of boundaries to the institution of art. Jacoby used subversive methods of critique whilst he was embedded inside the institution he was criticising, the main action of the critique, being the activist intervention of the Argentinian Brigade for Dilma that was located in his exhibition booth. However, certain preparatory elements, such as the production of the candidates' posters, were deliberately carried out by the artist beyond the biennial's physical and administrative territory. Also, following the interference by the biennial authorities, the aftermath and resonance of the project continued outside the biennial on the web, owing to the relay mechanism provided by Chto Delat?, who supported the underlying intentions of Jacoby's project. Using Fraser's earlier understanding of the institution of art as having both an inside and an outside, it can be seen that there were elements of Jacoby's project that took place physically inside the biennial, such as the installation and the performances, and others that occurred on the material outside, namely the preparatory work and the relay mechanism. If the institution of art were to be viewed as all encompassing, as Fraser purported in her later definition, then the entire critique espoused by Jacoby was located within the art system.

The biennial organisers had made a claim about the validity of linking art to politics, which the artist considered had not been honoured, and they lacked precision in construing the term "political". Political issues were, and still are, frequently addressed by artists, however, "party-political" subjects are unusual. Whilst it was deemed acceptable to discuss politics and democratic processes in general terms, the introduction of partisan politics was considered by the biennial organisation to be undesirable. The 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial offered a platform for a limited exploration of political ideas, but resisted attempts to bring partisan political issues into its forum. Jacoby revealed the biennial institution to be insincere in its desire to represent democratic processes through the means of art. Specifically, he criticised the hypocrisy of the biennial's mission statement, which purported to support the free flow of ideas between art and politics, when in practice it had only a narrow view of what it considered to be suitable and permissible.

*El alma nunca piensa sin imagen* evolved in an unexpected manner. First the

biennial curators involved themselves by physically intervening to censor certain aspects of the project. Second a collective with an international reach issued a critique of the biennial curators' act of censorship, creating an amplification of the work beyond the biennial's perimeter. Certainly Jacoby's actions tested the limits of art-making and curating with respect to the context in which he was working. In a joint statement, dos Anjos and Farias noted that, "we have no problem whatsoever in admitting that, in this particular situation, we have come to the limits of the institution, and that, in this sense, Mr. Jacoby's work 'achieved' its desired goal" (dos Anjos and Farias 2010: n.p.) It was in fact their interference that expanded the work and gave it its visibility and agency, facilitating what Jacoby wanted to achieve, namely, forcing the art establishment to become involved in discussions on political issues, evidenced by his contention that in South America "there is more experimentation, more creativity" and "more hope in the realm of politics — from institutions to social movements — than in the contemporary art system" (Zaya 2010 n.p).

Parallels could be drawn between this project and earlier institutionally critical projects that questioned the supposed neutrality of museums. Just as claims had been made that museums provided a neutral space for viewing art, here assertions were made that the biennial was open-minded about the close connections between art and politics, and was supportive of the notion that artworks might illuminate a discussion of democratic processes. However, both the museum as criticised by Buren and Haacke and this biennial as critiqued by Jacoby, appeared to renege on the positions they claimed to represent. The implications of this project were important because they revealed the process of dilution that often threatened artistic and curatorial initiatives that sought to critique art institutions. According to the biennial authorities, critique was permissible within certain limits, but the criticism should not harm the institution's reputation nor destabilise its activities.

## Conclusion

The founding premise of critique, based on Foucault's understanding that critique was heteronomous and must refer to something specific, remained valid for artist-curators. In each of the case studies discussed, they addressed specific aspects of the institution with which they were concerned. Wilson introduced problems of race into the museum and contested the traditional ways in which museums interpreted colonial histories. Hirschhorn focused on social inclusion and brought canonical artworks to underprivileged audiences outside the usual institutional frame. Jacoby contested the interrelationship between art and politics directly, by exposing the hypocrisy with which the institutional curators of the São Paulo Biennial purported to engage with this issue. The value of the critique was not determined by its exteriority, as had been the case when the art critic had performed the critical function. The erosion of the critical distance between the object or activity being criticised and the agent performing the criticism, which had become evident when artists engaged in institutionally critical practice, continued and a close working relationship between artist-curators and art institutions developed.

The evolution of institutional critique from an artistic activity to include the curatorial expanded the possibilities for institutionally critical practice. There was a difference, however, between the critique being carried out by artists working curatorially, and criticising the institution using other forms of art practice, such as adapting architectures or employing sculpture as did Asher, or using painting as in the case of Buren, or the factographic methods as employed by Haacke. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s artists had been invited by the institutions to carry out specific projects over a limited time frame, artist-curators often initiated the critical projects themselves, and usually undertook detailed on-site research, which required working with the museums for extended periods, meaning that the critique inevitably became more embedded in the institution.

From the discussion of their diverse practices, it is possible to map an evolution of the discourses to show that institutional critique could be understood as both a curatorial as well as an artistic practice. As discussed in the previous chapter, the authorities of institutional critique had categorised the strategies of critique to comprise: mimicry, subversion and activism. Hirschhorn, for instance, used a direct form of mimicry by replicating traditional museum processes. Copying formal museum procedures and reproducing them in a makeshift structure, he criticised the permanence of museum edifices that were manifested in architecturally impressive

buildings. He questioned whether these were the most appropriate spaces for viewing art, particularly as they might alienate the majority of potential viewers. According to him, provided the correct museological procedures were followed, an engagement with art was possible in a much simpler physical structure. For Hirschhorn it was the careful way in which the art was handled, rather than the institutional framing conditions that gave art its validation. However, his painstaking respect for museum procedures raised doubts about the criticality of his project and his work at times appeared to reaffirm rather than critique the museum.

In contrast, strategies of subversive mimicry were used by Wilson to challenge existing modes of display and contest the mainstream ideologies that were being generated by the Maryland Historical Society. As the subversion of existing structures of hegemony required a familiarity with the dominating power structures, an understanding of mimicry, copying and replication was present in most forms of subversion. Wilson created shifts in emphasis and interpretation by using the techniques of displaying, labelling and lighting objects differently than the host institution. He mimicked, but at the same time tampered with the methods of situating objects typical of institutional curators, thereby disturbing the museum's usual narrative, creating ambivalent installations that emulated conventional museological practices while equally problematising them. Demonstrating the way in which minor changes of emphasis could expose the museum's didactic and hegemonic point of view, he juxtaposed objects to produce unexpected associations, and was thus able to generate new interpretations of the material.

Subversion drew on its historical associations with activism and there were elements of art activist practice present in some subversive critical strategies. Jacoby's familiarity with such strategies was informed by his former practice as an art activist, where under the "old" definition of institutional boundaries, he was working outside the formal institutions of art. In the instance discussed in this chapter, he used subversive critical strategies to detour the stated curatorial objectives of an art biennial, demonstrating the porosity of the institution of art and the erosion of the boundaries between the inside and the outside.

The engagement of artist-curators in institutionally critical practice demonstrated developments in institutional critique in a way that was not foreseen by its authorities, both in terms of the kinds of institutions that were addressed, and the types of critical practices that were carried out. In contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, where artists had focused on mainstream museums, later there was a broadening of

the institutional objects of critique to include ethnographic museums, alternative art spaces and international biennials.

With respect to the critical practices, there were some differences in the specific areas of focus between artists and artist-curators. In the earlier period, artists had investigated the putative neutrality of the museum. Later, however, the idea that the museum was not a neutral space had become widely accepted, and emphasis shifted to contesting the museum's control of art historical discourses and the interpretative mechanisms surrounding the objects and activities on display. Artistic practitioners had voiced concern about the way in which the museum moulded consciousness and exerted its influence over the various subject positions, whether they were those of staff members or visitors. Artist-curators directly challenged this consciousness-moulding activity by re-interpreting the objects in the museum to facilitate an alternative narrative to the usual one, acknowledging the possibility of multiple subject-positions. Whereas artists in the earlier period, such as those involved in the AWC, had exerted pressure on institutions to widen the scope of artistic representation, later artist-curators were less concerned with this as wider representation had arguably been achieved, and their critical engagement was more focused on expanding the audiences for art as the projects by Wilson and Hirschhorn demonstrated.

Some of the pre-occupations, however, remained similar. Buren had contested institutional architectures, declaring, for example, that the Guggenheim Museum acted as an "overbearing mother" and that often the architecture existed for itself, rather than being an appropriate place of display for artworks. This concern was echoed in Hirschhorn's project, which showed that a simple pre-fabricated building could be a suitable place to exhibit art, and could be more appealing than a traditional museum, that might actually intimidate the visitors. Earlier, artists, particularly Haacke, had articulated the importance of the museum's stated vision and mission being carried out in the execution of its programme and procedures, and artist-curators continued to address this issue, as Jacoby's interrogation of the biennial's stated mission and actual practice attested.

As the practice of institutional critique moved into the institution, it became rooted there in ways that were not simply about the appropriation of the critical projects, shedding some of the perceived confrontational elements it was supposed to have possessed in the past, and reconceiving it as useful tool for institutional improvement. Artist-curators were not alone in their interrogation of institutional

hegemonies, and during this period independent curators were also becoming increasingly involved in institutional investigations. The emergence of independent curators, from backgrounds as varied as art practice, art journalism, commercial art galleries and the theatre, and their contribution to institutionally critical practice, is the subject of the next chapter.

### Chapter 3 – Collective practitioners and independent curators

My discussion of institutional critique as curatorial practice continues with an examination of the role played by collective practitioners and independent curators. The previous chapter examined the way in which artist-curators worked collaboratively with the institutions they were investigating and with other partner organisations. In all the cases discussed, the artist-curators were the projects' primary "authors"; this chapter, however, is concerned with shared authorship. To provide a context for the shift in the critical agents, I discuss the growth in collective practice and the emergence of independent curating.

Collective practice has been reviewed in a number of publications, such as Rogoff (2002), Stimson and Sholette (2007) and O'Neill (2010); and was the subject of a symposium entitled "Artist as Curator: Collaborative Practices", organised by the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and held at the Whitechapel Gallery (2013). Conceptions about authorship and the role of the artist had been changing since the 1960s, with the artist no longer being considered as a "lone genius", but instead viewed as an "artworker", collaborating with other practitioners. A growing pre-occupation with the site and working in context, and the shift to producing works in the exhibition space as well as in the studio, brought artists into contact with other artists and curators, and stimulated the opportunities for collective practice.

Collective practice among artists had a number of historical precedents, such as Dada, Surrealism, Letterism and the Situationist International. Within the timeframe of this thesis, critical collective practitioners included the AWC (1969-1971), whose activities were described in Chapter 1, and the GAAG (1969-1976). In the 1980s the artist collectives, Group Material and General Idea were both engaged in curatorial approaches to institutionally critical practice. According to O'Neill, both these groups were instrumental in establishing the notion that exhibitions were as much about "*how* art is seen as about *which* art is seen", and he further contended that artists who considered the spaces in which their work was displayed "are already curating from within their own practice" (2012: 106).

Members of Group Material were, for example, invited by the institutional curator Lisa Phillips to curate an exhibition to coincide with the Whitney Biennial in 1985. This institution usually exhibited a narrow range of mainstream art, which had been validated by sales in commercial galleries, omitting to include, "the broader definitions of cultural production or social contexts" (O'Neill 2007: 34). Group

Material's exhibition, *Americana* (1985) comprised artworks that were normally excluded from the Biennial, such as projects by socially engaged artists, by female artists and by black artists. Julie Ault, one of the collective's members contended that, "[t]he temporary exhibition was a medium through which models of social and representational structures were posited, and through which rules, situations and venues were often subverted" (ibid: 32). Ault was making an important point about the way in which a temporary exhibition could make a political statement, implying that a museum's permanent exhibition had as its function the display and interpretation of the collection. By entering into the discussion on the function of cultural representation, Group Material addressed the hierarchical positioning of various forms of cultural production, continuing the campaign for a broader spectrum of representation in museums that had been initiated in the late 1960s by the AWC and the GAAG.

Whereas art and independent curatorial practice were becoming quite similar in certain instances, some notable differences were developing between institutional curators and independent curators. Whereas the former were trained in museum studies, the latter came from diverse backgrounds, and had previously been gallerists, theatre directors, critics and artists. From the late 1980s, it was possible to train as an independent curator in specialised curatorial programmes, of which *École du Magasin* in Grenoble, established in 1987, was the first, followed by the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths in London and de Appel in Amsterdam. Independent curators worked in a wide variety of fields, such as organising temporary exhibitions in museums and art centres, participating in biennials, and curating their own projects. In contrast, the role of institutional curators had traditionally been to act as the link between the artist and the institution. Although institutional curators occasionally invited artists to produce works in the museum which were critical of the institution's architecture and its policies and practices, a commonality of interests between artists and institutional curators does not appear to have existed in most cases, and the artist-curatorial relationship seems at times to have been adversarial, as if the institutional curator were on the side of the museum, and the artist were opposed to it. This was evidenced by the disagreement between Buren and the Guggenheim curator, Dianne Waldman on the scope, scale and dimensions of *Peinture/Sculpture* (1971), planned for exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971 (Buren 2002).

The evolving role of independent curators since the late 1960s was discussed

by O'Neill, who explained how curatorial practice had developed, extending the traditional functions of the museum curator as a carer of objects to include: arranging site-specific installations, enabling interventions in museums, organising performances and facilitating events (2012). Drawing on the existing curatorial literature and interviews with curators, critics, art historians, and artists, O'Neill investigated the emergence of independent curating and the discourses that helped to establish it. He argued that what differentiated discussions about curating after the 1960s, was that "any evaluation of art and its institutions extended beyond mere critique of artwork", to comprise "a new form of curatorial criticism focused on the praxis of exhibition organizers, gallerists, critics and curators" (ibid 14). Moreover, "the critique of the institution of art began to call into question the curatorial act and the ways in which it was affecting the boundaries of art's production, responsibility for its authorship, and its mediation" (ibid).

O'Neill explained how independent curators developed new strategies to accommodate the emerging conceptualised, dematerialised and institutionally specific practices, merging artistic practice, curatorial methodology and techniques of mediation. He maintained that an emphasis on the "framing and mediation of art, rather than its production", also created "a new degree of visibility for the individual agency involved in framing these practices – that is, for the curator" (ibid 25). Whereas, apart from a few notable exceptions, such as Alexander Dorner and Pontus Hultén, the curator had been almost invisible prior to 1960 (akin to a librarian), according to O'Neill, in the late 1960s and 1970s, a shift of emphasis in art criticism moved "away from the primary critique of the artwork as an autonomous object of study and toward a mode of curatorial criticism in which the curator became a central subject of critique" (ibid 27). O'Neill was not implying that the curator became the object of critique, rather he viewed curators as agents of critique. According to him, the curator was "capable of instituting new alignments and providing the conditions and institutional context for art's display" (ibid 28).

O'Neill described the increasing visibility acquired by the curator during the 1980s, with the curatorial role securing "a dominant, single-auteur position" (ibid 28). During this period, "the exhibition became a synthesis of artwork, concept, and praxis transformed into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the total synthesis of works of art into one whole form) by the individual" (ibid). Similarly "classification systems, linked to museum display", were substituted with subjective forms "predicated on the curator's taste, style, and the affinities established between the exhibited works" (ibid 30). In

other words, there was a movement away from formal taxonomies in museums to a more open and personalised way of displaying work. From the late 1980s onward O'Neill identified "a paradigmatic shift away from the application of the noun 'curator', with its links to the traditional museum function, toward the use of the verb 'curating' which implied a practice of constructing narratives through correspondences between artworks" (ibid 32). O'Neill attested that pedagogical and dialogical approaches to exhibition production were becoming widespread and that they constituted varying "forms of negotiation, relationality, adaptation, and collaboration between subjects and objects, across space and time" (ibid 129).

By the 1990s, curators were acquiring an even more prominent position in the now widely defined institutions of art – which included biennials and other mega-exhibitions – what O'Neill called "supervisibility". First, this was owing to the "discursive turn" in curating, namely the practice of curators talking together publically, as a "powerful medium for brokering reputations and their transfer into the dominant historical discourses" (ibid 33). Second, the professionalisation of curating through the advent of numerous post-graduate training programmes in curatorial practice. Another explanation for the ascendancy of the curator was the declining status of the critic. O'Neill quoted the artist Liam Gillick, who contended, "the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions" (ibid 43), re-affirming Buchloh's earlier position on the demise of the critic (1987). By the 1990s, independent curators involved in institutionally critical practice were obliged by the nature of their work to engage closely with museums and art galleries, and their activities were firmly embedded in the institutions in which they worked. Additionally the growth of biennial-type exhibitions expanded the possibilities for independent curators in many roles, as exhibition organisers, as critics and as producers of artistic projects.

Emergent independent curatorial practice was not a museum-based development, but an activity occurring in the broadly defined expanded system of art. During the 1960s-1970s, independent curators came from diverse backgrounds, such as commercial galleries, and the theatre. Specific individuals, such as Seth Siegelaub, Anny de Decker, Bernd Lohaus and Harald Szeemann created innovative approaches to exhibition-making, which questioned the traditional methods used by institutional curators. They distinguished themselves from institutional curators in several different ways, including actively supporting artists who were concerned with exploring the

framing conditions of art, as well as investigating those framing conditions in their own right as “curators”. According to Alberro, the US gallerist-curator Seth Siegelau launched new channels of distribution and methods for promoting art, by publicising the artists rather than the artworks (2003). Siegelau was critical of the separation that existed between marketing artworks and curating exhibitions, which suggested that he considered that both activities were part of one commodified art system. Making spaces for buying and viewing art one and the same, Siegelau oscillated between commercialising contemporary art and running a critical conceptual practice. Destabilising the self-contained pictorial object and sculptural structure made for gallery display, he favoured interactive spectatorial spaces and complicated participatory modes, seeking an awareness of the interplay between the artwork, the architecture and the institutional setting. Alberro described how Siegelau was one of the first gallerists to explore the possibilities of the framing conditions of art and to interweave them into the exhibition concept, so that rather than being a “blank canvas”, the gallery became an active space. Such activities – which concerned the integration of artworks within the physicality of exhibition spaces, and the utilisation of parts of the framing device within the artwork underlined the emerging importance of context and site-specificity in the 1960s and 1970s as a defining pre-condition for the “new art” (Battock 1965). It was this pre-occupation with the site that was consistent with artists, gallerists and curators situating artworks within the institutional frame beyond the simple placement of works in spaces for display.

Intent on dehierarchising the art market system, and severing the link between the gallerist’s presentation of artworks and representation of artists within the formal limits of the physical gallery, Siegelau adopted curatorial modes of presenting work outside the gallery walls. Under the motto, “You don’t need a gallery to show ideas”, Siegelau exhibited art in what were, for the time, unconventional spaces, such as in universities and in the open air (Alberro and Norvell 2001: 38). His experimental practice went beyond an investigation of the wider possibilities of exhibiting outside the gallery space, to an examination of the critical potential of the artwork.

Siegelau’s contribution to institutionally critical practice was evidenced by the way in which he combined the activities of curator and gallerist, and created spaces for viewing and buying art that were indistinguishable, thereby introducing criticality into the buying process. He challenged traditional modes of display in favour of untested approaches and launched new channels of distribution and methods for publicising art. However, in the longer term, the fostering of artists rather

than artworks, in order to avoid the commodification of the artwork, did not produce the desired effect of focusing attention on the critical significance of the art practice. Instead, promoting artists rather than works led to some artists acquiring celebrity status, and shifted understandings of the role of the artist to that of an “art producer”, a change in function already pioneered by Andy Warhol.

In Europe, during the 1960s-1970s, the conservatism of many museums prompted critical artists to look for alternate spaces in which to display their work. Several galleries, such as Art & Project in Amsterdam, Konrad Fischer and Schmela in Düsseldorf, Krefeld and Sperone in Torino, and the Wide White Space in Antwerp played an important role in offering display opportunities to institutionally critical artists. In the case of the Wide White Space, founded by Anny de Decker and Bernd Lohaus, both Broodthaers and Buren exhibited extensively, and the gallerists supported both Broodthaers’ *Musée d’Art Moderne* (1968-1972) and exhibited Buren’s *Travail in situ* (1969-1974). Buren remarked in an interview with the art historian Yves Aupetitallot: “That scene in Antwerp and Brussels offered me a virtually indestructible back-up from the word go and definitely helped me to carry on my work, which was at the time in the crucial stages of its development” (1995: 106-107). On the one hand, de Decker and Lohaus were doing no more than would be expected from a serious primary gallery, working with artists, funding their practice, encouraging their development and organising their participation at international events such as the *Prospect* series in Dusseldorf and *documenta* in Kassel. However, they also invited artists to the gallery to participate in conceiving and planning their own exhibitions, which although commonplace now, was an innovative practice at the time. Previously, gallerists would select works during studio visits. De Decker and Lohaus were then at the beginning of a curatorial process, as we understand it today, in which the exhibition-makers worked closely with the artists. Given the disinclination of mainstream museums to display the “new art”, galleries undertook this “Kunsthalle” function of providing platforms for the display of critical art (Aupetitallot 1995). The Wide White Space’s invitations to private views and public exhibitions were inscribed with the words “behind the museum”, implying their aspiration that museums would eventually take an interest in the new art forms. The collector Isi Fizman argued, “We weren’t up in arms against the institutions, but here, in Belgium, we had institutions that were so bad, and we didn’t see why there couldn’t be good institutions” (Aupetitallot 1995: 132).

Over a ten-year period, until its closure in 1977, the Wide White Space Gallery showed a broad range of critical art in the shadow of disinterested public institutions. It was one of the few venues, during this period that registered the shifts within the contemporary artworld and provided participating artists with a platform to display their work. Aupetitallot argued that its activities contributed to a change in attitudes towards contemporary art, its recognition, acceptance and appreciation (1993). According to him, “[t]he Wide White Space reached far beyond what one might call the semi-public scale sphere of a private gallery. It was an institution which, though active only in Antwerp, supported and inspired the art scene worldwide” (1996: 12).

Some independent curators were working on institutionally critical projects in the late 1960s and 1970s, but as Institutional Critique, particularly in its genre-form, had been deemed to be an artistic practice, the contribution made by independent curators, both in the early period and subsequently, has not been written into the narrative of institutional critique. Despite his critical approach to art institutions, the independent Swiss curator Harald Szeemann has been excluded from the commentary on institutional critique. Szeemann was a significant figure in the “curatorial turn,” an expression used to describe the change in the professional profile of the curator from a person who was responsible for the collection, care, research, and exhibition of art or artefacts: to being a conceptor, a facilitator, an enabler, and a creative organiser. His contribution to institutionally critical practice included a readiness to interrogate institutional power structures and processes, and the development of an innovative and independent model of curating, which challenged traditional approaches to content and display (Szeemann et al 2007). He adapted institutional structures to suit artists and developed a curatorial approach that avoided institutionalisation, and instead of presenting the exhibition space as a location where art could be displayed, he constituted this space as an open, contested arena where physical and conceptual boundaries could be tested.

Szeemann’s signature exhibition, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) at the Kunsthalle Bern occurred at the same historical moment as institutionally critical practices were emerging in the US. *When Attitudes Become Form* was the first major survey of Conceptual Art in Europe, though a parallel exhibition, *Op Losse Schroeven* (1969), displaying a similar group of artists was curated by Wim Beeren at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (Rattenmeyer 2010). Szeemann’s exhibition, subtitled *Works, concepts, processes, situations, information*, marked an important methodological shift for exhibition practice, in that the artists

chose the works they wanted to exhibit, rather than accepting curatorial guidance (Szeemann 1969). In an approach that was quite different to the one he employed at *documenta 5* (1972), as discussed in the previous chapter. Szeemann let the artists “colonise” the Kunsthalle Bern, which became a site of production, and the artists, as authors of the exhibition, redefined the physical conditions for the works’ staging.

It can be seen from this brief overview that collective practitioners and independent curators had important roles to play in the evolution of institutional critique as a criticism of mainstream display practices. Collective practitioners, such as Group Material and General Idea were concerned as much with the framing conditions of art, the “*how art is seen*”, as about “*which art is seen*”. Particularly Group Material identified the temporary exhibition as a platform for the presentation of discursive ideas about ways in which art was displayed, and the fact that display practices often determined the interpretative influences of the artworks being exhibited. Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the work of independent curators was significant in marking a shift between traditional museum curating and curatorial practice in a wider public and semi-public realm. During the 1980s and 1990s independent curators continued to produce work that engaged with the conditions of the exhibition and with institutions, and progressively they became embedded in the institutions they purported to critique. In the 2000s and 2010s, independent curating continued to grow in terms of its professionalism, its international scope, and the types of projects undertaken.

The growth of collective practice and the evolution in independent curating expanded the potential participants in institutionally critical practice. In this chapter I examine the work of an independent collective comprising artists, curators and critics, an independent curatorial collective, and an independent curator collaborating with a museum director. The international scope of the origins of the critical agents and location of the critique have also expanded beyond the traditional protagonists and venues, described in previous chapters, to include Russia, Croatia, Turkey and Palestine. I explore the critical strategies being employed, identifying points of similarity and difference with institutionally critical practices being used previously and elsewhere, and I examine these strategies to assess the implications for on-going institutionally critical practice.

This chapter discusses three case studies that show different aspects of institutionally critical practice being performed by art and curatorial collectives and independent curators. I investigate a project that criticises practices and processes in

a museum of modern art, performed by Chto Delat?, a collective comprising artists, curators and critics. Then I explore the work of What How and for Whom (WHW), an independent curatorial collective, which employed subversive methodologies to critique the international biennial form. Finally, I discuss the collaboration between the independent curator, Khaled Hourani and the museum director, Charles Esche to transport an iconic work of Modernism from an established museum to be exhibited in a precarious viewing-site. In investigating these case studies, I explore whether the various critical strategies discussed in the previous chapters continue to be employed and whether new ones evolved.

### 3.1 Chto Delat?'s *Museum Songspiel – The Netherlands 20XX* (2011): An independent collective critiques a museum of modern art

Chto Delat? (What is to be Done?), a collective of Russian curators, artists, theorists and critics, was so named owing to the simultaneous references to the Russian writer Nikolay Chernyshevsky's novel *Chto Delat?*, written in 1863; and Vladimir Lenin's text, "What Is To Be Done?", first published in Lenin's *Selected Works*, Volume 1 in 1902. The group had its origins in a collective protest action against St. Petersburg's Tercentenary Celebrations in 2003, which took the form of a public gesture of "exodus", prompted by the "imbecilic program of culture events planned by the local cultural bureaucrats for the anniversary celebrations" (Misiano and Vilensky 2011 n.p). Similar strategies of exodus as ways of circumventing institutional hegemony have also been suggested by Alberro and Stimson (2009), and advocated Raunig and Ray (2009). Chto Delat? subsequently recognised the shortcomings of such approaches, as operating outside established institutions, meant it was difficult for them to ensure appropriate organisational methods, maintain sustainable funding and reach their desired audiences; echoing concerns also raised by Buchloh on the marginalisation of alternative groups (1987). Vilensky contended that, "after a short burst of direct-action activism and exaltation over the possibilities of grassroots movements had quickly reached its saturation point", it was timely to adjust both the group's aesthetic and political positions (Misiano and Vilensky 2011).

Chto Delat's ideological positions were shaped during the "Perestroika" of the 1980s and the transformative years of the 1990s, when, "the authorities and capital had no significant impact on contemporary art" (ibid n.p). According to a founder member of the group Dmitry Vilensky, activist critique of the art system only became relevant later, when the Russian capitalist model emerged with Vladimir Putin's ascent to power. At this moment, Vilensky noted that, "the sense arose that institutional work was necessary" (ibid), as private foundations, galleries, and festivals materialised, "that shaped the new space for art and generated the possibility of cooperating with them or resisting them" (ibid).

Chto Delat? was not, and still is not, active in the mainstream artworld in Russia as it was not, and still is not, recognised as a bona fide arts organisation, as the activities it carried out in the public realm were categorised as activist, academic and self-organised. In the context of Russia's system of *managed democracy*, which labelled all forms of oppositional activism as extremist, Chto Delat?'s activities were

frequently targeted by the authorities. As a consequence the majority of their projects have taken place in international art venues, which the collective regarded as useful platforms and conduits for their ideas. Chto Delat? member Nataša Ilić contended that “[i]t comes as no surprise that in the depoliticized market glitter of contemporary art in Russia, the source of their authority and (economic) independence is displaced to the West, embedded in the network of non-profit institutions of critical culture” (2011: np). The question was whether Chto Delat? was able to use these occidental art institutions as platforms, without compromising their own critical distance and self-organised autonomy. They have taken advantage of, and problematised, their privileged position of being able to work in both activist and institutional contexts. As the opportunities for collaboration with institutions were limited in Russia, most of the group’s collaborative practice has been carried out internationally, where they act as embedded participants, producing critical projects, while at the same time acknowledging that they are necessarily constrained by the requirements and limitations that might be imposed by the institutions with which they are working.

This section discusses the film *Museum Songspiel – The Netherlands 20XX* (2011), which was conceived and produced by the collective, and which recounted how the staff of a fictitious museum situated in an imaginary context, responded to the intrusion of illegal immigrants into the museum. The narrative of the film, styled in the manner of a Brechtian “Lehrstück” (learning play), actualised diverse aspects of museum practice, and used a form of mimetic critique to convey messages about the failure of the museum to fulfil the expectations of its utopian mission as a democratic all-embracing institution<sup>11</sup>. In this hybrid artistic-curatorial-critical project Chto Delat? initiated the contact with the collaborating institutions, examined the context, conceived its concept, wrote the script, directed the actors, and edited the film.

*Museum Songspiel* investigated the role of the museum in contemporary society and the specifics of cultural policy in the Netherlands, against the background of a transposition of political practices typical of Putinist Russia into the Netherlands by means of the invention the fictitious “National Democratic Party”. The film portrayed a group of immigrants fleeing from a fictitious nationalistic state authority to avoid deportation. They broke into the museum, viewing it as a refuge, and believing it to be the last bastion of inclusivity, free speech and democracy, (as illustrated in Figure 17), they squatted there, occupying the “Eye”, a panopticon-style glass

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11 The learning play is an experimental form of theatre devised by Brecht in which the roles of actors and audiences are conflated leading to participation and learning through role-playing and conscious identification with the situations portrayed.

chamber reserved for “street art” performances. Their occupation of the museum caused embarrassment and provoked a series of reactions from the museum staff, leading to the exploitation of the immigrants’ presence as participants in an art project, and their ultimate expulsion from the museum, and deportation from The Netherlands. Although the details were perfunctory, there were indications that xenophobic “National Democracy” was so brutal, that the escapees had nowhere else to turn, but the museum. The curator and critic Simon Sheikh contended that *Museum Songspiel*, “actually tries to take literally a fantasy once expressed by its [the Van Abbemuseum’s] director Charles Esche, who once imagined a museum becoming an asylum for refugees and illegal immigrants”, as if the museum might assume the symbolic function of churches in offering asylum to the dispossessed (Holten 2011: n.p.).



