

# Giant Step

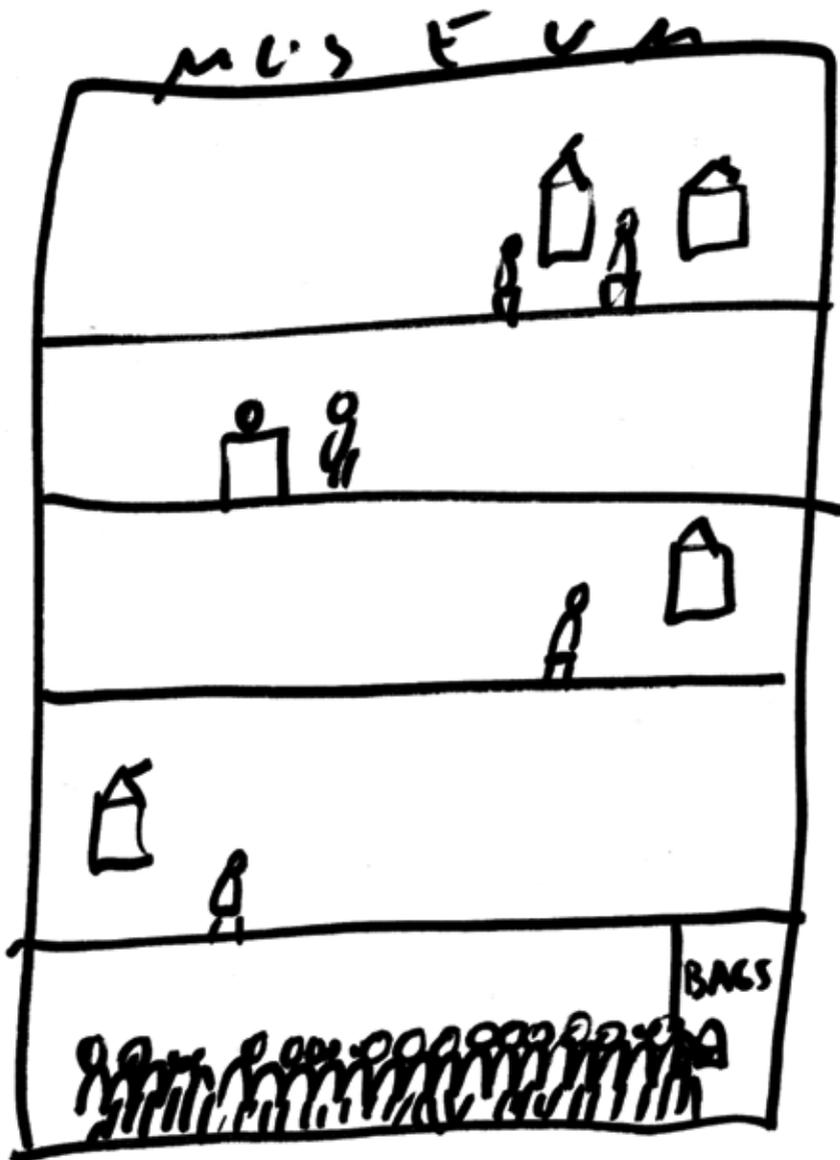
reflections &  
essays

on institutional  
critique

# Giant Step

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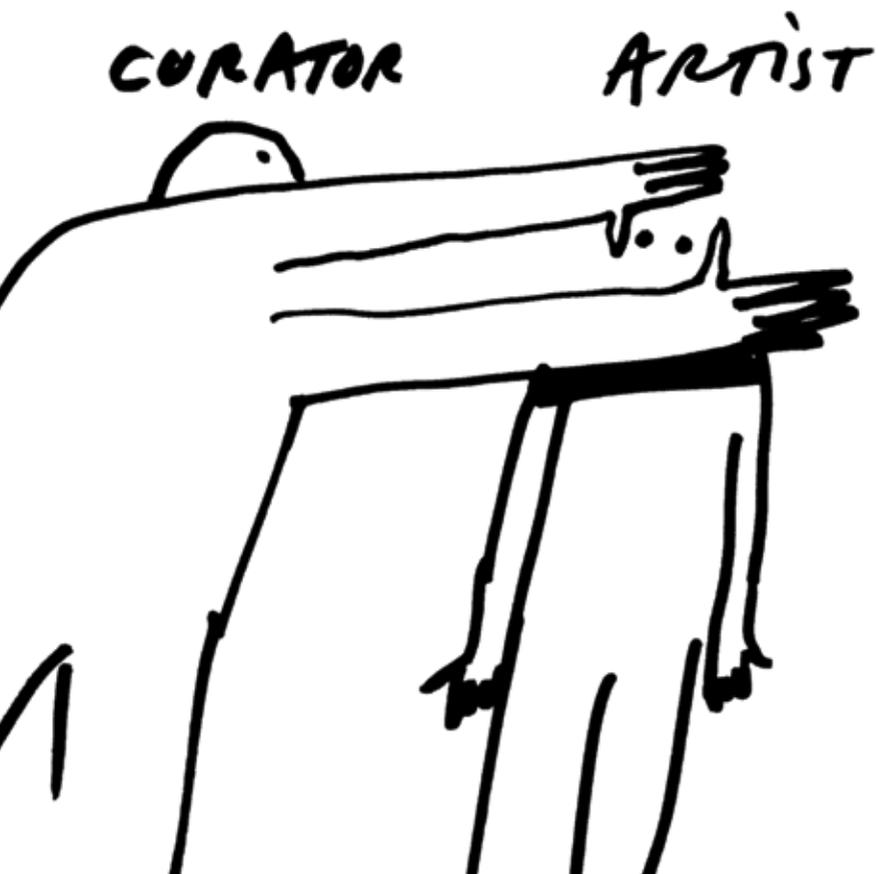
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**2003-2013**

# What is considered a *Giant Step*?

Rachel Pafe

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GIANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

Globalization has resulted in the spread of art, but also the spread of commercial art production. With the current fiscal crisis and government spending cuts, cultural projects represent a means for urban regeneration, and international biennales have thus proliferated. Yet, who is helped by this spread of *art* and *culture*? The new globalized art either remains in dominant centers heavily reliant on private spending or quickly sweeps in and out of the areas in which it is presented, leaving behind an abundance of texts, but little effect on the local population. The Giant Step project was born out of the desire to find alternatives to this dominant practice; to explore the 'ideal institution' and create a discussion on how the institution can function as a critical, public, participatory space that puts international art in dialogue with local and marginal area needs. It is rooted in the recognition that there is no one-size-fits-all resolution, but rather a multiplicity of solutions that international institutional collaboration and discussion can help encourage. I will examine the motivations behind Giant Step and analyze implications of local versus global, practicalities of format, and theoretical concerns of ethics and idealism. I will provide insight into what actions will result in more giant steps.

## **Inception of the Project**

Giant Step has its theoretical roots in the historical legacy of institutional critique. While it is helpful to look at these artistic actions that began in the early 1960s, several distinguishing factors are important to note. The 1990s experienced the emergence of relational and socially

engaged practices, which made their way into mainstream theoretical and social networks within contemporary art. At the same time, urban regeneration efforts often relied on cultural components, which created a large question mark about the relationship of these practices and commercial production. Lastly, the 1990s saw the start of the now omnipresent biennale, which has resulted in a generation of itinerant art practitioners.<sup>1</sup> These factors necessitate a different approach from early institutional reform efforts; they point away from early artists criticizing the institution and its structures, and towards institutional participation in self-reflexivity and reform. The resulting globalized culture formed institutional networks that allow marginal spaces to work together to realize improved methods of connecting, collaborating and programming.

The creation of the Giant Step network began with two established institutions, **Van Abbemuseum** (Eindhoven, Netherlands) and **MOSTYN | Wales** (Llandudno, North Wales), and two fledgling institutions, **vessel** (Bari, Italy) and **Galeria Labirynt** (Lublin, Poland). To correspond to this unique structure, the format of the *nomadic symposium* was chosen. Giant Step began on January 9th, 2012, when members of local artistic and cultural communities were invited to complete a survey of relevant literature, interviews, workshops and talks and examine them within discussion groups. The focus of this information centered on institutionally critical theory applied to the needs of the local area. The groups were a gauge for resident interest, provided grounding for the discussion on the local cultural climate, and contributed ideas to the varying dimensions of

what would constitute an *ideal institution* for each specific audience. Participants shared results and debate across an international network, which allowed for further discussion on the needs of marginal area institutions.

The second part of the project included a series of symposia held near each corresponding institution. Each symposium varied from the others; each was customized to respond to specific institutional needs and issues especially relevant to the geographic area. The symposia additionally differed in format and engagement: some were more traditional and held academic presentations, others allowed for more creativity through workshops or included local practitioners in their programming.

## Summaries of the Four Symposia

The first symposium, **Giant Step 1: Enter the Artworld? Marginal Establishments, Cooptation and Resistance**, was hosted by vessel in Bari, Italy (June 12-14). The main focus was confrontation and resistance within marginal spaces. How can small institutions in marginal geopolitical contexts, such as vessel, function as emancipatory institutions? This small size can work as an advantage in the struggle to resist cooptation by the institutional mainstream as well as offer the ability to formulate new modes practice. If an alternative practice were created, what series of rules would govern it? Participants were divided on the role that ethics should play (if any) in these rules for institutional operation.

**Giant Step 2: The Centre of the Periphery and The Periphery of the Centre** by MOSTYN (Wales), 21st – 23rd of September, further explored which methods would lead to a greater level of local engagement within marginal communities. What types of platforms/methods could be successful in engaging people outside of the art world? Participants related the need to build a local art audience through social opportunities such as discussions and dinners. The main issue that arose was the overall clash between the local and global: local problems were at risk of being overlooked in light of global conflict, while international dialogue could become irrelevant if the focus remained local to the point of provinciality.

**The Giant Step 3: And What If.... Institution: Alternate Senarios**, October 5th– 7th, 2012 at Galeria Labirynt (Lublin, Poland) looked at the issue of institutional relevance from a different angle. It posed participants the question: What is your ideal institution? This creative, art-lab approach shifted the discussion to more concrete aspects of how the institution can be publically accessible, such as the use of psychological and architectural methods. To put these exercises within the context of Lublin, Galeria Labirynt employees gave participants a historical overview of the gallery's evolution and how it is rearranging involved protagonists. Participants also toured the local area art scenes and historical sites to further understand the situation in which the gallery operates.

From 1 until 3 November 2012 the Van Abbemuseum hosted the international symposium **Giant Step: Critical Regionalism – Eindhoven as a Common Ground**. This symposium

focused on the Van Abbemuseum's function, values and programs, but also addressed issues inherent in the museum's relationship with the local community (Eindhoven in the North Brabant region of The Netherlands). The event allowed the museum to invite criticism of its current and ongoing practices, creating a self-reflexive space. Lectures, papers and workshops explored projects such as the Transparent Museum (a display which positions world history against art and institutional history) and Useful Art (how to create a definition for socially engaged, useful art).

## **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

### **Format Structures**

To examine recurring problems for Giant Step's protagonists, it is helpful to look at the format of each symposium. Each respective format was chosen by the participating institution, but also took into consideration the other events that had preceded it. Some symposia, such as GS1: vessel and GS3: Galeria Labirynt, suffered from formats that closed them off to the public, while GS2: MOSTYN and GS4: Van Abbemuseum were more successful at eliciting participation.

For vessel, the lack of local contributors at the public event was due to several factors, such as the decision to structure the event around academic lectures and presentations that were difficult for Bari residents to translate, let alone comprehend. Participants were given strict time limits for their discussions between presentations, which strained the dialogue within practitioners and left no space for local

interjections. This format resulted in a conference that, although it technically took place in Bari, did not amply engage with the local context. By contrast, Galeria Labirynt's symposium was not open to the public; it invited art practitioners to participate in a series of workshops exploring current conditions and the ideal institution. While they included a history of the gallery as well as much social space for the roughly 20 participants, again the symposium had trouble relating with the local public. In both cases, no attempts were made to engage the community through accessible situations such as shared dinners/tours or public workshops. While both symposia were effective in discussing many of the issues, they were just that: discussion. While articulation is a starting point, staying within strictly academic forms resulted in a self-reflexive experience.

**GS2: MOSTYN and GS4: Van Abbemuseum** experimented with formats that included broader elements of public participation. Both MOSTYN and the Van Abbemuseum combined academic papers with visits to the local area and discussion with resident community. While MOSTYN used presentations to highlight peripheral practices, Van Abbemuseum used the event as an opportunity to critique the problems inherent within its own ongoing programming. Both entities kept the first part of their program for art practitioners, which was successful in a way Galeria Labirynt and vessel were not. By strategically choosing to only open more accessible formats (shared dinners and tours) to the local community, Van Abbemuseum and MOSTYN avoided furthering public resentment of programs that necessitated specific art practitioner knowledge. While both institutions

engendered more public participation, difficulties arose in the divide between opinions on local versus global interests. In rethinking the notion of structure and format for future events, we need to consider the roles played by the public and by the organizers/practitioners. Although some events were more successful, clear divides (evident in interaction and programming) create the risk of engraining prescribed roles of participation.<sup>2</sup> Future events need to consider a wider variety of interactive events and platforms that can create the mutual trust that is vital for productive discussion.

### Local Versus Global

The divide between local and global interests was apparent at every symposium event, but particularly exemplified by MOSTYN and Van Abbemuseum where discussions with the public provided insight into the problematic nature of this delicate relationship.