Figure 17

Chto Delat?, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), deportees in the Eye

In the conception and realisation of *Museum Songspiel*, Chto Delat? initiated, conceived, curated and orchestrated all aspects of the project. They approached the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, with a view to organising a residency and obtaining funding; and they contacted Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, who became co-producers of the film (personal communication, Esche, Eindhoven 31.10.2013). Produced during Chto Delat?’s three-month residency at the Smart Project Space, filmed in the Van Abbemuseum, and exhibited in both locations, *Museum Songspiel* functioned as embedded critique and this layering of the presentation of the mimetic critique – the museum within the museum, and the viewers in the film versus the

viewers watching the film, both inside the museum and outside the institution of art on the web, permitted several possible interpretations of the critical messages, based on changed contexts and different subject positions<sup>12</sup>.

*Museum Songspiel* narrated the break-in to the museum by immigrants, how the museum staff handled the situation, and the way in which the visitors reacted. All the fictional protagonists involved were investigated in turn: the director for failing to take adequate control of the situation; the artist for his opportunism and for co-opting the immigrants into taking part in an artistic performance; the curator for her self-interestedness; the press for its virulent partisanship; and the museum visitors for their apathy. A Brechtian-style chorus of museum guards provided an ironic commentary on the events as they unfurled, claiming that art that was “aesthetically pleasing” and “uncontroversial” would show visitors “the way forward and teach them to think critically”.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 18

Chto Delat?, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), the deportees perform “Towards the Light”

The film was structured into a series of critical conversations involving the museum staff and protagonists engaged with the museum. The fictional director was censured for compromising artistic legitimacy in order to avoid public criticism and to protect his budget. The artist-in-residence, sanctioned by the director, recuperated the incursion of the immigrants as a “happening”, co-opting their act of disruption by transforming it into a performative work (as Figure 18 shows), and integrating it into his artistic project. The impromptu performance of “Towards the Light”, adapted from

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12 The film can be viewed on <http://vimeo.com/22798567>, last accessed 25.9.2014.

13 The use of a chorus to comment on the actions as the play unfolds was a characteristic of Brecht’s “Epic” or “dialectical” theatre.

the Russian Futurist opera “Victory over the Sun”, was not meant to defend the immigrants, but to extricate the museum and its staff from the inconvenience of the intrusion. Chto Delat? member, Thomas Campbell contended in “What Are Deportees Doing in a Museum?”, that the immigrants acquired legitimacy as performers and were “data points” in the artist’s “solo show mapping the deportations of immigrants, as colorful clowns in an avant-garde pantomime” (2011: n.p.). Chto Delat? criticised the artist-in-residence for his opportunism in subsuming the immigrants into an artwork as part of his project on contemporary interpretations of the Russian avant-garde. According to Campbell, “[t]he empty Eye at film’s end is a fitting symbol of the void at the heart of the liberal/social-democratic project and the blind spot in the eyes of its thinking (and leisure) classes” (ibid).

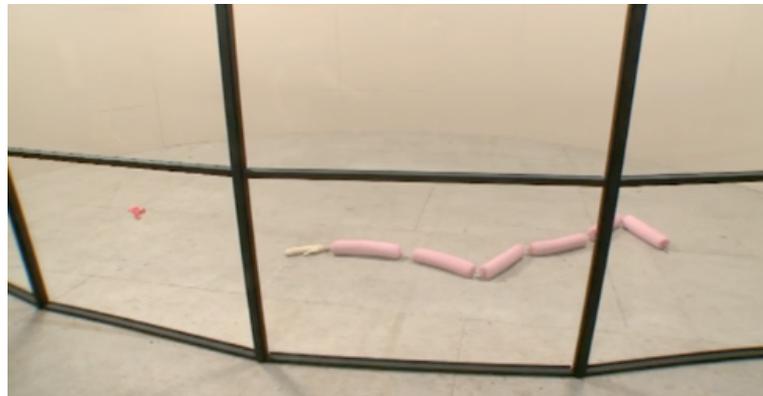


Figure 19

Chto Delat?, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), the empty Eye

The curator in the film was criticised for her resistance to the expedient solution of including the immigrants as part of the performance, because her objections were based not on “moral” grounds, but were owing to her concern to protect her personal interests, and also due to her attachment to an outmoded concept of the autonomy of art. She impressed on the director that although there were reports of atrocities committed against the immigrants, “this has nothing to do with the museum”. She insisted on cancelling the proposed performance as, “art is not life”, and also because the authorities were likely to bring a charge of extremism against the museum. She cited the contents of a letter, received from the fictitious Netherlands for Netherlands Democratic Committee, threatening the museum with “decisive measures”. Chto Delat? used the curator’s adoption of Greenberg’s position on the dissociation of art and life to underline their own position on artistic

autonomy. For Chto Delat?, events occurring in contemporary society were very much the concern of artists, but art should not dissolve into life, rather the concerns of life had their place in the museum. Vilensky argued further that despite the collective's "frequent productionist reduction of aesthetics", they did not question that "aesthetics remains a vital component of art's unique potential to impact society and individuals" (Misiano and Vilensky 2011).

The press, as represented in the film, was chided for its virulence, its manipulation of language and its distortion of the "truth". The journalist implied that the museum's staff were contravening the "National Democratic Law" by inviting the deportees into the museum. He insisted that the immigrants were both extremists and terrorists and that the museum's "irresponsible" exhibition on the Black Panther movement (a radical socialist group supporting civil rights for African Americans, active from 1966-1982), as depicted in Figure 20, had incited the break-in. The reporter pointed out that both members of the public and the government had criticised the exhibition for attacking National Democracy as the legitimate constitutional system of Dutch society. He reiterated that "dangerous extremists" were present in the museum, and reminded the director that, "harbouring criminals in a democratic society is a punishable offence". The journalist cited a television interview given by an inspector in the Department of Ideology, threatening to call in the police from the Centre for Extremist Prevention, a Stasi-style organisation, if the situation in the museum got out of hand.<sup>14</sup> The tone and language of the reporter's critique were so exaggerated that it prompted viewers of the film to question the validity of his remarks and to adopt their own points of view with respect to the incident, and arguably the overtly polemical remarks, devoid of realism and balanced positions, alienated the viewers of the film and distanced them from the protagonists.

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<sup>14</sup> The Centre for Extremist Prevention in The Netherlands was fictitious, though such a centre does exist in Russia and forms part of the Ministry of the Interior (Kasparov 2009).



Figure 20

Chto Delat?, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), the journalist interviews the director

Finally, the museum visitors, shown in Figure 21, were disparaged for their apathy and cowardice. Initially, they responded positively to the performance, and made the intended connections with its Russian avant-garde context, given that the works of El Lissitzky were being displayed at the time. “The artist really succeeded in reviving the Russian avant-garde spirit”, said one visitor. “Their performance was fantastic...I even felt like joining in the struggle to create a better world”, responded another. On hearing that the police have arrested the “actors”, the visitors were initially outraged. However, when it was confirmed that the police were from the Center for Extremist Protection, there was a hint of fear in their expressions, and they quickly decided that the arrests were not their concern. Although the visitors did not approve of the immigrants being ejected from the museum, they clearly stated that it was not their business to intervene. By showing this rapid reversal of opinions, which exposed the visitors to be fearful and disengaged, *Chto Delat?* alienated the film-viewers from the fictitious museum visitors. In so doing, the collective confronted the viewers of the film with the indexical present, inviting them to dis-identify with the morally disengaged visitors and react as “moral participators”, ready to take up an ethical position.



Figure 21

*Chto Delat?*, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), the museum visitors

The museum attendants or docents, who wore Van Abbemuseum-style uniforms, acted as a “Greek chorus” to provide unity and cohesion to the work and functioned as the “conscience of the museum”. They also emulated the Soviet Youth Groups with their red shirts and blue sashes, as they chanted the virtues of “Beautiful Timeless Revolutionary Art”. Their main concern was the museum’s reputation and they were worried that the incursion of the immigrants would discredit the institution. The attendants identified with the “mainstream public”, believing in law and order, and they manifested an unswerving faith in “national democracy” as inalienable law. They contended that being treated humanely was “a privilege and not a right”, and consequently this kind of treatment was available only for those who respected the National Democratic Law. The attendants were convinced of the power of art and were certain that every political regime, including National Democracy, needed art. Their position was that “beautiful and completely harmless art would show us the way forward and teach us to think critically”. The irony and ridicule in this sung statement was obvious, as *Chto Delat?*’s intention was to underline that art was able to exert agency with at least the potentiality to change minds, if not to catalyse a will to act.



Figure 22

Chto Delat?, *Museum Songspiel* (2011), the museum attendants

Considering the film *Museum Songspiel* as a whole, it is possible to interpret in several different ways. First, it could be viewed as Chto Delat?'s attempt to parody Esche's notion of the museum as an asylum for the dispossessed. Second, it could represent Chto Delat's interest in pointing out the instrumentality and the opportunism of the filmic museum – exploiting the deportees for its own ends. Third, it could be intended as an exercise in demonstrating the futility of socially and politically engaged art, evidenced by the apathy of the visitors portrayed in the film. Although the museum claimed to have a “democratic” approach towards all of its stakeholders, (defined as the artists it represented, the staff it employed and the audiences it served), the film portrayed a dystopian institution of “unrealised dreams” and “unfulfilled promises”, echoing the sentiments in Chto Delat?'s earlier work, *Perestroika Songspiel* (2008).

*Museum Songspiel*, however, posed questions concerning the potentiality of the utopian art institution, had other actions been taken. If the director had followed the museum's true mission of inclusivity, rather than being concerned about his reputation with certain publics, and the security of his funding sources, it might had been possible to realise the dreams and make good the promises that have been alluded to. The director had positioned the museum as an inclusive entity with democratic values and as having a role as a catalyser of public debate. Not just speaking of “his” museum, but also of museums in general, he remarked; “the museum is open to everyone...the task of the museum is to wake up society”. If the museum depicted in the film were to be closed down because its policies and programmes were unpopular with the ultra-right wing elements in society – such as

the nationalistic press; the fictitious Netherlands for Netherlands Democratic Committee; and the Center For Extremist Prevention, the implication was, that such “fascist” tendencies would emerge victorious. Underpinning the discourse was an implied critique of the lack of governance in Russia, as “real” Russian organisational structures of control were transposed on to this imaginary scenario in the Netherlands.

Another possible understanding of *Museum Songspiel* was in terms of how it positioned the Van Abbemuseum. Although the art institution in *Museum Songspiel* was supposed to be fictional, it was in fact recognisable as this particular museum, and although the actions were portrayed as a general critique of the attitudes of typical members of a museum’s staff, there were elements of specificity in the dénouement of the project, which meant that informed viewers could relate the supposedly fictional narratives to real situations. A characteristic of institutionally critical practice, was, and still is, that both the subject of critique and the frame in which the critique took place, were and are one and the same. First, the film was representative, being fictional in parts and factual in parts, with elements that were taken from generic museums, components specific to the Van Abbemuseum, and aspects transposed from Russian political practice. Second, *Museum Songspiel* was a collaborative project in which the motivation of Esche might have been to show his museum in the best possible light, by having it compared with the fictitious dystopian museum portrayed in the film. The fact that Esche supported the project and actively engaged in the contested issues of the role of the museum vis-à-vis its various stakeholders might have been because he wanted to expose the Dutch government’s alleged xenophobic attitude to immigrants. Third, Chto Delat? was obliged to compromise the independent principles of its activist practice in working with established institutions, nevertheless the group chose a museum and a project space well known for their critical practices, a collaboration which arguably facilitated a more direct way of communicating Chto Delat?’s messages than alternative approaches. Although criticised by young artists in Russia for deviating from their original activist practice, Chto Delat? increased their visibility and avoided marginalisation by strategic associations such as these.

Chto Delat?’s early works were based on the Brechtian principle of “Verfremdung” (estrangement or alienation), which involved performing in such a way “that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play”, so that the “[a]cceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was

meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious" (Willett 1957/1964: 91). The "alienation effect" in Brecht's dialectical theatre aimed to reveal how and why people behaved in a certain way and sought to analyse the mechanisms that produces social relations. For Chto Delat?, Brecht was an important reference because he showed the dialectical mechanisms at work in characterising reality as a process of conflicts and contradictions leading to constant change, which he interpreted as indications that the transformation of society was a realisable objective. Ray has argued that Brecht's dramaturgical approach can be adapted for art institutions, leading to the enhancement of the critical awareness of the involved participants (2010). The object of Brecht's "dialectical theatre" was "to teach the spectator a most definitely practical conduct that is intended to change the world" (op cit 33). This notion that the spectator should be dislodged from his/her complacent attitude as a recipient of entertainment, and reoriented towards having a fundamentally different, namely critical attitude, questioned the way art was produced by social relations, and how it was received. Both the form and content of Brecht's plays were engineered towards the creation of active participants, engendering a state of persistent critical awareness in both the actors and the audience. According to Vilensky, Brecht understood that it was important not to give the spectator the possibility of making obvious interpretations, but to engage him/her as a participant observer, able to read the performance in a critical manner. Similarly Vilensky underlined that Chto Delat's objective was to create a "participant observer" out of the formerly "passive visitor" (undated a).

As their practice developed Chto Delat? added fictional elements to their work, in order to elaborate on and emphasise their critical messages. Vilensky argued that the introduction of theatricalisation was an important turning point in Chto Delat?'s practice, and noted that the fictitious approach adopted in the *Songspiels* grew out of a disenchantment with direct-action activism and a need to rethink both aesthetic and political positions (Misiano and Vilensky 2011). Echoing thoughts expressed in the artist Hito Steyrl's text, "The Articulation of Protest" (2002), which questioned the effectiveness of activist documentalism, Chto Delat? decided to "sharpen" their approach with "fabrications and artificiality" (op cit).

In "Why Brecht?", Vilensky explained that Brecht "anticipated the main tactical method of contemporary activism known as 'subversive affirmation'" (undated a: n.p.). According to the curator and critic Inke Arns and the theoretician Sylvia Sasse, this approach was adapted from the resistance strategies developed during the

1960s in Communist Europe. In “Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance”, they explained that “[s]ubversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them”; which was a necessary approach in a regime where art practice was instrumentalised by the State and obvious resistance was censored (2006: 445).

To illustrate his point, Vilensky described a project by the German theatre director and artist Christoph Schlingensiefel entitled *Please love Austria* (2000) (undated a). Schlingensiefel appropriated the format of the television series “Big Brother”, but replaced the “housemates” with refugees seeking political asylum. Following the rules of the game, the spectators voted for the deportation of the refugees. The right-wing Austrian government tried to intervene to qualify the project with the message: “Attention! This is a theatrical performance!”. Vilensky argued that the government’s gesture would have provided an effective means of distancing the spectator from the hyperrealism of the action, thus preventing the work’s political meaning from coming to the fore.

The strategy of subversive affirmation in *Museumssongspiel* lay in the treatment of the deportees. Just as the refugees were substituted for the housemates in *Please love Austria*, so the deportees in *Museumssongspiel* were used as participants in the performance “Towards the Light”. In both works the aim was to criticise the discriminatory and xenophobic immigration policies of right-wing governments by instrumentalising “powerless” collaborators in the articulation of resistance. Vilensky was concerned, however, that the audiences might not understand and could instead adopt literal readings of such projects. For this reason he argued that strategies of subversive affirmation were effective only in certain circumstances and should be employed only “in the right proportions” (undated b).

This strategy was also apparent in the dialogues between the journalist and the museum director, and in the critical commentary enunciated by the museum attendants. Ilic pointed out that Chto Delat?’s films were often criticised for, “shameless didacticism and sloganeering”. She argued that this criticism failed to do justice to the collective as, in her view, “their films theatricalize and instigate the very act of constituting an audience in which divisions converge and the space opens for a re-appropriation of the alienated substance through a radical transformation of inter-subjective social relations” (2011 n.p.). Considering what the implications of this position might be in a reading of *Museum Songspiel*, it was possible that the

“alienated substance” could be the fearful reaction of the protagonists in the context of a repressive state. By exaggerating the severity of the fictitious regime, contrasted with its real counterpart, which was the then Dutch government, and by amplifying the reactions of the press, Chto Delat? initiated processes of thinking and reflection on the part of the film’s viewers, who were impelled to question the validity of what they were seeing and make comparisons with the reality in which they were situated. The transformation of inter-subjective social relations that this process entailed, achieved the desired goal of constituting an audience as active participants in an imaginary dialogue, rather than passive receptors of polemical positions. The theatricalisation of the notions of: inclusivity, the agency of art, the relationship between art and life, and the roles of public funding and cultural policy in shaping a museum’s programming activities, exaggerated the critique and demanded a stronger reaction from viewers of the film than would arguably be possible with ironic mimicry.

*Museum Songspiel* was enacted against a background display of artworks from the Russian avant-garde, including paintings by El Lissitzky, and also artefacts from the history of activism, such as the presentation of newspapers produced by the Black Panther movement. The avant-garde paintings by El Lissitzky represented a brief period of artistic freedom in the former Soviet Union, whilst the newspapers produced by the Black Panther movement were documentary evidence of activist practice. However, it was revealed that the revolutionary and critical potential of the avant-garde artworks, had already been lost by their framing and genre-isation in the museum. Equally, the agency of Black Panther texts was diluted by their aestheticisation, as the newspapers were not available to read, but had been framed as “artworks” and hung on the museum’s walls. Although, the positions of the historical avant-garde and contemporary activist groups, were given an airing, at the same time, the works were aestheticised and neutralised by virtue of their co-option by the museum and their status as part of the museum’s collection. Based on these observations, Chto Delat? understood that it had to do more than simply represent an idea in material form or document a movement, it was impelled to produce works that led its viewers to new ways of thinking and behaving.

*Museum Songspiel* represented an incident where problems from the “real world” entered the museum. The immigrants sought asylum, they had heard that museums were on the side of the oppressed and would be positively disposed towards them. The director had positioned the museum as an inclusive entity with

democratic values, maintaining that it was welcoming, socially embracing and moreover able to galvanise society into questioning established ways of thinking and acting. In setting up this scenario, Chto Delat? problematised the issue of what was inside and outside the institution of art. In this instance the political issues of immigration policy and the persecution of minority groups infiltrated the museum and were co-opted into an artistic project. This notion of the invasion of the aesthetically autonomous museum of modern art by some “unsavoury” elements from the outside, involved a potential contamination of the museum’s status as a neutral space, though a certain amount of irony in Chto Delat?’s viewpoint was present, given that this concept had long been superseded. The ultimate expulsion of the immigrants served to underline the hypocrisy of the museum’s claim to neutrality and its avowal to be open and accessible to all. Chto Delat?’s position on the nature of artistic autonomy differentiated it from other groups. According to the art historian John Roberts, the collective’s “defense of artistic autonomy as a principle of self-organization” distanced them “from the prevailing nonaesthetic orthodoxy in terms of their resistance to the dominant model of the sublation of art into life” (2010: 728). Contesting Alain Kaprow’s position on bringing “life” into the museum, as articulated in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (1993), according to Vilensky and the artist-critic Zanny Begg, whom Roberts cited, “[t]he point is not art’s dissolution into life, but its crystallization in life as a constant re-discovery, beyond our reactionary times, of the possibilities of new forms of life (yet) to come” (ibid).

*Museum Songspiel* drew attention to itself as a work of art, while at the same time exposing the “truth” about social injustice in the life world. The film self-consciously and systematically promoted itself as a device for posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality in Dutch cultural policy and museum practice. *Museum Songspiel* used a strategy of subversive affirmation to emphasise the prevailing ideologies of “national democracy”, and thereby called them into question. The narrative went beyond a simple story of flight, refuge, co-option and expulsion, to expose issues, such as the inclusivity of audiences, the agency of art, the relationship between art and life, and the role of public funding and cultural policy in shaping a museum’s programming activities. The approach of affirming, while at the same time subverting or actually undermining, is consistent with Chto Delat’s practice of referencing its Soviet past, as “subversion affirmation” was a favoured form of artistic practice in Eastern Europe pre-1989, as it was necessary to appear to be conforming to the official communist agenda.

The project was significant in that it demonstrated the conflicts of interest inherent in the art system, and the faults and opportunism of the individuals involved. It pointed to the hypocrisy of the museum's claims to be democratic in the sense of representing the interests of all of its stakeholders, versus the actions actually taken, namely to conform to: mainstream public opinion, the demands of the public authorities, and the exigencies of the public funding bodies. Evading public criticism and protecting funding sources were genuine concerns shared by many museum directors, and elucidated in their reactions to the shifts in Dutch cultural policy, as discussed by the art critic Moosje Goosen (2012). She explained that in 2012 the national budget for the visual arts was reduced by 44% to EUR 31 million, a decision that was supported by the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science, Halbe Zijlstra of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD); and by Geert Wilder's Freedom Party (PVV). Both politicians favoured a private funding model for art institutions that required museum directors to focus their programme on income-generating activities. Esche was criticised for failing to create popular shows and was called upon to produce more revenue by means of blockbuster exhibitions. On the other hand, there was strong peer-group support for Esche's critical programme, which has been outlined in the Dutch online contemporary art magazine, *Metropolis M* (undated).

Chto Delat?'s working methodology was nevertheless problematical as it combined the type of spontaneity that was associated with activist dissent, with the need for measured organisational processes and institutional alignment. This entangled them in a complexity of positions: their support for Marxist dialectics, their embedded relationships with international art institutions, and their practice of "exodus". The critic Ekaterina Degot argued that, when Chto Delat? emphasised its commitment to critical art, it might set the accent on *critical*, but *art* is what the young Russian artists heard first. According to her, "[t]hey are disenchanted with the group's insufficiently radical artistic politics (given its deep entanglement in the international network of non-profit art institutions) and often see the group as opportunists who do not sufficiently question their own practice" (2010 n.p.). They regarded Chto Delat? as having betrayed their political agenda as activists, which demanded an "exodus" from such institutions of neoliberalism, in order to constitute new organisational systems in the form of "instituent" practices, (Raunig 2006 and 2007).

Vilensky, however, argued that as the Russian authorities had failed to develop institutions of critical thinking and research, it has been left to self-organised

groups such as Chto Delat? to institute their own organisations. Chto Delat? achieved this by constructing “art soviets”, modelled on the system of soviet councils in operation in the former Soviet Union, which functioned as agents of participatory democracy, aiming to generate alternative forms of collaboration in the field of contemporary cultural production. According to the cultural historians Begüm Firat and Aylin Kuryel, “[t]he ‘art soviet’ takes on the function of a counter-power that plans, localizes, and executes cultural projects collectively” (2011: 224). Despite collaborating with international art institutions, Chto Delat? had by no means abandoned its alternative strategies. Referring to the situation in Russia, Vilensky explained that the collective’s aim was, “to explore the possibilities of communication and forming our own space outside of the framework of cultural institutions, because they embody the anti-humanist, corporate model for organizing society” (CAT Group: 2012: n.p.). He argued that, “association beyond their dehumanizing boundaries is the only possible means of political resistance to the powers that be” (ibid). According to Vilensky, “art is not directly concerned with constructing society’s relations in practical terms; instead, it formulates the possibilities for creating a society that is radically different from what we face today” (ibid).

As an extension to the art soviets, Chto Delat? also created “activist clubs”, modelled on the workers’ clubs conceived by the Constructivist artist Alexander Rodchenko in the 1920s. Following a strategy of managed infiltration, the collective located the activist clubs inside museums and art galleries, aiming to transform the leisure time of “privileged art consumers” into the “learning time of emancipated spectators” (ibid). The collective contended that a solution to the duality of producing projects both on the inside and the outside of the institution of art was to infiltrate activist practices by means of a Brechtian participatory learning processes. They argued that art was capable of exerting agency, with at least the potentiality to change minds, if not to catalyse the will to act. Viewing the museum as a platform from which to vocalise dissent, they equally disavowed the notion that radicalism should be contained in the “safety” of the museum, as this would neutralise its agency.

### 3.2 What How and for Whom (WHW)'s 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial (2009): Independent curators conceive a “subversive” biennial

The 11<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial exhibition, entitled *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* (2009), was directed by the curatorial collective What How and for Whom (WHW), which comprised the Croatian curators: Ivet Curlin, Ana Devic, Nataša Ilic and Sabina Sabolovic, and the designer and publicist Dejan Kršic. As was consistent with their practice, which favoured the use of “détournement”, the collective conceived and curated a subversive biennial (their term), with a view to exposing biennial practice to a detailed scrutiny. They sought to bring about a “Brechtian refunctioning” of the biennial as an institution, which they regarded as being tainted by the “neo-liberal values” (their denotation) of commodity fetishism and cultural tourism (Curlin et al 2009).<sup>15</sup> The curators viewed the biennial as a platform for the articulation of their alternative vision of a “better world”, based on the idea of a communist utopia, and their choice of artworks reflected this.

This 11th edition of the International Istanbul Biennial was named after the finale of Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera*, entitled “What Keeps Mankind Alive?”, whose refrain answered the question in the harshest of terms, “[t]he fact that millions are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced, oppressed”. Brecht’s work thematised the process of ownership, revealing the disparities and inequalities between poverty and wealth, and through a literary narrative offered a representation of capitalism. It critically illuminated various aspects of “bourgeois ideology”, such as marriage, religion and authority during the Weimar Republic in 1928, prior to Hitler’s accession to power. Esche, who was on the advisory panel for the biennial, argued that the exhibition resonated with “an abandoned leftist ideal of consciousness-raising”, and that the curators were able to represent the “unpleasant imbalances” that existed in the world and affected viewers, inducing in them an emotional response, in a way “that is unique and particular to this [the biennial] format, its protocols, and the ways they allow for the consumption of images” (2009a n.p.). According to the art historian T.J. Demos, “displaying remarkable foresight regarding Germany’s dark future, Brecht’s urgent call to politicise art serves as a rallying call for the curators [WHW] in their effort to re-situate aesthetics today in renewed solidarity with socialist modernity” (2009 n.p.). Demos argued that WHW’s curatorial premise was based on

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15 Brecht’s notion of “Umfunktionierung” (refunctioning) spelt without a hyphen, was a dialectical process in which theatre intervened via the agency of engaged spectators to re-shape society.

the notion that “utopian communism”, with its values of social equality, solidarity and social justice, “remains unique as an emancipatory politics capable of challenging the global hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism”, understood as, “the free-market economy, the privatization of national institutions, the dismantling of social protections and organized labour and autocratic governance”, which they claimed in a world of encroaching political authoritarianism and military domination was leading towards “fascist tendencies” (ibid).

The International Istanbul Biennial was founded in 1987, reflecting the festivalisation of contemporary art and the expansion of corporate sponsorship of the arts both in Turkey and internationally. Its governing body, the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), was structured as a business organisation, and according to the art historian Angela Harutyunyan, the media theorist Aras Özgün and the political institutions specialist Eric Goodfield, “epitomises the way in which contemporary art institutions have reorganized in conformity with the contemporary forces of economic rationalization” (Harutyunyan et al 2011: 480). Whereas the original supporters kept in the background, since 2006, when Koç Holding A.S., Turkey’s leading industrial conglomerate, took over the role of main sponsor, there has been an expansion of the presence of the sponsor at the biennial. Koç is a Fortune Global 500 company, with over 90,000 employees, active in a wide variety of businesses, including automotive, defence, consumer durables, food, finance, tourism and construction. It is possible that Koç Holding, also a family-controlled company, gave tacit support to WHW’s critical initiative as a way of being indirectly critical of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government, whereas a company with a wide institutional ownership might not have operated in the same way. Their support, however, meant that WHW’s subversive biennial was framed within a corporate neo-liberal structure from the outset, providing the curators with an arguably unstable foundation on which to construct their utopian curatorial premise. Specifically, their exhibition was actually funded by Koç, a fact that subsequently left the collective open to criticism from their detractors, since neoliberal funding sources might restrict the critical edge of artistic practices, making it less credible for the art to ignite a transformative debate in politics, and challenge the pervasive focus on cultural tourism and the commodification of artworks that were, and still are, typical of mainstream biennials.

The curator-critic Maria Hlavajova discussed the dual nature of biennials as both “institutions of art” and “exhibitions of artworks” (Filipovic et al 2010: 294). The distinction was important in the case of 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial exhibition,

*What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, particularly as WHW were implicated in the corporatist biennial structure, having accepted the invitation to be its artistic directors. The biennial institution provided the collective with a framework that, on the one hand represented the general attributes of biennials, which they were against, and on the other hand, gave them a platform for the articulation of their political position. The challenge for WHW was to rise above the limitations of their institutional embeddedness and create an exhibition that both reflected and did justice to their utopian aspirations.

In the same anthology, the critic Carlos Basulaldo discussed a different kind of duality endemic in large-scale international exhibitions to that explained by Hlavajova (ibid). For Basulaldo, biennials were affirmative, continuing the production of symbolic value created by museums, but at the same time biennials never totally belonged to the system of art institutions in which they were supposedly inscribed, and they often had subversive agendas, particularly when their location on the “periphery” offered opportunities to decentre the western artistic canon (ibid 124-135). It was precisely this type of subversive agenda of furthering emancipatory politics viewed through the lens of art in a biennial that was located beyond the mainstream circuit of mega-exhibitions that WHW had in mind. Moreover, independent biennial curators occupied a special position in the functional hierarchy, between the biennial organisation and their status as independent curators. As artistic directors of the biennial, they possessed autonomy with respect to the artistic direction of the programme. In other words, although the existing biennial structure remained in place throughout the biennial, and in a limited form between biennials, during the moment of artistic conception and implementation, WHW had the authority to shape this particular biennial as an exhibition that reflected their specific curatorial concept.

*What Keeps Mankind Alive?* investigated the political and economic implications of the post-1989 “new world order” at a time when the financial crisis of 2008 challenged the legitimacy of the neoliberal premise. As such, the exhibition, according to the curators, sought to “rethink the biennial as a meta-device with the potential to facilitate the renewal of critical thinking” (Curlin et al 2009: 39). The exhibition was framed within the context of Brecht’s political engagement in art, and his specific methods of production and distribution. WHW’s strategy was not to transpose the Brechtian approach – predicated on a detestation of fascism and an espousal of a communist utopian ideal – but rather to adapt and remodel Brecht’s modus operandi to the current situation, necessary because “the language of politics

is effectively depoliticised” (ibid 41). They contended that the concerns raised by Brecht with respect to social injustice were equally important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that the financial crisis post-2007 could have lasting negative effects, not unlike those that transformed the world after the financial collapse of 1929. They argued that the role of art in instigating social change was as pressing in 2009 as it was in the 1930s, when Communism, defined as the utopian left, confronted Fascism and Stalinism (ibid). Contending that these problems were not addressed appropriately within the all-encompassing system of the cultural industry, which was restricted by the commodification of art, the cult of the celebrity artist and cultural tourism, WHW conceived their biennial exhibition as an emancipatory alternate vision of the contemporary world.

In their self-imposed mission to create an exhibition that differed from the majority of exhibitions in mainstream biennials, WHW adopted a didactic stance, registering their disapproval of the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, and the way in which the biennial form, in their view, had become yet another example of capitalist appropriation and exploitation. By creating a different kind of biennial from the usual offering, the curators sought to raise questions about the way in which mega-exhibitions propagated the celebrity cult of artists and circulated their artworks as goods for consumption. The curators also sought to criticise biennial visitors, drawing attention to the cultural tourism that such mega-exhibitions attracted, implying that this detracted from the activity of taking art seriously.

WHW also criticised the operational processes of biennial institutions, identifying their characteristic opaqueness as undesirable and proposing transparency as the preferred approach. WHW disagreed particularly with the way in which the financial processes of biennials were organised, and argued in favour of a greater level of disclosure, and specifically they published a summary of their income and expenses, as shown in Figures 23 and 24 (Curlin et al 2009: 23). They aimed for a wider range of artists represented than was usual in most biennials, and provided details of the gender-age-nationality mix of artists that their exhibition contained. In the conception of their programme WHW particularly strove to obtain a better balance between artists from the “centre” and the “periphery”, and equilibrium between age and gender, and eschewed the usual artists from the western contemporary canon that were typically displayed on the biennial circuit, in favour of emerging artists from Eastern Europe and the Middle East (ibid: 18).



Figure 23

11th International Istanbul Biennial, “Budget – Income”

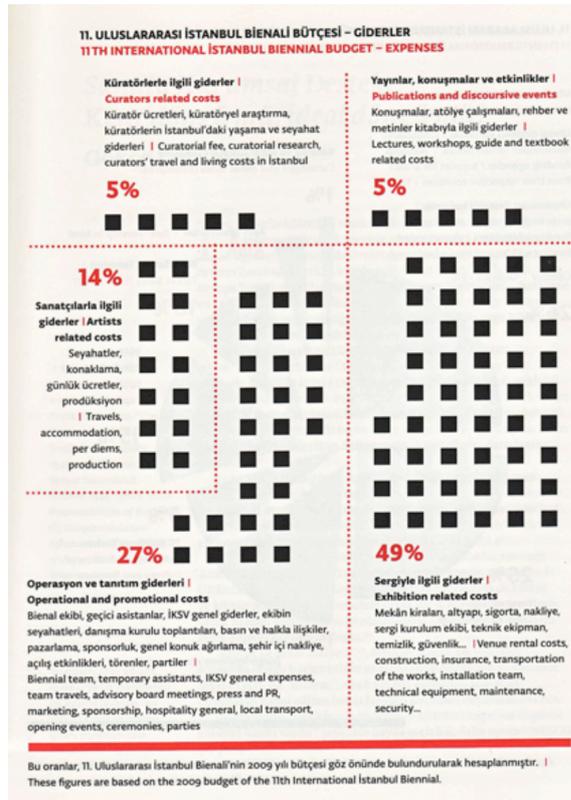


Figure 24

11th International Istanbul Biennial, “Budget – Expenses”

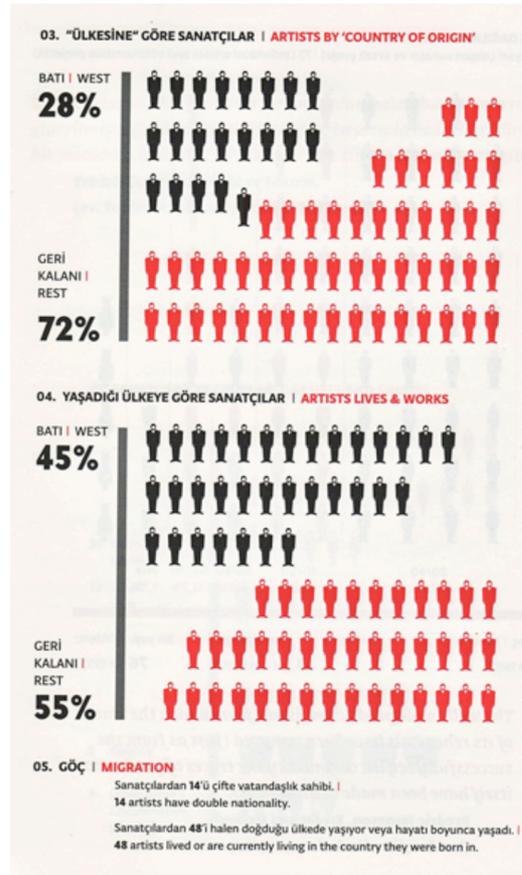


Figure 25

11th International Istanbul Biennial "Artists by 'Country of Origin'" and "Artists Lives & Works"

WHW contextualised its version of the biennial drawing on Brecht's emancipatory theory of art and praxis, that "art" was able to transform daily life, including politics. Their approach did not apply Brecht's theory of art and praxis in a rigorous form, but mapped out a function for art beyond aestheticism. Using a series of Brechtian devices, such as aesthetic de-familiarization, reflexive theatricality and pedagogical experimentation, the collective addressed the central question as to what extent could art biennials be subversive, or rather in what way could their specific biennial subvert the biennial norm. The aim of Brecht's epic theatre had been to render the faults existing in social structures transparent, and having made the viewers aware of these shortcomings, to suggest ways of overcoming them. WHW aimed to transpose this approach to the ideological use value of cultural production on to the present situation, which they identified as a crisis of contemporaneity.

The collective contended that Brecht's ideas continued to be relevant, notably that creativity was often best fostered and formed collectively, and that the function of art was not to give aesthetic pleasure, but was a means of public education, and a tool for political agitation. WHW were concerned to create a "politicised aesthetic

prompt” that could stimulate an understanding of the problems of the present more clearly, and catalyse an ability among individuals to rethink positions on many contemporary subjects, thereby nurturing both the viewers’ critical faculties and their potential for action. As a writer and a theatre director, Brecht continuously sought to reveal, display, deconstruct, and transform the theatre’s production apparatus, and it was this approach, WHW argued, that could lead participants in the art system out of what they perceived to be the deadlock of the apparatus of contemporary art.

Most of the artworks displayed in *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* addressed specific socio-economic issues in the “non-art” world rather than the biennial as a cultural institution. A film by Chto Delat? entitled *Perestroika Songspiel – The Victory Over the Coup* (2008), adopting the Brechtian format of dialectical theatre with a Greek chorus and five “heroes” – a democrat, a businessman, a nationalist, a revolutionary and a feminist, narrated a story of “hopes that didn’t come true, of promises that weren’t made good”. The work evoked the neoliberal global crisis with which the biennial was directly concerned, and posited its aspirations for a better version of the world. The work parodied the failures of the Soviet Union’s Perestroika reform project, while still remaining faithful to the Communist utopian ideal. The film was accompanied by a wall chart that provided a fictional counter-history of what might have happened in a different scenario, chronicling an alternate post-1989 trajectory in which the “West” undergoes its own version of Perestroika and is impelled to carry out a series of radical social-democratic reforms.

In keeping with the political focus of the exhibition, some of the works displayed were originally produced for non-art purposes. Zeina Maasri’s *Signs of Conflict – Political Posters of Lebanon’s Civil War 1975 – 1990* (2008) “started life” as political posters, as their title clearly indicated. The posters were propaganda materials, designed to pictorialise and vocalise various partisan positions on the Lebanese Civil War, but took on the character of artworks by virtue of being displayed at the biennial. Maasri’s political posters underwent a process of acquiring agency through re-contextualisation and acculturation. The differences between an artwork and a political poster, or a government report, or an image in the press, are its sustainability and longevity. Long after the political posters have been torn down, the government reports have been forgotten, and the press photographs have been archived, a work of art can engage viewers and lead them to new avenues of thought. Ulrike Groos, the Director of the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, argued that in this exhibition, “[t]hemes such as poverty, war, nationalism, xenophobia were dealt with

more personally and affectively, with more differentiation and urgency, and above all more playfully and with more humour than is possible in the daily overkill of the news media” (2010: 23).

However, in some respects the exhibition might have succeeded in aestheticising rather than radicalising the artworks it presented. Harutyunyan et al contended, that although WHW sought to display “radical emancipatory politics”, catalysed by art, in practice the collective only achieved a statement about the “politics of aesthetics” (2011: 1). These writers argued that despite their well-intentioned efforts to instrumentalise art into resolving socio-economic and political problems, by taking Brecht’s concept out of context, WHW erased the singularity of the specific experiences. According to them, “[t]he simultaneity of the event’s complicity in market and aesthetic capitalism alongside of its rhetorical commitment to a communist brand of radical activism effectively neutralizes its ethical agency” (2011: 485).

In “Some Notes on Brecht and Dialectics”, the critical theorist, Gene Ray questioned whether, “a particular dialectic of form and content reveal the individual as a ‘causal nexus’ capable of struggling and collectively changing the world?” (2009: n.p.). According to him, despite WHW’s curatorial intentions, and the radical nature of the artworks on display, the biennial did not go nearly far enough in its implementation of Brecht’s approach. Ray argued that in Brecht’s work, “each formal element...sets up a separate dialectic with the unfolding action, or content, and that the total effect of these dialectic moments or episodes was insight into the changeable nature of reality that stimulated and empowered the spectators’ critical faculties” (ibid). However, this biennial exhibition did not appear to display the “radical separation of elements” that Brecht called for, so that a specific work might be interpreted as taking a critical position vis-à-vis a particular issue, which could later be compiled into a position on the whole. According to Ray, WHW failed to establish sufficient clarity about the particular function of a given artwork with respect to the nature of critique that it was making, namely was it critiquing a particular aspect of this specific biennial, or biennials in general, or did it question the entire neoliberal art system, underlying points made by Foucault about the importance of specificity with respect to critique.

With respect to WHW’s critique of the biennial on an institutional level, this was most clearly articulated in the catalogue, evidenced in the curatorial statements and the transparency on the budget and the gender and nationality mix of artists

represented (Curlin et al 2009). As the curators were commissioned by the biennial organisation, their method of critique can be characterised as embedded as they were working in parallel with the institution they purported to criticise. They claimed that their method of internally generated criticism was subversive, which contrasted with Fraser's viewpoint that subversive critique is a form of criticism typically generated outside the institution of art (1985). Their self-reflexive approach to directing the biennial generated discussion and critique outside the physical perimeters of the biennial, but inside the total system of art.

When it came to the exhibition form, the critic Pablo Lafuente argued that the collective opted for traditional methods of display in a variety of "white cubes". The exhibition venues comprised: the former customs house at Antrepo 3 on the Bosphorus, a de-commissioned tobacco factory, and the disused Greek Feriköy School – although not formal art venues, Lafuente contended that such locations were typical choices in large-scale exhibitions. *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* was criticised for failing to transform the "exhibitionary complex" and for choosing a conventional, modernist exhibition format. Therefore, despite the politicised meaning and radicality of many of the artworks, this canonical form of exhibition-making did not, it was argued, succeed in transmitting its message, nor in rallying audiences (Lafuente et al 2009). Esche noted that the exhibition "made use of the familiar tropes of fine art in well-installed, museum-like white cubes that spoke for the works' autonomy from its immediate surroundings" (2009a n.p.). Not all the commentators agreed with this analysis and the art historian Julian Stallabrass, in an eye-witness account, pointed out that the Greek Feriköy School, far from being a white cube, was indeed a politically charged space, given that the Greek population had been forced out of Istanbul and much of the paraphernalia of the Turkish "occupation" remained, including a portrait of Atatürk which hung on the walls (personal communication with Stallabrass in London, PhD Viva, 2.12.2014).

Critics of the biennial argued that more artworks and art projects should have been exhibited in the public realm and fewer in the established exhibition spaces. The curator Pip Day made the point that WHW actually avoided socially engaged practice (Lafuente et al 2009). Both Lafuente and Esche argued that only by going beyond their display in a modernist formal setting, such as situating them in the public sphere, could the artworks in the biennial develop their full potential. This might have been possible with their presentation and interaction with individuals in social situations where collaboration was possible – such as schools, factories, offices,

theatres and leisure facilities – and also with people who were engaged in self-organised associations (ibid). Going beyond the exhibitionary framework could have opened up spheres, it was argued, of politically involved individuals and groups, and thereby inscribed the artworks in quite a different support structure than the usual biennial framework. Although the curators eschewed activist strategies and socially engaged practice, which were often the presentational methods used for politicised art, their modes of presentation nevertheless conveyed their intended critical messages.

As WHW's objective was to give agency to the artworks, they chose to do so within the traditional frame of the white cube. By exhibiting the artworks in this manner, with all the accompanying discourses, it was arguably possible to attract viewers to see critical art in its "rightful" institutional surroundings, but framed within a different discourse, just as Brecht had contrived to attract audiences into his refunctioned version of the theatre (Thomson and Sacks 2006) and (Mumford 2009). Esche contended that *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* proposed a different modernist legacy to "the standard narrative of Western origination and Eastern adaptation as promulgated, for example, by New York's Museum of Modern Art" (2009: 2). Exhibiting works produced in Eastern Europe and Asia, the biennial articulated that the evolution of modernism was broad, and based on "parallel and agonistic international relationships" (ibid 2-3). This deliberate attempt to circumscribe the dominant orthodoxies, according to Esche, was intended to make the cultural establishment feel excluded and generate an alternative momentum within the biennial form.

The 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial had its enthusiasts and its detractors. The enthusiasts applauded the curators' sense of purpose, their conviction about the agency of art, the responsibility entailed in their curatorial approach and the transparent methods with which they operated. According to Demos, the WHW's project of re-animating communism constituted a complex experiment, given "the catastrophic totalitarianism of its lived experience" (2009: n.p.). He contended that the collective had articulated its objectives with restraint, "seeking to avoid a nostalgic or unmediated return to the past in their effort to extract the current potential of socialism", and that they rightly understood "contemporary fascism" as an approach to politics that promoted "extreme economic inequality, political disenfranchisement, unjust warfare and environmental destruction" (ibid). Granted that analogies are problematical, such comparisons were nevertheless useful, he

argued, as they served to warn, created awareness about potential problems ahead, and encouraged timely resistance. Despite the utopic messages embedded in the exhibition, the curators were careful not to make unsubstantiated claims about the ability of the works they displayed to catalyse any meaningful change to the existing structure of political, socio-economic or cultural globalisation. For Demos, the value of such exhibitions was that they advanced “metapolitics”, which he defined as a political engagement beyond partisan interests, arguing for its importance, precisely because it “represents a crucial source of political sustenance at a time when there are few outlets for effective political mobilization” (ibid). The argument that, since politics have become de-politicised, art institutions may have a function as platforms for the articulation of political viewpoints, has been made by several other commentators, such as Möntmann (2006) and Raunig and Ray (2009).

Among the detractors, Harutyunyan et al, pointed to the strong polemic emerging from WHW’s curatorial statements, and the anachronistic idealism of their search for a “better world”, and asked whether a biennial, understood as the very cultural manifestation of neoliberal globalisation, could credibly propose a communist agenda without inviting outright cynicism (2011). Despite the curators’ claims that they were able to resist instrumentalisation, spectacularisation and exploitation, there were a number of problems with their conduct of the exhibition, particularly the fact that not one of the 140 participating artists were paid a fee for taking part. The precarity of cultural workers in various institutions has recently become the subject of widespread debate, and has been explored in the project, *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions* (2010), curated and mediated by Katharina Schlieben and Sønke Gau at the Shedhalle in Zurich.

*What Keeps Mankind Alive?* also encountered local criticism. Three weeks before the opening, posters parodying the event, designed in the same “socialist” style as the official advertisements of the biennial, were disseminated by autonomous art collectives and artists, subverting the title of the event by replacing the word “biennial” with “begenal” (sounding like “biennial” owing to the Turkish soft “g”), which was a supermarket slogan, meaning “Taste and Buy”. Other posters juxtaposed the communist symbols of the red star, the hammer, and the sickle with the logos of the corporations and organisations which sponsored, or were affiliated, with the biennial, “so as to draw attention to the socialist discourse of the curators and their appropriation of Brecht while producing a capitalist spectacle” (Harutyunyan et al 2011: 489). The curators were particularly criticised for using fundraising

techniques that were redolent of neoliberal compromise. Even though they were open about their sources of sponsorship and published this information in the biennial catalogue, the fact that the main sponsor was Koç Holding A.S., Turkey's leading industrial conglomerate, provoked local protests and called the curators' critical strategies into question. The opening of the Biennial was marked by a series of disruptive interventions from individual artists, collectives and political activists, and groups organised parallel events in other venues to protest against what they perceived to be a hypocritical collusion between spurious utopian aims and a capitalist framework. The local activist group Direnistanbul, in an open letter to all the participating artists and curators, stated, "[we] resist in the streets, not in corporate spaces reserved for tolerated institutional critique" (Resistanbul Commissariat of Culture 2009). Direnistanbul, also known as Resistanbul, was an activist group, which protested against organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank. In their blogs, the group reinforced their criticism, "[what] is enthusiastically clapping the speeches of the CEO of [the] Koç Holding and the Minister of Culture, right after shouting out 'every bourgeois is a criminal', if not a symptom of cynicism?" (Holmes 2009).

Reaction to the protests took two forms. On the one hand, WHW viewed them positively, as they proved the biennial had succeeded in provoking a debate and in galvanising opinion. The theorist Brian Holmes corroborated this position, and went one step further to argue for the incorporation of the counter-event as part of the biennial (2009). On the other hand, an attempt to de-legitimise the protests circulated in one of the texts that accompanied the exhibition. The critic Sureyya Evren, in "Neither With You Nor Without You", argued that contemporary art was under attack from the orthodox left, which rejected the emancipatory political aesthetic of contemporary practices (Curlin et al 2009). Harutyunyan et al contested Holmes' position, contending that an effective and un-co-optable subversive critique of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial was performed by the "counter-spectacle", which took place in the street, organised by a social network that was able without any formal administrative apparatus was able to produce "an art of resistance" (2011: 492).

In understanding the significance of *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* in terms of its contribution to discourses on institutionally critical practice, it is important to weigh the ambitious nature of WHW's aims against what was achievable within the privately sponsored biennial frame in which the curators were working. Esche argued that *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* was "an opening gambit", a starting point, and could

potentially “empower an existing collective project that sees art as a means to imagine new kinds of political encounters” (2009a: n.p.). He pointed to the dangers inherent in the type of self-reflexive institutional self-critique which the curators engaged in and he contended, “it did not, and probably never could, truly deliver” (ibid).

WHW’s exhibition represented a model of what a utopian institution might aspire to be. The importance of this type of critique lay less in its ability to change the art system, or re-function institutions, and more in terms of the awareness it raised with respect to providing alternatives to a system that was homogeneous and commodity based. Although the critique seemed more symbolic than subversive, the collective did succeed in reminding audiences that art represented values other than purely “capitalist” ones. According to Esche, “the biennial very precisely defined art’s potential political agency in terms of education – art as an informative intervention” (ibid). The value of symbolic critique within the biennial context was its ability to raise awareness about particular issues, and provide opportunities for discourse, communication, learning, reflection, education, knowledge production and information exchange, but its disadvantage was that this type of critique lacked agency.

With respect to the subversive nature of the biennial, it is arguable that Fraser’s definition of subversive criticality was too limited and that in its most developed form, subversive criticality requires a combination of effective dialectical positioning and interventionist practice, operating on the nexus of knowledge and power within the institution. Exhibitions such as the 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial did not change the existing system, but they had the potential to propose new ways of thinking about the role of art within the neo-liberal system. The biennial did not incite the debates on politics, economics and culture among audiences that the curators had hoped for. It did, however, catalyse much discussion among critical art professionals about a range of possibilities with respect to imagined alternate systems.

Chto Delat? and WHW both adopted a Brechtian post-Communist approach to their critical curatorial practice. They shared a common ideology as a point of departure, though their respective practices manifested themselves in the employment of different forms. During the last five years, Chto Delat? has utilised fictional films as their preferred medium. They used recent understandings of curating drawn from artistic practice in their conception of a fictitious film, which exposed the

dilemmas of a museum of modern art struggling to adapt itself to the contemporary context of the neo-liberalisation of art and curatorial practice. For WHW the discursive exhibition form was the preferred critical medium, as manifested in the work they carried out within the context of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial (2009). Their curatorial approach drew on traditional methods with respect to exhibition practice, supported by a catalogue, which sought to demonstrate the criticality of their objectives. The next case study, although not inspired by Brecht, also addresses the issue of re-functioning institutions, and draws on traditional methods of curating in unusual circumstances.

### 3.3 Khaled Hourani's *Picasso in Palestine* (2011): An independent curator re-functions an iconic artwork to constitute a "new museum"

*Picasso in Palestine* (2011), was initiated by Khaled Hourani, an independent curator and the founder and director of the International Academy of Art Palestine (IAAP) in Ramallah. The project involved negotiating with the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, to borrow and exhibit a single work by Pablo Picasso, his portrait of Françoise Gilot, entitled *Buste de Femme* (1943), from June 24 to July 21, 2011. My conception of the project is the whole process of negotiating, navigating, transporting, securing, and exhibiting *Buste de Femme* at the IAAP. Hourani documented these activities with the filmmaker Rashid Masharawi, and *Picasso in Palestine* (2011) had its first public screening at *documenta 13* (2012). Unlike *Museum Songspiel*, the film of *Picasso in Palestine* was neither an artwork, nor a work of fiction, but functioned as documentation, and became a substitute, a partial account of the unrepresentability and opaqueness of the process by which the project, *Picasso in Palestine*, was realised.



Figure 26

Picasso's *Buste de Femme* at the Van Abbemuseum

The film investigated the collaboration between the director of a recognised museum in Europe and the independent curator of an art school (in a territory, which had not, and still has not, received full international recognition as a sovereign state), to lend a western iconic artwork with the purpose of exhibiting it to the public. The film explained how shipping a famous artwork, with all the necessary permissions and precautions, to an unrecognised state, was difficult in practice. The Van Abbemuseum curator Remco de Blaaij observed that much of the decision-making that was carried out to make *Picasso in Palestine* possible, occurred behind closed doors, with little or no evidence to indicate how exactly permission for the painting's passage was finally granted. This was particularly the case as there were, understandably, no reports in the film on discussions with the Israeli Civil Administration, the Israeli customs authorities and the Israeli Defence Forces. The intentions of the agents and the special circumstances of the viewing destination meant that what would have otherwise been a relatively simple logistical process, became an institutionally critical act, questioning museums' international lending policies, the processes involved in shipping valuable artworks, the act of constituting "a museum", and the discursive issues surrounding that act.

Prior to *Picasso in Palestine*, the Van Abbemuseum's approach to lending artworks was straightforward. Loan requests arrived routinely from institutions, with which the museum was already in contact, and were handled by the curator of the collection, Christine Berndes and the chief conservator, Louis Baltussen. In January 2009, Hourani visited the museum as part of an ongoing discussion organised by Esche with curators from the Middle East, to explore ways of facilitating broader cultural exchange outside the normal lending parameters of the museum. Responding to a behind-the-scenes tour, where Berndes had shown the artworks in storage that were available for loans, Hourani expressed an interest in borrowing a work to show at the IAAP. Although it is difficult to establish a causal link between Hourani's request and Esche's aspirations to re-function the loan procedures of the Van Abbemuseum, it is known that even before this approach, Esche was in the process of reformulating the museum's lending policy beyond the usual circle of established museums, envisioning a dynamic approach to expanding the collection's audiences by seeking out unconventional exhibition situations and building up an expanded network of institutions. *Picasso in Palestine* was a test case for the Van Abbemuseum, and the apparently simple proposition of lending one work would

entail them entering territory where the procedures were vague and imperfectly understood, and would question existing political agreements and bureaucratic systems. The project might also change both institutions, the interpretative possibilities of the Picasso, and the status of Palestine within the international art system. According to the artist critic Michael Baers, Hourani was aware that such a loan, “would inscribe Palestine within the administrative procedures of a prominent Western museum in an unprecedented manner” (2011a n.p.).

There were various practicalities to be overcome in shipping the artwork. First, it was felt imperative to prevent the Israeli guards from opening the specially constructed sealed crate, exposing *Buste de Femme* to the inhospitable climate. Fatima AbdulKarim, whom Hourani had recruited from the Ministry of Foreign Relations to handle the complex political agreements and bureaucratic systems through which the Picasso would be shipped, exhibited and mediated, argued in favour of sending the work as a diplomatic package, so that it could not be opened. Esche, however, was against this approach, arguing that it defeated the whole aim of the project, which was to test the normal procedures of lending an artwork from one institution to another. Alternatively the painting could be shipped under the parameters laid down in the TIR “Carnet de Transports Internationaux Routiers”, a multilateral treaty that simplifies the administrative formalities of international road transport in sealed containers. Apart from diplomatic immunity, TIR authorisation was the only protection available to prevent a breach of the crate. Although Israel was a signatory to the treaty, Palestine, as a “non-state” was not covered, and the only way in which the treaty could be applied was for the crate to travel under Israeli “protection”, as Palestine was, and still is, subsumed under all international treaties signed by Israel.

The second issue was to avoid the 15% duty normally levied by Israel on the importation of artworks. The painting was valued at EUR 5 million, which meant that the duty payable was beyond the means of either the Van Abbemuseum or the IAAP. Given the existence of an international agreement on tax exemption for museums for the temporary importation of artworks for exhibition, a possible solution was to seek museum-status for the IAAP, but the International Council of Museums (ICOM) rejected their application. The other option was to have *Buste de Femme* travel under the ATA “Carnet de Passage en Douane pour l’Admission Temporaire”, an international customs document that allows the holder to temporarily import goods without payment of the normally applicable duties and taxes. The Israeli authorities,

who were responsible for handling the importation of the work into Ben Gurion airport, insisted that they were the taxing authority, given Israel's jurisdiction over Palestine. The IAAP argued that Israel was only a transit country, and that Palestine was the final destination of the work, and moreover the Palestinian Ministry of Finance had agreed to forgo the tax. In the end the Israeli Civil Administration also waived the duty, "due to the special circumstances of this case", (Israeli Defence Forces blog 2011).

The logistical complexities of the project were equally problematical for the lending institution with respect to agreeing the specifications in the transportation documentation, particularly the destination of the shipment. This was no ordinary museum loan, but one redolent with institutionally critical and political implications. To state that Israel was the destination for the Picasso was for Esche contrary to the project's entire concept, but as Palestine has no airport and no officially recognised frontiers, for practical purposes the artwork had to enter Israel and traverse Israeli controlled borders. Esche understood that stating that the final destination was Palestine was awkward from an administrative viewpoint, "If you're trying to ship something to a place that obviously exists physically, but doesn't have a clear identity in this world that is divided into these clear identities called nation-states, then for the bureaucracy, that's difficult" (Baers 2011a: 13). Eventually a compromise was found, and the customs documents noted that the painting was being shipped to a "proxy country", namely Israel, with the final destination being Palestine. The document explained, somewhat pedantically, that the exhibition was taking place at the IAAP, which was located in Ramallah, and neither in Tel Aviv nor in Jerusalem.

The decision-making processes behind the final permission being granted for *Buste de Femme* to be shipped to Ramallah required navigating through an ambiguous maze involving diplomatic pressure, fiscal authorities, complicated insurance agreements and freight negotiations between the Van Abbemuseum, the IAAP, the transport companies and the Israeli authorities. AEK, the Van Abbemuseum's insurance broker, refused to insure the loan and the artwork's passage had to be covered, not by a specialist art insurer, but by an insurer of "extraordinary risk", SNS REAAL. Despite all the efforts to avoid breaching the crate, it was opened by a customs official at Ben Gurion airport for three minutes, a duration that Baltussen found acceptable, before being transported to the Qalandiya Checkpoint, where the Israeli driver was replaced by a Palestinian with a Jerusalem Identity Card, enabling him to traverse the checkpoints dividing East Jerusalem from

the West Bank. Ironically, the guard on duty at the checkpoint ignored the customs forms and gave the crate only a cursory glance, before waving the consignment through. Journalists and photographers accompanied the Picasso on the three kilometre “no-man’s land” section of the journey between the Qalandiya Checkpoint and “Area A”, where neither Israeli, nor Palestinian security and military personnel have authority, up until Palestinian guards took over the consignment for the final leg of the journey to Ramallah.



Figure 27

*Picasso in Palestine in transit*

*Buste de Femme* was exhibited in the building in which the IAAP was situated, which was of significance as a symbol of Palestinian cultural identity for the following reasons: first, it was located in a villa that once housed Gallery 79, a well-known art space that was forced to close by the Israeli Defence Forces during the First Intifada (1987-1991), and second, during the 1990s the building served as the offices of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Culture. To prepare the building to exhibit a valuable artwork, various structural and security adaptations were undertaken to create a small, temperature- and humidity-controlled structure, a “mini-museum” to hold one important artwork for public appreciation. In constructing the shipping crate, Balthussen had placed the artwork within a second transparent container to stabilise the temperature and act as a barrier and level of protection, should the checkpoint guards insist on opening it. He extended the idea of a second chamber to his concept for the exhibition space, designing a room-within-a-room that would guarantee that

the temperature and humidity levels remained stable. *Buste de Femme* hung in its room guarded by two soldiers and visitors were only allowed to enter in pairs.



Figure 28  
*Picasso in Palestine, arrival in Ramallah*



Figure 29  
*Picasso in Palestine, travel crate being lifted into the International Academy of Art Palestine*



Figure 30

The Van Abbemuseum chief conservator Louis Baltussen opening the crate on arrival



Figure 31

The curator of the Van Abbemuseum collection Christine Berndes  
and Louis Baltussen hang *Buste de Femme*

In addition, to the structural and architectural elements that defined the IAAP as a museum, there were also discursive factors in place supporting this definition, such as complementary displays and a mediation programme. First, the custom-built crate, fabricated by Hasenkamp Holdings and the Fraunhofer Institute for Material

Flow and Logistics, was exhibited in the foyer of the IAAP and constituted an integral part of the project. Second, the Al-Ma'mal Gallery in Jerusalem displayed all the documentation involved in realising the project, and third, there were two days of seminars underwritten by Outset Contemporary Art Fund, a London-based art charity, which has a branch in Israel. The participation of two Israeli art organisations in the realisation of *Picasso in Palestine* detracted from the criticality of the project in the following ways. First, it implied that the entire project in its widest and most discursive sense could not have taken place without the acknowledgement and participation of Israel. Second, it suggested an instance of co-option into a political agenda as opposed to into an artistic one.



Figure 32

Billboard announcing the *Picasso in Palestine* exhibition

The IAAP observed all the traditions of an official gala opening event, complete with a speech from Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority, and a performance of traditional Palestinian dance and music. Although some critics perceived the introduction of Palestinian folklore as inappropriate considering the institutionally critical and political implications of the project, Baers (2011) contended that the festivities were a deliberate ploy by Hourani to emphasise the significance of exhibiting a Picasso in Palestine, pointing to the acculturation of *Buste de Femme* by inscribing it in Palestinian culture. Baers also mentioned in this context, that although Picasso was often claimed to be a universal representative of Modernism, universals were always relativised by the specific circumstances in which

they were situated and displayed. In this instance, the contextualization of *Buste de Femme* in the framework of traditional Palestinian music, typical of the music played at wedding festivities, situated the “autonomous” artwork in the specifics of Palestinian culture.