MOSTYN looked at the museum not as a point between local and global, but rather as a space in which to reverse the notions of periphery and give it the potential to become the center. Discussion juxtaposed the risk of not engaging with the local context versus operating embedded in the local context and isolated from international affairs. The local can become irrelevant in the face of globalization, but it still must understand the worldview in order to operate better. Organizers felt that the local contained the potential to open previously neutralized issues to the global art discourse, but how can the institution build up and engage a mostly non-art practitioner audience?

By contrast, the Van Abbemuseum envisions itself as a potential meeting space between the local and the global, but local artists do not agree. The museum is internationally well respected because of its intellectual and political positions, but within Eindhoven's community it is considered a monolithic art entity solely reserved for connoisseurs. The artistic community outside of the museum is mostly composed of designers and artists who do not work with socially engaged or political practices. The museum remains a contentious issue: the public wants Van Abbemuseum to feature local artists, but conversation over shared dinners revealed many challenges to collaboration. While the museum emphasized the effects of global crises such as international economic stagnation and turmoil in the Middle East, the public emphasized the immediate problems facing them in the local context, such as finding project funding.

Both institutions struggled with the idea of public consensus. This issue was faced by every participating entity: vessel's location within marginal Bari also faced the issue of majority non-socially engaged artists who don't see value in their projects, while Galeria Labyrinth faced the threat of public protest and governmental censorship of art deemed inappropriate.<sup>3</sup> What role can the institution play amidst such conflicting ideological visions? While this can be achieved through institutional sacrifice of parts of its stated concepts, I do not believe there will ever be enough concessions on both side to reach a full agreement. In this context, Simon Sheikh's writings on the public sphere are particularly relevant. We need to think of the public arena as fragmented; it is at time complicit with and often at odds with the institution.<sup>4</sup>

He suggests that instead of focusing on agreement, the institution should strive to be a space for what Chantal Mouffe deems 'agonism', or the opportunity to recognize other beliefs without hostility. It is impossible to consider the local without the global and vice versa; the next step is experimenting with building these agonistic structures into the museum's programming and interactions in order to expand and build within the community.

## Ethics and the Ideal

Much of Giant Step deals with the ideal: the ideal institution, the ideal public, the ideal audience. The notion of the ideal is one of the main strengths of art in dealing with reform: the use of imagination and creativity to discover potential solutions.

This view was exemplified by the workshops in the Galeria Labyrinth symposium in which participants literally created institutions out of drawings, cardboard and discussion. The conversation at the vessel symposium centered on ethics and its place within the ideal institution. Ethics are rooted in morals, which some see as inherently absent in art, while others believe that ethics are of the utmost importance. On one hand, shouldn't we apply personal ethics and morals when dealing with more responsible institutions? Wouldn't this ideally lead to greater transparency on issues such as funding, labor, connections and public money? Furthermore, is the institution ethically responsible to educate its public? At the Van Abbemuseum symposium, a line was drawn between the notion of educating and teaching. While most agree that the institution should be a pedagogical space,

teaching creates a hierarchy between those who know and those who do not. Director Charles Esche felt that there must be more possibilities for learning together as well as opportunities to respond, contribute and test existing structures. He laid out the exhibition as a platform for testing ideas and eliciting criticism and questioning.

Besides education, participants discussed the importance of an autonomous rather than heteronomous institution. This translates to running the institution according to internal drives, values and desires rather than the external forces and obligations of the normative art market. At the vessel symposium, participants discussed marginality as a tool for emancipation from dominant structures of the institutional mainstream. Although all institutions, artists and DIY spaces operate within the capitalist market, public funding does not completely compromise institutions. The ideal institution would be in an 'engaged autonomous'<sup>5</sup> relationship to capitalism, in which art acknowledges the system but uses both its perceived irrelevance and its potential as a tool for change.

### Concluding remarks

Symposia discussions focused on a variety of topics important for change, such as the need to connect with local public, the struggle between local and global and the complex concerns of institutional ethics and education. While these are all valid points, we need to additionally consider means of going beyond the discussion of the problem and actually 'inhabit the problem'.<sup>6</sup> I suggest going beyond talk about flaws

and trying to understand what motivations. In this sense, the ideal institution is a place in which we go beyond the idea of accessibility to information/space as equality and consider the true extent to which the public can interact with and play a role in the institution. Only by further research, further socialization and a continued effort to truly understand local needs (despite their potential contradictions to institutional goals) can we begin to imagine a correlating space.

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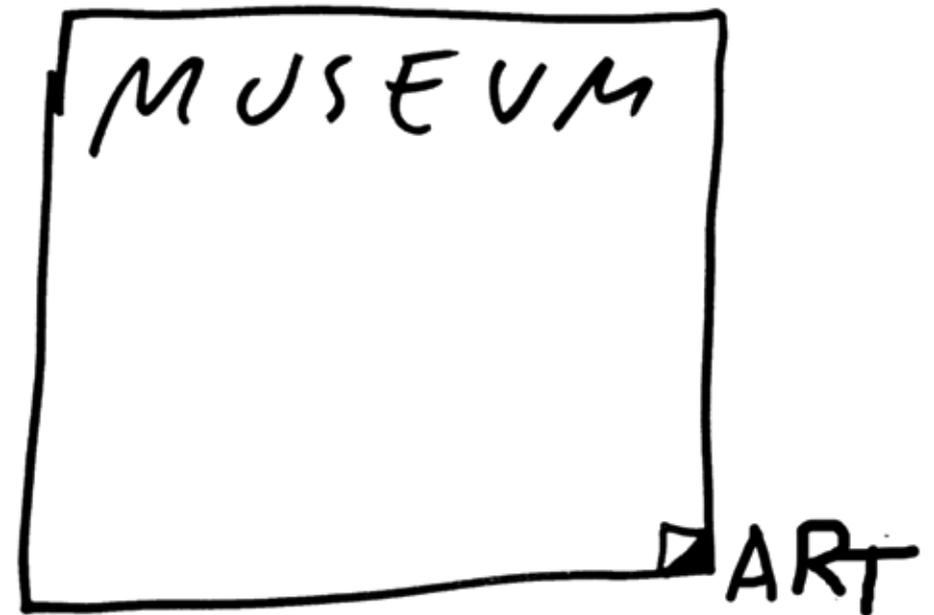
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# Impossible possibilities: art, philosophy, and institutional critique

Vlad Morariu

Thanks to Mihaela Brebenel and Francesco Scasciamacchia for their critical comments and advice.

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GIANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

It seems to me that the virtue of the relatively recent interest in institutional critique – see, for example, the dossiers and publications of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies<sup>1</sup> – is that it advances a radical attempt to re-articulate the philosophical concept of the institution. The merit of thinking about instituent practices, revolutionary machines, extradisciplinary investigations, and truth-telling conditions is that, I believe, it breaks with the oppressive entrapment of thought and imagination that the current *industrialization*<sup>2</sup> of culture enacts. I refer here to maybe the most significant process that we have experienced in the last two decades in the field of culture – which amounts to the rewriting of institutional matrices as part of the so-called *creative economy* and *cultural industries*. These have recomposed the field of culture following the lines of measurements of utility, of economic reasoning, of managerial and logistical thinking, and of a type of conceptualization of the institution in terms of profit, self-subsistence, and resilience which doesn't leave space for much more. Integrated into governmental policies, political branding, and corporate strategies, this ideology passes nowadays as the new undisputed norm and as the natural-factual outcome of the forces shaping our global economic, social and political context. As George Yúdice commented in 2002:

*...the 'bottom line' is that cultural institutions and funders are increasingly turning to the measurement of utility because there is no other accepted legitimation for social investment. In this context, the idea that the experience of jouissance<sup>2</sup>, the unconcealment of truth, or deconstructive critique might be admissible criteria for investment in culture*

– comes off as a conceit perhaps worthy of a Kafkaesque performance skit.<sup>3</sup>

To argue, therefore, about an institutional-critique-to-come precisely when, as Gerald Raunig explains, there is less empirical evidence to build on, and more something akin to the grasping of a theoretical and political necessity internal to the logic of institutional critique<sup>4</sup>, amounts, I believe, to an effort of re-legitimizing the social and political meaning of such concepts as truth, critique and deconstruction.

It also appears that a certain understanding of institutional critique facilitated, at least partly, by its canonization, has been successfully distilled by art institutions, which nowadays invite artists to respond critically to the conditions of their existence. On the other hand, however, it is also quite true that this remains a phenomenon which, to put it in Hito Steyerl's terms<sup>5</sup>, takes place at the most visible surface of the institution, whereas the deeper sedimented relations between the artworld elite, politics and business have hardly been disrupted. Critique has done little more than unmasking these connections; it has found itself unwillingly playing a game whose rules it does not control. Its strategy was to lower its expectations to losing as little as possible, as its nostalgic, at times conservative stance attempted to defend a crumbling status quo, struggling to assure itself that whatever is left out of the commons will not be further dismantled by neoliberal policies. But I am wondering if it is at all possible to do something which brings back a sense of self-empowerment, something which will allow us to co-participate in the shaping of the rules of the game. That is, something which essentially

postpones this logic and allows us to experience that repressed supplement of the capitalist logic of utility and calculation, an experience of *jouissance* which refers to a certain practice of art and philosophy. Or, to put it in different words, I am wondering if what we need right now is rather some time off and a return to the philosophical exercise of re-articulating from scratch the roles and mission of the art institution.

Looking, for quite a while now, at the contested field of the art institution, I have always been fascinated by the complicity between the practices of art and philosophy. I have tried to argue elsewhere<sup>6</sup> that if there is a concept which describes the practices of institutional critique – beyond their succeeding 'waves' or stylistic commonalities – the concept of deconstruction serves us best. But here, I suggest, we should not understand deconstruction as a mere literary technique applied to the critical interpretation of texts or works of art, denouncing and reversing metaphysical hierarchies. I am rather interested in advancing a philosophical-political practice which includes the critique of representations (texts, statements, strategies, positions) but also goes beyond it, in a movement which installs itself materially in textures of the institution. In a fascinating text which tackles the concept of the frame, and whose political consequences have scarcely been discussed, Jacques Derrida wrote that '*because deconstruction interferes with solid structures, 'material' institutions, and not only with discourses or signifying representations, [...] it is always distinct from an analysis or a 'critique'. And in order to be pertinent, deconstruction works as strictly as possible in*

*that place where the supposedly 'internal' order of the philosophical is articulated by (internal and external) necessity with the institutional conditions and forms of teaching. To the point where the concept of institution itself would be subjected to the same deconstructive treatment.*<sup>7</sup>

It seems to me that institutional critique is precisely that: a political-artistic practice which breaks the necessary character of institutional conditioning, interfering with representations that take the shape of norms (from the architectural to the objectual and textual orders, the arrangement of the visible, etc.) but charges them as functions of deeper institutional structures that, consequently, are dismantled and recomposed. In approaching the frames of art, the context of its deployment, its arbitrary manners of deploying structures, and its subjectifying techniques, the work of institutional critique – or better, institutional deconstruction? – can never be finished. I am being careful with this choice of words, because I want to safeguard it from a certain interpretation of deconstruction and more generally, of post-structuralist philosophies, which rejects their political implications or denies their potential for political articulation.

After we have been reading for years, in universities and cultural laboratories alike, the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Tony Bennett and Eilean Hooper Greenhill, it is hardly any secret to anyone that the art institution shares a structural isomorphism with the school, the prison, the psychiatric ward, the university, etc. – all those objects of the science of governmentality. The art institution has always been conceived as a political,

social and ideological entity (thus, the thing proper to philosophical treatment). From this point of view, post-structuralism has been particularly helpful in providing the tools with which one can diagnose the hegemonic display of our contemporary culture; at the same time, however, it has also managed to undermine the vantage points and grounds of criticism itself. The concept of critique, as it was articulated at the dawn of modernity, has always presupposed a radical fictionalization of the position of the critic<sup>8</sup>: almost like in the case of a *déjà vu*, the critic's position was articulated as oppositional, separatist, non-compliant, non-participative in or with the object criticized. The effects of post-structuralism's radical doubt amounted not only to the breaking of the spell that capitalism's fictions enacts upon us, but also to the questioning of the very foundations and the vantage points from which it is at all possible to criticize. This has meant a 'turn to the subject' of institutional critique, which broke the promise of the critic's non-compliant and non-participative position. We find ourselves, as a result, in the post-post-structuralist world, entirely conscious of the double binds and hypocrisies we are enmeshed in. And this is the reason why many experience a feeling of despair, inescapable helplessness and resignation, at best self-irony and cynicism.

I began this essay by suggesting that the virtue of those positions which are trying to conceptualize a new phase of institutional critique lies precisely in the fact that the discussion is brought back in the realm of philosophy. Because, if I am right when I claim that institutional critique articulates a political form of deconstruction, then the answer to the

question about a way out of political helplessness and despair is to re-articulate the complacency between art and philosophy and to put it to work in a project of reshaping institutional configurations. That is, I want to relate back to a basic experience of *jouissance* – the *jouissance* of articulating an art practice of institutional critique as political deconstruction. And if this is a valid chain, then I believe that there is something here which allows us to ask, again, *impossible* questions. One series of questions about which I am particularly fond of is, ‘What is it that we want from art and the art institution?’, ‘How do they concatenate?’ and ‘How do they serve us?’ These are *impossible questions* inasmuch as they have no universal answer and inasmuch as there is no universal consensus or resolution around them. But I want to believe that this type of impossibility does not amount to a logical contradiction, or something which would freeze thought and bring the discussion to a halt. On the contrary, I think that this impossibility is creative in the sense that it represents the condition of possibility in articulating something which has virtue in exceeding any sort of calculation of the type that neoliberal pragmatics compels us to submit to. Note that when I formulated these questions – what do we want from the art institution? – I chose one particular term – *want*. This only suggests that, in fact, I believe that art and the art institution are entities which have no pre-established meaning, that they are something which lack a pre-established essence, or, better said, that their essence is always in the making: that is, they are social, collective, and participative. And so, I talk about desire, because I believe that when making rules for the production, distribution, and consumption of art, there is always

something of a libidinal dynamics which is enacted. Desire is, of course, most of the time, caught in the capitalist commodification of life<sup>9</sup>. But, at times, maybe it is possible to articulate a collective desire for art which is emancipatory and liberatory. Perhaps a social composition whose basis are founded in the collective experience of intellectual and sensual pleasure from what art is, of attraction and repulsion towards what art does or could do, something which would be felt as self-empowering and capable of composing a dynamics that breaks predetermined norms about the place of art in our lives and especially how to see and experience art. And here I think that there is something that art and philosophy share: a certain common pleasure that one takes from doing art and from pursuing philosophy, and which has something to do with the pleasure of autonomous creation and action. There is a deep connection between art and philosophy if philosophy is, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, ‘the autonomous art of fabricating, inventing and conceiving new concepts’<sup>10</sup> and if art itself is, as I take it, the autonomous practice of inscribing the concept in the order of the sensorium. I claimed that the merit of those who think about the future possibilities of institutional critique is that, by reminding us about exodus, institution-constitution-destitution and parrhesia<sup>11</sup>, they graft a certain *jouissance*, the pleasure of free, imaginative and playful thinking onto art’s possibilities of doing and acting.