Figure 33

Publicity for the *Picasso in Palestine* exhibition in Ramallah, showing the proximity to Jerusalem

Only a few Palestinians attended the Outset conference, and even the students from the IAAP were largely absent. This was partly owing to the fact that the talks were held in East Jerusalem, and not many Palestinians had the appropriate travel permits. Others simply boycotted the conference because Outset has Israeli connections, such as an office in Tel Aviv, that were unpalatable to many Palestinians. Hourani was also uncomfortable with the collaboration, understanding that it might restrict the critical edge of *Picasso in Palestine*, making it less credible for the project to ignite a transformative debate about Palestinian politics, as it could be interpreted that the Israelis were determining the interpretative influences of the

project.

In considering the project *Picasso in Palestine*, the institution of art may be thought of as the entire art system, including all the permissions and authorisations, insurance, customs waivers, packing, shipping and insurance that were required to transport a valuable artwork, from the lending museum, to the borrowing institution; in other words, the art system took the form of a logistical chain that was firmly embedded in a political and bureaucratic context, whose regulations and procedures were not always transparent. In answer to the question, to what extent had Hourani succeeded in re-functioning an art academy into a museum, the structurally and discursively adapted IAAP was not considered to be a museum by international museum authorities; similar to the way in which Hirschhorn's *Musée Précaire*, which had no official museum-status in the eyes of the French authorities, was formally not a museum. However, both entities performed museum-like functions that met and possibly exceeded the expectations of the viewing public. By the time the exhibition, *Picasso in Palestine*, was due to open, the IAAP was a de facto museum.

The location of the critique relative to the institution of art can be viewed differently in *Picasso in Palestine*, compared with other projects discussed in this thesis. There was no critical negation of institutions in this project, rather the critique was focused on the exclusion of the IAAP from the art system, both as a recognised institution of art, and as a participant in cultural exchanges programmes, owing to the special circumstances of its location. The particular situation of Palestine meant that *Picasso in Palestine* was embedded in the institution of art in a different way from the other projects discussed in this thesis. Both the lending and borrowing organisations intended this act of cultural exchange to be part of the international art system, but at the same time, were aware that however much the project embodied and replicated existing processes, owing to the "statelessness" of Palestine, it nevertheless remained outside it. Hourani and Esche used the Picasso to delineate the loan process from an established museum to a relatively unknown art academy in an unrecognised state, which would have been a straightforward procedure in any "normal" situation. By using routine procedures and eschewing special privileges, such as diplomatic protection, they sought to use the logistical process of shipping art from one location to another to reveal that the art system, embedded as it is in political and bureaucratic processes, discriminated against certain destinations. Bouadi argued that, "[t]he displacement of the work showed the underlying conditions of both the nation state and the modern art world, and their complicity

when invaluable pieces of art become object of global transportation (2011: 182). The collaboration between Hourani and Esche connected the “periphery” to the “centre” of the artworld, collapsing the centre and periphery for a brief moment into one seamless system, but despite the on-going dialogue between the two organisations, this relationship had not been honed into a sustainable institutional structure.<sup>16</sup>

With respect to the critical reception of Picasso in Palestine, opinions were divided on whether the Picasso exhibition addressed the westernised, “intelligentsia” and “culturati”, or whether there was a genuine desire to find new audiences amongst other segments of the Palestinian population. Some reports argued that the audience was a privileged one, and that the aim of arranging an encounter between a famous artwork with the “Palestinian public” seemed to have got lost en route. The anthropologist Nicola Perugini contended that the opening was far from being an “open event”, rather it was a “caged event” for the cognoscenti, and moreover, that the whole area around the IAAP was closed for security reasons (Baers 2011b: 1). In parallel with the opening of *Picasso in Palestine*, Palestinians, protesting in favour of the release of Palestinian prisoners incarcerated in Israeli prisons, stated clearly that as far as they were concerned the Picasso was irrelevant for them (Hourani and Masharawi 2011). Thus there was a bifurcation between the privileged international audiences, who were well aware of the project’s symbolic significance, and disinterested local audiences. For the latter, the project revealed the paucity of their encounters with artworks and the dearth of their experience of art institutions, a lack that, by extension, referred to the absence of an autonomous state in which an art institution might be “ideologically and topographically situated” (Baers 2011b: 4). Although only a few thousand viewers saw the painting, the international mediation of *Picasso in Palestine* was considerable, as photographs of the project were disseminated widely on the web, ironically the most ubiquitous of which was an image of the work, flanked by armed guards, reaffirming the interrelationship of art and politics within the institutionally critical context of the project.

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16 To date, *Picasso in Palestine* was the only project to be successfully realised under the Van Abbemuseum’s expanded lending policy, although there are two other projects under discussion, a project with SALT, a not-for-profit, interdisciplinary research institution in Istanbul, and a collaboration with a Chinese artist to exhibit in his home town in Hunan Province.



Figure 34

Guarding Picasso's *Buste de Femme* at the International Academy of Art Palestine.

Although Hourani and Esche shared common objectives in the realisation of *Picasso in Palestine*, as they both viewed the project as a “politicised aesthetic prompt”, their intentions were not identical. Hourani sought to re-function a well-known artwork as a political instrument, to emphasise the lack of territorial recognition for the marginalised state in question. His objective was that the special political situation in which the art school was located would be made visible by employing the protocol of a well-known Western museum’s loan policy. The loan agreement would inscribe the unrecognised state of Palestine within the administrative procedures of the museum, tantamount to giving it de facto recognition. The artwork’s provenance would subsequently include mention of the unrecognised territory, evidence of an acknowledgement of its existence. “Hourani could envision the work as anticipating (or promoting) a two-state solution”, but equally “critics could claim that the project opened itself to instrumentalization as publicity for the PA and its security apparatus” (Baers 2011b: 9). The curators, Rasha Salti and Hourani argued in “Occupational Hazards of Modern Art and Museums”, that “[i]n the making of *Picasso in Palestine* the means are as interesting as the end. The means are, in fact, an end in themselves” (2011: 42). The Van Abbemuseum curator Galit Eilat contended that as “art is considered autonomous”, it provides a “grey zone” in which to act, and “this zone is never fully defined in political terms, that’s why it can accommodate change and be used as a tool for transforming the society” (Eilat et al 2011: 82).

Esche sought, on the other hand, to test museums' international lending policies and the processes involved in shipping valuable artworks to unconventional locations. As a proponent of "experimental institutionalism", he was also interested in redefining the role of museums, and what it meant to re-function an art school as a museum. As far as Esche was concerned, the ideological implications of the loan, the political references contained in the artwork, the re-contextualisation of the work in its new location, and the constitution of a new, albeit precarious, "museum", all underlined how far the discourses had evolved away from the notion of the museum as a neutral space, towards the concept of the museum as a platform for partisan positions. For Esche the temporary, mini-museum encapsulated the idea of the museum as a locus for the articulation of political ideas and for a discussion of the relationship between art and politics. As Baers argued, "Esche could consider the work a successful attempt to refunction a museum collection as a political agent" (2011b: 9).

For Esche the project was about lending a painting "by arguably the most famous artist of the twentieth century" to "a country that is arguably the most monitored territory on the face of the earth today" (de Blaaij et al 2011: 52). Esche's concept of the "dispersed museum" was "one that was present in the relations forged across cultural regions rather than in the art objects held in the collection" (ibid). He was in the process of devising a long-term strategy to enhance the relevance of the Modernist collection of the Van Abbemuseum for future audiences. Acknowledging that "Western modernist universalism and European cultural hegemony are discredited concepts", he posed the question of what other concepts might take their place (ibid). Recognising the emergence of cosmopolitanism, Esche was aware that the cultural values in formation would no longer be as Western-focused as in the past, however, it was likely that some "elements of former Western ethical and cultural inventions will be valid for the future" (ibid). The project, *Picasso in Palestine* was as much about the future role of established museums as it was about embryonic institutions, as it posed questions about how Western art museums could become meaningful in a wider context than their own local audiences. It suggested that the works of Picasso, and other iconic artworks, which had lost their radical edge through a process of canonisation, could be re-imagined or re-contextualised in ways that would restore "the sensation of alienation and the sense of a strange, yet close, emotional distancing that they produced in their own time" (ibid). Alternatively, it might be argued that using a famous artwork in an instrumental way served only to

exoticise the alterity of the borrowing location and its makeshift museum, and could be misread as a form of cultural imperialism. Esche was initially skeptical of what it would mean to take a Picasso, an icon of Western European culture, and exhibit in Palestine, as this action could be interpreted as a form of cultural colonialism. Hourani argued against this evaluation, pointing out that the initiative to borrow and exhibit the Picasso in Ramallah came not from the Van Abbemuseum, but from the IAAP. According to the Associate Director of Outset Contemporary Art Nick Aikens, it was vital for the project's integrity that *Picasso in Palestine* was not "a project orchestrated from a European museum" (2011: n.p.). For Aikens the process of a straightforward loan procedure between the Van Abbemuseum and the IAAP "had to be rethought due to the exceptional nature of the Palestinian reality", and "protocols had to be adjusted and legal frameworks re-set relating to insurance, transportation and imports into the West Bank" (ibid). For a brief moment, Ramallah was in possession of a "museum", prompting reflection about the type of institutions that are appropriate and the ways in which a "Western museum could or should engage meaningfully in such politically volatile terrain" (ibid). Bouadi contended that with the project, *Picasso in Palestine*, "the death of the Picasso as we know it occurs and a new one is born for the singularity of the individual reader" namely, superimposed over the existing readings of Picasso were new understandings of the work (2011: 183). An important part of the project was the path traced by *Buste de Femme*, drawing an invisible line, delineating a bureaucratic process where the art system and the political system met. With respect to the political and cultural implications of the project, the painting was significant beyond its iconic status, owing to its recontextualisation and acculturation in Palestine. However, the interrogation of the loan procedure and the negotiations between different institutions, organisations and public authorities, showed that Palestine continued to be excluded from the official art system.

Both Hourani and Esche were intent on soliciting an implicit recognition for the "State of Palestine" by having the exhibition of *Buste de Femme* in Ramallah officially mentioned in the artwork's provenance. Both shared a belief in the agency of art, "to imagine the world otherwise", as articulated in Esche's impassioned speech at the inauguration of the exhibition (Hourani and Masharawi 2011). As Aikens remarked, "if Picasso can come to Palestine, side-stepping seemingly insurmountable hurdles, then art, museums and new publics still have an important role to play" (2011 ibid). The protagonists sought to use the symbolic value of an iconic artwork to imagine

what a real museum and normal viewing experience might be like in an atypical situation. The theorist Slavoj Žižek discussed the importance of “normalcy” with Hourani and the Van Abbemuseum curator Remco de Blaaij during the opening (Hourani et al 2011). According to Baers, one of the central motives of the project was “to canalise [channel] the sign-value of a work by Picasso, modernism’s most iconic artist, in the service of imagining what a normal institution of art in a normal state might look like” (2011a: 3).

For Bouadi (2011), Hourani’s choice of Picasso was based on the idea that for the Palestinians it would symbolise modernity and its promise of democracy, better than any other artist from the West. However, “orientalist” discourses articulated by the cultural historian Edward Said (2003), pointed to the problematics of harnessing modernity outside the geographical and metaphysical conditions that give rise to it. Žižek described *Buste de Femme*, as an “occupied face” whose gaze was split, with one “terrorized lively eye” cowering beneath a “horrible metallic eye like in Terminator”, representing ambivalence and indeterminacy (Hourani et al 2011). As Baers commented, “Palestine, prefigured as a woman within the tradition of resistance iconography, now appeared as a portrait without semblance, split within itself, and splitting, too, the vision of her beholders, whose gaze oscillated between the painting itself and the guards standing by with their weapons at the ready” (2011b: 10).

*Buste de Femme* was chosen out of three Picasso’s in the Van Abbemuseum’s collection, as the idea was not to exhibit an explicitly political artwork. Showing the portrait of a woman argued Hourani would open up a useful discussion of the role of women in art and society, and the practice of representing women in Palestinian art, since the “female” was regarded as a symbol of national identity. Baers explained that by mentioning the history of female representation in Palestine, Hourani was alluding in particular to Sliman Mansour’s painting *Bride of the Homeland* (1976), which portrayed the death of Lina Nabulsi, a schoolgirl killed by Israeli soldiers. Such was the potency of this image that when a lithographic edition was distributed, the Israeli intelligence service seized the posters and confiscated the original painting. Baers’ decision to compare *Buste de Femme* to *Bride of the Homeland*, was prompted, no doubt, by the fact that Hourani invited Mansour to witness the opening of the crate when the Picasso arrived at the IAAP. The connection that was made between Mansour and the Picasso lead to a potential reappraisal and a re-contextualisation of *Buste de Femme*, as the painting was

consequently introduced into a new constellation of references, and became subject to “a détournement of significations” according to Baers, “that the organizers [Hourani and Esche] hoped would be reciprocal – affecting both painting and context alike” (2011a: 7).

*Picasso in Palestine* did more than simply introduce Picasso to the Palestinian public. For Baers, the painting also entered “into a process of semiotic slippage, finding itself inscribed with an alternative set of interpretations and associations” (2011a: 7). He described *Picasso in Palestine* as a “semiotically polymorphous work”, encompassing multiple representations: the image of *Buste de Femme* in its acclimatised traveling crate crossing the Qalandiya checkpoint, the image of the crowd at the opening listening to Salam Fayyad’s speech and enjoying the traditional dance troupe, or arguably the most widely reproduced image, that of the painting on display, flanked by armed guards. Bouadi corroborated this point, contending that in the long wait at the border during the painting’s return journey, *Buste de Femme* became inscribed in the commercial and social activity that is part of daily life at the checkpoints, and thus also formed part of a communitarian and socialising process (2011).

*Picasso in Palestine* was not the first instance of an artwork by Picasso being associated with institutional critique. In 1970, members of the Art Workers Coalition brought the poster *Q: And Babies?* – a photograph showing the bodies of women and children, collateral damage from the Vietnam War, sprawled side-by-side in the middle of a narrow dirt path – into MoMA, and displayed it in front of Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937). The critic Elena Volpato described how this act re-contextualised and arguably re-instrumentalised *Guernica*, which had, in her opinion, lost its political agency owing to the fact that it had been canonised as an important art work, as part of the MNCARS collection on loan to MoMA. She contended, “[t]his painting about the Spanish Civil War, so close in spirit to what the poster decried, could also be reduced to a symbol opposing the change the AWC was demanding from contemporary art museums.” In other words, “*Guernica* was the historical version, cleansed and defused, of a historicised tragedy” (2010 n.p.). As if to restore some of the lost criticality to *Guernica*, Salti and Hourani, in their article, “Occupational Hazards of Modern Art and Museums”, explored the connections between *Guernica* and *Picasso in Palestine*, the former denouncing the horrors of war, giving prominence to the victims, rather than the perpetrators, and the latter, exploring the discursive and legal paradoxes of Israel’s occupation of Palestine, and in this context,

they described an incident documenting the freeing of Palestine and Lebanese prisoners from the Israel Hadarim prison in 2008, photographed against a reproduction of *Guernica* (2011).

During the Picasso talks accompanying the exhibition, which took place in Jerusalem, the art historian Lynda Morris emphasised the political content of Picasso works, arguing that he had supported a number of political causes, and cited the artist's near forty year membership of the French Communist party as evidence of his political commitment. In "The Battle for Picasso's Mind", Morris questioned the usual formalist, aesthetic and canonical reading of Picasso, which had led to the marginalisation of his radical political commitment (2011). Her interpretation provided an alternative reading of *Picasso in Palestine*, disavowing the claimed promotion of European Modernism with its values of abstraction and formalism, and supporting instead the position of the theorist Andrew Conio, who argued that the project created a new kind of "strategic interventionist artwork", that expanded "beyond representation to include legislative procedures and legal frameworks, creating an alternative model for political practice" (2011: 27). Esche argued in "Picasso in Ramallah" that the project "represents a symbolic connection between European modernity and contemporary Palestinian culture; a connection that can serve, if understood well, as a way to imagine cultural globalism as mutuality rather than conformism to a single worldview" (2011: 51). In other words, the Picasso that returned to Eindhoven, was not the same, in a discursive sense, as the one that had left it a month earlier, as it has acquired an additional provenance and a new set of interpretations. In this way, the Picasso was arguably re-functioned from being an autonomous icon of modernism, into being an instrumental artwork, and part of a political strategy to achieve recognition for Palestine.

In assessing the significance of *Picasso in Palestine* in institutionally critical practice, there are a number of central issues. First, it questioned the neutrality of the museum as a container for art, and showed how an art institution can be refunctioned as a platform for the articulation of political ideas. Second, it demonstrated that the museum had a role to play in developing narratives closely related to the contemporary, rather than just aestheticising the objects it contained, or using them to create histories of the past. Third, the project contributed to discourses about the agency of art and the role of museums in unrecognised states. Fourth, it revisited Modernism, and constructed new readings of the genre, rendering it relevant to the present. According to Baers, the project was about "fabricating an art museum and

installing within it a work of high modernism” (2011b: 8). In so doing, the initiators of the *Picasso in Palestine* project “resuscitate both the museal project and that of ‘universal’ autonomous art” (ibid).

## Conclusion

The case studies discussed in this chapter showed the way in which collective practitioners and independent curators became engaged with institutionally critical practice. All the agents of critique were independent in the sense they were not employed in the institutional mainstream. Both WHW and Hourani were attached to mini-institutions in Zagreb and Ramallah respectively, and Chto Delat?'s active web-presence was an institution in a different form. Nevertheless, in all of the instances discussed, they were reliant on the co-operation of established institutions in order to realise their projects.

Throughout the period under review, the location of the critique changed as the expansion in opportunities for viewing art increased. Whereas the early protagonists associated with institutional critique were occidental, by the 2000s the geographical scope of institutionally critical practitioners and their projects had expanded to include Eastern European and Middle East countries. Moreover, my research has demonstrated the continued broadening of an understanding of the institution of art, to include not only established museums, but also international biennials, and alternative art institutions, thus increasing the possibilities for critique.

This expansion in the nature and the type of the critical agents led to more extensive critical practice than hitherto, demonstrating degrees of complexity with hybrid practices spanning activism and institutional embeddedness. The intricacies and potential conflicts of interest of performing embedded critique were particularly evident in the work of WHW, who used their artistic direction of an international biennial to criticise the biennial form as an instrument of the capitalist system of art, while at the same time accepting sponsorship from a major commercial company. However, as Rogoff has argued, compromise and critique go hand in hand, and just because critical distance was not possible in this instance, this did not mean that criticality had no value, and indeed it could be useful in terms of raising awareness about how biennials function.

The emergence of these new critical agents also had implications for the critical strategies that were employed, which reflected the changing contexts and circumstances in which they worked. The critical strategies used by collective practitioners and independent curators were varied with respect to each other and different compared with strategies employed previously. The meaning of subversive critique had expanded beyond Fraser's earlier definition of a method of critique employed outside the institution of art, and was later considered to also be an

embedded strategy, as Rogoff explained. This type of critique also acquired specific nuances, such as the term “subversive affirmation”, an expression used to describe the undermining of hegemonic powers by a protagonist, without obviously appearing to do so. Chto Delat?’s use of subversive affirmation involved theatricalising ideas about the agency of art, and the role of public funding and cultural policy in shaping the museum’s programming activities. Subversive strategies were used differently by WHW to undermine the biennial form. The collective’s understanding of internally generated subversive criticism was different from Fraser’s, which was arguably too limited. In its most developed form, subversive criticality required a combination of effective dialectical positioning and interventionist practice, operating on the nexus of knowledge and power within the institution. Although WHW purported to use subversive methodologies, their effect was largely symbolic, and their exhibition did not change biennial practice, but provided an alternative model that reminded audiences that other values were important apart from capitalist ones.

Fraser regarded symbolic critique as a mild form of criticism that was generated by artists working inside the institution (1985). In taking up this position, she was possibly misrecognising the importance of symbols, which were valuable and drew attention to issues that were problematic. Hourani’s exercise in extensive diplomacy in the face of considerable political and logistical obstacles demonstrated the validity of symbolic critique. He used art’s agency as a force to underline and undermine the exclusion of Palestine from international museum culture and by implication pointed to other exclusions to which Palestine is and was subject(ed). The transportation of an iconic artwork and its display in a precarious viewing space in the face of considerable bureaucratic and logistic obstacles represented an important symbol of resistance and self-determination for the IAAP. Hourani’s operations did not change the situation in Palestine, but his project highlighted many of the problematics with respect to border controls, travel permissions and visa restrictions that beset the everyday lives of Palestinians.

WHW’s project critiqued the capitalist model of economic relations and developed a curatorial concept designed to show that a fairer approach would be to establish a system of utopian communism. They investigated the political and economic implications of the post-1989 environment at a time when the financial crisis appeared to challenge the legitimacy of the neo-liberal premise. They argued that communism’s values of social equality, solidarity and social justice were the only form of emancipatory politics able to challenge the global hegemony of capitalism,

which they understood as autocratic governance, the free-market economy, the privatisation of national institutions, the dismantling of social protections, and the emasculation of organised labour. The value of such exhibitions was that they advanced meta-politics, namely a political engagement beyond partisan interests, and importantly provided a discursive platform at a time when arguably there were fewer outlets for effective political mobilisation than previously.

*Picasso in Palestine* utilised a museum loan process to gain recognition for the State of Palestine, operating in an art system that was firmly embedded in a political and bureaucratic context whose regulations and procedures were not always transparent. The participation of an Israeli art organisation in its realisation detracted from the criticality of the project, as this implied that it could not have taken place without the acknowledgement and participation of Israel, suggesting its co-option into a political agenda (as opposed to into an artistic one). The ideological implications of the loan, the political references contained in the artwork, the re-contextualisation of the work in its new location, and the constitution of a “new museum”, all underlined how far the discourses had evolved away from the notion of the museum as a neutral space, to the concept of the museum as a platform for political positions. It demonstrated that the museum had a role to play in developing narratives closely related to contemporary events, rather than just aestheticising the objects it contained, or using them to create histories of the past. An important part of the project was the journey that the artwork traced, drawing an invisible line, delineating a bureaucratic process where the art system and the political system intersected. With respect to the political implications of the project, *Buste de Femme* was significant beyond its iconic status, owing to its re-contextualisation and acculturation in Palestine.

All these projects employed or implied Brecht’s notion of refunctioning the institution, as reinterpreted by Ray who adopted it for the art system (2009). Chto Delat? recreated Brechtian dialectical theatre, employing Brecht’s technique of “Verfremdung” to provoke a reaction on the part of the film’s viewers that demanded they respond differently from the museum visitors portrayed. WHW’s use of Brecht’s methods was explicit, evidenced by the collective’s references to the dramaturge in the curatorial concept, and in their intention to refunction the biennial away from having a purely commercial objective, to espouse political and critical purposes. With respect to *Picasso in Palestine*, the Brechtian concept of refunctioning was implied throughout the project, such as in reorienting the museum’s lending strategy, in

developing atypical logistical procedures, and in adapting an art school as a temporary museum.

A progressive politicisation of content can be observed in all these projects, compared with earlier institutionally critical practice that, with the exception of Haacke, was much more focused on the physical and discursive parameters of the viewing experience. Chto Delat?'s film exposed emergent neo-fascist tendencies in Europe. WHW's project criticised capitalism, and proposed in its place a utopian form of communism. *Picasso in Palestine* re-affirmed that in certain situations, the relationship between art and politics was, inextricable. This growing politicisation reflected both the interests of the critical protagonists, changing contemporary circumstances and global thematics.

During the 2000s and 2010s, the previously clear demarcation, which had existed between independent curators and institutional curators became less distinct. Some independent curators found institutional curators, who were sympathetic to critical practice and collaborated with them. Others opted for institutional positions, convinced that there would be more possibilities for the conception and implementation of critical projects if they were vested with specific authority. The migration of independent curators into institutional positions as "director-curators", and the evolution of museum directors sympathetic to institutionally critical practice are investigated in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4 – Directors of experimental institutions

This chapter investigates the role played by directors of experimental institutions in institutionally critical practice. I refer to these individuals as “director-curators”, a term that was coined by Foster to describe prominent curators (1996: 198). I understand the role of director-curators, as combining the functions of management and curatorial policy in an art institution. They are vested with strategic, operational and budgetary authority, usually occupying the position for sufficient time to conceive and implement a definable artistic programme. Taking responsibility for the direction of the artistic programme was what differentiated them from the directors of mainstream museums, where the tendency was for artistic programming responsibilities to be delegated to the curatorial staff. Although I do not detail all the roles played by the various team members in these organisations, I acknowledge the importance of their multiple authorship and recognise that many of the projects were collaborative. The category director-curator refers to the role of the critical agent, and I do not make a claim for the “genius” status of individual director-curators.

I question whether certain director-curators employed similar strategies to the ones discussed so far, or whether they adopted different experimental or critical approaches, more appropriate to the art centres and museums that they led. I examine what modes of institutional critique have been incorporated into institutions, and how director-curators have articulated and manifested critique, and how their approaches differed from those of other critical agents. Whereas artists, artist curators and independent curators directed their critique towards the institutions that had commissioned their work, and set out to reveal aspects of practice or process characteristic of the institutions which had invited them, the particular director-curators discussed in this chapter had a different set of objectives. Their approach was to identify mainstream museum practice and process, and then develop alternative forms. Their understanding of the term “mainstream” applied to those art centres and museums which functioned as part of the neo-liberal art system; focusing on blockbuster shows, increasing visitor numbers, and operating as a validating instrument by bringing “popular” artworks into the art historical canon. This is not meant to imply a criticism of all established museums, as several were concerned with issues such as integrated programming, social inclusion and audience participation. The point is that with respect to the types of critical strategies employed, there was a difference between the relative levels of institutional

embeddedness of artists, artist curators and independent curators, and the institutional responsibility of the directors of experimental institutions.

The art historian, Rosalind Krauss, in “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum” (1990), had already explained that museums had transformed from being bastions of elite culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to their then present form as populist centres for leisure and entertainment. According to her, whereas a museum’s collection had previously been regarded as cultural patrimony, or as a repository of cultural knowledge, the objects they owned were later treated as assets, where their primary value was their exchange value. She argued, “[t]he notion of the museum as a guardian of public patrimony has given way to the notion of the museum as a corporate entity with a highly marketable inventory and the desire for growth” (1990: 5). Krauss discussed how the former Guggenheim director Thomas Krens, who led the corporatisation and global branding of the Guggenheim, spoke not of museums, but of a “museum-industry”, and that he referred to artworks as “products”. According to the late capitalist model, Krauss argued, “market efficiency” for art institutions, meant an increase in visitor numbers, requiring restructuring, a centralisation of operations, aggressive marketing, extreme specialisation, and a global expansion programme with branches in major cities. Although Krauss’ remarks were directed at collecting institutions, they had equal application to art centres, as discussed by the art historian Nina Möntmann (2007).

I preface my discussion of the case studies with an overview of the rise of director-curators, whose emergence occurred in parallel with the continued evolution of independent curators. During the 1990s, formerly independent curators began to take up positions as heads of experimental art institutions in Europe. These included Ute Meta Bauer at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart and Ursula Biemann at the Shedhalle in Zurich. In the 2000s this tendency became even more pronounced: Nicolaus Schafhausen directed the Kunstverein Frankfurt, Vasif Kortun established Platform Garanti Contemporary Art in Istanbul, and Catherine David headed up the Witte de With in Rotterdam. Prior to this, these individuals had curated biennials, founded alternative art spaces, launched critical journals, and initiated critical and curatorial studies programmes. In addition to practicing independent curating, they had also developed specific positions as critics and educationalists, especially with regard to articulating and mediating the expanded field of curating.

The types of institutions that were either founded or re-functioned by formerly independent curators have attracted a number of different labels.<sup>17</sup> The director-curator Charles Esche called them “experimental institutions” (2003), while the curator-educator, Simon Sheikh referred to them as “progressive institutions” (2004), a term which has also been used by the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) (2004). The most widely used expression to describe these developments was “new institutionalism”. This nomenclature was co-opted from the social sciences by the curator and critic Jonas Ekeberg, who, on the instigation of Ute Meta Bauer, the then Director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, edited *New Institutionalism* (2003). In this publication Ekeberg argued that “new institutions” espoused alternative ideologies and presented a different concept of programming to traditional art centres. He described their aims: to develop an alternative model to the white cube “inherited from high modernism”, to go beyond “the limited discourse of the work of art as a mere object”, and to engage in collaborative practice in contrast with the usual “top-down attitude of curators and directors” (ibid: 9). Ekeberg contended that new institutionalism involved “catching up with contemporary art”, and as the working methods of artists had changed, and they operated in an “ever-expanding art field”, they required new institutions that were “flexible and open” (ibid: 11). In practice, new institutions, he maintained, de-emphasised the primary role of the exhibition in favour of fostering the production of artworks, creating innovative approaches to mediation and education, and providing a discursive platform for a wide range of socio-political, economic and cultural issues, focusing on the specific interests of micro-publics.

All these terms – experimental institutionalism, progressive institutionalism, and new institutionalism – were slightly different manifestations of, and various ways of expressing approaches to, re-functioning institutions. The notion of re-functioning institutions has a long history, and can be traced back to the work of the art historian Alexander Dorner who, as Director of the Hannover Museum in the 1920s, contributed to changing the then existing approaches to exhibition making, and pushing the boundaries towards the invention of new interdisciplinary structures. Working directly with artists, Dorner contested the notion of the museum as a neutral space, and contended that the art institution should transform itself from being a

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17 In this chapter “re-function” is used to indicate a new or adapted function, and “refunctioning” (without the hyphen) is the translation of the German “Umfunktionierung”, which is a concept developed by Bertolt Brecht, whereby theatre is involved in the process of re-shaping society.

repository of universal knowledge, to becoming a *Kraftwerk* (power station), in other words, a producer of new energies. In *The Way Beyond Art – The Work of Herbert Bauer* (1949), he discussed his plans for dynamising the museum, transforming it from the “white cube”, to create a more heterogeneous space (O’Neill 2012). Dorner anticipated many of the museum-related issues that would reappear later, such as: the museum in permanent transformation, the museum as an oscillation between object and process, the multi-identity museum, the museum as a laboratory, the museum as a source of relative truths, and the museum as a locus of intersections between art and life.

Following Ekeberg’s publication on *New Institutionalism*, several other authors commented on these experimental forms of institutionalism, and the nature of their programmes implied a criticism of the approaches undertaken by mainstream art centres and museums. The curator-critic Claire Doherty in, “The institution is dead. Long live the institution”, described new institutionalism as “a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within” (2004: 6). For Doherty, new institutionalism was characterised by “temporary/transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness”, and employed dialogue and participation to produce event or process-based works, rather than simply displaying objects (ibid). She viewed new institutionalism as a self-reflexive process, in which the role and function of the art institution was brought into question by the professionals working there. She contended that the evolution of such non-object-based initiatives meant that conventional art institutional timeframes, programming, staffing structures, distribution mechanisms and marketing strategies, no longer addressed the needs of contemporary artists or their work. New institutional programmes, Doherty explained, were distinguishable from the usual arts centre model by “an inter-disciplinary approach, allowing particular projects and events to develop through different formats and timeframes” and move through “the spaces of their buildings, being online and off-site, when and where appropriate” (ibid: 7). According to Doherty, new institutions aimed at “an integration of programming staff (across exhibitions, education, performance, talks and film)”, and required changes in visitor behaviour, oscillating between reception and participation (ibid).