I want to avoid getting myself trapped in the pleasures of speculation, and to bring something out of my own experience in this discussion. I owe my intellectual development to both realms, philosophy and art, but I am also deeply indebted to

the context in which I got in contact with them. More than ten years ago I was acquainted with the art world coming precisely from philosophy, in a geographical and cultural context which many would call marginal – marginal at least in relation to a center where established institutions would have had already a long history, where the most influencing theories and histories of art would have been written, and where the newest trends of art and culture would have been set. But far from constituting a lack, I believe that this assemblage of circumstances constituted a unique chance, no less contradictory and frustrating, but nevertheless, something which I remember as quite singular: I'd like to think of this meeting as a joyous and productive coincidence. I turned to art because I grew impatient and disillusioned by the institutionalized version of philosophy that I was dealing with in university courses and seminars. In contrast with the bureaucracy of academic philosophizing – an obvious contradiction in which philosophy finds itself enclosed, since it ceases to apply its self-reflective radical doubt upon the conditions of its possible unfolding – the art that I was exposed to was doing precisely that: charging the establishment and questioning its frameworks. Of course, in the post-socialist context where I grew up that was the only thing to do, since the institutional establishment was either still resisting change or had already joined uncritically the anti-communist witch hunt, seasoned, at times, with right-wing attitudes. But somehow artists managed to mobilize themselves faster than philosophers: and I felt that art held the promises of being capable of sublating itself in a kind of practical philosophy that was called to contribute to the creation, invention and deployment of new concepts and structures and, indeed, institutions.

I joined a collective of philosophers, sociologists, social workers and artists which later grew in an art institution. And I experienced a certain *jouissance*, related to exploring collectively uncharted spaces of thought and action. We engaged ourselves in community projects and art interventions, we published books and magazines, and we even developed one of the most interesting contemporary art biennials in Eastern Europe which was, perhaps significantly, called **Periferic**<sup>12</sup>. Some of us traveled to Western Europe and brought back leaflets, books, CDs and DVDs. From many points of view the uncharted territories ahead of us would have rather been filled with whatever we thought inspiring in the *West*. That force of the iterative chain, which meant reproducing already existing models, learning about chains of resources, appropriating the *proper* discourse, was difficult to resist. In fact, we hardly thought about resistance or about self-colonization. But I believe that with every iteration there is a certain disjuncting once the reproducible sequence gets to be merged in an alien context. We wanted to have an institution like in the *West*, but ended up with having to think about an institution which would have to graft itself – with everything we desired from it – upon its actual conditions of possibility. And I believe that this meeting between desire and context, as we soon understood, needed to be worked and reworked from within, but also charged and tackled from without, allowed an ubiquitous movement of thought, both inside and outside, or neither inside, nor outside of the institutional establishment, describing a space in which everything and little, close to nothing would have been possible.

In the context of a former socialist country, which was lost in the violent contradictions of social and political passageways, both art and philosophy can, at times, overplay their dramatic role. We praised critique, but learned, in fact, and by practice, that critique is not separation and isolation, but something closer to what Foucault referred<sup>13</sup> to as 'being partner and adversary, at the same time' with the powers that be. In my passage to the artworld, I was experiencing the remains of that crumbling ideology of biennialization. I have a love-hate relation with biennials, as I recognize their economic dependency their ready instrumentalization into gentrification policies, or because they have simply augmented the exquisiteness of celebrity culture. But I remember that, at the time, developing a biennial 27 km away from the border of the former Soviet Union in a city which would never assume it, was very far from the object of a biennial's critique. It was rather honestly trying to construct something closer to the title of *Periferic 6*, the Walter Benjamin inspired 'Prophetic Corners'. We organized short term residencies and visits for the participating artists and curators, we tried to devote ourselves to a growing local audience, and we would discuss collectively about the construction of the commons, about the public space and about open access, about art's performative character and its possibilities of *doing things*. This is to say that concepts, at times, grow old and are no longer capable of mapping a mutated reference. And *biennial* remained just a buzzword for something which looked more like a laboratory for knowledge production – intellectual and sensorial – which tried to immerse itself in various social, cultural and political tissues. A buzzword whose death we eventually acknowledged. But in any case,

in the larger context, they had been already overtaken by the omnipotent presence of the art fair: and ironically, the shift in paradigm caught many unprepared, as artistic legitimation was sought, more and more, not in the symbolic capital obtained by working in or with a thought-provoking context, at who knows at what geographical, social or cultural marginality, but directly at Basel, where there is no secret and no veil to be unveiled in what is served to us today in terms of what we should desire from art: a measure of utility, commodified ornamental experience.

The art market, of course, has always been there, and it would be plainly naïve to ignore its existence. And it has to exist, since there is hardly another way for artists and cultural practitioners to make a living. But in the current conditions of the market – with its hyper-inflationary bubbles, with its policies of supporting celebrity culture, whose effect is, among others, the bypassing of traditional spaces like the museum or the *kunsthalle* – artists and curators alike walk on a slippery slope. It is obvious that the winds are blowing in another direction: and it is hard to miss this, when you see young graduates of fine art academies working through their expensive education with the aim of making appealing art for a potential gallerist or when, in conjunction to that, you perceive the complex manners in which art fairs have developed, proposing alternative educational programs, talks, and seminars with some of the most renowned critics of the world. So it is not as if the same mantras – critique, audience engagement, democracy, resistance – would not be chanted over and over again: but it is quite clear that the turn to utility and the unbearable commodification of art, against the

lowering of state subsidies for art and culture, means, in fact, an assault against art's autonomous sphere and capacity to address and hold responsible the powers that be. So, then, what comes after analysis, diagnosis, and critique? A suspension of all that seems necessary and conditioning, of all that is inescapable, of all that shows itself with urgency. Include here our own position, our own weakness, and our own idiosyncrasies. A suspension, most of all, of the dialectical necessity of conditioned reaction, since this only compels us to the same logic that we hate. Imagine that ahead of you there is uncharted terrain where everything is possible. For that, one doesn't need to go to Eastern or to Southern Europe. There are uncharted autonomous margins of thought and action everywhere in this world: here in London, there in Puglia, elsewhere in New Delhi. But most importantly, allow yourself a certain *jouissance*: allow yourself the joy of imagining, creating, inventing concepts, structures, ensembles, and make them work, for the desire of art. If there is merit in thinking anew about institutional critique, it lies precisely in the fact that it brings back the joy of asking what we want from art. With this will and desire articulated collectively and unselfishly, things start to move. And this is what, in the end, matters.

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<sup>1</sup> See the dossier 'Do You Remember Institutional Critique?' at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106> (accessed June 2013) and Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The term comes from French and refers to an extreme form of enjoyment or pleasure; in a sexual register, it means orgasm. The concept was developed in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory; it is also present in the writings of, among others, Roland Barthes, Slavoj Žižek, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous.

<sup>3</sup> George Yúdice, 'The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era, Post-contemporary Interventions' (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Raunig, 'Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming', in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Hito Steyerl, 'The Institution of Critique', in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), pp. 16-17

<sup>6</sup> I am referring to my PhD research project which focuses on the conditions and possibilities of institutional critique.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Truth in Painting'. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 19–20.

<sup>8</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, 'Critique and Crisis : Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society'. (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most convincing work, in this sense, is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia' (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What Is Philosophy?' (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> From ancient Greek, the term means to speak freely and boldly, to tell the truth even in situations which involve personal risk. The term has been discussed by Michel Foucault in a series of lectures from 1983 (<http://www.foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/index.html>), and was re-appropriated, especially by Gerald Raunig, in his argument for a new phase of institutional critique.

<sup>12</sup> From the Romanian 'periferie' meaning periphery.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What Is Critique?', in Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth, (eds.), The Politics of Truth, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (New York: Semiotext(e) : Distributed by the MIT Press, 1997), pp. 41–82.



# Eindhoven as a common ground

Robin Wallis Atkinson &  
Alessandra Saviotti

Eindhoven is a complex city and it is a model itself. Here science, technology, design and art are mixed together to create a vibrant energy. Researching the visual art context, it is clear how important collaborative practices are, since the majority of the artists seem to work together in collective spaces such as De Fabriek, La Citta' Mobile, Ateliordorp... just to name a few.

*Collaboration is better than competition* could be the motto for Eindhoven practitioners who are organized in these collaborative spaces. As Claire Bishop analysed in a recent article, although the objectives and output of various artists and groups vary enormously, all are linked by a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas.

A sense of belonging to this community is tangible because here, the city as Miwon Kwon argued, is not a neutral container or a void within which social interactions can take place, but rather an ideological product and an instrument itself<sup>1</sup>. Each organization is composed by members, who share a building where it is possible to work together, in order to create a small community. We agree with Lucy Lippard when she affirms that artists are stronger when they can control their own destinies and respond to what they know best—and this is not necessarily related to a place<sup>2</sup>. They are working together and they are sharing a condition indeed, and this creates a sense of solidarity.

Through **Giant Step –Critical Regionalism: Eindhoven as a Common Ground**, we tried to investigate the relationship between the art practitioners based in Eindhoven and the

Museum, asking ourselves a series of questions:

- What can a museum offer to the local art community?
- What if we try to share our networks in order to build a new local/international art community based in the city?
- How can a local art community use the museum better?
- How can this relationship flourish without overwhelming the participants involved in the process?
- Is it possible to use each other effectively and together, try to formulate an identity, which can be further developed in a dialogue with the city?

As Charles Esche recently affirmed, the Van Abbemuseum has developed new models for how a city art museum can relate to the local and international communities in the 21st century. The museum of the future is a dispersed museum that reaches beyond its walls to meet its audience.

In accordance with this thinking, we believed that it was not enough to simply show to the international art community what was going on in a place, but to also engage others to foster new collaborations and projects in this place.

Quoting Saskia Sassen *'The local now transacts directly with the global: the global installs itself in locals and the global is itself constituted through a multiplicity of locals. The distinction between the global and the locals – notably in the assumption about the necessity of proximity in the constitution of the local – needs to be rethought'*<sup>3</sup>.

## The development of the research

Building from the information in the archives of the museum, along with anecdotal information from conversations between ourselves and the curators in the institution, we tried to construct a project that would embed itself directly within the local community in order to bring a discussion about the apparent gap between the Van Abbemuseum and the cultural producers based in Eindhoven to the fore. In order to conceptualize this process, Atkinson suggested using Kenneth Frampton's propositional method of Critical Regionalism as a guiding method. As Frampton puts forward in **Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance:**

*'The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place. It is clear from the above that Critical Regionalism depends upon maintaining a high level of critical self-consciousness. It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of local light, or in a tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site.'*

Our goal was to find out what these *peculiarities of place* were in Eindhoven and attempt to outline if these would account for a perceived gap between the institution and the local community. It was also very important for us that we did not assume this gap, but that we investigated in each instance if it existed, and if not, to redefine or complicate our approach accordingly. The main goal was to create a platform

that could account for positions across a spectrum of local to international, understanding that no practice could be defined neatly as one or the other. We contacted a broad array of creative projects throughout the city, artists collaboratives, independent spaces, other art centers, design collectives, and individual artists. We met with many people over the course of July through studio visits, directly visiting each of these alternative sites of cultural production, in order to discuss their relationship with the Van Abbemuseum. After an initial group of participants had signed on from the local community, we began to hold informal get-togethers at a local bar every Thursday evening, inviting each group of participants that we had met with since the start of the project. As the summer went on, more and more community members would attend these informal meet-ups, which we also strongly recommended that the curators from the Van Abbemuseum should attend.

## The Symposium

We tried to build the context for the conference participants in Eindhoven considering the city as the main institution. In order to develop a conversation aiming to investigate the relationship between the so-called 'local' and the 'global', participants were encouraged to bike and to go on a studio tour all around the city. We used this strategy as an informal way to shape the first day of conversations, which culminated in a community dinner at **Temporary Art Centre** – one of the biggest art organization located in the city.