The mediator and educationalist Sally Tallant reaffirmed Doherty’s notion of new institutionalism as hybrid programming. In “Experiments in Integrated Programming”, Tallant contended that whereas curatorial and educational activities

were usually kept separate in museums, and learning and public programmes were typically perceived as secondary to exhibitions, new institutions placed “equal emphasis on all programmes”, creating “spaces and modes of display that reflected this, including archives, reading rooms, residency schemes, talks and events as well as exhibitions” (2009 n.p.). She argued that a combined approach to artistic and educational programming permitted the “integration of programming teams so that education, exhibitions, performance, public programmes” were “conceived as part of a programme of activity rather than the more traditional and territorial departmentalisation of these areas of work” (ibid). Tallant further expounded the need to renegotiate “the role of the gallery and museum as a site of production that operates beyond the demands of the market and in relation to wider socio-political concerns” (ibid). She contended that such “situations and interventions result in a collapse between politics and aesthetics and produce work both in the world and as social intervention” (ibid). Tallant had identified counter-hegemonic, socially engaged and politically conscious tendencies in the institutions she was describing.

The socio-political leaning of new institutions was also emphasised by the curator-director and former critic Alex Farquharson, in “Bureau de Change” published in *Frieze* (2006). Farquharson characterised new institutions as political, activist, and well networked, “collaborative as opposed to hierarchical, self-organized rather than instrumentalised” (ibid n.p.). He emphasised the participation of artists and artist collectives in the new institutional programmes, which he claimed “results in zones of relative autonomy within the institution, the collectives operating according to their own internal patterns, the institutions serving as their hosts” (ibid). Farquharson argued that many new institutions replicated this approach, and their politicised programmes epitomised the shrinking of the welfare state, the erosion of the social contract, the privatisation of public space, and the global hegemony of neo-liberal economics, points that were also made by Möntmann (2006).

Although new institutionalism was originally understood to be an activity found in art centres; an integrated programming approach, self-reflexive art practice, the role of production, de-emphasising the importance of the exhibition, a stronger focus on education and an appeal to micro-publics, were also theoretically possible in collection-based institutions. Farquharson questioned whether Esche, as director of the Van Abbemuseum, could employ the tools of experimental institutionalism, “to reshape museum culture, with its far larger publics, operational machinery and systems of accountability” (2006: n.p.). Farquharson also posed the question as to what extent

Manuel Borja-Villel, then director of MACBA, was able to adopt a similar critical approach. Farquharson asked whether collection-based institutions could be flexible, or whether they were de facto “resistant to the new institutional values of fluidity, discursivity, participation and production” (ibid n.p.). My research specifically investigates this issue with respect to the final case study.

The art historian, Sara Diamond had already argued that such experimentation was possible, in, “Harvesting Time on the Server Farm (Reaping the Net’s Body Politic)” (Ascott et al 2000). She used the term “radical museology” to describe an approach adopted by collection-building institutions, which was “self-reflexive”, namely “absorbing its own institutional critique into presentation”; revisionist, in that, “the museum becomes a site for the re-interpretation of the collection” and pluralistic, a “repository of subjectivities” (ibid). The term “radical museology” has also been used by Bishop in *Radical Museology, or What’s Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013). She questioned the future of the public museum, asking whether it was able to represent the interests of the “ninety-nine percent”, rather than simply to address privileged audiences. She examined the implications of reductions in public funding cuts and posited alternatives to the “neo-liberal museum” (her denotation), by examining the revisionist collection strategies in several museums (2013).

Some cursory references have been made in the literature between institutional critique as an art practice and new institutionalism, but no detailed analysis on the relationship has been carried out. Doherty contended that new institutionalism “emerges from a forty-year-old institutional critique characterised by such canonical art works as Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ performative washing of the steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in 1973, not forgetting the work of Hans Haacke, Michael Asher or Daniel Buren” (2004: 7). Farquharson maintained that “[i]n some senses ‘new institutionalism’ represents the absorption of institutional critique as theorized and practised by artists since the 1970s” (2006: n.p.). He viewed new institutionalism as “institutional critique practiced from the inside, exposing and opposing the ideological and disciplinary structures through which art in institutions comes to be mediated” (ibid). He argued that for “most artists of the 1970s the idea of an institutional critique being practised by institutions themselves would have been oxymoronic”, (contradictory) because “institutional critique, by definition, was something conducted from the outside” (ibid). According to Farquharson “[t]his mythical outside, which assumed that the institutional lay in buildings not discourse,

led to a negative dialectic that essentially left art institutions unchanged” (ibid). Tallant asserted that “since the 1990s many artists and curators have embraced the idea of creating flexible platforms for presenting work, extending the institution and its functions and absorbing aspects of institutional critique as proposed in the 1970s” (2009: n.p.). None of these authors have examined the specific critical strategies carried out by the directors of these experimental institutions, an area of research this thesis seeks to address.

Until recently there had been no further mention of the term “new institutionalism” in the published literature. The closure of a number of experimental art centres, which had been cited with reference to this nomenclature, or their return to more conventional programmes, was a possible explanation for this, as has been discussed in “The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism – Perspectives on a Possible Future” (Möntmann 2007). Möntmann described the demise of several new institutions, including the closure of NIFCA in Helsinki, where she was a curator (2003-2006). She argued that in the West “[c]riticality didn’t survive the ‘corporate turn’ in the institutional landscape”, not only owing to the fact “the larger institutions” were “run like a branded global company”, but also because smaller institutions, such as Kunstvereine and art associations, “which are supposed to be experimental” were “increasingly forced into curating programs” that were mainstream and conventional (ibid n.p.), underlining points already made by Krauss (1990). However, many of the practices that were employed by the new institutions continued, and experimental programmes in art centres and museums were ongoing.

The debates on experimental institutions were revisited recently by the art historian, Rachel Mader in “How to move in / an institution” (2013). She argued that terms like “progressive institution” implied “the possibility of a future-oriented entity that is open to experimental practices, both politically in terms of content” (ibid: 36). Adopting a sociological approach to the evolution of institutions, she investigated the way in which “[t]he ideas of institutional critique as well as a continuously expanding concept of art have undermined and challenged” traditional institutions (ibid: 35-36). Citing the art historian Martin Warnke’s notion of the institution as “Ausgleicherzeugnis” (a balance of interests), and Olivier Marchart’s concept of the institution as a “struggle for hegemony”, she contended that although the relationship between the individual and the institution “have been subject to intense scrutiny in connection with Foucault’s concept of governmentality”, such ideas “have rarely been applied to art institutions, especially not as an analytical instrument to examine

the actions of individuals within institutional structures”, issues this chapter will address (ibid 41).

Although Fraser did not discuss the issue of institutional experimentation, she observed in her article, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” (2005), that if institutions were to change, they needed to take up the mantle of critique. Fraser’s notion of “an institution of critique” provided a framework for understanding the type of self-reflexive discourse that was typical of many experimental institutions. The development of this argument is to be seen as an extension, and not as a negation, of artistic and curatorial institutionally critical practice, which, as the evidence has shown, continues to be useful. Fraser noted that art institutions had abandoned their earlier claims to neutrality, and could take the initiative to reform from within, provided certain criteria were met. She argued that in order to qualify as “an institution of critique”, it was necessary first to demonstrate an ongoing process of critical discourse and practice, implying that the museum’s vision, and the expectations of the public authorities, the trustees, the curatorial and administrative staff, the participating artists and micro-publics had been fulfilled. Second Fraser contended that an institution of critique’s self-representation as critical must be constantly questioned. Third it should prove that its radicality was genuine and that its critique was more than merely symbolic. The artist and critic Hito Steyerl, however, has argued that the very idea of an institution of critique was absurd, given that “critical cultural institutions are undoubtedly being dismantled, underfunded, subjected to the demands of a neoliberal event economy” (2006: n.p.), and my discussion of the three case studies contests this argument.

The second and third chapters of this thesis investigated critical projects that were embedded in the institutions they purported to critique. This chapter, however, has a different purpose, namely to examine the way in which the heads of particular institutions were taking the lead in defining the critical strategies to be employed, and performing themselves the role of critical agent. Director-curators were clearly embedded in the institutions they led, but they also had an enhanced level of responsibility compared to the other agents of critique. Whereas in the earlier chapters, I have examined specific artistic and curatorial projects in detail, in this chapter I focus on institutional programmes, and how they process criticality. Although specific projects in given programmes are discussed, they are not examined in the same level of detail as in previous chapters. The objective here is to give a sense of a programme’s critical direction, and to compare it with mainstream

practice, as understood in Krauss' definition of the "late capitalist museum" (1990), and Möntmann's comments on the "corporate turn" affecting art centres (2007).

The chapter investigates the strategies of three director-curators in different institutions, located in various countries: Charles Esche at the Rooseum in Malmö (2000-2004), Maria Lind at the Kunstverein München (KM) (2002-2004), and Manuel Borja-Villel at MACBA in Barcelona (1998-2008). My research focuses on the director-curators' formative and developing institutional experiences in the context of the future evolution of their practice. In each instance the individuals had a specific set of intentions to re-function the institution for which they were responsible.

#### 4.1 “Democratic deviance”: Charles Esche at the Rooseum, Malmö (2000-2004)

The director-curator Charles Esche took charge of the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art in 2000, following a recommendation from Gertrud Sandquist, Director of the Malmö Art Academy. The Malmö City Council, which had acquired responsibility for the Rooseum in 1991, following the death of its founder, Frederik Roos, a financier and art collector, had previously appointed mainstream directors. Esche sought to differentiate his tenure at the Rooseum from the “conventional” programmes of previous directors and was equally critical of mainstream approaches in art centres elsewhere. Within the Rooseum he established an experimental programme, differentiating its activities from the mainstream both in terms of the programme content which was politicised, and with respect to its way of operating, expanding the art centre’s activities beyond the mounting of exhibitions. In my analysis of Esche’s practice as a director-curator I differentiate between his implied criticism of other institutional practices and the experimental institutionalism of his own practice. I contend that the main differentiator between the institutionally critical practices of artists and curators, and director-curators is the latter’s ability to focus institutional criticism on re-functioning the institution.

Esche resolved to use the Rooseum as a laboratory to implement experimental programming ideas that he had been developing for some time. His objective was to create a “political imagination forum”, namely to build an experimental institution conceived as an imaginative space for expressing individual and collective desires that could not be accommodated within current political discourses (Esche 2003 n.p.). In an interview with the critic Jelena Vesić, he explained that his “personal journey into the art world [was] as a disillusioned socialist looking for another field in which a new social democratic/socialist imaginary could be constructed” (Vesić 2005 n.p.). Esche’s vision of experimental institutionalism went beyond the existing “showroom” model of the Kunsthalle, towards expanding its possibilities so that it would become an active space of participation between artists, curators, mediators and viewers. He envisaged art centres not just as exhibition venues, but also as spaces of production, community centres, laboratories, and academies. According to Esche such hybrid functionality would increase “creative thinking and intelligence(s) in society”, and “achieve an appeal to minority publics ” (ibid). The de-emphasising of the exhibitionary role of art centres in favour of a wider range of more discursive activities is much more usual now than it was in 2000.

Esche had developed the concept of “integrated programming” before the term had been theorised by Tallant (2009).

Previously, Esche had been the Visual Arts Director of Tramway in Glasgow (1993-1997), and in 1998, he had co-founded the Modern Institute, also in Glasgow, as a research organisation and production company for contemporary art (Stjernstedt 2000: n.p). He was also interested in experimental forms of education and mediation, establishing the Protocademy at the Edinburgh College of Art in 1997, to explore ways of structuring the resources available in the city, and serve as a meeting-point for artists, academics, cultural producers, politicians, business leaders, and citizens. The aim was to provide an interface between art research and multiple micro-publics through exhibitions, conferences and publications (Esche 2009b). Esche had also worked as an independent curator, curating *Intelligence*, the first Tate Triennial of British Art in 2000. In an interview with the critic Beti Zerovc, he explained that this experience convinced him that an independent curator had no possibility of changing an institution, and for this reason he decided to accept a position at the Rooseum, which he viewed, as a locus where art, the institution and various publics might interact (Zerovc 2005).

As part of his approach to experimental institutionality, Esche created a network of artists, curators and critics, who disseminated this way of working internationally. As a consequence of these relationships, Esche became included in the discourses on “new institutionalism”, which were being propagated at the time by critics and curators, such as (Ekeberg 2003), Doherty (2004) and Farquharson (2006). In our discussion Esche said he disliked the term “new institutionalism”, contending that the “new” had too close associations with the “neo” in neo-liberalism. He preferred the expression “experimental institutionality”, given that it reflected more accurately what he was trying to achieve in terms of providing an alternative approach than was available in mainstream art centres (personal communication, Esche, Eindhoven, 31.10.2013).

In order to implement his strategy, Esche structured the overall programme at the Rooseum into: experimental exhibition formats, group exhibitions, solo shows and long-term programmes. In addition he created: Artist Studios, a Curatorial Residency, the Future Archive (reference materials for curators and artists), the Open Forum (a discussion group with Malmö citizens), the Universal Studios (a site of production), and the Critical Studies Test Site (a curatorial programme run in conjunction with the Malmö Academy), (Stenbeck 2007). My discussion of Esche’s programme focuses on

projects that investigated methods of re-functioning the Rooseum, and that addressed socio-political issues, such as the problem of immigration in Malmö, and the demise of Social Democracy in Sweden. According to the critic Shepherd Steiner, under Esche's direction the Rooseum functioned as a discrete eco-system in which ideas could be nurtured, protected from "the cold winds of neo-liberalism" (2007: n.p.). In an unpublished article, entitled "Of Warmth, Better Weather and the Greening of a Northern Institution", Steiner argued, "the Rooseum progresses, complexifies, diversifies", moving towards "more open curatorial models" and "gives voice to far ranging democratic initiatives" (ibid n.p.).

Esche's programme at the Rooseum comprised a series of "discursive exhibitions", so named because their aim was to create opportunities for discussion as much as exhibit objects. In devising his first project, the appropriately named, *There's gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding* (2001), Esche signalled that he was about to make some far-reaching changes, and indicated that under his directorship Rooseum was going to take a very different course than previously.

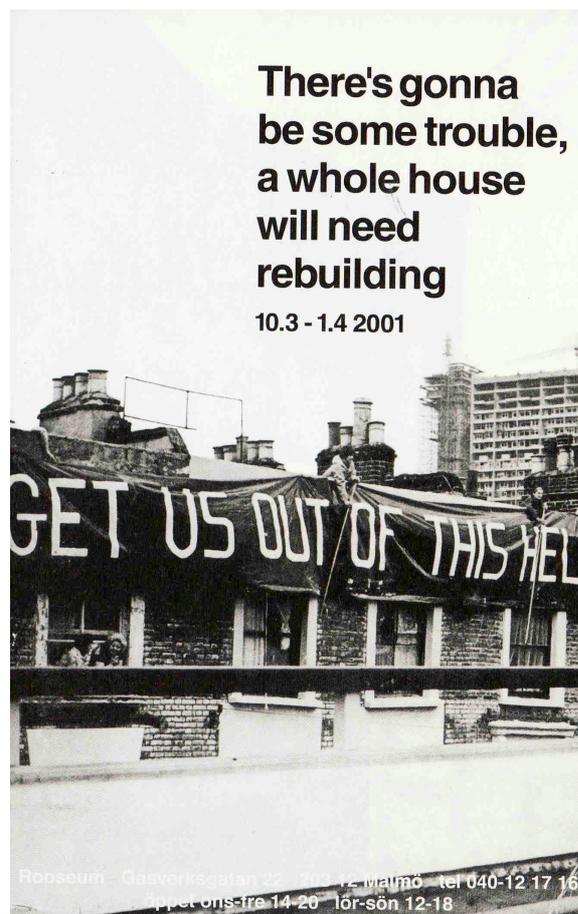


Figure 35

*There's Gonna Be Some Trouble*, poster designed by Andreas Nordström

He worked with artists on exploring many aspects of the institution, commissioning Liam Gillick to create a proposal for a new entrance for the Rooseum, to focus audiences on the idea of having a different kind of viewing and discursive experience. The artist Mark Bain was invited to undertake a project in which he intervened in the structure of the building “to instigate a new era for the institution” (ibid 69). On the inaugural night Bain carried out a documented performance of *A Starck Act of Removal*, where one of the internal walls of the gallery was detached from the rest of the building and was re-functioned as a stage for Will Bradley’s project *All the needles are on red*, where bands from the Malmö region were invited to record their first demonstration tape (ibid).



Figure 36

Mark Bain, *A Starck Act of Removal* (2001)

Bain’s project referenced Asher’s practice of removing and remodelling the internal walls of the exhibition space (Buchloh 1983), but whereas Asher’s objective had been to reveal the power structures in the gallery, Bain re-functioned the institutional space, creating new areas of different dimensions, and constructed a stage for performances. *There’s gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding* (2001) deconstructed the physicality of the institution, deemed a necessary step prior to re-functioning the art centre. Removing the wall and reconfiguring the

interior gallery space also had a symbolic function as it indicated that Esche intended to tear down the ideological edifice of a conventional Kunsthalle and what it represented, in order to build a platform for the articulation of institutionally critical and politically conscious discourses. The vertical wall re-functioned as a horizontal stage could thus be understood as a metaphoric platform for the new experimental approach.

Following the opening, Esche focused on the socio-political context in which the Rooseum was situated and worked towards re-functioning the art centre as a political platform. He introduced “real life” issues in the form of socio-economic and political subjects into the gallery space; evidence that he neither considered the gallery to be neutral, nor limited in function being a container for displaying art, thus emulating a practice established by Haacke of bringing political subjects into the gallery. The programme, *In 2032 Malmö will no longer be ‘Swedish’* (2002-2003) struck at the core of Swedish identity, and evoked an imaginary future state where Sweden had been overrun by immigrants. The programme was conceived as a series of projects, oriented towards phases of research, production, presentation and evaluation, with the appraisal of one element of the project serving as a point of departure for the next. It was developed in collaboration with: the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki (NIFCA), the Malmö School of Communication and the art mediators Konstfrämjandet Skåne, directed jointly by Esche, Lene Crone Jensen, the Rooseum’s deputy director, and the curator Åsa Nacking. Commenting on *In 2032 Malmö will no longer be ‘Swedish’*, they contended “the programme wished to test the possibilities for art to work as a platform and mechanism for some of the many disenfranchised communities in Malmö” (Stenbeck 2007: 76). They invited the artists Yael Bartana, Esra Ersen, Laura Horelli, Lyn Löwenstein and Katya Zander to meet specific groups of local citizens and generate the process and content of the programme collectively, arguing that “one of the intentions of the programme” was “to focus critically on projects in the public sphere and their relation to a multi-cultural society” (ibid). The objective was “to open a debate on the potential of art projects as effective social interventions”, and facilitate “a rethinking of the art institution in relation to cultural diversity”, which implied a criticism of the conventional showroom approach adopted by many art centres at the time (ibid).

The curators intended to raise awareness about the problems of immigration in Malmö, and to highlight the resentment of the city’s population to the increased number of foreign inhabitants. The aim was to build a platform in the Rooseum for

disenfranchised immigrant communities and create opportunities for artists to work together with groups of citizens to facilitate better community understanding and a multi-ethnic consciousness. However, the programme irritated the public authorities on a number of counts. As far as they were concerned, the Rooseum was interfering in the domain of politics, it was not producing art, and unwelcome attention was being brought to bear on the vexed issue of immigration, an aspect of urban life the City Council wished to de-emphasise given their strategy of promoting tourism (personal communication, Esche in Eindhoven 31.10.2013). In Esche's view, the City Council's interest in creating a tourist destination was misplaced, as Malmö, in his opinion, did not possess the necessary attractions to justify it being a locus for tourism, and Malmö's apparent blandness offered instead the potential as a site for an experimental art institution (ibid). He argued that Malmö should not compete with other European cities by using culture as a motor for economic development, contending: "why not simply do what we felt was urgent, important or just plain right for the moment?" (ibid 29). The implications of this de-localisation of the art centre were that the visitor profile changed during Esche's tenure from local art appreciators to internationally art-engaged individuals and collectives, who collaborated with the Rooseum on projects (Esche 2003).

Continuing with the theme of investigating political issues at the Rooseum, Esche conceived the project *Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?* (2004). The project investigated the history of social democracy, both at the local and international level, and pointed to the "co-presence of art and politics in the formation of the cultural conditions that are of real concern to its audience" (ibid 144). In a collaborative essay with the artist and critic Pavel Büchler, Esche argued that social democracy "as an intellectual agenda or 'world view'" offered no "constructive response" to the problems raised by twenty years of "globalisation, monopolistic mass culture, the ascent of professionalized supra-parliamentary politics and the aggressive interests of capitalist restoration" (ibid 145). They contended that such questions were just as much the concern of artists as they were for politicians and social scientists, because these issues were "rooted in a cultural understanding of our world and its socio-political dynamics" (ibid). Esche and Pavel contended that "from the perspective of an art institution, the challenge to re-image social-democracy" proceeded "from re-assessing and re-imagining the public role of the institution itself in the concrete terms of a particular cultural situation and climate" (ibid 145-146). This desire to politicise the art space, reflected Esche's opinion about the de-politicisation

of politics, the perceived role for art as having agency in the political sphere, and the notion of art centres as political platforms and as critical vehicles vis-à-vis society.



Figure 37

Olof Olsson, *Sport Democrats* (2005),  
*Whatever Happened to Social Democracy ?*

The impetus behind Esche's interest in Social Democracy was his objection to the hypocrisy of the social-democratic left, contending that it only paid verbal allegiance to the principles of social reform and universal welfare, unsupported by real conviction or action. By instigating *Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?*, Esche struck at the core of Malmö's self-identity, as the city claimed to be "the place of origin of social democracy" (2003). Esche's point was that social democracy had run its course, it had become untenable as an economic programme, being outmatched by capitalism, and unworkable as a political solution to the impending global crisis. It was this perceived economic and political deadlock in the "real world" that prompted Esche to consider the art centre as a possible location for re-imagining social democracy. He was particularly interested in exploring the confusion between Malmö's claims of founding social democracy and the city's actual actions in the post-1989 neo-liberalism system, evidenced in its policies for cultural tourism, and an ideological mind-set, which he described as comprising a mixture of "social democratic self-deception" and "social democratic fantasy". He implied that the citizens were deceiving themselves into believing they were still in touch with their

post-war socially democratic roots, despite the fact that the country had embraced neo-liberalism (Esche 2012).

By the time, Esche had conceived these two main discursive programmes, *In 2032 Malmö will no longer be 'Swedish'* (2002-2003) and *Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?* (2004), he had set up a dialectic attracting interest from artists and curators internationally. While during his tenure there were fewer general visitors than previously, there was an increase in attendance particularly of specialists from abroad, who were frequently collaborators in the Rooseum's diverse programmes. This appeared to be elitist and potentially at odds with Esche's aim of engaging with local communities when he first arrived at the Rooseum. However, with a Konsthall and Konstmuseum, as well as a number of smaller exhibition and "art" cinema venues, Malmö was well served with cultural spaces, and arguably there was no reason to replicate what was already available (2003). Given the presence of a University, an Art Academy, and a School of Communication, Malmö had a thriving student population who had sufficient time and curiosity to become engaged with the more complex projects that the Rooseum offered.

The critical strategies employed by Esche were different to those used by the artists and curators discussed previously, in that he neither opted for mimetic nor symbolic nor subversive approaches. To what extent was Esche carrying out strategies that would later be characterised by Fraser as those appertaining to "an institution of critique"? (2005). Under this rubric, she contended that such an institution had to demonstrate an ongoing process of critical discourse and practice. Esche adopted critical discourses, derived from notions of "democratic deviance" developed by the theorist Slavoj Žižek. Žižek contended that liberal-democratic hegemony was sustained by an unwritten "Denkverbot" (prohibition to think), referencing the infamous "Berufsverbot" in operation in Germany in the late 1960s, an injunction that denied individuals suspected of radical or left-wing affiliations from applying for positions in the public sector (op cit n.p.). "Denkverbot" meant that any serious questioning of the way in which the liberal-democratic order was complicit in the phenomena it officially condemned, was excluded, and any sincere attempt to imagine a society whose socio-political order could be different, was precluded. The exclusion of all thinking beyond the sphere of democratic capitalism entailed a prohibition to criticise democracy, which opposed a key tenet of democracy, namely freedom of expression. In other words, individuals were allowed to articulate whatever they pleased, on the condition that they did not question the predominant

political consensus. As soon as they showed the slightest sign of engaging in political projects that could possibly challenge the existing order, a counter-reaction from establishment forces would ensue. Esche concurred with Žižek, who argued, “[t]his is the point on which one cannot and should not concede: today, the actual freedom of thought means the freedom to question the predominant liberal-democratic ‘post-ideological’ consensus - or it means nothing” (ibid n.p.).

Esche viewed art centres as having the potential to challenge this notion of “Denkverbot”, seeing them as places where a “political imagination forum could develop” (2003: n.p.). He envisioned art as a tool to imagine the world otherwise, and argued in favour of its potential agency to change the world (2009b). He described art centres as “creative engines for a rethinking of the categories of visual art and the role of artists”, and aimed to show “how visual culture can alter personal consciousness, and even change the world” (op cit). The question was whether such notions remained at the level of rhetoric, versus to what extent was there evidence of “democratic deviance” in Esche’s approaches to programming.

*In 2032 Malmö will no longer be ‘Swedish’* (2002-2003), which had addressed the problems of immigration and implied a critique of the government’s policies, touched on the issue of “Denkverbot”, as the public authorities disagreed with the way in which the Rooseum’s discursive programmes encroached into the political arena. *Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?* (2004) equally provided them with an unwelcome reminder of the abandonment of Social Democratic political principles in Sweden in favour of neo-liberal pragmatism. Projects about the demise of Social Democracy criticised the fact that the government had reneged on its previous ideals and formed an important part in Esche’s programme, as he viewed the art centre as an appropriate location for political dialogue, given the perceived de-politicisation of politics in the political sphere. Esche characterised this as navigating the “difficult terrain between engagement and autonomy or social ambition and the subjective psyche” (2003). Esche raised uncomfortable questions in the public sphere and he used his artistic programme to draw attention to issues that he considered to be undemocratic. However, his approach was neither able to change policies towards immigration nor social democracy, though arguably he might have been able to change some attitudes. There appeared to be ambitions in Esche’s rhetoric that could not always be achieved in the results of his programme in practice. In other words, there was not always a congruity between the discourse and the practice, but although they did not always reinforce each other, nevertheless they were co-

dependent.

Second, Fraser contended that an “institution of critique’s” self-representation as critical needed to be constantly questioned. Esche claimed to be experimental rather than critical, however his experimentalism implied a criticism of conventional approaches to curating in art centres. He was engaged in discussions with several critics about his practice, defending his position on why politics should properly reside in art centres, and what it meant to build an experimental art institution. In discussions with Zerovc, Esche explained how he had become “extremely disillusioned with the possibilities of politics”, particularly with respect to its ability “to affect people’s imagination” and also “to affect changes in thinking and acting”. According to him politics had become atrophied, unable “to rethink globalization, injustice, emancipation”, indeed “almost anything beyond “everyday management” (Zerovc 2005: 91). He contended that the left was in disarray following the demise of a coherent class structure and that no mechanism was available to challenge the capitalist model. In conversations with the critic Jelena Vesić, Esche argued that given the “weight of defensive ideology crushing new thinking on the left”, he had “found a space for freer thinking in contemporary art” (Vesić 2005: n.p.). He also maintained that he did not wish to limit his field of interests “to issues of aesthetic selection only”, and that it was “natural” to situate what he did as a curator within the political field (ibid). Esche did not mean “natural” in an essentialist sense; he was referring to the lack of real debate in politics, the practice of consensus, what Meyer had called the “de-politicisation of the political” (1993), and also the absence of constructive agonism as expounded by Mouffe in *The Democratic Paradox* (2000). For Esche traditional party politics offered few possibilities for imagining the world otherwise, whereas “art could be terrain where that can happen today” (ibid 93). Although he had limited success at the Rooseum, his later post-Rooseum projects have had more agency, as has been seen in the instance of *Picasso in Palestine* (2011).

Zerovc questioned why Esche had re-entered the institution, and he explained that an independent curator, invited to carry out a project, has “very little possibility to change the fundamental structures through which that institution is run”, and he was interested in engaging with the institution in depth and in re-functioning it to create a space for experimentation (Zerovc 2005: 102-103). Under Esche the Rooseum was deconstructed into a multiplicity of spaces to give visitors a range of participatory and viewing experiences, as well as provide working facilities for artists and curators.

Esche argued that one of the main characteristics of an experimental institution was its “embedded hospitality”, the idea that every one was welcome, and everyone had a role. Referring to the Open Forum, Esche elaborated on extended meanings of “hospitality”, contending that it entailed being responsive to the visitors’ concerns, and accommodating their needs “to the point of giving up ownership or authorship”, in short he claimed a disposition of considerable generosity (ibid 101). However, he appeared to exclude local communities at times, in preference to attracting an international coterie of professional artists, critics and curators.

In an interview with Vesić, Esche explained that building an experimental institution was about creating the possibility of imagining the world otherwise. For Esche possibility was not a fixed condition but a “slippery and changeable state made up of spatial, temporal and relational elements” (Vesić 2005: n.p.). For this condition to emerge there needed to be “a site, a moment and a group of people”, and a catalyst in the form of an artwork, all “material that is obligingly in the hands of public institutions” (ibid), and for Esche, it had to be created “from within existing structures, there being no outside from which to gain an overview anymore” (ibid). This meant that he focused on re-functioning existing institutions rather than on constructing new facilities and activities outside existing institutional structures, stating that he was “absolutely certain that we have to conquer and change existing contemporary art institutions rather than invent our own” (ibid).

As far as Fraser was concerned, “an institution of critique” needed to prove that its radicality was genuine and that its critique was more than merely symbolic. It was difficult for any institution to substantiate that it was genuinely radical, not least owing to the many different understandings of the term. My analysis of Esche’s directorship at the Rooseum has shown that his actions were more than simply symbolic owing to the varied experimental programming activities that he instigated. Moreover, Esche understood that radicality had its limits and that it was necessary to work with the parameters of a given institution. Recognising the embedded nature of his curatorial practice, he demonstrated both utopian aspirations and a practical realism about what was possible. He also acknowledged the restrictions imposed by the “life-world”, contending that “the artists, the public institutions and the self-made artists’ spaces that produce and promote art are all necessarily located within the economic hegemony of capitalism” (2003 n.p.). However, Esche made the important point that although practitioners were compromised in their embedded state, this

could be managed advantageously if they adopted a subversive manner of working (ibid.).