The second day was dedicated to the presentation of the academic papers. Every speaker presented a project related to a particular country – Canada, Belgium, Spain, The Netherlands – emphasizing the fact that those projects potentially could be considered as attempts to foster the relationship between institutions, citizens and art communities in a specific location. Two papers in particular took into consideration the actual context of global crisis in which we live. One of the most remarkable points was explained with these words:

*'Maybe artists, curators and institutions from hegemonic countries have to learn from their counterpart in developing countries how to work, to think and to act in an international context of crisis, precariousness and instability, not least financially; a common state of things in many regional contexts, and indeed a familiar situation for some of us here. Adaptability becomes mandatory. And it usually runs from the Regional to the International.'*<sup>4</sup>

Eindhoven was the right city for this kind of reflection. During the studio tour both artists and curators explained the difficulties they were facing due to the budget cuts operated by the Dutch government. We understood their need to re-organize their work in a more flexible and collaborative way, sharing spaces, resources and networks both locally and internationally. At the same time the Van Abbemuseum was trying to develop new strategies of collaboration – and Giant Step could be one example – which culminated into **L'internationale**, a new confederation of European museums, with the aim to rethink the model of the museum from the perspective of public use or relevance.<sup>5</sup>

## The Results

The entire conference attempted to balance very carefully the presence of local and outside knowledge, understanding that these positions sit across a spectrum rather than across a divide. The conversations held during the conference have led to several new programs initiated by the museum and by the other participating organizations, which are seeking to create a more fluid relationship between cultural producers in the city. One example is a new program for art critiques called **The Attic**. The core of the initiative consists in *'a group of Eindhoven (NL) artists and curators who meet every two weeks. They discuss and show each other's work in so called Peer Critique Sessions in order to raise critical awareness and set up a dialogue. The Attic's aim is to establish and confirm a community that connects locally, nationally and internationally. The Attic is a nomadic initiative, meaning that every meeting is at a different location.'*<sup>6</sup>

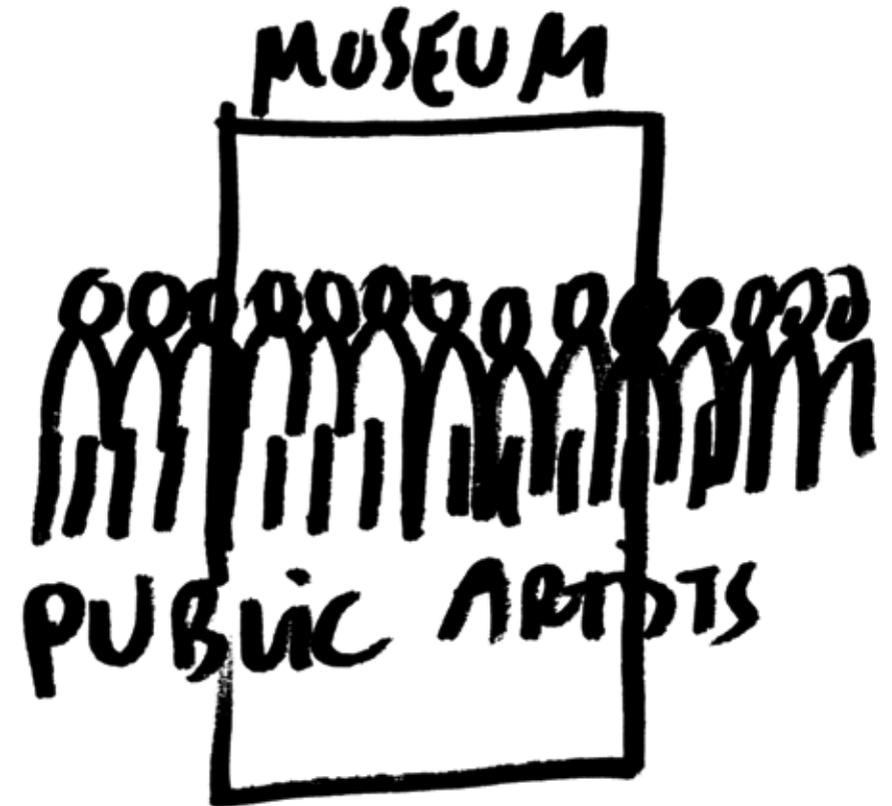
With this kind of approach, speaking with local producers and trying to begin conversations about the perceived gap between the local and global, points of entry into a daily-lived reality were developed. So with exploration into the specifically relevant topics based in a location, we can amass information to attempt to build a frame for our discursive projects, not as established knowledge which is necessary for a local audience, but as accessible information which can complicate, compliment, or cooperate with already occurring relationships and conversations.

If the self/other discursive divide is taken as a given, instead of blissfully ignored – after all, we are not our audience if we are the ones addressing it— then we must make that gap useful. The anthropological process of constructing a 'history of the present' or the sociological project of pragmatic critique embeds cultural producers within the public in order to investigate how to effectively address this public. Between our outside position with its access to a broader discourse, and a more context specific set of local concerns, we can attempt to create a space which connects to both and derives its legitimation from relevance within each.

It is a double mediation that can connect the dots between conversations that the international community deems relevant and those, which someone living in a specific set of circumstances feels accessible, useful, or interesting. And only in this way can the expertise and knowledge created in the international discourse become really useful or viable within a specific location, to ground itself in actual events and realities, rather than to remain dislocated and ethereal.

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# *Public Museum, Public Funding, Public Sphere*

Dave Beech

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## **Introduction: Art and Society**

GIANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

At the heart of the controversies concerning the political economy of art, including the instrumentalization of art in gentrification processes and the question of the state subsidy of the arts, is a struggle over the relationship between the individual and the social body. Concepts like community, society, nationality and humanity are often deployed in conservative and liberal affirmations of art's social function, leaping from the individual to the universal in one giant step. Somewhat smaller steps tend to be taken by critical commentators, linking individuals to class, race, gender and other fragments of the social whole. Art, therefore, either appears as the representative of universal culture, which is ideological, or appears as the specific culture of a class, race, gender and so on, which is contingent. When both arguments are combined, then art appears sociologically as the culture of a dominant minority expressed as the universal culture.

A more nuanced understanding of art's social relations can be developed by examining the apparatuses through which art is circulated. The two apparatuses which dominate discussion of art's social ontology are (1) the market, and (2) the state. Art's institutions, such as galleries, museums, art schools and magazines, are typically divided into those funded and regulated by the market and those funded and regulated by the state. Rather than adopting one of the available positions within the market versus state controversy I want to consider the mode of sociality that each presupposes in order to address the social form of the public art institution. Moreover, following Habermas, I want to distinguish these

two modes of sociality with another form, namely the public sphere.

Despite the evident contrast between the mechanisms of the market (viz. individual choice constrained by supply and demand) from the mechanisms of the state (viz. laws underwritten by the monopoly on violence), they have an aim in common that is revealed by a convergence in their respective official discourses. Neoclassical economics and liberal politics share the goal of converting individual preferences into social aggregates. An aggregate of consumers is a market that is a constitutive part of an economy; an aggregate of voters is an electorate that belongs to a state: the first is called *demand*; the second, *democratic will or mandate*.

One form of aggregation cannot be converted into another without loss, misrepresentation and tension. Hence, economists complain that liberal democracy imposes the decision of the majority onto those who voted for an unsuccessful candidate, while pointing out that every single dollar is spent according to the preferences of the consumer. Political theorists complain that market demand neglects the interests and preferences of those without cash and, effectively, gives multiple dollar-votes to the wealthy in social decisions governed by markets. Moreover, both forms of aggregation cannot take the place of the public without misperceiving what the public is. Neither neoclassical economics nor liberal political theory can conceive the aggregate of individuals as forming a public. Proof: both turn to anonymous mechanisms as replacements for discursive exchange, making discursive exchange redundant.

Neither markets nor states produce a public. A public is a social formation constructed by discursive interaction. Consumers have cash, voters have votes, but members of a public have opinions, make judgements and hold values that they express through discursive interactions – not only through publishing well constructed arguments but also through applause, heckling, chanting and booing. If public art institutions require a public (an entity that they help to produce), then neither the market nor the state can provide it for them. Contemporary debates concerning the relative merits of markets and the state in the provision of art for society, therefore, need to be expanded, especially since both pro-market and pro-state advocates typically pass off their preferred apparatus as the embodiment of the public itself or as delivering the public interest.

### **Apparatuses of the Social: Market, State, Public**

Public art institutions require not only a collection of consumers and voters but also a public. Public galleries and museums, as well as magazines and art schools, have relations with consumers and voters (the first buys tickets, pays fees, purchases books, food, and so on, while the latter ultimately authorise public subsidies and ratify curricula), but art institutions neither operate according to consumer sovereignty (i.e. satisfying demand with artworks and corresponding discussions that match consumer tastes), nor democratic principles (in which the wishes of the majority are granted). Questions of quality in art are not sacrificed for consumers and voters by the procedures embodied in art's public institutions, although it must be admitted that the

market and the state exert considerable pressure on them nonetheless. This means that the art museum, art school and art magazine are not primarily determined by markets or the state, but by art's public. It is only insofar as art's public influences decision-making that art can enjoy any substantial independence from markets and the state.

The difference between art's public and the social aggregates of markets and the state is expressed with some tension in concepts such as elitism and minority culture as well as the idea of art's unpopularity, its alleged illegitimate use of taxpayers' money and similar complaints. This is an uncomfortable starting point. It serves to remind us that any values that derive independently of the market and the state – neither subject to consumer choice nor the votes of the electorate – tend to appear as arbitrary, in the way that feudal power appeared to the Reformist bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century. Questions of quality in art, for instance, are often reckoned to be mere expressions of preference (economics) or interest (politics), rather than as arising out of judgements rooted in and measured against extended collective debates. The reduction of the public sphere into the terms of economic and political aggregations testifies to the fact that not enough has been done to topple discourses of the market and the state from their dominant position within the academic and popular culture.

Insofar as the market and the state dominate social decision making, public institutions face certain practical difficulties that arise from organising themselves around publics instead of market and political constituencies. Insofar as that which

goes by the name of *the artworld* holds sway within art's public institutions, then those institutions will conspicuously fail to organise themselves as the markets and the state would like. The art public, which is not reducible to the aggregates of consumers and voters, finds itself either outside of the processes by which resources are allocated or must address the market and the state in the terms of the incentives and interests of those aggregates. In fact, since many of the resources on which art's official public institutions depends tend to be distributed by the market or the state, the primacy of art's public in decision-making and judgement about art establishes a permanent antagonism between art's public institutions and the institutions with which they must negotiate.

### **Thinking the Public: The Liberal Critique of Markets**

The concept of the public remains seriously disadvantaged in relation to the aggregates of markets and the state in modern societies, but the public has not gone unnoticed or un-theorized. Since Habermas, we can say we have a substantial and serious tradition of thinking about the public in relation to the public sphere. However, this tradition has not successfully dislodged the aggregates of the market and the state in the discussion and assessment of art's relationship to society. One of the reasons for this failure is that the tradition of the political theory of communicative action has been based on distinguishing this style of politics from class-based politics and statist socialism, rather than focusing on the essential distinction between the public sphere on the one hand and the *steering media* of market and

state on the other. I will show this, briefly, by looking at three leading communitarian moral philosophers who provide a rough map of the politics of communicative action in relation to market forces and state power.

Iris Marion Young's case for deliberative democracy is usually contrasted with bureaucratic, technocratic and liberal-individual modes of social organization, decision-making and management, not the market and the state. Young has examined 'ways that individuals can think about their responsibilities in relation to global social structures',<sup>1</sup> including political and economic structures. Young speaks of *political responsibility*, extending Hannah Arendt's use of that term, in relation to the economic phenomenon of *sweatshops*, for instance, especially in cases where third world states are too inept or corrupt to impose the correct regulations on factory owners.<sup>2</sup> This version of political responsibility has been effective, she explains, with examples of organised consumer boycotts, especially through large institutional customers such as universities. Since deliberative processes are systemically eliminated from market mechanisms, it is not much of a stretch to imagine her thinking as a confrontation between market, state and discourse. However, Young fashions a conception of the production of ethical or political value that is in practical harmony with the capitalist system it confronts since it achieves its ends through market mechanisms.

Nancy Fraser responds to what she calls *marketization*,<sup>3</sup> with an egalitarian politics of redistribution and an emancipatory politics of recognition. Emancipatory politics, in

Fraser's account, is not a confrontation with the institutions of capital and state, but a cultural project of recognition independent of money and power. What is hedged, here, is how the independence of the public sphere from money and power can be established and maintained as a real, rather than a formal, condition. If markets and the state actually hold a dominant place within society then the public sphere will have to do more than differentiate itself from a politics of redistribution or else it will find itself crushed by market forces and state priorities. And the dominance of state and economic forces is shored up even further by Fraser's insistence that Habermas' distinction between the *system* and *freeworld* is not a *substantive institutional distinction* (that is, markets and state apparatuses on one side and the institutions of the public sphere on the other), but an *analytical distinction of perspectives*. Separating economic questions of distribution and redistribution from political and ethical questions of recognition and cultural identity is preferable to economic determinism, in which the latter merely reflect the former, but this separation does not tackle the hegemony of economics over the reduced forces of discursively produced values.

Michael Sandel approaches the question of 'commodification, commercialization and privatization'<sup>4</sup> in ethical terms. Is it wrong for students to tip their tutors? Is it wrong to ask someone to sell their kidney, their sperm, their baby, their vote, the window space of their book shop— or, we might add, the exhibition space of their gallery? What is wrong with prostitution, exactly, and why not companies

make a profit from running prisons? Sandel is interested in *the moral limits of markets*, which means his theory, unlike Fraser's, directly confronts economic hegemony and neoliberal doctrine. He has two objections to market forces: coercion and corruption. The first 'points to the injustice that can arise when people buy and sell things under conditions of severe inequality'<sup>5</sup> and relates to the moral idea of consent, while the second 'points to the degrading effect of market valuation and exchange on certain goods and practices' and relates to the moral importance of the good at stake. Sandel argues that 'it is reasonable to question the idea that all goods can be captured in a single measure of value.'<sup>6</sup> He is referring to the prices set by markets. The vital importance of the public sphere will not be vindicated by restricting the tensions between economics, politics and publics to special cases of coercion and corruption — i.e. examples in which free market enterprise and democracy fail their own standards.

By and large, the critique of markets by liberals informed by Habermas' concept of the public sphere rejects the politics of resisting markets and the state along with their philosophical rejection of market relations and power relations as adequate accounts of community. This has resulted in the blunting of the public sphere's antagonism to money and power, especially the difference between social aggregates and publics formed through debate, dissent and discursive exchange. Craig Calhoun, in his introduction to the book, 'Habermas and the Public Sphere', is right to point out that 'money and power are non-discursive modes of coordination',<sup>7</sup> but the issue is not limited to the question of how to think of discursive coordination formally but how

these different modes of coordination intersect in real situations. Rather than object to marketization and commodification from an ethical or political point of view, or speculate about the character of the public of public institutions as a separate entity with its own theoretical framework, we need to examine the confrontation between the public of the museum and both the market and the state.

### Public Subsidy: Economics

The public art institution is one of the key sites that bring together the public with the market and state into a tense confrontation. What makes a public art institution public is not that it receives state funding. On the contrary, when an institution is awarded state subsidy, this is a recognition of its apparent record in providing services to the public. As such, the public sector of the economy (state funded activities) should not be conflated with the public sphere (the production of publics through discourse) but the two become entwined in cases where public subsidy is forthcoming as a result of achievements in the formation of publics.

Politically, the public sector is a portfolio of institutions, services and infrastructure that have been designated as in the public interest and, typically, therefore in receipt of state funding or subsidy. Economically, welfare economics has devised various rationales for public funding, including a battery of special concepts such as *market failure*, *externalities*, *public goods*, *social goods* and *merit goods*. Between the 1940s and the 1970s these economic concepts

aided politicians in implementing and extending the welfare state.

Since there is no way for the market to ensure that those who pay for flood-control, the fire service and the military are protected while those who refuse to pay or can't pay will not be protected, then 'social wants of this kind', Richard Musgrave argued in the 1940s, 'cannot be satisfied through the mechanism of the market.'<sup>8</sup> Ruth Towse says these features of non-rivalry and non-excludability 'make it unlikely that private for-profit firms will produce public goods.'<sup>9</sup> Economically, therefore, public provision takes over, in principle, where the market fails to provide goods that are socially valued but incapable of producing profit. These economic concepts are expressions of the conflict between the political and economic as contradictory modes of power, with their distinctive mechanisms of decision-making and class dynamic.

In the 1970s Tibor Scitovsky said we 'need to reclassify satisfactions according to some principle which will separate the economic from non-economic.'<sup>10</sup> When we wash, dress and take care of the house, for instance, he says, we satisfy ourselves in a way that is 'beyond the range of the economic accounts'.<sup>11</sup> But the difference between the economic and non-economic is not based on the difference between self-satisfaction and satisfactions derived from others. The consumption of goods and services provided by others, he says, 'may or may not be economic satisfactions, depending on whether or not they go through the market and acquire a market value in the process. Passage through the market is the

criterion: whatever passes through the market belongs in the realm of economics.'<sup>12</sup> Scitovsky adds that labour itself 'which produces market goods may be an economic activity, but the satisfaction the worker himself gets out of his work is not an economic good.'<sup>13</sup> In another instance of production that is simultaneously economic and non-economic, Scitovsky says that artists are often cut off from demand, 'often not producing what the consumer wants.'<sup>14</sup> Therefore 'one of the producers to whom consumers relinquish initiative is the artist.'<sup>15</sup> Although Scitovsky romanticises the artist, his distinction between the economic and the non-economic helps to clarify the complex relationship between art and its non-market circulation as based on the values that are attached to art through discursive exchange.

However, economists since the 1970s, especially neoliberals, have whittled away at the list of genuine public goods, and complain that many alleged public goods can be provided by the market at a profit and therefore their public subsidy cannot be justified. The case for public subsidy, which began with welfare economics making the case that certain goods ought to be available to all without direct cost, has been reduced to a technical question of market failure. The methodological distinction between positive and normative economics is added to this, making welfare economics appear to fall short of the requirements of economic science. Nowadays the range of arguments and circumstances that once demanded the differential concepts of *public goods*, *social goods* and *merit goods*, has been reduced to a rather puny and technical definition of *public good*. Public goods, according to economic

doctrine, are non-excludable and non-rival in consumption. Non-excludability means it is impossible, improbable or impractical to prevent others from having access to a good (for example, the provision of clean air cannot be withheld from those who do not pay their taxes, and the same is true for flood control, clean streets, the judiciary and the armed forces). Non-rivalry means that the good can be enjoyed without reducing its capacity to be enjoyed by others (for example, looking at an artwork, swimming in the sea, reading an ebook).

Alan Peacock, who pioneered the neoliberal approach to art, began his career in the economics of art within welfare economics and argued for state intervention in the arts, heritage and broadcasting with reference to market failure in relation to the unexpressed demands of future generations, as well as the non-economic goods of *national cultural standards* and *social cohesion*. Peacock was among the first economists to take an increasingly heightened and increasingly negative view of the public subsidy of the arts. The problem, he said, is that some appointed authority decides on our behalf what we want or, worse still, what we ought to want. Anyone who believes in the unrivalled efficacy of market mechanism to allocate resources according to the subjective preferences of consumers looks upon state subsidy as an interference. 'Some properties of the arts and culture are true public goods in the economic sense, such as shared history, cultural history and language',<sup>16</sup> Ruth Towse concedes, before reigning welfare economics in, saying, 'but far and away the majority of goods and services in the cultural sector are not public goods; they are rival (the more

for you, the less for me) and access to them can be limited to those who have paid an entry charge or subscription (they are excludable).'<sup>17</sup> The argument that certain goods such as art ought to be free to all is replaced with the argument that whichever cultural goods can be feasibly allocated according to market mechanisms ought to be subjected to market disciplines. She provides the standard rationale for such thinking as follows, 'Of course, a cultural organisation can choose to let some people in for free, say children, or to give their product away (such as a 'free' newspaper). Even if 'free' goods and services are supplied by a public organisation, though, they are nevertheless 'private' goods in the economic sense unless they have the specific combination of non-rivalry and non-excludability, and it is important to distinguish publicly supplied goods from public goods.'<sup>18</sup>

Mainstream economists today approach the question of public subsidy in two ways. The first is to establish the economic concept of a public good, and the second is to examine the behaviour of public policy makers in terms of the private incentives, satisfactions and preferences that they express in legislation, which is called public choice theory.

According to Ruth Towse: '*Public choice theory analyses the incentives to politicians and bureaucrats to behave in certain ways. It explains why public employees act in their own interests rather than those of the public they are supposed to be serving. The public ownership and control of cultural provision, the granting of public subsidies and regulatory controls all enable politicians and bureaucrats to exercise their power and influence. This can explain some*

*otherwise seemingly anomalous behaviour: for example, public museums all over Europe close on Mondays to suit the needs of the employees rather than those of visitors.*<sup>19</sup>

Public choice theory collapses the problem of the conversion of subjective preferences into a social aggregate by asserting that political representatives are led by their own self-interests rather than the communities they formally represent. Worse still, public choice theory presupposes behaviour to be determined by private preferences to such an extent that the public as a collective body shaped by discursive exchange disappears altogether.

### **Public Subsidy: Politics**

Public subsidy is at once an economic and a political choice. That is to say, if there is only an economic case for the provision of a given good, then the market can be relied on to provide it. Public subsidy is not required to step in unless the market fails in some way to allocate resources adequately. This means that even though public subsidy is necessarily an economic activity, it is not driven by economic but political considerations. Economists can judge the economic viability of state expenditure, not only advising on what can be afforded but also the *opportunity costs*, externalities and multiplier effects of any chosen expenditure. However, economists are in no position to advise on the merits of what should or should not be subsidised, as these are political questions. Economists of the neoliberal variety overcome this problem, to a certain extent, by counselling policy-makers to do away with a great proportion of public subsidy on the

basis that it interferes in the efficient operation of the free market. While such advice might appear to be economic, it is always political and therefore involves the economist, either unwittingly or cynically, entering politics.

One of the most suggestive economic concepts that deliberately and provocatively imports politics into economics is that of 'merit goods'. At the end of the 1950s, the welfare economist Richard Musgrave argued that the main allocative objective of public finance is to provide resources to the satisfaction of public wants, social wants and merit wants. The difference between these three wants is due to the manner in which they are justified. Public wants can be justified by appealing to externalities and market failure, especially non-rivalry and non-excludability. Merit wants cannot be justified on these terms. Even if it is possible for the market to provide such goods as healthcare, policing and the education, the concept of merit good allows public provision on political grounds. Merit goods are items that benefit from public subsidy for normative reasons. Musgrave specifically argued that merit goods were those goods which people should be able to consume not only regardless of the ability to pay but also regardless of preference.

Merit wants can be supplied by the market and consumed in the standard way, but there is a case for arguing that everyone ought to enjoy the good equally nonetheless. Merit goods are not supplied by the state in response to market failure, but in response to political problems arising from market success. The controversy over merit goods is tied up with its flouting of consumer sovereignty. Merit goods, which

are publicly funded to ensure universal, equal and free consumption, contradict consumer sovereignty. The suspension of consumer sovereignty that the concept of merit goods requires strongly indicates that another (non-economic) form of sovereignty takes precedence. In his discussion of social wants, Musgrave asks a searching question: 'Since the market mechanism fails to reveal consumer preferences in social wants, it may be asked what mechanism there is.'<sup>20</sup> The answer, as he puts it, is voting. Voting reveals preferences that markets cannot. Consumer sovereignty has no part to play in allocation of merit goods because the decision to produce them for universal consumption is taken by democratic representatives. There is no economic rationale for the funding of merit goods; the case for public funding derives from norms at large in society, or perhaps that part of society that has effective sway over policy makers. In fact, merit goods might be best understood as a concept that approaches economics from the perspective of political priorities. Economics has no methods to predict such priorities and market mechanisms are incapable of allocating them in the desired magnitudes (i.e. universally and equally).

So, in the case of merit goods, interference with market mechanisms is based on values attributed to a good independent of subjective judgements of utility by consumers at large. In other words, it is the precondition of the concept of merit goods that they do not conform to the standard pattern of neoclassical supply and demand. Merit goods, which are publicly funded to ensure universal, equal and free consumption, contradict consumer sovereignty. Consumer sovereignty has no part to play in allocation of merit goods

because the decision to produce them for universal consumption is taken by democratic representatives. The suspension of consumer sovereignty that the concept of merit goods requires strongly indicates that another (non-economic) form of sovereignty takes precedence. This is why Musgrave warned very early on that, 'the satisfaction of collective wants should be limited because of the compulsion involved.' In his discussion of social wants, Musgrave observes that, '[s]ince the market mechanism fails to reveal consumer preferences in social wants, it may be asked what mechanism there is.'<sup>21</sup> The answer is in the mechanism of democratic collective decision-making, or, as he puts it, voting. Voting reveals preferences that markets cannot.

If a good has so much merit that we believe everyone ought to be able to consume it regardless of ability to pay (and, moreover, regardless of the choice to consume it), then, it will, as a result, be exempted from the economics of supply and demand. For this reason, the economists West and McKee, who subscribe to the doctrine that markets are the most effective mechanism for allocating resources, suggest that the public supply of merit goods ought to be temporary measures only.<sup>22</sup> They illustrate their point with the public funding of education. If, they argue, those who are uneducated are less likely to demand education in the open market, then supplying education services to them will raise their education and, presumably, show them the value of education, leading to an increase in demand for education. And they regard the fact that universal free and compulsory education still exists as proof that the merit want arguments

and the policies they have fostered have failed.

To make this assessment they first have to convert a hypothesis into a condition. Some merit goods, we might speculate, can technically be supplied by the market once the state's provision of them as merit goods has created the demand for them. However, it is a political choice, not an economic principle, that determines whether to guarantee education for all or to subject education to market forces, in which ability to pay and willingness to pay are determining forces, giving advantage to the wealthy. Even in Higher Education, which has no claim to be universal, it is a political choice to have candidates preselected by their ability to pay rather than their ability to excel. The point of recognizing and funding merit goods is to ensure that every member of society has access to those benefits that society chooses politically to be universally valuable and which society deems not to be restricted to those who can afford them.

### Public Sphere: Publics Beyond Market and State

The public funding for the arts that Keynes pioneered combines the Romantic insistence on artistic independence and individuality with a revival of the Enlightenment concept of art's public and a modified role for the state within a novel economics of patronage. Historically, United Kingdom's Arts Council model develops as much out of the Humanist tradition of patronage as it does the earlier practice of religious patronage, but it also depends upon the transformation of artistic production that took place through the replacement of patronage with dealers mediating between artists and collectors. The art market is a prerequisite for

its apparent opposite, the public funding of art, but the public funding of art is not merely a bastardized form of market relation. It is based, equally, on the conception of the bourgeois public sphere and the role of collective decision-making in public affairs.

As I have noted, the question of public subsidy is not an economic question at all, but a political one. For mainstream economists, this opens up a Pandora's Box of state interference in free markets, the crowding out of capital investment and the flouting of consumer sovereignty. Public subsidy is a political choice outside the remit of professional economists, but economists are opposed to public subsidies on principle and are regarded as experts by national budget holders. Habermas, however, would look at this as Hobson's choice. If public subsidy is either economic or political, then the entire debate on the allocation of public and merit goods has been colonised by *the system* and has not been brought within the auspices of *the lifeworld*. In other words, the collective decisions have been handed over to the steering media of anonymous market mechanisms or the bureaucratic machinations of power by professional politicians.