It was Esche's desire to politicise the art centre that set him apart from previous Rooseum curators. However, the City Council regarded the political to be their domain, and as far as they were concerned the Rooseum was responsible for organising exhibitions and should not be encroaching on their territory, (personal communication, Esche, Coppet, 20.3.2013). The public authorities expected Esche to deliver them an appropriate artistic programme, for Esche the lack of specificity in his institutional mandate was an invitation to experiment. This absence of clarity was one of the factors that led him into disagreements with the City Council, who took a narrow view of politics, namely that politics should be left to the politicians and be conducted within the sphere of the "democratic representative institutions" (ibid). It was probable that Esche's interest in social democratic politics, a legacy of his earlier left-wing activism, particularly at a time when the social democratic model was losing in influence in Sweden in favour of the neoliberal system, created tensions between him and the public authorities that were hard to resolve.

Esche's institutional experimentation at the Rooseum offered an alternative model for an art centre at the time to the usual one of focusing on the exhibition format of single artist or group shows, though subsequently his experimental approaches became usual curatorial practice. He engaged with art in a variety of exploratory and representative formats and focused on an attitude of hospitality that welcomed professional practitioners. By networking the Rooseum with similar institutions via conferences and seminars, he ensured that his understanding of experimental institutionalism was widely disseminated. Although Esche's programme attracted specific micro-publics, he offered little that was designed to appeal to the "mass audience", and for this "deliberate neglect", he was criticised by both the trustees and the public authorities (ibid). Esche argued that achieving a broad appeal was in any event not part of his vision. His concern was specificity, and for him experimental institutions meant a plurality of forms, focusing on specific micro-publics, with a particular emphasis on investigations into the political. His disillusionment with left-wing politics and its failure to redirect "the course of globalization to make the world safer for a plurality of power and vision" (Mangabeira Unger 2005: ix), led him to seek a political imagination forum in the artworld (Esche 2003 n.p.). In a discussion with the critic, Domeniek Ruyters, Esche explained that "[a]rt contributes to a democratic culture by stimulating skills, like open-mindedness

and the possibility to see and imagine things differently”, and that this is of “vital importance for a constructive political process where differences have to be constantly negotiated and there are always alternatives” (Ruyters 2013 n.p.).

When Esche left the Rooseum, Crone Jensen became the acting director and continued a similar experimental programme from 2004 to 2006. However, the Rooseum was subsequently closed down, and in 2009 the exhibition space was absorbed into the Moderna Museet Malmö, a satellite of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. In 2004 Esche was appointed the director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, where he continued to carry out an experimental approach involving collaborations with art activist groups, such as Chto Delat?’s *Museum Songspiel* (2011), and an expanded loan programme, evidenced by *Picasso in Palestine* (2011), as discussed in Chapter 3.

#### 4.2 “Constructive institutional critique”: Maria Lind at the Kunstverein München (2002-2004)

This section concerns the tenure of the director-curator Maria Lind at the Kunstverein München (KM), where she introduced an experimental programme to this long established art centre, which had been founded in 1823. Prior to her appointment, Lind had been a curator in Stockholm at the Moderna Museet (1997-2001), developing the Moderna Museet Projekt (MMP), an off-space belonging to the main museum. Lind was aware of the richness of Munich’s artistic panorama, the multiplicity of museums and art centres, sufficient to satisfy the mainstream aesthetic tastes of the metropolitan population. The KM, as one of the oldest cultural institutions, formed a part of this landscape, and as a private association, was controlled neither by the state of Bavaria nor the City of Munich, although it received some funding from the Munich Arts Council. Lind was aware that, as an independent membership organisation, the KM was less subject to representative obligations, and to having to legitimise itself as a tourist venue, than many other art institutions governed by public authorities. Thus she intended to take advantage of the KM’s relative independence for the purposes of curatorial experimentation. In her mission statement for the KM, entitled, “Editorial. In Place of a Manifesto”, published in the newspaper she launched entitled *Drucksachen*, Lind declared her intention to undermine the usual approach adopted by directors of the KM of focusing on the exhibition as the primary means of expressing curatorial positions. She identified the KM as occupying “a market niche without a market”, something that she intended to take advantage of “for the purposes of experimenting with the potential activities of the institution” (Lind et al 2004: 21).

The nature of programming in art centres, which were, and still are, usually temporary exhibition spaces without collections, was that with the appointment of a new director, the entire approach, and programme of the institution would change. This gave incoming director-curators the opportunity to devise experimental programmes and to implement them in a short space of time. However, the sustainability of their new approaches could not be assured, once they had vacated their posts. In conceiving her programme, Lind took account of the historical function of Kunstvereine (art associations), which had originally played an important role as viewing spaces for artists who were unable to have their work exhibited in the Academy. She recalled that such associations had often been co-founded by artists

and existed not only for holding exhibitions, but were also spaces for art production and discourse. It was part of her strategy to reconnect the KM with its past and to counter the discontinuities that she had observed as every new director-curator seemed to start afresh.

In formulating her programme for the KM, Lind drew on her experience at the Moderna Museet, particularly projects such as *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design*, (2000), a tri-partite exhibition-seminar-publication project, characterised by an intensity of working relations between the curator and the artists, in which standardised exhibition formats, with their focus on displaying objects, were supplemented with process-based work and conferences about experimental artistic and curatorial processes. In *What If*, the museum was re-functioned “as a production site...a distribution channel, and as a venue for conversation” (Kuan Wood 2011: 257). Lind articulated, “I want to go beyond display, and if you look at the programme at Kunstverein Munich, you can see that the pre and the post is often as important, if not more important, than what we traditionally see as the moment of art in an institution; which is the display moment” (2011b: 39-42). Lind was concerned with the relationship between the artwork and the institution in the widest sense. She claimed to be sensitive to the “internal logic” of contemporary artworks and disinclined to let the institution dominate wishing to “combine the modalities of a particular institutional situation” with “the surprise, the questioning, the contemplation, and the problematisation of contemporary art” (ibid).

In structuring her programme for the KM, Lind and her team of collaborators, Sören Grammel, Katharina Schlieben, Judith Schwarzbart, Ana Paula Cohen, Julienne Lorz and Tessa Praun, devised five formats: exhibitions, screenings, retrospectives, workshops, and “sputniks”. My discussion of her programme focuses on the exhibition, *Telling Histories: An Archive and Three Case Studies* (2003), which was a collaborative practice undertaken with KM curators Cohen and Grammel; and on projects carried out by the artist Carey Young under the sputnik format (2002-2004).

Lind was interested in reconnecting the KM with a revisionist version of its history and she sought to expose pockets of radicality, such as controversial exhibitions, in its otherwise conservative past. To provide a rationale for this approach, she commissioned an essay by the art historian Walter Graskamp, who described the ongoing traditionalism of the KM and the aesthetic provincialism of the city of Munich in “Rivals and Partners: The Art Association and the Art Academy in Munich” (Lind et al 2004: 36-51). Graskamp maintained that the KM had already

overlooked a significant number of important art historical movements, rejecting Impressionist and Jugendstil artworks; and ignoring abstraction, introduced by the Zen group; and Situationism, pioneered by the Spur collective, leading art historian Wolfgang Jean Stock to observe that right up until the end of the sixties, the KM “continued to operate in a field of super-regional insignificance” (ibid 41).

Lind, together with Cohen and Grammel, sought to counteract this conservative narrative, by investigating three previous exhibitions that had been significant for the Kunstverein in a project entitled, *Telling Histories: An Archive and Three Case Studies with Contributions by Mabe Bethônico and Liam Gillick* (2003). In re-visiting previous exhibitions, Lind examined the way in which the KM had mediated the then contemporary art in the past, and she selected exhibitions, chosen for the controversy they had provoked at the time. Integral to the *Telling Histories* project was the reconstruction of the KM’s archive.



Figure 38

*Telling Histories*, exhibition entrance, display of the historical archive of the KM

Most of the archive had been destroyed during the Second World War, and when Lind assumed the directorship, there was no formal archive, so the first task was to collect and identify the historical material. She invited Mabe Bethônico to build an archive, and commissioned Liam Gillick to design a format in which to present it. In engaging two artists as archivist and designer respectively, Lind showed that she was more interested in facilitating an experimental, than a scientific, approach to the KM’s archive. The project evolved in three stages. First the archive material, such as

curatorial concepts, installation shots and press reports were displayed in a variety of forms: as an installation at the entrance to the exhibition, in display cases and in light-boxes. Second, a series of talk shows organised by Grammel were filmed, presented on video and integrated into the exhibition on video monitors; and third a symposium, entitled, *Curating with Light Luggage* (2003), was organised, which extended the debate to investigate critical curatorial practices and the role of experimental institutions beyond the confines of the KM.

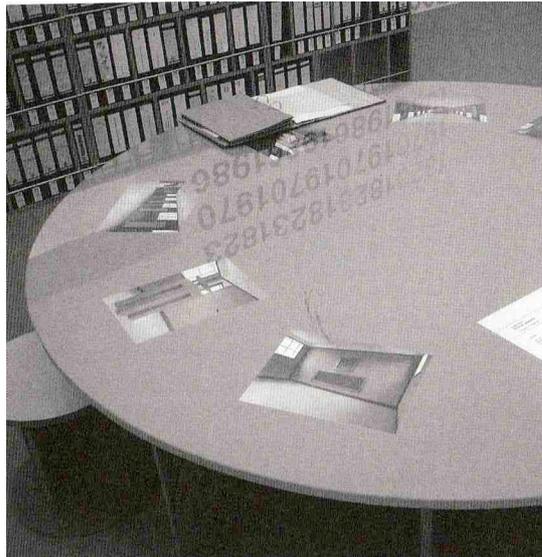


Figure 39

*Telling Histories*, material relating to the exhibition Dove Sta Memoria, Gerhard Merz (1986)

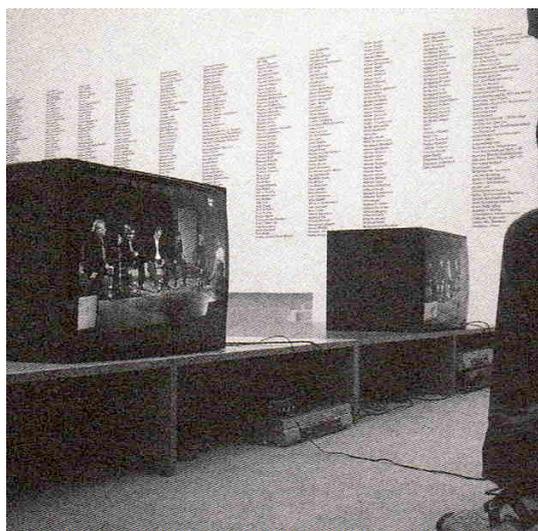


Figure 40

*Telling Histories*, viewing the talkshows on DVD

The first historical exhibition to be investigated was *Poetry Must Be Made by All! Transform the World!* (1970). Under the directorship of Rainer Kallhardt, it comprised photographs, texts and models, from Russian constructivism, Dadaism and Surrealism to the events of May 1968. One of the elements in the exhibition was a free communication space called the “Fourth Wall”; and following a confrontation between the students of the Munich Art Academy and the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture, Kallhardt invited the students to occupy the space. According to Lind, this resulted in an exhibition of “1968 revolutionary propaganda”, in which “a collage of texts, photos, commentary, painting, and slogans grew thicker and thicker on the walls and floors of the Kunstverein throughout the exhibition” (Kuan Wood 2011: 312). Lind commented that the “provocative power” of these actions lay in the “artistic-political posture of a collective”, which aroused considerable annoyance among the KM’s trustees, who insisted that Kallhardt evict the students, which resulted in a termination of the entire exhibition.

*Poetry Must Be Made by All! Transform the World!* demonstrated that an art institution could become a platform for the articulation of political viewpoints, and exposed divisions of opinion between those who supported this approach and others who saw the function of Kunstvereine as providing opportunities for “noncommittal aesthetics without political implications” (ibid 313). In her reflections on the exhibition, Lind cited the reaction of the critic Laszlo Glozer, who in “Die Verhinderte Aufklärung” (The Prevented Enlightenment), described the exhibition as, “an irradiation of the ‘hidden power-political networks’ of the Munich art scene, emphasizing its political effects” (Kuan Wood 2011: 311 fn. 9). However, according to Lind, the art historian Juliane Roh, in “Kritisches zur Krisensituation eines Kunstvereins” (Critical of the Crisis Situation in a Kunstverein), identified “terrorist means” at work in the exhibition, and commented that the “venerable” Kunstvereine were being “put to the use” of minorities, and that “the task of the Kunstverein is no longer to inform the public about contemporary art” (ibid fn. 10). Lind’s point in revisiting this exhibition was to show that an art centre was not a neutral space, and that it had a role to play in the creation of art history, and that memory traces of the past were still relevant today. Lind saw the art centre as a place for the articulation of controversial points of view, a public discussion forum, not simply a space for viewing art – similar points had been made by Esche.

The second exhibition in the *Telling Histories* project was *Dove Sta Memoria*

(Where is Memory) (1986), curated by the artist, Gerhard Merz, who created an “historically, aesthetically, and architecturally conceived exhibition” to explore Germany’s Nazi past (ibid 414). This included installations, such as pillar with a sacrificial bowl on top, reminiscent “of the lamps used during artistic events during the Third Reich” (ibid). One of the exhibits was a print of the murdered German-Jewish artist, Otto Freundlich’s sculpture “Der Neue Mensch” (The New Man), which referenced publicity material from the National Socialist *Degenerate Art* exhibition (1937), that took place in the KM’s buildings. Lind reports that the art historian Winifred Nerdinger criticised the exhibition, considering it to be a “calculatedly perverse game with the evocation and mixing of monumentality, sublimity and National Socialist symbols” (ibid 313-314). Roberto Ohrt objected to Merz “having used fascist iconography in a careless and naïve way”, contending that the exhibition celebrated the Nazi aesthetic, abstracted from its gruelling historical realities (ibid 315-316). Lind again wanted to demonstrate that the Kunstverein was not a neutral container for art, but its ideological framework was deeply embedded in the region’s history. Institutional critique was concerned with site and context specificity, and Lind’s strategy in revisiting the KM’s past was to locate it in the history of the Third Reich, disproving the institution’s claimed neutrality. By revisiting an exhibition redolent of Munich’s Nazi past, Lind refocused attention on the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) (1937) exhibition, and the fact that it had taken place in the KM’s premises.<sup>18</sup> Lind was conscious that in Munich in the 2000s, most references to the Nazis had been obliterated, and she considered it important to render Munich’s associations with National Socialism transparent. By unpeeling the layers of the KM’s exhibition histories, Lind provided a context within which to conceive future exhibitions, demonstrating that all spaces were permeated by memories and loaded with meaning.

The third exhibition explored in *Telling Histories* was Andrea Fraser’s *A Society of Taste* (1993), which investigated the functioning of the KM and how it interacted with the “bourgeois” social life of Munich. In this project Fraser interviewed members of the KM’s Board, posing simple questions, such as “When did you first become involved with art?”, “Do you own art objects?”, “What service do you think the Kunstverein provides in Munich?” and “Do you think the Kunstverein is a location for a particular social group?” (ibid 317). Fraser edited the replies to produce a sound

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<sup>18</sup> *Entartete Kunst* was mounted by the Nazis, and consisted of chaotically hung Modernist art, accompanied by text labels deriding the works.

installation that played in the galleries of the KM. The answers she received were prosaic: “Art is something that is less boring than other things”, “I couldn’t imagine a life without art”, and “We are all members of a society of taste” (ibid). The sound installation was accompanied by an exhibition of artworks belonging to members of the KM’s Board, with no indication of whom the owners or the artists were. Fraser’s project elicited criticism from viewers for being “unaesthetic”, and critics “repeatedly objected to the translation of documentary material into exhibition form” (ibid). However, *A Society of Taste* was viewed favourably by one particular critic, Christian Kravagna, who accused the Board of suffering from “aesthetic schizophrenia”; arguing that it was useful to scrutinise an art institution, make visible the limits of artistic production, and propose a discussion on, for whom, and in whose interests the KM really existed.

Revisiting these three projects was about reconstructing the archive and grounding the KM of the 2000s in its past. Lind chose these particular exhibitions not only for their controversial reception, but also for the insight into different artistic and curatorial possibilities that they offered. *Poetry Must Be Made by All! Transform the World!* showed the “deliberate ‘alienation’ of an art institution from its traditional goals” in transforming itself into “a platform for political discussion and collective action” (ibid 319). *Dove Sta Memoria* demonstrated how by aestheticising an “unacceptable” subject, it was possible to re-introduce the “unspeakable” back into the arena of public debate. *A Society of Taste* made a sociological study of the internal power structure of the KM, rendering transparent the motivations of the trustees for being engaged with art and with the association.

Lind adopted a self-reflexive approach in her position as a director-curator, and invited a team of “sputniks” (a Russian term meaning travelling companion), comprising various artists, writers and curators, to follow the activities, and comment on the projects being carried out by the curatorial team, thereby facilitating an ongoing critique of her programme (2011a). The observers whom she engaged, developed long-term relationships with the KM and also undertook critical projects, which had as their aim the introduction of improvements into the institution. Under the sputnik programme, the artist Carey Young conducted a series of projects, entitled *Viral Marketing* (2002-2004), in which she made various interventions into the communications structure of the KM. In *Win-Win* (2002), Young provided a negotiation skills course in which a business trainer spent a day with the KM team to teach them how to represent their interests more efficiently. The work displaced

practices used in business, into an art institution as a form of “readymade”, or “found” process, and in this respect her strategy of mimicry was akin to Haacke’s specular appropriation of corporate strategies (Young 2002: n.p.). Young’s interest was to establish the effectiveness of the team in communicating and negotiating with sponsors, the trustees, the KM’s members, artists, specialised publics and the press, and she returned one year later to assess whether they had acquired and utilised these skills constructively. She argued that although *Win-win* was primarily an artwork, the project also had a use value in that the KM team genuinely benefitted from the skills training. According to her, “[w]ith this quasi-real quality” *Win-Win* adopted “an uncanny quality, allowing the work to reside in the imagination of the viewer as something which has the potential to transform the institution” (ibid).



Figure 41

Carey Young, *Win-win* (2002), documentation of negotiation skills workshop

*Debit and Credit* (2003) was a project combining art and commerce in which Young designed and distributed a “loyalty card”, as a substitute for the KM membership cards already in operation. Membership of the KM entitled visitors to free entrance to exhibitions, discounts in the shop, reduced prices at events, a newsletter and access to other art centres. Despite these entitlements, membership numbers were declining. In “Works Both Ways: Carey Young’s Projects for the Kunstverein München”, the art historian Mark Godfrey noted that this problem was not exclusive to the KM, and that “membership societies” were generally “threatened with obsolescence in a networked society” (Lind et al 2004: 431). Young observed

that as repeated visits to the KM did not result in any additional advantages for the members, an added incentive was required, namely a loyalty scheme, offering a material reward in the form of a “credit” for frequent visitors. Accordingly, once visitors had visited the KM eight times, and had the requisite number of stamps in their loyalty card, they would receive a courtesy copy of Ulrich Kluge’s publication, *Die Deutsche Revolution 1918/19*.

*Debit and Credit* (2003) demonstrated Young’s co-option of a device from the commercial world (the loyalty card), transformed into an artwork. Conscious that business often appropriates from art, she countered this by encouraging art institutions to mimic business practices, and she adopted the commercial sector’s strategies and techniques and translated them for use in the cultural sector. By mimicking the corporate strategies of marketing, negotiating and positioning, and transferring these approaches to art institutions, Young also drew attention to the tendency of mainstream art institutions to co-opt experimental art projects. It was this activity of subverting the neo-liberal techniques of branding and public relations in order to engineer improvements in art institutions that were particular characteristics of Young’s approach. The purpose of Young’s project went beyond simply helping the institution retain and potentially increase the number of members by introducing a loyalty scheme. According to Godfrey, Kluge’s book might “serve as a useful reminder of the once radical politics of Munich immediately after World War I”. Commenting on the fact that the building now occupied by the KM had been one of the venues for the Nazis’ *Entartete* (1937) exhibition, he contended that the show “remained a persistent stain upon the image of the institution”, and that “Young’s scheme would subtly introduce a counter-memory into its circuits of association”, thereby re-connecting visitors with the institution’s left-wing political histories (ibid). Kluge’s counter-hegemonic book was supposed to resituate the KM in a more radical past, though it is doubtful if this had anything other than symbolic value. In the autonomous space of the gallery, *Debit and Credit* (2003), gave visitors an opportunity to think critically about why businesses use loyalty cards. Yet Young also blurred the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the gallery, as participation in the project required the visitors to carry their card outside the gallery, and to (possibly) read their copies of Kluge’s publication in the “life-world”. Acknowledging her state of embeddedness in commercial organisations from which she sourced her material, and in the cultural institutions that commissioned her work, Young contended, that “inside/outside binaries seem ever more out-moded”,

moreover, “a singular stance does not seem credible anymore”, and “in that what ever commercial process or system I expose or make projects within, I still reveal myself at the same time to be included within that mechanism. It is not oppositional in a traditional sense” (Richter and Wolfs 2011: 25). Thus, Young’s projects emphasised her state of embeddedness, the experimental nature of the KM, and its implied criticism of mainstream art centres.

In addition to mounting collaborative and discursive exhibitions and projects, writing formed an important part of Lind’s critically institutional practice. In “Stopping My Process” (Hannula 1997), she described the need for “effective institutional critique”, which was not “aggressive and bitter”, but “sensitive and intelligent” (Kuan Wood 2010: 219). Lind developed an expanded understanding of art institutions early on in her practice as a curator (Wade 2001). She viewed the museum not as the physical building, but as “the sum of its activities”, and regarded the curator’s function not as to “bind the projects to the museum’s new building, but rather to shadow the artists, to follow the art out of the museum’s walls” (op cit 245). Lind contended that art institutions needed “to act as platforms for experimental art”, and “become more flexible and heterogeneous”, as well as being “capable of renewing and reinventing both their formats and their audiences on a regular basis” (ibid 247). In arguing in favour of flexibility and heterogeneity, she implied that administrative and bureaucratic impasses frequently beset institutions, and that it was not the curator’s function “to dutifully fill gallery space within the timeframes dictated by the institution” (ibid 252). She favoured instead using the space for artists and finding the most appropriate framework and support for their work.

Lind explained her views on institutional critique in “Models of Criticality, commissioned for the exhibition catalogue of *Contextualize – Zusammenhänge herstellen* (Contextualise – Establish Connections), Kunstverein Hamburg (2002), (Kuan Wood 2011: 81-96). She contended that although institutional critique “has to a certain degree been placed on a pedestal – it has nevertheless laid out a number of practical and influential approaches” (ibid 86). Lind viewed Buchloh’s attitude to institutional criticism as “often judgemental and negative in its approach” (ibid 87). She argued that it was necessary to go beyond criticism by thematising the problems and seeking out strategies for dealing with them. Lind, like Fraser and Rogoff, recognised the embedded nature of criticality, arguing that one of the difficulties “in trying to maintain a critical stance”, was the “dilemma of always being in some way implicated by the system you want to change” (ibid 96).

Lind's approach was to privilege the artworks and to argue that the institution should adapt itself to the artists' needs. In "Learning From Art and Artists", she documented the projects she had carried out at the MMP, where the artists had been given free range in their interpretation and utilisation of the exhibition- and in-between-spaces in the institution (Wade 2001). Lind discussed the work of several specific artists who adopted, in her view, a more positive approach to institutional critique than she had gleaned from Buchloh's writings. According to her, both Apolonija Šušteršič, and the collaborative Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van de Pol (Bik Van de Pol), advanced the discussion of institutional criticism by "proposing alternative ways of reasoning and acting" (Lind 2002: 93). Lind described how Šušteršič, created a Light Therapy Centre at the MMP to counteract the well-known phenomenon of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), brought about by long high-latitude winters. Lind explained that Bik Van de Pol produced situations in which people meet and exchange thoughts and ideas, such as installing a full-size replica of the theory section of the ICA bookshop in the Museum Boijman van Beuningen, which had a lack of such publications. Such projects, according to Lind, demonstrated "context sensitivity", going beyond an investigation of the physical characteristics of a given site, and placing historical and ideological issues in the foreground. Lind defined "context sensitive art" as art that "does not abide by the status quo, but progressively interacts with it by using a slight twist – often with protests and challenges, albeit it procreative ones" (ibid fn 15). She characterised "context sensitive art" practice as "performative and participatory", and coined the term "constructive institutional critique" to describe this approach (ibid).

Lind's critical strategies differed from those adopted by artists and curators. Constructive institutional critique was primarily about context sensitivity, which was why it was important to Lind to recover the "lost" historical context of the KM, as a necessary foundation on which to build her artistic programme. However, in choosing those exhibitions that were uncharacteristic of the acknowledged conservatism of the KM's past, Lind exploited fissures in the KM's history, and re-crafted the narrative to present the institution as having legacies in moments of radicalism (*Poetry Must Be Made by All! Transform the World!*), transparency (*Dove Sta Memoria*), and self-reflexivity (*A Society of Taste*). Constructive institutional critique was also defined by its performative and participatory modes of working, and in this respect, the various sputnik projects organised by Lind, of which Young's *Viral Marketing* is but one example, were evidence of a commitment to critical, collaborative practice.

Lind's approach to constructive institutional critique had a resonance beyond the physical walls of the KM. Her typical programming strategy attracted the attention of critics and art historians internationally, and she was frequently invited to explain her "new" approach at conferences, and she propagated her views and recorded her curatorial experiments in the production of various texts. The KM under Lind's direction was classified by Doherty (2004) and Farquharson (2006) as a "new institution", and she was deemed exemplary of the approach known as "new institutionalism" (Ekberg 2003). Lind criticised mainstream art centres for being too close to the market (Lind and Velthuis 2012). Although such institutions had originally been founded as sales organisations for local artists, they had over time become part of the vetting machinery in which artworks were legitimised and accepted into the art historical canon. Lind took the view that this whole process of canonisation was driven by the market and that those artists who were represented by powerful galleries were most likely to be invited for solo exhibitions in art centres, thereby confirming a cycle of ongoing cultural legitimisation, commercialisation and commodification.

Although various authors linked the genesis of "new institutionalism" to institutional critique, they did not explore the connections in detail. Fraser's "an institution of critique" provided a possible model against which to judge a director-curator's critical strategies. Despite the fact that Fraser's articulation of this vehicle occurred at the same time as when discussions on new institutionalism were in the foreground, there was little attempt on the part of critics and art historians to explore the connections between these phenomena. This is curious because one of the aims of practices associated with institutional critique was to create utopian art institutions, and new institutionalism purported to characterise experimental practices that moved in this direction. Fraser had argued that "an institution of critique" needed to demonstrate an ongoing process of critical discourse and practice, implying that it must fulfil its stated vision and its stakeholders' expectations. During her directorship of the KM, Lind evidenced a self-reflexive approach to her practice, which she demonstrated in the publication of bi-annual newspapers, articulating the thinking behind her strategies for re-functioning the KM, and published as *Drucksachen* (Lind et al 2004).

Fraser also contended that an institution of critique's self-representation as critical needed to be subject to a continuing examination. As self-reflexivity was a constituent part of Lind's work, she instigated an ongoing critique of her curatorial

programme at the KM by initiating the sputnik concept. According to Schlieben, the function of the sputniks, who were artists, critics and curators, was to contribute to the “shape and character of the Kunstverein with their questions, critique, advice and ideas” (ibid 25). These relationships were kept flexible and their activities took many forms. However, they were not fully independent and performed a “participant observer” role, an ethnographic term, implying the sputniks were also implicated in the processes they were observing. Certain projects, such as Young’s *Viral Marketing* (2002-2004), became part of the KM’s “existing structures”, and thereby exercised “an influence on the design and form of the institution itself” (ibid).

According to Fraser, “an institution of critique” needed to prove that its radicality was genuine and that its critique was more than merely symbolic. Although it is hard for any museum or art centre to prove that it is genuinely radical, not least owing to the many different understandings of the term, the evidence during Lind’s tenure at the KM shows an attempt, as far as was possible, to exploit the art centre’s potential beyond that of the show-room, and construct a collaborative and participatory platform, where many forms of artistic and curatorial experimentation could take place.

After Lind left the KM her approach was discontinued, a point she explained in a conversation with Alex Farquharson at Tate Modern, August 6 2006, (Hansen and Iversen 2007). Lind argued that there was a problem of continuity, namely that once an experimental curator departed, an art centre might easily return to a blank slate, and the incoming director might have a different vision, and could return to conventional formats of exhibition-making. In other words, according to her, such institutional experiments had insufficient time to become properly embedded in an art institution. In understanding why Lind’s approach was not sustainable, it appeared that in practice the independence granted to her by the institution’s statutes was limited, and the trustees remained conservative in their ways of thinking, shown by the fact that after her departure, they appointed more traditional curators (Lind et al 2004). It was likely that Lind’s contract, which was not in the public domain, had left much scope for flexibility and invention, but the trustees were not prepared for the radicalism of Lind’s programme, which eschewed a mainstream “showroom” approach, such as a disavowal of short duration one-person shows and theme-based group exhibitions, in favour of long-term research programmes, and the publication of a regular self-reflexive newspaper emphasising the role of discursivity (personal communication, Lind, Tensta Konsthall, 22.1.2014).

Nevertheless the programme that Lind had created was important because it constituted an attempt by a director-curator to create an institution that was not dedicated only to the display of objects, and instead conceived an art centre as a place for experimentation, art production and dialogue. Lind created with the re-functioned KM, an art space that put forward an alternative programme that was critical of mainstream art centres. She engaged visitors in an active dialogue and implicated them in the “indexical present” of the projects on view (Hayt-Atkins 2002). The intention was not only that audiences would view the objects, processes and performances inside the KM differently, but having seen them, go out and regard the world in a transformational way.

Although the KM was not re-functioned in a sustainable manner, shown by the fact that the succeeding directors, Stefan Kalmár and Bart van der Heide returned to a conventional programme, the knowledge that Lind’s experiments generated continued to be in circulation after she had departed. Subsequently Schlieben transferred many of the experimental practices generated at the KM to the Shedhalle in Zurich (2004-2009). There she launched a politicised exhibition, event, and mediation programme, and published a regular newspaper, the *Shedhalle Zeitung*, thereby ensuring an extension of Lind’s “constructive” approach to institutionally critical practice in the ongoing discourse on the subject.

#### 4.3 “Radical museology”: Manuel Borja-Villel at the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (1998-2008)

This final section discusses Manuel J. Borja-Villel’s period as the director of the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) from 1998 to 2008. He obtained his doctorate in art history from the Graduate School of the City University in New York (CUNY), and has had close contact with the art historians writing for the journal *October*, particularly Buchloh and Krauss. Previously he directed the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona from its inauguration in 1990 until 1998, where he curated *Els límits del museu (The End(s) of the Museum)*, arguing that the museum “cannot be a simple accumulation of objects”, but in order to be “an active centre of creation”, must “build, demolish and rebuild itself, continually” (1995: 11).

At the Tàpies Foundation, Borja-Villel had already curated the exhibitions: *Hans Haacke – Obra Social (Social Work)* (1995), and *Marcel Broodthaers – Cinéma* (1997), and he was familiar with the discourses surrounding their work. In “The Museum Questioned” Borja-Villel described the way in which Broodthaers “revealed the discursive nature of the museum”, as opposed to its supposed neutrality, and how Haacke “questioned its idealistic condition” (2010: 25). According to Borja-Villel, Haacke’s contribution to institutional critique was two-fold. First, the artist addressed the material reality of the gallery and the way in which it framed the artworks; and second, he introduced information into the gallery from the real world, which “blurred the line between the art world and the ‘exterior’”, so that “[t]he separation between the space of the street and the museum ideal was completely reformulated” (ibid). This notion of indistinguishable boundaries between the museum’s interior space and the space beyond the museum’s walls was a guiding principle in Borja-Villel’s approach to institutional experimentation.