Neoliberalism has an overwhelming desire to cut public funding for art, education, health and unemployment benefits not just because economists are philistine, elitist, uncaring and spiteful (some of them, it turns out, are not), but because neoliberal doctrine insists that free markets allocate resources more effectively than state monopolies and that market forces are more democratic than political democracy. Market utopians are frustrated by the *crowding out* of private

investment by public subsidy and put their faith in the private sector to fill any vacuum created by withdrawing public funds. Their utopianism is not merely a preference for one source of funds over another: private investment appears superior to state funding in the eyes of the enthusiasts of market forces because, ironically, they regard markets as more democratic than a democratically elected government. Their rationale for comparing the market favourably with the political processes of democratic rule must be confronted before any progress can be made in the overthrow of neoliberalism's *economics imperialism* and the fanaticism of the free market which has led not only to so much privatization but also stands behind the idea that austerity is the cure for the financial crisis.

Ludwig von Mises famously argued that dollars are democratic because dollars are like votes, with every purchase acting as a vote for some good or service. Murray Rothbard added that Mises' comparison of the market to the democratic process was unfair on the free market. In democracy, the majority decision is binding on all (the candidate who receives 51% of the votes will govern 100% of the people), hence, the free market is more democratic than democracy because every dollar counts. All those situations in which discussions are held to arrive at an agreed action – from a family deciding which movie to watch, to a dispute over the teaching of evolution in faith schools – would not be improved if they were governed by market forces. Furthermore, that the wealthy get more dollar-votes than the poor shows that the argument that markets are, in principle, superior to democracy must be indifferent to certain criteria that binds the democracy of elections, such as 'one person one vote'. Hence, in at least

one respect, we can say that as a mechanism for arriving at collective decisions, voting is more equitable than market forces. What is potentially liberating about the democratic process in relation to market forces is that the collective will can correct imbalances in power due to wealth. This kind of egalitarianism can be achieved only by suspending 'consumer sovereignty' or subjecting the consumer to the democratic will of all. But the full political critique of market forces as a method for arriving at collective decisions should not be limited to the case for democratic voting. Markets allow those with disposable income to express their preferences, but discussion allows us to reflect on our preferences and change them in the light of arguments made against them or for alternatives. Voting is required only if discussions fail to produce a consensus.

Mainstream economists distinguish the sovereign consumer not from other ordinary political individuals, namely *sovereign citizens*, but from political figures such as leaders, rulers, tyrants and officials. So, instead of pitching the sovereign consumer against its political equivalent, mainstream economists imagine *a clash between the economic power of consumers and the coercive power of the state*. This asymmetry makes it a lot easier for economists to make the standard case for consumer sovereignty as ruling out political interference. Joseph Persky is quite wrong when he says, 'consumer sovereignty is attractive because under its impartiality, producers are more easily resigned to their roles as servants of society.'<sup>23</sup> Producers do not serve society through consumer sovereignty; they serve capital. Consumers are consumers only insofar as they own, spend and

represent money that will realise the value of invested capital through sales. Consumer sovereignty is an expression of the dominance of capital over the production and allocation of social use-values. What about citizen sovereignty, or other forms of sovereignty not expressed through money?

Mainstream economists believe markets to be superior. They are fond of the analogy, first formulated by Ludwig von Mises, one of the most fanatical pro-marketeers in history, which every dollar spent by consumers on the free market is like a vote cast in favour of a certain commodity.

We need to state the case for democracy over economics.

Consumer sovereignty needs to become one of the battlefields of a new case against the neoliberal assault on art, the humanities and education. Art's institutions, I want to suggest, would be well advised today to develop a discourse in their favour based precisely on the superiority of processes of public formation rather than the assumption of the sovereignty of the consumer. It is a weakness of mainstream economics that it underestimates the merits of democratic and discursive processes for arriving at collective decisions. Neoliberal policies are therefore vulnerable, in principle, to the argument that they universalise the sovereignty of the consumer and thereby eradicate the sovereignty of the citizen or the participant in public opinion formation. This includes powerful interests such as politicians, journalists and activists of all kinds. The future of art's public institutions is dependent on a critique of the doctrine of consumer sovereignty and a defence of the sovereignty of both the political choice to fund it and the self-determination of art's publics.

There are other significant weaknesses to the neoliberal argument, which privileges the market over all other methods of mediating between individuals and the social whole, that can be exploited by the advocates of art and its institutions. One of the most important of these is the question of quality. Consumer sovereignty, insofar as the consumer is assumed, as a matter of principle, to be the best judge of commodities available in the marketplace, is a doctrine that is indifferent to questions of quality. Economists are aware of this problem and have attempted to dispel the irritating presence of issues of quality – of a type of value that cannot readily be reduced to economic value or measured by the price of an article – by claiming either, directly, that quality is nothing but a question of taste and therefore preference, or, indirectly, that consumers can have access to knowledge of quality and therefore the market can reflect such judgements. Treating art and the humanities as consumer goods that can be bought means neglecting the dimension of quality in which we speak of the experience of them being earned, benefitting from prolonged study, being augmented by close attention and rewarding effort. Consumers can buy artworks or a library full of books, but the quality of the experience is not guaranteed by the purchase. Economics has a poor track record in discussing quality and so it should be a conspicuous element of the critique of the neoliberal attack on art and the humanities.

You can find out what experts and other consumers know about the quality of a particular car or hotel and adjust your purchases accordingly. But art and education are unusual in this respect. Quality in art is only recognised, understood

and experienced through time and effort put into it. Asking what Hank and Ingrid want is a rhetorical device for making us indifferent to quality and critical self-transformation. The consumer of philosophy, too, cannot make judgements of the quality of arguments prior to purchase based on the recommendations of others. Courses designed according to student preferences or employer demand are, like consumer sovereignty generally, indifferent to quality. The alleged consumers of education (potential students or potential employees of graduates) are in no position to judge the quality of knowledge or pedagogy on offer, since students lack knowledge of the subject that they are being asked to judge, and employers have interests external to the subjects which are being taught. Quality, insofar as it is a matter of judgement, experience, opinion and taste, can be legislated (e.g. handed over to experts) or entrusted to market demand (i.e. as if the satisfaction of wants are the best way of expressing judgements of quality) or they can be subjected only to the rigours of dispute and debate within publics formed through discursive exchange. By and large these three modes of dealing with the question of quality co-exist uneasily and somewhat unhappily together in liberal democracies. Publics are often regarded as the worst of the three by virtue of being neither democratic nor bent to the sovereign consumer. Under these circumstances, simply advocating publics over market forces and political democracy is self-defeating.

Quality is central to a reconsideration of art's public institutions but it cannot be presupposed as our elitist and humanist predecessors had it. Art's public cannot be seen as that minority which safeguards the quality of art through its superior judgement and taste. Art's public must be seen as

a social platform through which questions of taste — rather than market demand or popular will — can be realised.

## Conclusion

Art's public institutions are not public by virtue of their public subsidy. It is because art's institutions address the public, rather than the market or the electorate, that they have any chance of being awarded public funds. Mainstream economists are typically dismissive of the argument for the public subsidy of the arts because they have come to believe that the only justification for public subsidy is market failure. If public subsidy is not primarily an economic question at all, but a political one, then art's public institutions can be awarded state monies on account of their social merit. What's more, it is clear that the public sphere sits alongside liberal democracy and the self-regulated market as a distinctively bourgeois mode of sociality. The point is not to advocate one bourgeois social institution in opposition to the others but to show how the hegemony of economics, or the false dilemma of public subsidy as being either economic or political, is not even the full bourgeois picture. Rather than assuming the merit of art or the merit of its educated and tasteful publics, the basis for art's public funding ought to be linked to art's vigorous production and proliferation of publics. That is to say, instead of simply asserting that art is 'high' culture as the Keynesian pioneers of art's public funding did, the case for the public subsidy of the arts in the new century must be based on the understanding that questions of quality, which cannot be resolved in the marketplace or the ballot box, and must be addressed through discursive interactions in the public sphere.

This can only occur if art's institutions are public institutions. The young Marx said the first condition of the freedom of the press is that it is not a business activity. Likewise, the first two conditions of the publicness of art's public institutions is that they are subjected neither to consumer demand nor majority rule. The bourgeois public sphere is the only extant alternative, today, but we must not be limited by it.

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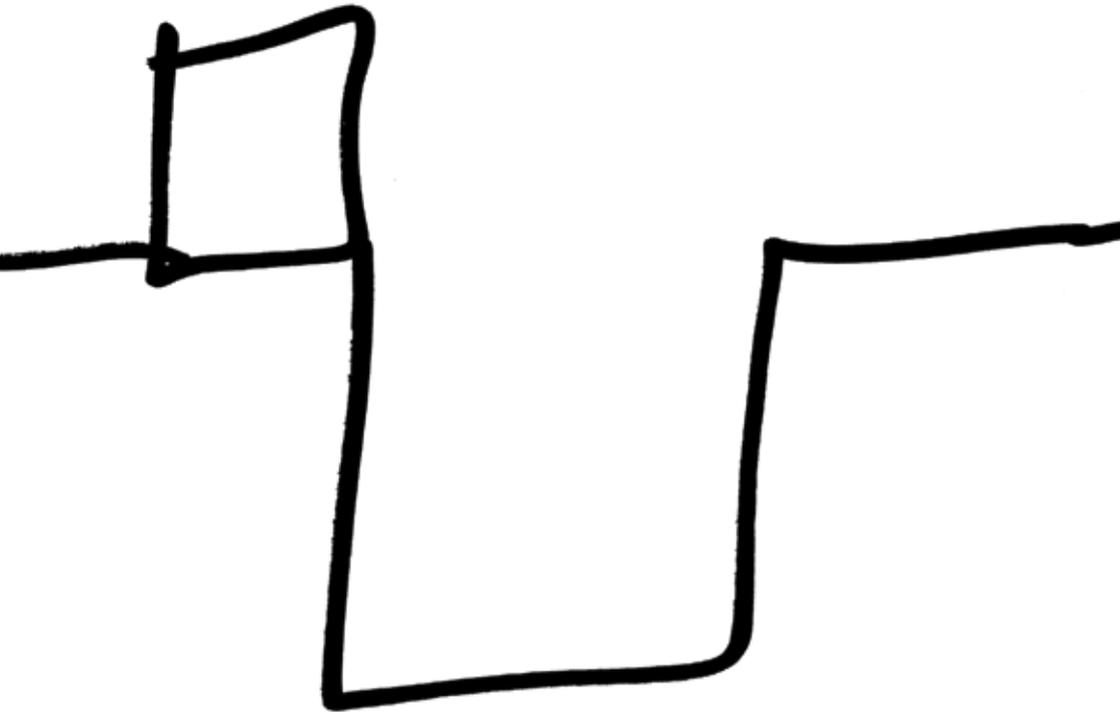
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# *Institutional Critique: misunderstood legacies and modes of criticality*

Victoria Preston

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GIGANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

## Introduction

This paper deals with conceptual frameworks, aspects of practice and discourses about institutional critique that are still largely misunderstood and underdeveloped. Despite a plethora of publications and conferences on institutional critique and a huge expansion in the field of museological studies and literature on curating, art practices associated with institutional critique continue to be read as historicised genres.

My remarks have two main objectives. First, to expand the scope of associated practices and discourses to which its main advocates, Andrea Fraser and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh have hitherto confined institutional critique. Second, to show that practices associated with institutional critique are ongoing and relevant in that they mostly involve a positive form of criticism intended either to improve institutions or modify their functions. Specifically, I aim to question the declared historicisation, institutionalisation and obsolescence of institutional critique, and instead to argue for its relevance as a method of working or mode of practice, or as Simon Sheikh evaluates it, 'an analytical tool, a method of spatial and political criticism and articulation' (2006: np). In order to do this, I explore institutional critique in terms of various possible modes of criticality.<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical underpinnings of the modes of criticality have their origin in practice, rather than being a priori theoretical discussions. Of central interest in each approach is the question of how the activity of critique operates on the

strategies and processes of the institution being criticised. In other words: by what mechanisms does critique create public awareness about the institution and provoke institutional responses at the structural, operational and programming levels?

### The institutionalisation of Institutional Critique

Fraser's signature museum performance works have been commissioned by institutions, sometimes at her instigation. In an article published in *Artforum* in 2005, entitled, **From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique**, Fraser suggests that institutional critique has been institutionalised and has become obsolete. This may be considered a moment of self-realisation for Fraser, as well as an approach to practice, which she advocates may be applied to other artists' projects associated with institutional critique.

The position that Fraser adopts reflects both her observations of practice in general, and aspects of her own work. With respect to the latter, Fraser was producing the institutionally critical video-performance work, **Little Frank**

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NOTE:

<sup>1</sup> The modes of criticality are developed in detail in **From Specific Interpretations to Expanded Discourses: An Investigation of Institutional Critique in Art, Curatorial and Museological practice**, a draft of the doctoral thesis developed in collaboration with the CCC Research-Based Master Programme /Pre-Doctorate/PhD Seminar critical curatorial cybermedia (2011-2012) at the Geneva University of Art and Design.

and his **Carp** (2001), while simultaneously planning a television project on the Guggenheim Bilbao, entitled **El Museo** (2000 - 2002), which was never realised. In an interview with the art historian, Yilmaz Dziewior, Fraser states her concerns regarding art institutions and the art system, which include the bureaucratisation of practice, the professionalisation of curating, the instrumentalisation of art as social service by public funders and the entertainment function adopted by corporatised museums (2003: 98). Fraser contends that, '[at] the time I started to realize that given the direction that museums were going in – and the fact that I wasn't getting many invitations to work in them – I either had to return to the commercial gallery or stop being an artist' (ibid 99). Failure to realise **El Museo** – which would have been critical of the interventionist nature of the Guggenheim museum on the social fabric of the city of Bilbao – may have provoked Fraser's disenchantment with the potential agency of institutional critique. Indeed, she subsequently stopped producing museum-based critical projects.