The foundation of MACBA, which was officially inaugurated in 1995, formed part of the urban renewal of Barcelona in the 1980s to the mid-1990s. It marked the city’s transformation into a modern tertiary economy, with a focus on tourism and cultural production. According to Borja-Villel, who succeeded the previous directors, Daniel Giralt-Miracle (1988-1994) and Miguel Molins (1995-1998), “[i]n recent decades one of the basic objectives of capitalism has been to extract formulas for producing and consuming vital experiences in their various manifestations” and “[i]n this context, the museum runs the risk of confusion with the theme park” (2007 n.p.). Borja-Villel had no intention of building a museum of this type, instead he wished to

create an experimental institution, arguing that, “[a] museum of a progressive nature cannot be a mere accumulation but rather a centre for creation” (ibid). Furthermore, “[i]f museums want to make a break with their monumental nature they must abandon their aims and constantly espouse new ones” (ibid).

Under Borja-Villel, MACBA became a pioneer of experimental institutionalism; focusing on revisionist histories, collaborating with activist groups, building institutional networks, and creating platforms for the generation of alternate ways of thinking about socio-political and economic problems. The “MACBA model” constituted a particular understanding of the museum, namely that the institution was a platform, a space for debate, difference, radical alterity and agonistic conflict, as explained by Mouffe (2000); which brought together art practice, social issues and action-based research as a way of giving art a possibility to demonstrate both agency and legitimacy in the public sphere. Hence MACBA emphasised conferences, research seminars and public programmes, a comprehensive multi-lingual website, and the publication of a variety of journals, to counteract the hegemony of the exhibition. To implement this strategy, Borja-Villel, in collaboration with Jorge Ribalta, the Head of Public Programmes, fostered an interactive learning and active mediation programme “in co-operation with social agents and social movements” (email, Ribalta, 29.11.2013). With respect to the exhibition programme, Borja-Villel was interested in activities that were relevant to the city and involved art collectives and activist groups. He also favoured projects of a long-term duration. According to Ribalta, “[t]hese projects, set in the tradition of the museum practice of institutional critique, sought to outline a model of metropolitan art policy for present-day and future geopolitical conditions” (2008: 225).

Borja-Villel’s experiment at MACBA worked at the level of the collection, the public programme and the museum’s relationships with activist groups. The original collection comprised works from the Catalan Government, the Barcelona Council and Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona Foundation. Under Borja-Villel’s direction, collection strategy was re-focused to privilege non-mainstream artists, such as Antoni Abad, Marcelo Expósito and Muntadas, articulating their positions from a critical perspective, taking into account both the artworks’ historical origins and the museum’s context. During his tenure at MACBA, Borja-Villel built up a collecting institution to reflect alternative art histories, arguing that the accepted canon of art history was not neutral, but reflected “occidental” modernism (Borja-Villel 2010). Borja-Villel’s vision for MACBA meant acknowledging Spain’s colonial history with

Latin America, including Latin American post-colonialism and coming to terms with Spain's Fascist past. The purpose was to construct multiple configurations of the period, thereby subverting the logic of a single hegemonic account and manifesting a multiplicity of potential stories, evoking parallels with Wilson's practice in *Mining the Museum*.

With this pluralistic approach in mind and to establish an archive to recover the forgotten histories of Latin American Conceptualism, Borja-Villel, in collaboration with the art historians, Jesús Carrillo and Antoni Mercader, initiated the Southern Conceptualisms network at MACBA, hosting the seminar "Vivid [Radical] Memory" in 2000. This term, Latin American Conceptualism, was used to describe forms of art that had emerged from activist groups South America, expressing their resistance to the dictatorial regimes in power. Up until this moment, these groups had acted independently, but the seminar gave artists and researchers the opportunity to meet and exchange views. Although not formally linked, these movements shared counter-hegemonic elements, and the work they created was counter-canonical in that it had not been produced with the museum in mind. Following *documenta 11* (2002), Latin American conceptual and activist art was "re-discovered", and researchers became aware of the need to generate alternative processes to preserve these legacies, which would neither involve ownership by private collectors nor neo-colonial readings typical of international museums - though some important groundwork had been undertaken by Camnitzer in his publication, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (2007). According to Carrillo, "in Latin America there is a very strong national culture, but there is no trans-national tradition", and during this period, "these countries began to discover themselves through the gaze that the international art system projected on Latin America", and came to understanding this as "an external front to propose an alternative" (de Benito Fernández 2012: n.p.). Following the seminar "Vivid [Radical] Memory," there was a realisation that a new type of archive was required, "one that would be open, shared, and susceptible of being permanently activated from the present" (ibid).<sup>19</sup>

Museums had not developed as elsewhere during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), and Spain did not experience the evolution of the "modern museum" as epitomised by MoMA in New York, whose model subsequently became the norm in Europe. According to Ribalta, by the time democracy had been restored in Spain, the growth in modern museums was receding in favour of postmodern art institutions,

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<sup>19</sup> Borja-Villel has continued this project at MNCARS.

driven by the economic imperatives of neoliberalism (2004: n.p.). The same phenomenon was recognised by Borja-Villel, who argued that the museum must “stop being an archaeology of modernity” and “take on a post-modern praxis” (2007 n.p.). However, his conception of a postmodern museum was very different from the spectacular, “starchitect” museums that have been constructed since the late 1990s.

Whereas the purpose of many postmodern museums was often instrumentalised, and had the attraction of tourists and the stimulation of the local economy as their objectives, as for instance the Guggenheim Bilbao, Borja-Villel’s vision for MACBA was of a museum that built relationships with local activist groups, and conceived a programme that was relevant to the interests and needs of local citizens. MACBA differentiated itself from mainstream museums, by being critical of the dominant mechanisms of representation and exhibition in the museographic field, particularly the reification and monumentalism represented by the exhibitionary complex, which was seen as propagating the old myths of identity and nationhood, and failing to address local micro-publics or collective forms of creativity. Consequently, MACBA under Borja-Villel diversified activities away from a focus on exhibition-making to create an integrated programme of curatorial and discursive projects.

Borja-Villel saw one of the museum’s tasks as responding to social and political events in the “real” world, such as the anti-globalisation movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s. He contended that the role of the museum was to be “transformative”, and to re-function the institution into an agent of change, it must “go beyond institutional critique and enter into a direct dialogue with activist groups” (Ribalta 2008). He sought a new basis for the museum beyond it being a repository of universal values, arguing it was necessary to exit the museum in order to “renegotiate the fundamentals of the institution and recover the discourses of the public sphere” (personal communication, Jesús Carrillo, Madrid, 19.2.2014).<sup>20</sup>

Borja-Villel and his team also viewed exhibitions as having a particular role beyond the purely aesthetic, in that the activity of display could be conceived as a form of “direct action”, and could be used as a tool to assist activist groups articulate their points of view. With this in mind, they invited artists to collaborate with activists in the project *Las Agencias* (The Agencies) (2001). This initiative grew out a workshop held at MACBA entitled *Direction Action as One of the Fine Arts*, in which the concept

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20 Carrillo was an independent researcher at MACBA, and is currently the Director of Public Programmes at MNCARS.

of agency was understood as empowerment, by giving a voice to micro-institutions. The participating groups, each of which represented a different issue, were: RTMark (anti-consumerist), Ne Pas Plier (utopian politics), Fiambrera Obrera (anti-globalisation), Kein Mensch ist Illegal (anti-deportation), and Reclaim the Streets (community ownership of public spaces).<sup>21</sup>

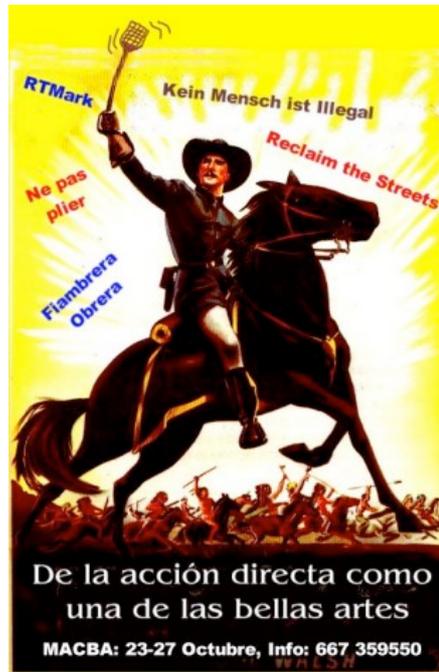


Figure 42

Poster for *Direction Action Considered as one of the Fine Arts* (2000) by Las Agencias

*Las Agencias* were established during the preparation for the World Bank Summit, planned for Barcelona in June 2001, but which was cancelled due to the organisers' fears of violent demonstrations in the city, following the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle in 1999 and Genoa in 2001. Despite the cancellation of the official summit, the counter-summit went ahead and the activists played a central role in the process, particularly in the design of communication strategies, such as the "Dinero Gratis" (Free Money) poster campaign, that expanded the possibilities of intervention for anti-capitalist movements in the city (Ribalta 2004).

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<sup>21</sup> The English translations of the activist groups are: Ne Pas Plier - Do Not Bend, Fiambrera Obrera - Workers' Lunch Box and Kein Mensch ist Illegal - No-one is Illegal.



Figure 43

*Direct Action as one of the Fine Arts workshop, Barcelona, 2000*



Figure 44

Workshop and Show Bus of Las Agencias during the campaign against the meeting of the World Bank, Plaça dels Àngels, Barcelona, June 2001

Borja-Villel and his team devised a “molecular organisational structure” for the

museum by creating various agencies, with different functions, such as: a graphic agency to create posters articulating the museum's critique of the socio-political and economic situation in the city; a photographic agency to document the activities; a media agency to develop tools for intervention in public places; a bus as a mobile exhibition agency, and a "social relations" agency in the form of a bar (Ribalta 2008).

*Las Agencias* signaled that Borja-Villel did not intend to confine programming activities within the museum's walls, but viewed the city as an extension of the museum. The concept was to establish a broad collaboration between the museum and the activists, so that the museum could reach into new areas of experimentation; and the activist groups could retain their independence while taking advantage of MACBA's resources. This arrangement was also intended to function as a self-critique on the part of the museum so as to avoid atrophying into a rigid hierarchical structure. Arguably the museum either encouraged or imposed an over-formal structure on the activist groups, which was to prove problematic. The project did not achieve its objectives and floundered on misunderstandings between the museum staff the activist groups. Disagreements arose for instance between squatter groups and the museum with respect to what MACBA represented in terms of the gentrification of the Raval district in which it was situated. The activists accused the museum of enacting policies of precarity, and of failing to find them suitable space within the museum to carry out their projects. MACBA for its part was disconcerted because the activists made copies of the keys and used the workshops and computers as if they were their own property. The ensuing discord resulted in a demonstration on the part of the activists, which led to clashes with the police and a formal complaint issued by the MACBA Consortium (trustees) to Borja-Villel. The final outcome was a dilution of the *Las Agencias* projects, and the departure of some of its participants (Benavent 2013). Some groups refused to work with the museum altogether and accused those who did co-operate of being "collaborationist". Nevertheless, *Las Agencias* was an important learning experience for many of the activist groups, and the collaboration with MACBA gave them a good grounding in institutional processes, which resolved them to be more circumspect in their relationships with museums in the future.

Borja-Villel viewed the role of MACBA as being part of a network of inter-related institutions with shared concerns. The project *Desacuerdos. Sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español* (Antagonisms. On art, politics and the public sphere in Spanish State) (2000-2005), carried out in collaboration with Carrillo,

explored the relationship between art and politics. It grew out of a collaboration between MACBA, the Arteleku-Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa (a contemporary art centre in the Basque Country), the Universidad Internacional de Andalucía and the Centro José Guerrero-Diputación (an experimental art centre in Grenada). All shared the idea that institutional frameworks should be challenged through critical processes capable of opening them up to public scrutiny. The fact that they were situated in three different geopolitical contexts, namely Euskadi, Catalunya and Andalucía meant that they operated in an expanded field, in the manner of a decentralised network, and correspondingly developed different analytic methodologies and presentation formats to suit the specific characteristics of their respective audiences. According to the art historian Valentin Roma, *Desacuerdos* took place at a time when the political vocabularies in Spain were being reconfigured and concepts such as identity politics, collective action and public space were being subjected to important critical revision (2013). In the early 2000s there was an attempt to rethink exhibition practices so as to imagine “the exhibition as a space of political and aesthetic confrontation” (Roma 2013: 125).

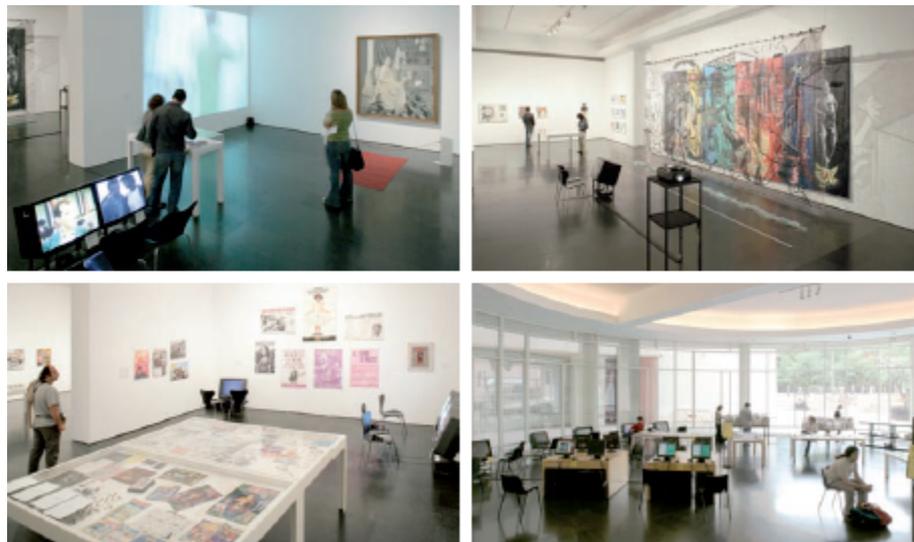


Figure 45  
*Desacuerdos* exhibition (2005)

Collective forms of organisation gathered momentum in the wake of the emergence of the anti-globalisation movement, and according to Roma, this “created a breeding ground for the articulation of new ideological codes from which to reimagine what we understand by culture” (ibid: 125).



Figure 46

Leaflet of *Desacuerdos* at Arteleku, (2005)

Importantly in the 2000s, a new generation of artists, curators, critics and art historians emerged, and having been educated in the post-Franco environment, they had a different perspective on the role of institutions. One of the most significant contributions to discussions on institutionally critical practice made by *Desacuerdos* was to concentrate the efforts of over forty artists, activists, curators, critics and art historians. Taking Mouffe's concept of agonism as its starting point, *Desacuerdos* set as its mission the recuperation, contextualisation and reinterpretation of artistic practices produced in Spain from the 1960s through the early 2000s.



was possible” (Ribalta 2008: 254).<sup>22</sup> The project challenged Spain’s atypical modernity, by asking “to what extent cultural institutions might contribute to processes of radical democratisation of society, versus the observed growing authoritarianism of the economy and the State” (ibid), thereby creating new understandings about recent art history to produce alternatives to the canonical occidental version of modernity (Borja-Villel 2010). According to Ribalta, *Desacuerdos* questioned how an “institutional exhibitionary framework” could “render visible antagonistic, process-based and experimental practices” that challenged “the established institutional frameworks and their implicit disciplinary divisions” (ibid 255). The project embraced the paradoxes and difficulties of combining action and representation, intention and materiality and as such, was “a self-critical reflection on the conditions and relations of the power of institutional knowledge and the limits of the museum” (ibid). The exhibition was not presented as a single chronology, but as a framework with various possible itineraries, giving multiple possible historiographical readings.

Roma described how during the early 2000s, art historiography and art criticism in Spain reaffirmed the artistic canon and assessed the value of art in terms of its market price, whereas *Desacuerdos* produced a revisionist anti-canonical history of art. During the period 2003-2005, the project brought together an extensive network of researchers, whose work was presented through a series of exhibitions, seminars, workshops and serial publications. Their investigations pursued two lines of enquiry: *1969-...* juxtaposed the 1968-inspired struggles and the 1980s resistance to counter-culture with oppositional artistic practices from the early 2000s, addressing the fight against globalisation. Roma observed that “*1969-...* placed special emphasis on the idea of rupture and consecutive ‘diachronic cuts’, threading together a possible counter-dominant narrative”, but “by drafting a landscape of such clearly interconnected conflicts”, also created “an alternative map of legitimisation of these practices” (ibid: 126). *Lineas de fuerza* (Force Lines) was structured around three critical paradigms linked to major moments in Spanish cultural policy-making. “Trivialisation” challenged the prevalent myths of euphoria that characterised many accounts of the first years of democracy in Spain. “Commercialisation” examined the relationship between art and the economy, focusing on ARCO, the art fair established in Madrid in 1982 to catalyse an art market in Spain. “Spectacularisation” charted the

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<sup>22</sup> The *Desacuerdos* project without the participation of the activist groups is ongoing in documentary form at MNCARS.

1990s, exploring the expansion of biennials, and the globalisation and monetisation of art. The public presentation and articulation of *Desacuerdos* ran in parallel to the research project. Despite the radicality of the counter-narratives, MACBA chose to present the material in exhibition form. However, the display of documentary materials collected during the research process did not translate easily into this presentational form, and according to Roma, “at times it was hard to differentiate strictly ‘archeological’ operations from critical readings” (ibid: 127).

According to Carrillo, *Desacuerdos* failed because both the museum and the activist groups approached the project with different aims that were not clearly stated from the outset, and because no clear rules of engagement were established on how to implement the project (personal communication, Madrid, 19.2.2014). Initially MACBA did not declare its intention to produce an exhibition show-casing its collaboration with the activist groups. MACBA staff seemed to think that sharing concerns about “the state of the world”, and being in sympathy with anti-globalisation movements, were sufficiently binding common interests, so that the implementation of the project would be straightforward. Also as the principal funders of the project, they assumed that they would determine the agenda. The activist groups had a different perspective, and although they accepted the funding, they disagreed with any restrictions on their activities, whether tacit or stated. Although some of the participants shared similar concerns to MACBA, they had different viewpoints about how such issues would be represented and documented. Above all they were against having their methods and processes objectified, and potentially commodified, by having them displayed in an exhibition, claiming that the museum’s appropriation of their projects was tantamount to “contamination” (ibid). Not all the activist groups adopted such extreme positions, and some were prepared to collaborate with the museum up to a certain point, however, as in previous projects, they were accused by other groups of being “collaborationist” and of “betrayal” (ibid). Nevertheless, despite the failure of the experiment, *Desacuerdos* had some value, as it showed that MACBA was trying to go beyond the approaches adopted by mainstream museums, whose prime objectives were perceived to be growing the collection by aggressive acquisition strategies, seeking broad audiences, and exhibiting blockbuster popular shows.

The wide-reaching scope of the project and its long gestation period represented a significant turning point in institutional discourses, offering new readings of historical events and practices that were previously either overlooked or

insufficiently interpreted. The project drew attention to a series of critical elements that radically altered the existing conservative approach to art historiography in Spain, urging a debate around narratives that had become consensual precisely because of their lack of articulation. Given the situation of financial precarity in Spain, where most art institutions were, and still are, focused on their financial problems and conditions of survival, there was, and still is, a risk that the critical narratives posited by *Desacuerdos* might become in the words of Roma “a hiatus in the articulation of a critical interaction between museums and antagonistic practices, or perhaps even a hiatus absorbed as part of hegemonic institutional narratives” (ibid: 132). However, more optimistically, the alternative historiographic narratives that this project posited might still continue “to generate critical formats and to contest hegemonic and consensual narratives of artistic and political history” (ibid).

MACBA’s collaboration with activist groups contrasted strongly with the attitudes of some mainstream museums elsewhere, which have reacted differently to activism. MoMA in New York has ignored the incursions of the Occupy Museums Movement, which took advantage of the museum’s “Free Fridays” policy, where large audiences were assured, to articulate its objections to the museum’s close relationship with Sotheby’s auction house. MoMA spokesperson Kim Mitchell contended, “our official position is no comment” (Pollack 2012: n.p.). Tate Britain and Tate Modern, on the other hand, have removed all traces of the activities of the British activist group, Liberate Tate, which aimed to sever the links between Tate and one of its main sponsors, the oil company BP.

As the projects *Las Agencias* and *Desacuerdos*, and the revisionist approach to the museum’s collection strategy demonstrated, MACBA had adopted a different strategy to many of its peer organisations in Spain and elsewhere. The “MACBA Experiment” was characterised by a high degree of discursivity about institutionally critical practice. In a dialogue with the critic and curator David G. Torres on redefining the museum “as a political and knowledge based structure”, Borja-Villel argued that, “institutional criticism has turned into a genre in itself whose ‘redemption’ capacity goes rather through the structure of its statements than through its own political effectiveness” (2006; n.p.). This implied that Borja-Villel regarded I(i)stitutional C(c)ritique as an historical project powered by its own rhetoric, rather than as a useful ongoing method of reformist practice. This was because Borja-Villel saw I(i)stitutional C(c)ritique as an activity located in the museum, whereas the MACBA experiment was about exiting the museums to form networks with other institutions

and collaborations with activist groups. However, for Borja-Villel institutional critique still had value in its ability to articulate concerns about the role of the museum in general terms, even if this approach to criticism was not particularly effective, as he saw it, in the context of MACBA's position in Barcelona.

Torres asked whether being independently critical was possible, and would "the natural place of the criticism space" be compromised, and critique become institutionalised, if the museum adopted this function. Borja-Villel responded that there was no longer any space for independent critique, contending that it was "hard to think about something exterior to the world we live in, and where the purity of the critical judgment would be possible" (ibid n.p.). He argued "[i]n this time and age of capitalism with knowledge power", that "there is no interior and exterior", but "this criticism space occurs in the fractures of the system" (ibid), echoing similar arguments made by Haacke (1974) and Foster (1986).

Borja-Villel's views about the genre-isation of Institutional Critique were reflected in Ribalta's article, *Experiments in New Institutionalality* (2008). Ribalta explained that MABCA viewed Institutional Critique as an artistic practice which laid "bare the institution's working conditions and implicit power relations" (ibid 256); it was seen as an historical project, emerging from the 1960s movements and having as its aim the unveiling of the museum's power structure. Institutional Critique was regarded as "the continuation of the modern enlightenment tradition", that saw "the museum as the space for popular education", and at the same time as representing a "self-critical break with this tradition" (ibid). It was seen as an instrument for translating "liberal democracy within the museum", so as to configure "the museum as a model of the democratic public sphere", but also as "the antagonism that constitutes the social space within the museum" (ibid). These viewpoints indicated Borja-Villel and Ribalta's awareness of institutional critique having the potentiality to be both affirmative and critical.

Ribalta explained in the same article how MACBA's experimentation with institutional critique only served to reveal the "true limits" of institutional critique, those being the limits of the museum, which was bound by a practice of representation, on the one hand, and a set of administrative and organisational rules on the other. For Ribalta, a solution to the restrictions imposed by the representational function of the museum was to switch to a relational paradigm. In reporting on a MACBA conference entitled *Another Relationality: Rethinking Art as Experience* (2005-2006), he argued that "[r]elationality is a concept that enables us to

intervene controversially in the debate on art institutions and their audiences”, in order to restore “political density to a concept”, which had been misused to create “a simulation of participation by trivialising and making a spectacle of the concept of antagonism as constitutive of the social” (ibid). In making these comments, Ribalta was criticising the approach to relational aesthetics adopted by the curator Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), on the grounds that it emphasised social relations devoid of political content, points that were also raised by Claire Bishop in “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents” (2006). Ribalta argued that, “the vocation of institutional critique involved its socialisation beyond the limits of the museum”, and that in order to avoid becoming purely formalistic, the role of institutional critique should further the “construction of new institutions, new practices and new rules”. Ribalta was probably referring to the physical limits of mainstream museums in this comment. He contended that the programmes conceived by MACBA during Borja-Villel’s tenure had been explicitly conceived to “bring down the institutional borders that exist between different fields” (ibid).

Ribalta viewed Institutional Critique as an historical project, related to exposing power relations in the museum, contending that in order to adapt, the museum could not exist as an independent entity, it needed to be a porous institution, sensitive to, and communicative with practitioners and organisations outside its physical walls. In other words, absorbing institutional criticism could be regarded as a mechanism of survival and renewal for museums. Ribalta explained that MACBA had focused on dismantling institutional boundaries by creating a network of relationships among art collectives, activist groups and smaller institutions, extending the platform of the museum into the metropolis and beyond. As he clarified, MACBA’s strategy was to go beyond the limits of a singular museum to create a “molecular museum”, in other words “the museum as constituted as a diffuse network of activities rather than as a site” (email, Ribalta, 29.11.2013).

Borja-Villel was, and still is, a prolific writer. In contrast to the previous directors, he initiated an institutionally critical approach at MACBA and contributed to the discourse on re-functioned institutions, which has also been labelled “radical museology”. Bishop defined “radical museology” in terms of the construction of revisionist histories, by using the collection and its associated archival and documentary material to work to create counter-narratives. MACBA’s engagement with the development of the Latin American Conceptualism network and its method of retelling Spanish art history as an alternative modernity, are evidence of this.

Diamond used the term “radical museology” to describe a process adopted by collection-building institutions, which was: “self-reflexive” in the sense of “absorbing its own institutional critique into presentation”, “revisionist” in that “the museum becomes a site for the re-interpretation of the collection”, and pluralistic, acting as a “repository of subjectivities” (Ascott et al 2000). MACBA demonstrated these approaches by reflecting on aspects of historical institutional critique that were relevant to its role as an experimental institution, by focusing on alternative modernisms with respect to curating the collection, and viewing its role as a node in a network of other experimental institutions, which recognised a plurality of interests and shared concerns.

In investigating the forms of critique that might be adopted by the museum, Fraser argued that the institution needed to demonstrate a continuous process of critical discourse and practice. The projects, conferences and public programmes, described in this section indicated that MACBA was committed to an ongoing process of critical practice and discourse, owing to its self-reflexive assessment of its relationship to wider society; the provision of opportunities for exchanges of opinion among experts and specialists in the fields of art practice, cultural theory and political science, as well as ways of engaging with activist and community groups. Fraser also contended that an institution of critique’s self-representation as critical needed to be constantly questioned. MACBA claimed criticality in the following spheres of activity: its revisionist conception of the collection, its re-functioning of the museum to address the needs of the city in which it was located and its cooperation with activist groups and like-minded institutions. However, MACBA was criticised by some of the groups with which it worked for engaging in precarious labour policies – a critique that has also been levelled against mainstream museums. The question was whether MACBA as a critical, self-reflexive, experimental institution should operate with higher standards than mainstream museums. In “Take Me I’m Yours: Neoliberalising the Cultural Institution”, the critic Anthony Davies took issue with MACBA for adopting the very same precarious labour policies that it claimed to decry in its public programmes (2007). He described an event, which took place prior to the second part of the conference *Another Relationality* (2006), where the local activist collective ctrl-I, whose membership comprised temporary workers formerly employed by MACBA, issued a public declaration of withdrawal, accusing MACBA of “complicity with the very neoliberal imperatives it purported to critique” (ibid n.p.). Davies described how some of those who had spoken out against the museum were removed from their

contracted positions as guides and placed in other less publicly engaged roles which provoked objections to the museum's employment practices and some resigned their jobs in protest (ibid: Fn. 1). It was ctrl-I's knowledge of precarious labour conditions at MACBA, involving low pay and "flexible contracts", implying insecure employment conditions, which enabled them to launch this trenchant critique. To express their discontent, they published a subvertisement (a subversive advertisement) with the slogan, "McBA – Museu de Precarietat Contemporània de Barcelona", against a background image of a McDonald's hamburger; stating that "[t]alking about precariousness in the McBa is like taking a nutrition seminar at McDonald's" (ibid). Ribalta refuted the criticism of MACBA's treatment of temporary workers as portrayed in Davies' article (email 29.11.2013). According to Ribalta, Borja-Villel did not dismiss any employees and "gave a tremendous importance" to educators and mediators in the museum. He claimed, "there's been falsification and demagogy on this affair, which does not mean that MACBA was free of conditions of precarious labor", but "in terms of a critique of the MACBA experiment", it was taken out of context and "perversely used at the time" (ibid). Steyrl argued that under the "ruling economic circumstances", precarious labour was characterised by "flexibilised working structures within temporary project structures and freelancer work within cultural industries". She contended that with regard to "the function of the institution of critique", there "seems to have hardly ever been more need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires" of precarious workers that the current situation of the dismantling of "critical institutions" by "neoliberal institutional criticism" had provoked (2006: n.p.).



Figure 48

MCBA subvertisement by ctrl-i

According to Fraser, "an institution of critique" must prove that its radicality is genuine and that its critique is more than merely symbolic. It was difficult for any institution to prove that its progressiveness was real and that its critical stance went

beyond the symbolic, as the effectiveness of institutionally critical programmes was hard to prove and subject to different interpretations. The longevity and intensity of the experimental programmes at MACBA under Borja-Villel's direction indicated a continuing authenticity of vision that went beyond the norms of displaying objects and making the museum attractive to tourists. Despite the modest resources available, a collection was built and documented that reflected Spain's post-colonial context (Borja-Villel 2003 and 2010). With regard to public programming, considerable efforts were made to reach out to marginal groups and micro-publics in the city, and to create activities that were relevant to their supposed interests. Similar concerns were voiced by Dewdney et al with respect to the appropriateness of Tate Britain's programmes vis-à-vis its audiences' interests (2013). In terms of its contribution to discourses on institutionally critical practice, MACBA was arguably one of the most active institutions in the field, both in terms of its Independent Study Programme (PEI), and the plethora of conferences it organised, some in association with the eipcp.

Borja-Villel sought a different approach for MACBA, distinct from the paths of the museum "that responds to the culture of the spectacle" (2010: 30). His notion of experimental institutionality involved providing alternative narratives to occidental modernist art history, developing new forms of mediation and considering "the spectator not as a passive subject or consumer, but as an agent, a political subject" (ibid 31). His approach was important in discussions on experimental institutionalism because he criticised the notion of the museum as being primarily a container for the display of objects and a destination for tourists. MACBA under Borja-Villel created a discursive and educational platform, and activated the viewers, refunctioning them as involved participants. Together with his team, he showed what other possible critical museological approaches might be, and although, he did not change the way in which other museums operated, he provoked the discussion of alternative models.

Given the length of Borja-Villel's tenure at MACBA (1998-2008), some of his projects have become institutionally sustainable, and initiatives, such as reaching out to the metropolitan area, focusing the collection of artists from the South and Eastern Europe, and the Independent Study Programme, continued after his departure. However, the deteriorating economic situation in Spain and changes in the metropolitan government in Barcelona, placed MACBA under severe budgetary constraints. Under its subsequent director, Bartomeu Marí i Ribas (2008-present), it is succumbing to the usual pressures of financial self-reliance and the need to increase

visitor numbers, which are likely to influence and possibly force the popularisation of its programming strategy. In her introduction to the conference “The Now Museum: Contemporary Art, Curating Histories, Alternative Models” (2011), Bishop had classified MACBA as a “radical museum”, but she did not include MACBA in her more recent publication, *Radical Museology, or, What’s Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013), suggesting that MACBA had been unable to sustain its critical path, a point which was reaffirmed by the former MACBA curator Carles Guerra at the “Radically Uncompleted Radically Inconclusive. On Art and Language’s Legacy” conference (personal communication, Guerra, Barcelona, 17.5.2013).

## Conclusion

Institutionally critical practice entered a different paradigm when the institution took on the role of the agent of critique. It constituted a change that artists practicing institutional critique in the 1960s and 1970s did not envisage, as the institution was, at that point in time, the direct object of their critique. The evolution in critical practice to involve the institution as a critical agent, a role performed by the director-curator, indicated the way in which critique had moved from the outside to inside the institution of art. However, the critique of the institution was not only carried out by director-curators and their staff, but also by artists, activists, and guest curators, who were invited into the institution to produce projects. In the majority of cases, the invited participants reaffirmed the critical message that the museums and art centres aimed to communicate, but occasionally they were critical of the institution's programme, reinforcing and regenerating the cycle of criticality that was also important for the continuation of institutionally critical practice.

The case studies in this chapter specifically addressed periods of institutional experimentation that have been completed, and all the director-curators have moved on to other posts; however, in conceptual terms their work represented an experiment in progress. The institutions examined in this chapter were all conceived as being different from mainstream art centres and museums, as can be seen by the epithets of "new institution", "experimental institution" and "radical museum" that have been used to characterise them. All three director-curators were embedded in, and responsible for, the organisations in which they worked, and were assisted by their staff in the re-functioning projects with which they were engaged. They occupied different roles with respect to the institutions than the artists, artist curators and independent curators discussed in the previous chapters, as they represented not only the curatorial, but also managerial functions within their institutions. In their position they had the power to effect change whilst they were in charge, but they were unable to ensure the sustainability of the reforms once they had departed.

The case studies examined the way in which the director-curators modified the institutions that they led. They went beyond the management and the representative functions typical of a director, to construct institutions that were experimental works in progress, and there were some fundamental differences between them in their ways of working. Lind was the most self-reflexive, establishing the "sputnik" programme to review and critique her approach to institutionally critical practice. Esche was the most politicised, viewing the art centre as "a political

imagination forum”, while and Borja-Villel reconfigured the museum as an instrument for revisionist histories, and sought a role for the museum “beyond the museum’s walls”, in collaborating with activist groups. However, all three focused on constructing specialised networks: Lind through conferences and publications; Esche via the development of projects with a group of internationally-based art-professionals; and Borja-Villel by collaborating with other institutions, activist groups and academics.

Although the contexts, circumstances and interests of these director-directors, were different, there were common elements in their approach, as they all viewed the institution of art in counter-hegemonic terms. Mader pointed out that one view of “artistic institutional critique from its very beginnings was aimed at destabilizing the institution”, as the institution was viewed in Althusserian terms as a “repressive state apparatus” (2013: 37). She contended that, “[c]orrespondingly a critical attitude must always position itself in opposition to and never within the particular, equally hegemonic institution” as such institutions are “implicated and enforcing the dominant ideology” (ibid). These director-curators had a different view of “artistic institutional critique”, and saw it in terms of projects intended to improve, rather than de-stabilise museums and art centres. For them the institution was porous and heterogenic in the sense that there were always spaces for alternative viewpoints, agonistic interchanges and critical thinking. They understood the institution as a locus in which divergent interests were in a constant state of negotiation with one another.

However, the critical strategies employed by these director-curators, in providing alternatives to, and implicitly challenging, neo-liberal institutions of art were beset with methodological problems and internal contradictions. Although they provided a stimulating environment in which to engage with art, and they avoided the “Disneyfication” to which other art centres and museums were prone, they were neither able to meet all of the expectations laid out in their concepts of “democratic deviance”, “constructive institutional critique” and “radical museology”, nor did they fulfil all the requirements laid down in Fraser’s concept of “an institution of critique”. Esche particularly lost touch with “the local” in his pursuit of building a specialised network of like-minded practitioners and his view of the Rooseum as a laboratory for experimentation abstracted from its local context.

Nevertheless, the role of these experimental institutions as institutions of critique was significant in producing alternative programmes to mainstream museums

and art centres. The institutionally critical practices of Esche, Lind and Borja-Villel, contributed to an understanding of art institutions as being more than spaces to view art. In all cases there was a consciousness about the institution's role in society as a locus for the articulation of shared concerns. Particularly these director-curators were against the unequivocal participation of museums and art centres in the capitalist art system, either as tourist venues, catalysts for stimulating the local economy, or as validating instruments for the art market. They confirmed these positions in subsequent discussions. In a dialogue entitled "Destroy the Museum" held in 2011, Esche and Lind re-affirmed their concern about the way in which culture was being privatised, and public funding for museums was shrinking. They saw commodified mainstream art as "superseding art that was meaningful, political, self-reflexive and critical" (ibid n.p.). In "Talk between Charles Esche & Manuel Borja-Villel", a conversation they held at the Van Abbemuseum in 2012, Esche and Borja-Villel discussed the way in which museum directors needed to address the challenges of the market economy, not least as the work they carried out in organising exhibitions and authoring catalogues created a process of cultural legitimisation, which reinforced the art market, echoing points already raised by Krauss (1990).

The articulation of these positions indicated that institutionally critical practice was useful and ongoing, but the challenges remained, and efforts needed to continue until the "utopian art institution" had been attained. The evidence suggested that art centres and museums had the potential to be spaces of experimentation and critique, where new ideas were tested that had nothing to do with spectacular architecture, celebrity artists and blockbuster exhibitions. Esche, Lind and Borja-Villel provided three different approaches to re-functioning the institutions that they directed, and although they did not entirely fulfil their personal missions, nor all the requirements that Fraser indicated were necessary to achieve the status of "an institution of critique", they made progress towards that end.

## Conclusion

The authorities have presented a complex picture of I(i)nstitutional C(c)ritique in which on the one hand, it was canonised as an art historical genre, and on the other hand, viewed in terms of its possibility for critical practice. This thesis has shown the way in which institutional critique has continued as a practice in a curatorial mode, evidenced in a wide range of case studies, which demonstrated an expanding field where different types of agents have engaged in institutional investigations. As circumstances changed, the strategies employed and the focus of criticism shifted to examine the new priorities that arose. Whereas many artists had initially been concerned with specific projects that examined particular physical and architectural aspects of the framing of art, from the 1980s onwards, artists acquired a repertoire of curatorial skills as they investigated how modes of display influenced the reception and interpretation of art. During this period the boundaries between art practice and curatorial practice became harder to distinguish, and the notion of the “artist as genius” ceded to the concept of the “art-worker”. Collectives and independent curators entered the field and, together with a rapid expansion in the globalisation of art and “biennialisation”, the institutional and geographical scope of critical practice expanded beyond its original focus on Western mainstream museums. In this non-linear trajectory, the practice of critique became increasingly embedded in the institution, with both artists and curators initiating projects and researching and working in or with institutions for long periods of time.

The migration of formerly independent curators into institutions as director-curators, brought about a paradigm shift with important implications for critical practice. As critique became allied to the director’s role, it was complicated by the nature of responsibility. Farquharson argued that the institution acted as a straightjacket restricting the director’s engagement in critical practice (2014). Some director-curators focused on the internal operations of the art centres they were leading and engaged in self-reflexive practices and involved artists in decisions about the production, exhibition and reception of their work. Others looked outside and focused their energies on adopting issues from the life-world into the exhibition space. This interest in matters beyond the museum led in some instances to the development of networks with other institutions and co-operation with activist groups. Not all these directors were self-reflexively critical and some focused their criticism, both direct and implied, either on their institutional predecessors or on

mainstream museums and art centres, which they considered had “sold out” to neo-liberalism and the occidental canon.

### 1. Critical or “post-critical”?

Over a period of fifty years many different agents have been critical of art institutions, but their aim was neither to destroy nor abolish the institution of art (as had been the case with Dada and the Situationists). As Bürger noted, neo-avant-garde practices were concerned with improving the institution of art, not with destroying it. In other words, institutionally critical practice was about positive criticism, or “constructive” critique, as Lind characterised it. This raises the question of what the tipping point might be between criticising an institution and re-functioning an institution. The adoption of responsibility for critique by director-curators was potentially the seminal moment. This phenomenon has been labelled, “an institution of critique” by Fraser and “New-Institutionalism” by other authors, who have argued that such institutions were “experimental”, “radical” and “progressive”. These concepts became intermingled with the notion of criticality, and the terms were sometimes used interchangeably (Kolb and Flückiger 2014). The question was whether criticality had changed into something else, namely experimental, radical or progressive practice, or whether it had simply, in the words of Latour, “run out of steam” (2004).

Julian Stallabrass had argued that if “some sliver of the utopian, some element of resistance” is sought in art, “then criticism will have an essential part to play in reflecting on the present and looking to the possibilities of the future” (1998: 10). Some authors, however, questioned whether the term “critique” was an appropriate one when applied to art institutions. Dewdney et al (2013), suggested that the term “post-critical” was better adapted to institutional investigations, particularly as they associated “critique” with an overly theoretical approach to assessing museums. Poteat (1985) and Polanyi, whom he discussed, also preferred the expression “post-critical”, holding that the term “critique” was closely linked to discussions about Modernism.

Other authors commented on critique’s perceived demise: points that were summarised in an essay by Foster, entitled “Post-Critical” (2012). Foster explained that “most curators, dependent on corporate sponsors, no longer promote the critical debate once deemed essential to the public reception of advanced art” (2012: 1). He traced the perceived decline in critique’s importance through a series of charges: the “rejection of *judgement*”, the “refusal of *authority*” and the “scepticism about

*distance*” (his italics) (ibid). Although Foster did not specifically say so, the issue of critical judgement and critical authority might refer to his concern about the way in which “most academics no longer stress the importance of critical thinking for an engaged citizenry” (ibid). The issue of critical distance was concerned with the way in which critique had become progressively embedded as curators involved themselves in institutional investigations. Foster mentioned further objections to critique: that it was “driven by a will to power”, was unreflexive “about its own claims to truth” (ibid: 4), and was “compromised by its dependence on demysification” (ibid: 5).

Having briefly outlined the perceived problems of critique, Foster set out to rescue critique from its detractors. First he qualified the issue of critical distance, arguing that, “not all critique depends on correct distancing”. Second he pointed out the existence of “interventionist models”, in which “critique is produced immanently through techniques of mimetic exacerbation and symbolic *détournement*” (ibid: 2). The idea that criticism was intrinsic to the subject was similar to positions adopted by Foucault on the heteronomy of critique, and to Rogoff’s notions of embeddedness. Foster’s articulations resembled some of the expressions that had been used by other writers on critical strategies. “Mimetic exacerbation” involved the use of mimesis, which could be in the form of direct mimicry or ironic parody. “Symbolic *détournement*” appeared to collapse into one, the symbolic and the subversive critical strategies that have been described in this thesis.

The purpose of Foster’s essay was to dismiss the criticism of critique and to seek out its allies. He cited Latour, who contended that “[t]he critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles”, he/she “offers the participants arenas in which to gather”, and “if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution” (ibid: 6). Although Latour’s position can sometimes be read as post-critical, in this instance he would appear to support the notion of the critical agent as a re-functioner of institutions. Foster then called critique into action, characterising the present times “economically as an age of boom and bust”, and “politically as a period in which a state of emergency becomes more normal than exceptional” (ibid: 8). Artists responded to this, according to Foster, either by enacting chaos, fleeing from it, or building something from its ruins. Thus he concluded: “If there is anything to this echo, then surely it is a bad time to go post-critical” (ibid).

I argue that the term “critique” is useful for my purposes of institutional enquiry, and that there are differences in my understanding of the term, compared

with other writers, who prefer the term post-critical. I contend that critique is specific to its purpose and context and, just because it has been used in connection with Modernism, does not mean it cannot be used for non-canonical subjects. Similarly, the fact that the term has often been used in connection with theoretical writing, including commentary on institutional critique, such as by Raunig and Ray (2009), does not mean that its usage should be limited to these spheres.

This thesis began with an analysis of Ramsden's argument that critique was futile because in his view, the capitalist art system was unbreachable. Stallabrass made similar points about criticism's "apparent powerlessness" given that the art world was "thoroughly entangled with the society, its economy and politics (1998: 10). Buchloh observed that practices associated with institutional critique were marginalised as critical artworks were co-opted and canonised as soon as they were produced. According to Fraser, some unspecified persons had declared institutional critique to be obsolete, while she attested that independent critique by individuals was impossible, as the institution was everywhere, even inside people.

The argument about the supposed obsolescence of institutional critique was connected to the notion of the lack of critical distance between the agent of critique and the institution. However, as soon as Rogoff's concept of embedded criticality was adopted, it became evident that having critical distance had become less relevant. According to Fraser, although the individual became more important as the agent of critique, the institution also started to take up this role. There is no denying that a more or less instant co-option and canonisation of critical practices was taking place. However, co-option, as Beech implied, was one of the ways that the interpretative influences of critical art entered the museum. Also just because certain art practices had been canonised, did not mean, as the case studies demonstrate, that all or subsequent institutionally critical practices should be consigned to genre-status. As criticality, according to Foucault, only has an existence when it is applied to particular object, event or concept; as contexts and circumstances changed in and around the viewing spaces for art, criticality remained relevant – its focus simply shifted, and its chosen strategies changed.

## 2. Strategies and notions of critique

Institutional Critique had been genre-ised and declared problematic by its authorities because it was regarded narrowly as an artistic practice, or viewed in overly generalised terms. As soon as critique was understood in terms of its specific

operations, it was possible to regard institutional critique as an ongoing practice that adapted its form to the given situation. The shift in the agent of critique that Buchloh had originally identified was the first in a series of shifts, and the case studies have analysed the different ways in which subsequently artist-curators, collectives/independent curators, and directors of experimental institutions have critiqued the art institutions with which they were involved. The specific mimetic, subversive and symbolic strategies of critique that Buchloh and other authorities identified, were adopted, elaborated and extended by the different agents of critique. Later, activist strategies were pinpointed by other writers, including Sholette (2004), and activism wove its way in and out of narratives of institutional critique, but this has not been the main focus of my analysis.

An assessment of the critical strategies across the case studies showed that the majority of artists and curators favoured mimetic strategies and that these strategies took on different forms, such as direct mimicry, subversive mimicry, ironic parody and subversive affirmation. Buchloh observed that in adopting a mimetic approach to the ideological apparatus of the museum, artists could subvert institutional processes by appropriating the same tools and procedures that were used by the institutions. A direct form of mimicry was used by Hirschhorn, who replicated traditional museum processes, copying formal procedures and reproducing them in a temporary structure. Criticising the permanence of museum edifices that were manifested in architecturally impressive buildings, he questioned whether these were the most appropriate spaces for viewing art. For Hirschhorn it was the careful way in which the art was handled, rather than the institutional framing conditions that gave art its validation. In contrast, strategies of subversive mimicry were used by Wilson to challenge existing modes of display and contest the mainstream ideologies that were being generated by the museum. Wilson mimicked, but at the same time manipulated, the methods of situating objects typical of institutional curators, thereby disturbing the museum's usual narrative. He created ambivalent installations that emulated conventional museological practices while equally problematising them.

Mimesis was also used by Chto Delat? in the form of ironic parody to convey messages about the failure of the museum to fulfil the expectations of its utopian mission as a democratic all-embracing institution. The layering of the presentation of the mimetic critique permitted several possible interpretations of the critical messages, based on changed contexts and different subject positions. The

collective's critical strategies went beyond ironic parody and they used the approach of subversive affirmation by employing fictional elements in their work to deliberately exaggerate the narrative. The theatricalisation of the notions of inclusivity, the agency of art, the relationship between art and life, and the role of public funding and cultural policy in shaping the museum's programming activities, intensified the critique and demanded a stronger reaction from viewers of the film than would be possible with ironic mimicry.

Subversive elements appeared in strategies of mimesis, but also existed as critical strategies in their own right. As the subversion of existing structures of hegemony required an acute study of the dominating power structures, it was evident that there were also elements of mimicry, copying and replication in most forms of subversion. In addition, subversion drew on historical associations with activism and there were elements of art activist practice present in some subversive critical strategies. Jacoby's familiarity with subversive critical strategies was informed by his former practice as an art activist, where under the "old" definition of institutional boundaries, he was working outside the formal institutions of art. He used subversive critical strategies to detour the stated curatorial objectives of an art biennial, demonstrating the porosity of the institution of art and the erosion of the boundaries between the inside and the outside. Different subversive strategies to those used by Jacoby were employed by What How and for Whom (WHW) in order to undermine the biennial form, and the collective's understanding of internally generated subversive criticism also varied from Fraser's view that subversive critique was a form of criticism generated outside the institution of art. Her definition was arguably too limited, and in its most developed form, subversive criticality required a combination of effective dialectical positioning and interventionist practice, operating on the nexus of knowledge and power within the institution. The evolution in the critical strategies evidenced the on-going nature of institutional critique as practice, belying its consignment to history.

### 3. Politicisation of content

During the period discussed in this thesis a progressive politicisation of content was in evidence compared to earlier institutionally critical practice that, with the exception of Haacke's work, focused on the physical and discursive parameters of the viewing experience. By the expression "the politicisation of content", I refer to the importation of issues from the life-world into museums and art centres. This reflected the

concerns of the agents about the “de-politicisation of politics” – the claim that it was no longer possible to have a democratic discussion about politics within the political sphere (Meyer 1993) – and meant that alternative platforms, such as museums and art centres were sought for the elucidation and discussion of politics. Thus the museum was no longer only a place for the display of aesthetic objects in a timeless frame, but became a space intimately interconnected with the life-world, where politics, economics, social and cultural matters came together in reflection on issues in the contemporary transcultural, transnational and trans-visual world.

During the 1990s, interest in the politics of representation and display declined in favour of projects that directly engaged with contemporary socio-political and economic issues, and Haacke’s earlier approach of bringing life-world concerns into the gallery was continued in the work of Jacoby, Chto Delat?, WHW, Hourani and others. This externally focused politicisation of content reflected both the interests of the agents of critique, and changing institutional circumstances and global thematics. This is not to argue that the political in art was a new phenomenon, nor was it within the preserve of artists and curators associated with institutional critique. On the contrary, over the last two hundred years art has been used as a vehicle to articulate political opinions, often in a forceful and emphatic fashion, as is evidenced in the works of Goya, Hogarth, Millet, Courbet, Daumier, Kollwitz and Groz among others. Institutional critique, however, posited a different approach. Whereas these earlier artists represented political subjects in their work, artists associated with institutional critique brought political subjects directly into the gallery, thus expanding the purview of institutional critique beyond the institutional frame.

Many of the artists and curators were concerned with using the institution as a platform to investigate issues from the life-world. They were primarily interested in criticising the abuse of power in the democratic system, and in the capitalist model of economic relations. Chto Delat?’s critique of democracy in the Netherlands and its growing xenophobic tendencies was achieved by exaggerating the extent of the Dutch government’s undemocratic use of power by transposing elements of Russian Statism on to the narrative set in the Netherlands in some unspecified time in the future. The collective’s project examined the museum under “a state of siege”, investigating the antagonism between the public authorities and the press, versus the museum. WHW’s project critiqued the capitalist model of economic relations and developed a curatorial concept that advocated a system of utopian communism. The collective investigated the political and economic implications of the post-1989

environment at a time when the financial crisis appeared to challenge the legitimacy of the neo-liberal premise. It was argued that communism's values of social equality, solidarity and social justice were the only form of emancipatory politics able to challenge the global hegemony of capitalism. The value of such exhibitions was that they advanced meta-politics, namely a political engagement beyond partisan interests, and importantly provided a discursive platform at a time when arguably there are fewer outlets for effective political mobilisation than previously. This propositional endeavour of politicisation without partisanship is an important role for contemporary art beyond aestheticism. Other projects used museum processes to gain recognition for specific political issues, and in the instance of *Picasso in Palestine*, employed a museum loan process to solicit wider international acknowledgement for the State of Palestine. The ideological implications of the loan, the political references contained in the artwork, the re-contextualisation of the work in its new location, and the constitution of a "new museum", all underlined how far the discourses had evolved away from the notion of the museum as a neutral space, to the concept of the museum as a platform for political positions. It demonstrated that the museum had a role to play in developing narratives closely related to contemporary events, rather than just aestheticising the objects it contained, or using them to create histories of the past.

#### 4. Complexity: collective and collaborative practice

Over the course of this research, an increase in the complexity of the projects being carried out can be observed, which was partly owing to the shift that was taking place in the agents of critique, the move from individual to collective and collaborative practice, and strategic networking and alliance-building by museums and art centres. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the artist-institution relationship was predominately bi-lateral, in the form of an invitation to the commissioned artist from the commissioning museum, as evidenced in the majority of projects carried out by Asher, Buren and Haacke. Later many of the relationships became more complex and multi-lateral, and multiple agents were involved in the conception and execution of institutionally critical projects. This led to the creation of practitioner networks, such as the ten art centres that congregated under the umbrella of "Institution 2" (2003-2004), a discussion and exhibition project, curated by Jens Hoffmann, and organised in collaboration with NIFCA and KIASMA in Helsinki. More recently five European museums have grouped together in the "L'Internationale" to contest established Western canonical readings

of their collections, and re-interpret them according to avant-gardist, trans-local and international perspectives (Höller 2012).

Collaborative practice involved a multiplicity of different working relationships. Sometimes artist-curators worked closely with independent curators, such as Wilson's collaborative project with Corrin. In this instance, Wilson supported by Corrin, was able to direct the curatorial process and could consequently conceive and realise an exhibition that conveyed his ideological messages without interference from the museum. At other times, artist-curators formed partnerships with curators from institutions located in the periphery and together they launched an initiative to undertake a collaborative project with a mainstream institution. Hirschhorn worked with Chappuis from the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, and with Pacquement and Gingeras from the Centre Pompidou. In this instance the artist and the independent curator were less able to exert their authority over the evolution of the project, owing to institutional sensitivities that accompanied the display of iconic artworks outside the museum's walls, and despite some concessions from the museum, the project remained entangled in the lending institution's protocols and procedures.

Whereas most critical projects sought to improve the institutions of art, a small number were focused on undermining it. Jacoby's relationship with the institutional curators of the biennial was one of very few recent instances of confrontational institutional critique. His project was complex in that it partially involved work carried out exterior to the physical site of the institution, but which nevertheless entered the art institution. Jacoby's reading of the political in terms of partisan politics led to complications with the biennial organisers, to the extent that the biennial curators did not regard themselves as being sufficiently qualified to disallow aspects of Jacoby's project, and so called on an institution exterior to the art system, in the form of the Electoral Tribunal, to articulate the terms of censorship.

The participation of collectives in projects associated with institutional critique also added to the complexity of institutionally critical practice compared to the early years of single practitioners. Chto Delat?, who were already familiar with the Van Abbemuseum having shown their work in a previous exhibition, worked together with the museum and the Smart Project Space in the realisation of their film, which required both the logistical and financial support of these two institutions. The complexity in the conception of the film was reflected in the multiple readings of the work: first, as an imaginary event, given that it was situated in an unspecified time in the future, second, mimicking the actual situation and socio-economic and political

context of the Van Abbemuseum, and third as an allegory for museums in general, torn between the conflicting interests of pursuing their curatorial objectives, and managing their relationships with the press and the public funding authorities.

When a curatorial collective took on the critique of the biennial form (as opposed to just its mission statement), the number of collaborators had expanded to several hundred, adding to the multiplicity of inter-subject positions. WHW had to manage both the formal relations with the Istanbul Biennial institution and its corporate sponsors, while simultaneously pursuing their objective of creating a subversive biennial within the existing framework of the biennial qua institution. This required a delicate balancing act between the fulfilment of certain institutional responsibilities, and the construction of a radical programme committed to positing, elucidating and realising their primary curatorial premise, that utopian communism was a conceptual alternative to neo-liberalism. Compromised by their embedded state within the biennial framework and their reliance on financial support from the very neo-liberal entities they purported to critique, WHW's project was bound to fail to fulfil its primary objective of creating a subversive biennial. When embeddedness morphed into entanglement with the hegemonic forces behind the biennial, the counter-critique of Dierenistanbul had arguably more agency than the subversive biennial.

But complexity was not just a product of the intricate inter-subject, inter-institutional and inter-agent positions of institutional critique beyond its established modes of portrayal as artistic practice, some projects were complex owing to the ambitious nature of their objectives. In a series of deft diplomatic manoeuvres, Hourani "cooperated" with the Israeli authorities, a major museum and several international organisations. It would be hard to find a more surprising mix of collaborators, Hourani, a politically well-connected Palestinian, heading up a modest art academy, the Van Abbemuseum, an established museum in Europe, albeit with an experimental director, working together to bring an iconic artwork to Palestine, which involved both collaborating with Israel, and at the same time resisting Israeli hegemony.

The complexity of institutional investigations reached a new level, when curator-directors became responsible for strategies of critique as such approaches had important ramifications for the re-functioning of those institutions that they directed.

## 5. Re-functioning museums and art centres

As the critical agents changed, from academic critics to artists, to artist-curators, to collectives and independent curators, and finally to directors of experimental institutions, the degree of institutional embeddedness increased. As this happened, criticality and institutional affirmation became more difficult to distinguish from one another, which sometimes led to a dilution of the critical effect, or at least a failure to recognise it. The case studies correct these (mis)perceptions by elucidating the positive aspects of co-option and the value of embedded critique in terms of the longevity and sustainability of the projects, and the degree of critical engagement of the various protagonists in several different institutional contexts.

Institutional change is not a new phenomenon, and Raunig described the notion of institutions in a constant state of flux as “instituting”, denoting an ability to redefine and re-invent themselves (2007). During the period under consideration, there were major changes in the nature of art institutions that were the object of critique. In the earlier period, the main focus was on mainstream museums in the USA. The globalisation of art and the proliferation of biennials brought about a substantial increase in the number and types of viewing spaces for art that meant there were a greater number of potential objects available to critique. Museums in the earlier period were considered to be hegemonic, didactic institutions that preserved the canons of art history. Later museums underwent a series of changes, which attracted the epithets of “New Museology” in the 1980s and 1990s (Vergo 1989), and “Radical Museology” in the 2000s and 2010s (Bishop 2013). These changes were mainly concerned with opening up the museum to a wider representation of artists, expanding the possibilities for the interpretations of artworks, engaging participatory audiences, and narrating histories beyond the occidental canon. One of the suggestions made in this research is that art institutions fall into two categories, mainstream and critical. It is not intended to oversimplify the variety and hybridity of the institutions that exist(ed) in practice. This deliberate polarisation was adopted for the sake of clarity, and of course partly reflects the institutional rhetoric, as “radical museums” and “experimental art centres” sought to establish distinct identities conscious of their embeddedness, and complicity, in the capitalist art system. Equally I acknowledge that both conservative and radical elements can be operative within a given institution at the same time.

This thesis has investigated the activities of the agents in the institution, rather than examining the institution as an organisation. The *impact* of the endeavours of the

critical agents on the strategies and structures of institutions is difficult to assess. However, the activities of the agents had a number of *implications* for the institutions with respect to re-functioning them, beyond the cultural policy initiatives and the economic imperatives occurring at the time that were clearly also important. Understandings of the museum during the period under discussion have shifted from the singular bounded institution to the notion of the expanded interconnected museum or art centre, the change being manifested in the establishment of collaborative practices and the construction of networks with individuals, groups and other institutions. Dewdney et al differentiated between “contributive”, bounded institutions and “distributive” interconnected ones, conceptualising the distributed museum as “a series of networks of interest and expertise going beyond any singular institutional setting” (2013: 156).

The director-curators discussed in this thesis shared similar visions in going beyond the boundaries of the institutions they were in charge of, to develop networks with individuals, groups and other institutions. Esche collaborated with international art and curatorial networks in creating “a political imagination space” in the Rooseum, though at times a gap between rhetoric and practice was to be observed. Lind created networks with artists, critics and curators, and instigated the “sputniks”, leading institutional thinking on “constructive” institutional critique. Borja-Villel cooperated with other art institutions, universities and activist groups, in order to enhance the museum’s legitimacy. He perceived a role for the museum outside its walls, responding particularly to the anti-globalisation movement, which was active during his tenure. He constructed alliances with like-minded or complementary entities, conscious of a need to re-assert the relevance of critical practices in an era of encroaching neo-liberalism.

Institutionally critical practice thus worked to refute the hegemonic powers of the capitalist art system. While recognising that this system existed and that museums and art centres were an integral part of it, nevertheless institutionally critical practitioners variously questioned, challenged, and undermined this status quo. Some commentators have argued that this was a futile exercise, given the way in which art and its institutions were entangled with capitalism. Others maintained that to critique the system was detrimental to the individual’s self-interests and could affect both career opportunities and funding provisions. This suggested that protagonists should accept the co-option of their projects into the capitalist art system, and consign any utopian aspirations to a radical imaginary. It has also been

argued that it was no longer possible to be critical, because the institution had been absorbed within people, and it was impossible for individuals to resist the art system's bureaucratic machine.

If the validity of adopting critical positions were denied however, there would be a lack of debate about what kind of art institutions are desirable. Whereas market-related and consumer-oriented museums proliferate, other types of institutions require a spirited defence. The value in having critical institutions is that they provide an alternative to the capitalist museum, and they serve as reminders that art goes beyond being a commodity and also embodies symbolic value. It is art's ability to mean, signify, or represent something beyond its constitutive material and its exchange value that enables it to ignite a potentially transformative debate.

It is evident from the case studies and my analysis that institutionally critical practice provides some of the essential elements in a constitutive process that, if well managed, can re-function art institutions so that they are better able to resist the tendencies towards neo-liberal homogenisation that are observed to be taking place. If critical strategies are not simply co-opted by art institutions, but are accessed as constituting powers, it may be possible to institute an ongoing cycle of practices that have as their objective the improvement of art institutions, helping museums and art centres to evolve, not only as part of the art market system, but also in terms of institutional utopias.

## List of illustrations

1. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, empty pedestals, labeled Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Benjamin Banneker; *Globe* c.1913, silver-plated copper designed by Mr. Thoman, manufactured by Stieff Company, surrounded by acrylic mounts, c.1960, maker unknown; Sobal Vail Clevenger, *Henry Clay*, c.1870; artist unknown, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, c.1850; C. Hennecke & Co, *Andrew Jackson* c.1870.  
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2. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, Justus Engelhardt Kuhn, *Henry Darnall III*, c.1710, oil on canvas.  
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11. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, children's workshop, Piet Mondrian Week, 5 May 2004.

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