Fraser articulates her position on the institutionalisation of institutional critique through her understanding of the expansion of the institution of art. She observes art moving into a wide variety of non-art institutional contexts, which later become part of the institution of art by virtue of them having been colonised by art. Moreover, moving from an understanding of institutions of art as specific places to a conception of the institution of art as a social field complicates the notion of what is on the inside and what is on the outside. Fraser draws on Pierre Bourdieu's reading of the institution of art as a cultural field – a repository of cultural capital that

involves not just the physical institutions of art, but also the social relations, symbolic capital and associated discourses (Bourdieu 1993). According to Gene Ray (2007), Bourdieu's critique of the cultural sphere is accomodationist, rather than transformatory. In other words, Bourdieu describes the institution of art as a status quo, without suggesting an alternative – there is no transformatory moment, no utopian solution and no revolutionary horizon.

### Institutional Critique as a historical genre

Practices associated with institutional critique were canonised shortly after they had been identified and labelled. Fraser perceives the inception and canonisation of institutional critique to be almost simultaneous, claiming that she found herself *'enmeshed in the contradictions and complicities, ambitions and ambivalence that institutional critique is often accused of'* and also *'caught between the self flattering possibility'* that she was *'the first person to put the term in print and the critically shameful prospect of having played a role in the reduction of certain radical practices into a pithy catch-phrase, packaged for co-option'* (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 410).

Buchloh also takes a historicising view of institutional critique. In his monograph on Asher, Buchloh claims that institutional critique had been historicised before it could reach its critical potential, contending that, *'[the] 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). In a much cited

article, *Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions* (published in October 1990: 105–143), Buchloh charts institutional critique's progressive historicisation, defining it as a genre and locating it firmly in a genealogy of Minimalism and Conceptualism. This article has had a profound influence on scholars, critics and artists and it is constantly referred to, and has done more than any other piece of writing to establish Buchloh as an authority on institutional critique. In charting the transformation of the *aesthetics of administration* to the *critique of institutions*, Buchloh traces a lineage via the decline of the visual, the preoccupation with framing and new modes of distribution and reception in the 1960s. He argues that institutional dialectics, aesthetical withdrawal and the critique of painting and the readymade created the conditions for a new definition of 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. By concluding his coverage of projects associated with institutional critique in 1969, Buchloh conveys the impression that institutional critique is the final chapter in an historical process towards Conceptualism that is now closed.

### Identifying modes of criticality

Fraser does not entirely foreclose on institutional critique, but leaves open the possibility of its recuperation. She gives clues to a way out of the impasse of the historicisation, institutionalisation and declared obsolescence of institutional critique, though she does not develop these points in detail.

She mentions, for example that, Haacke personifies institutional critique 'as heroic challenger, fearlessly speaking truth to power' (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 415). She also suggests that *activist practice* could foster institutional critique, noting that '[for] Haacke, the development in his work took place very much in the context of political activism of the late-1960s and specifically', and 'through his involvement in the Art Workers' Coalition' (Sperlinger 2009: 31).

Fraser maintains that the practices carried out by the early practitioners of institutional critique reveal their *complicity* with the institutions of art. '[The] idea that institutional critique opposes art to institution, or supposes that radical artistic practices can or ever did exist outside of the institution of art before being "institutionalized" by museums is contradicted at every turn by the writings and work of Asher, Broodthaers, Buren and Haacke' (Alberro and Stimson 2009: 411). Their knowing complicity, according to Fraser, displays awareness of the hegemony and the importance of such institutions for them as artists, as both the catalyst for their art practices and a container in which to display their works.

The complicit approach contrasts with Fraser's earlier remarks on *subversive practice* in her discussion of the artist Louise Lawler (1985: 122-129). Fraser explores how Lawler sought to disrupt the notion of artists as producers of aesthetic objects in order to provide a more heterogeneous idea of *artists as publicists*, (producers of publicity materials which were designed to supplement cultural objects), and *artists as curators*, (presenting, arranging and displaying works by other

artists). Fraser explores Lawler's interests in the margins and peripheries that frame the circulation and display of art objects. Unlike other early practitioners, Lawler did not situate her critique in art institutions, but rather she adopted an alternate approach, viewing the institution as a set of social relations into which she inserted her works. Lawler knew that artworks get a special kind of attention, and that to introduce a small object such as a matchbook or a napkin into the *art system* could be a useful strategy for introducing meaning into unexpected places (Lawler and Crimp 2001: 70-81).

Buchloh also leaves open possibilities for institutional critique, acknowledging that criticism can be effective if generated within the institution and performed by artists who mimic institutional practice (1990). Having said this, Buchloh thinks that it is probable that institutions will co-opt such practices, not least to reinforce their own legitimisation. However, this openness implies that provided artists continue to adopt methods of self-reflexivity and a subversive interpretation of institutional mandates; new forms of critique may emerge to replace those that have been appropriated and an on-going cycle of institutionally critical practice may be maintained.

### Theoretical underpinnings of the modes of criticality

In order to develop categories of criticality, it is necessary to draw on some theoretical understandings of critique. I harness Michel Foucault's (1978) notion of *sapere aude* (the courage to use one's own mind), his idea of 'not wanting to be

governed quite so much', his emphasis on the importance of independent thought and his insistence on the development of a *critical attitude*. These positions have been extended by Irit Rogoff's concept of embeddedness, which she calls 'embodied criticality' (2003 and 2006). I additionally make use of Bertolt Brecht's notion of 'Umfunktionierung' (refunctioning of the institution), namely the idea that the institution has agency, the power, to change minds by appealing to the social conscience of the audience, rather than seeking to entertain them. Ray has argued in favour of applying Brecht's approach, originally conceived for the theatre, to art institutions (2010).

With respect to the terms complicit, activist and subversive, as mentioned in Fraser's writings, I examine them according to their critical distance from the institution. By complicit criticality, I refer to situations in which institutions aim to represent themselves as self-reflexively critical by commissioning projects that examine their programmes and processes. In this mode, a mandate – either in oral or written form – exists between the protagonist and the institution, which is executed in a manner that conforms to the institution's expectations. In such cases, the artists are usually aware that their projects may have affirmative effects – such practices are strongly embedded in the institution. Specifically, in investigating complicit criticality, I explore projects which are either located within the museum's walls, or are closely related to the museum. I investigate art practices in which the institution aims to present itself as self-reflexively critical, either by means of commissioning projects, or by collaborating with

artists in some form of extra-museal practice. Fraser experimented with this approach in the mid-1980s and today many art institutions not only actively accept critique, they encourage it by commissioning critical artworks, thus enabling themselves to claim transparency and self-reflexivity. In these projects, complicity is embedded in the contractual mandate between the commissioning institution and the commissioned artist, and most projects of this type have a dual character, in that they are both critical and affirmative.

I use the term activist criticality to describe strategies generated outside of the museum. As such, these practices are not embedded in the formal structure of the institution, though they may take place inside the museum as temporary guerrilla performances. These critical practices emanate outside of the gallery within an understanding that the institution of art is not confined within the museum's walls, but also exists and operates in the public realm as a constituent part of the cultural sphere. As art is being produced and exhibited in a multiplicity of extra-museal sites, the possibilities for critical projects are increased. Over time, the focus of art activist groups has shifted away from demands for enhancing the representation of a wider variety of art practices in museums and increasing the representation of a broader spectrum of artists in art institutions, to rendering visible the nature of sponsorship relations between art institutions and the private sector and highlighting issues of labour precarity in the cultural sphere. Two recent anthologies have analysed the development of activist strategies in relation to institutional critique. Alberro and Stimson (2009)

take a literal interpretation of evacuating the institution and adopt a periodising approach to institutional critique, viewing the current phase of institutional critique as the moment when artists exit the framework of the museum to create projects beyond its walls. Raunig and Ray (2009) address the notion of ‘exit’ differently, calling for the constitution of new powers, which they call ‘instituting’.

The mode of subversive criticality is based on the notion of ‘détournement’, namely the deflection, diversion, misappropriation or re-routing of an object or process from its original or formal aim or purpose. In this mode, I investigate critical practices where artists and also curators undertake critical projects that are intended to reorient and possibly disrupt institutions of art. Such projects are usually located in art institutions, such as art centres and biennials, and are often instigated by curator-directors as a détournement of their institutional mandates. As such, subversive critical practices are moderately embedded in art institutions, but tend only to last as long as the instigating protagonist is in place. Subversive tactics, which were employed at the margins of art practice during the 1970s and 1980s, have today become more widespread and larger-scaled.

## Conclusion

Harnessing the critical theories of Foucault, extended by Rogoff, and notions of refunctioning the institution as propagated by Brecht and developed by Ray, I re-interpret institutional critique as an on-going mode of practice. This is achieved by identifying modes of criticality – complicit,

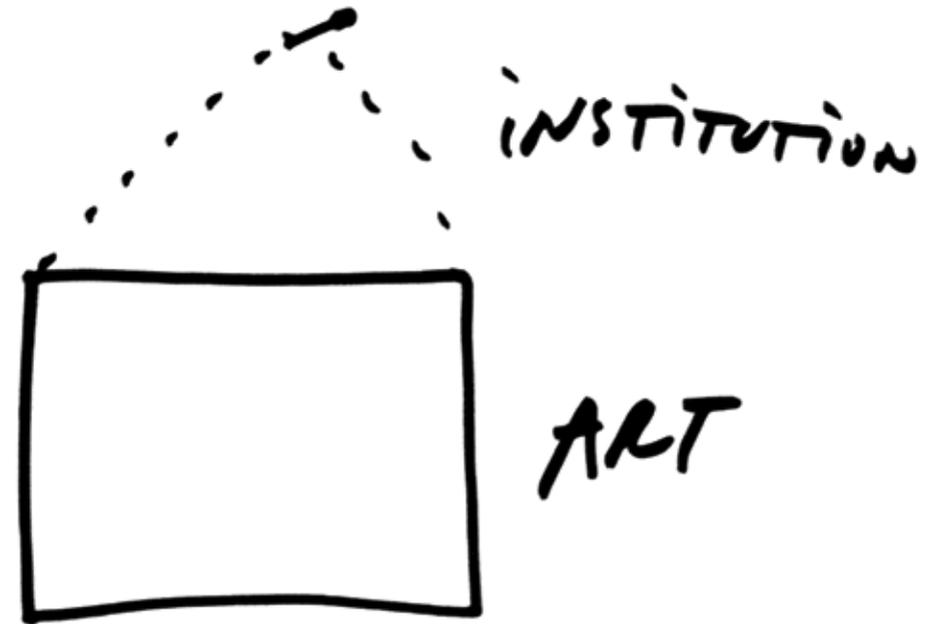
activist and subversive – each with differentiated attributes, each situated in different contexts and each with varying degrees of proximity and embeddedness to the institutions they critique. By investigating different understandings of critique and exploring recent and current art and curatorial practice, criticality is still possible within the predominately neoliberal cultural field. Institutionally critical practice in both its art and curatorial forms, continues to be valid, legitimate, constructive and relevant today, and has the potential to change opinions and catalyse a will to act.

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# IN SUSPENSION

## – Some *(FINAL)* Remarks on the Concept of Model

Alfredo Cramerotti's Lecture at  
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven,  
The Netherlands 3 November 2012

Transcribed by (in no particular order) Lauren Mele,  
Tirdad Zolghadr, Cathy Haynes, Alfredo Cramerotti, Fredric  
Jameson, Kari Conte, Clifford Geertz, Cristiana Tejo.

*Proxemics* is the study of distances. The term was introduced by anthropologist Edward Hall in the 1960s, and was picked up by notoriously distanced, elusive artists such as Liam Gillick only recently. The proxemics Wikipedia page can explain subtleties distinguishing *critical distance* from *flight distance*, *personal distance* from *social distance* and so on. Distance, that is, as a thing in itself. Not wafty and aristocratic, like a curatorial statement, but very tangible, like an Easyjet boarding pass, with which I will fly home tomorrow.

Let's step outside the institution for a moment. What is the reciprocal relationship between an artist, a curator, an audience and a place?

There is expectation from the art world for artists and curators, and for audiences to some extent, to be itinerant, to move from place to place in order to grasp the global span of contemporary art practice and contemporary culture, and to make the most of it. Some others though, have started to foresee that more and more artists and curators will have significant and long-term investment and commitment in a particular place, wherever it may be, producing sets of relationships between the local and the global.

We are talking here of distances between geographies, aesthetics, disciplines, practitioners, educations, websites, institutions and more. Proxemics over proximities.

As artists work (more and more) in situation-based contexts, curators perhaps will (work and work) for a long time in the same place, and will engage with local dynamics on intimate

levels. It will generate substantial potential for cultural production. In a way, artists and curators will become institutions in the proper sense – a set of relations between people, space and function.

So, let's re-enter the institution then, and consider myself as such. *I am an institution.*

Life as an institution is projected towards the future – not who I am now, but who I will become. It is a question about how I choose to think of myself as artist, curator and audience while producing, engaging with or using an exhibition, or a cultural programme. Today is therefore an ongoing effect to be shaped, a model to be refine hour by hour.

I get closer to grasp me (as an institution) when I consider myself as a possibility among others. Not when I represent who I am, but when I construct a model for it, and declare it. Only when I engage with the possibility of something can I try to change what is important (for me, as institution). If I, as interested public, accept the opportunity to *develop* this or that topic in time, as part of my own story, I activate a sort of witness process, and I become my own audience.

So the mysterious pleasures of proxemics (the study of distances, spatial and temporal) are important to the arts as a constitutive *modus operandi*, including myself both as producer and as respondent. The technique is nothing unusual to critics, who very often dogmatically keep a distance from practitioners they are writing about, in the very hope of evacuating intention from the critical equation. The

staggering problems that arise when the writer, the writing and the bewritten disregard the rules of proxemics have all been thoroughly theorized in the field of literature, but the topic remains a mess in the charisma-driven field of the arts, including me as an institution. It's yet to be accepted that the producers are somewhat beside the point when it comes to their work.

Similarly, the notion of cultural representation and its relevance in regional and international contexts is in a constant state of flux and is continuously under scrutiny and examination. To state the obvious, every individual sees the world differently from a specific location, and the aesthetic makeup of man-made or man-assigned models can change vastly from culture to culture, and from location to location. One person or community may view *something* as representative and truthful of *something else* in a specific context, whereas the rest of the world may have a different association entirely about the same *something*.

One of the points of issue with research and participation in the cultural field is that often you physically cannot see with the naked eye what the model of work is representing; the research is there purely to constitute knowledge of what the *thing* is. This is where Regionalism has the luxurious avenue of subjectivity and specificity at its disposal, which somehow Internationalism (or a model standing for it) is not permitted flexibly. We cannot have a specific International, but we happily deal with a specific Regional.

As knowledge becomes ever more specialised, and public and private life becomes more commercialised and internationalised, art – what we are doing here – will increasingly take on the role of the trespasser, luring itself into other fields, markets and discourses in ways that re-introduce regionalist difference, that crack open their normalizing effects and show another life (or another way of doing things) is possible. That's a bit of aspiration perhaps, but as institution I constitute myself as I go ahead and it is essential to keep a horizon in view...

I consider culture (in this case, art) being like a map; functioning both as a model of – describing phenomena, processes and events – and a model for, providing the instructions to build my reality. In other words, I create a system of references for interpreting what I do. The artists here, and curators, and institutions, construct a world in order to question the way it is constructed, or a model of reality in order to ask the viewer what is being modelled.

Maybe artists and curators and institutions from hegemonic countries have to learn from their counterparts in developing countries how to work, to think and to act in an international context of crisis, precariousness and instability, not least financially; a common state of things in many regional contexts, and indeed a familiar situation for some of us here. Adaptability becomes mandatory, and it usually runs from the Regional to the International.

*This is me as institution talking.* To have a model for something in the Regional context means to act as a catalyst for

understanding that specificity; and in the International context, as a catalyst for knowledge to transfer to somewhere else, possibly adapted. Adaptation is a crucial concept. In accordance with this stance, accuracy is integral for a Regional model to be productive and relevant. However, often a Regional model is created on the premise that what they are 'standing for' is not so visible to the naked eye of the external viewer, so Regionalistic liberties are, inevitably, taken.

To put this proposition in the context of this symposium, I look at something outside art, and apply the idea of Critical Regionalism to the argument of 'ex-aptation', as opposed to 'ad-aptation'. A bit of background: studying the biological design of the living species, scientists Elizabeth Vrba and Stephen J. Gould coined the term *ex-aptation* to indicate those characters that appeared for a specific reason in the evolutionary process, but developed further to become a broad and universalized element of survival.

I quote: '*An ex-aptation is, basically, a character evolved for a purpose other than that for which it is currently used. A trait, evolved to serve one particular function, ultimately serves another one. Bird feathers are a common example: initially evolved for temperature regulation, they were later adapted for flight, which became the main feature of birds.*'

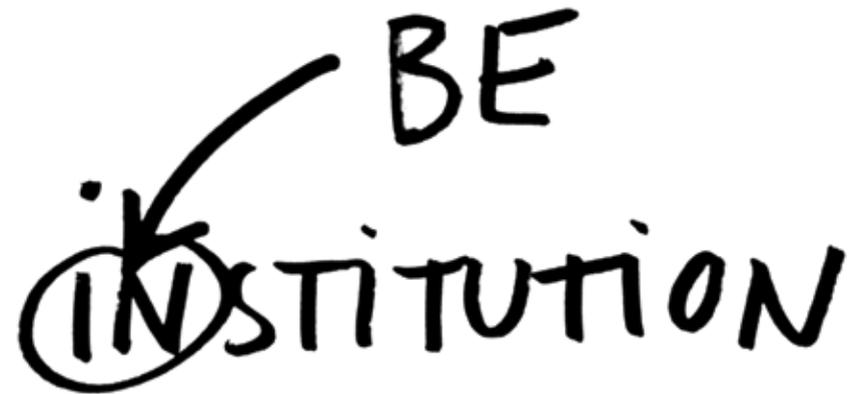
In parallel, the Regionalist trait first developed to expand its relevance on the context that generates it, since the tools at its disposal from the Internationalist approach were no longer enough; that trait could now ex-apt and shape the subsequent view of the (art) and cultural world globally, by returning full

circle to Regional contexts and specific ways of working. It is in a roundabout way, if you want. It could provoke a state, or perhaps more a process, of *sustained curiosity*, and in turn change me, as inhabitant of the Regional, let alone as an institution, through an attempt to comprehend what I am (internationally) curious about and therefore unaware of.

In fact, to think about a model in a *secure* way by means of structured Internationalism, is to reduce the (Regional) unknown to the expected, and therefore take away the possibility of learning.

Over to us.

Thanks.



BE  
INSTITUTION

# *New Institutionalism* *Revisited*

Translated from German  
by Christopher Jenkin-Jones

Nina Möntmann

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The new structural and operative configurations initiated by independent curators in the late 1990s and dubbed 'New Institutionalism' were looked upon as 'radical changes ... attempting to redefine the contemporary art institution.'<sup>1</sup> They were based on a self-reflexive critique of institutional organization and curatorial action that aimed at jettisoning the functions and organizational forms of the traditional modernist exhibiting institution as well as the market and image-orientated exigencies of museums that had corporatized within the context of neoliberal social developments. The institution was to become a flatly hierarchical, interactive, and versatile production site at all levels, incorporating curatorial criticality and multifunctional rooms adapted to a flexible, interdisciplinary program. It should produce a public rather than reach an audience; integrate the process of artistic production into institutional activities with residencies, workshops, and studio space; initiate a discourse, or at least admit critical debate into institutional practice at various levels, rather than reactively depicting and commenting on what is happening in the world; and the viewer was to be relieved of his passivity and become an active participant in a creative and discursive process. Un-bureaucratic organizational transparency and participative openness in program-planning are thus fundamental factors in the functioning of the *new institutions*. The concept of New Institutionalism derives from sociology. In the art context it describes, first and foremost, an institutionally political, organizational, and curatorial method; but the method has also given rise to *new institutions*; it is a

somewhat open concept that avoids the misunderstandings of another *-ism* and admits a range of curatorial approaches. As with all summaries of phenomena and developments, the individual actors differ to a greater or lesser degree, yet the common tendencies outlined above are discernible.

Frequently cited examples of *new institutions* in this sense are **Rooseum in Malmö** (under Charles Esche and later Lene Crone Jensen, 2000–2005), **the Munich Kunstverein** (Maria Lind, 2001–2004), **Palais de Tokyo, Paris** (Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, 1999–2006), **Platform Garanti, Istanbul** (Vasif Kortun, 2001–2010), **MACBA, Barcelona** (Manuel Borja-Villel, 1998–2007), **BAK Utrecht** (Maria Hlavajova, since 2000), **Bergen Kunsthall** (Solveig Øvstebø, since 2003), **United Nations Plaza, Berlin** (Anton Vidokle and Julietta Aranda, 2006–2007).

As this (incomplete) list shows, New Institutionalism is a European phenomenon that has developed chiefly in the countries of Western and Northern Europe since the end of the 1990s. Size and regional context, and the specific history of the various institutions, are the main factors influencing the scope of activity for directors and curators. These factors and the distinctive profile of individual curators influenced whether the interdisciplinary approaches of particular programs focused on pop culture, theoretical discourse, or activism; whether a major contemporary art institution in a larger city took a multi-track approach; or whether economically and politically independent institutions offered a completely experimental seminar-based program where, in addition, the location provided a sufficiently large, interested public, or where it was possible to build one up over a period of time.

The situation for institutional work has deteriorated in the past few years, particularly at the economic level, not least as a result of the financial crisis. The conservative government that came to power in the Netherlands in 2010, for instance, with Geert Wilders' anti-Islamic 'Party of Freedom' (the PVV) forming a majority, cut the budget for culture and vocational training by one quarter, with the result that art and cultural institutions across the board are faced with grave problems.<sup>2</sup> But it is not only in the Netherlands – in Great Britain, Germany, and other countries as well the economic plight is becoming increasingly dire, limiting the scope for action and defining the primary task of many institutions as a struggle for survival.

This is another reason why it makes sense today to consider more closely which institutional changes have meanwhile become established; which current tendencies continue to be interesting and/or which imaginaries live on; and what has proved a red herring or has failed to withstand the (cultural and) political headwinds. In short: *What have we learnt from New Institutionalism?*

To tackle this question I want to look back on my essay **Aufstieg und Fall des New Institutionalism: Perspektiven einer möglichen Zukunft**<sup>3</sup> (**The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism Perspectives on a Possible Future**) (2007) and consider what changes have occurred in recent years. There, I proposed the thesis that by 2007 many of the critical *new* institutions had already fallen victim to political headwinds and followed this by taking a look at future possibilities.<sup>4</sup> My main focus was on the significance of institutional networks in the context of globalization and the political and geographical changes it is producing.

## The Achievements of New Institutionalism

In response to the drastic cuts in cultural spending in the Netherlands, Nikolaus Schafhausen, Director of the Witte de With in Rotterdam at the time, called for a return to the central task of exhibiting, *'...[w]hen art institutions become venues that not only organize exhibitions, but also provide scholarly conferences, establish their own (albeit temporary) academies, while universities are forced to withdraw from these areas for political reasons; when the politicians responsible for culture are only willing to finance the educational efforts of the institutions and cut funding for their structural development.'*<sup>5</sup> Schafhausen's argument is similar to David Harvey's critique of NGOs, which, by relieving the state of its welfare duties, tacitly support it in its neglect of citizens' fundamental needs. In other words, when art institutions offer a nonmeasurable, non-result-oriented, non-exam-relevant debate by organizing academic conferences, they tacitly support the Bologna process since they offer what no longer has a place in a streamlined exam, result, and achievement-oriented tertiary education system. Just as Harvey is structurally right, yet can be rebutted by the argument from individual urgency as well as by the realistic assumption that not even strategic non-cooperation will stop the government's selective cuts in late capitalism, so too Schafhausen's call for pure exhibition making – a course not pursued by his institution Witte de With – is toned down.

Indeed, the way that interdisciplinary activities such as the above-mentioned seminars, symposia, film programs, and workshops are offered as a matter of course, not only

by the smaller art spaces but also by the big exhibition halls and museums, is an achievement of the era of New Institutionalism. Although film programs as such are in no way new, it is the weight that is laid on these educational events within the overall program, and their sweeping success in recent years, that has broken through the thick hide of the exhibition-fixated function of art institutions. This is not only reflected in the generally high rates of attendance at such events, but also in the fact that these art institutions have become participants in academic debates, thus 'unshackling' them from academia and making them accessible to a broader public. Theme oriented readers that are of value for research are published – as formerly solely by the Dia Art Foundation with its **Discussions in Contemporary Culture** (1992–1997) reader series, which ran for twelve volumes. Parallel to the subjects of its in-house exhibitions and symposia, for instance, the BAK regularly publishes readers, such as **Concerning War**<sup>6</sup> or **On Knowledge Production**<sup>7</sup>; since 2006, the Whitechapel Gallery has collaborated in bringing out the **Documents of Contemporary Art** series with the MIT Press; the Munich Kunstverein with its symposium and reader **Curating with Light Luggage**,<sup>8</sup> and the Bergen Kunsthall with its **The Biennial Reader**<sup>9</sup> and preceding conference, furthered debate on the critical developments in their respective fields.

The situation in the late 1990s and early 2000s was profoundly influenced by the corporatization engendered by neoliberal economic policies, the effects of which today, little more than a decade later, have drastically increased in intensity. Neoliberal developments that first set in then are now in *full bloom* and the effects they are having on institutions are

sometimes disastrous, as in the above-mentioned case of the Netherlands. Against this backdrop, medium-size institutions in particular have become experimenting grounds for a **New Institutionalism**. On the one hand, they are flexible enough to get in on a range of variously articulated protest movements; on the other, being in a position to create the necessary visibility for such schemes, they experiment with ideas of alternative social systems that deviate from the prevailing societal system and reject political representation. In Paolo Virno's words: *'[T]he possibility to transform rules, to construct new rules and to reduce old rules to a factual state are integral parts of a non-representative democracy.'*<sup>10</sup> Precisely this principle of a revaluation of norms requires an experimenting ground rooted in society but that also offers enough space to discuss counter-models. It is in precisely this spirit that curators interested in founding a *new institution* view the art institution – as an organ not directly subject to the mandate of state power, yet that is equipped with a system of rules.

Maria Hlavajova, Director of one of these *new institutions*, the BAK in Utrecht, is of the opinion that the new institutions are *'capable of responding to the post-Fordist requirements of flexibility, horizontal organization structures, and even mobility. ... [T]hey are capable of investing in notions of continuity, locality, and concentration.'*<sup>11</sup> She invokes the inversion of precisely those post-Fordist values that once emerged from the culture industry where they developed, in part, as a necessary response to a precarious economic situation, but that were also in part voluntarily celebrated as

a self-determined lifestyle (Richard Sennett, Angela McRobbie, and Marion von Osten, among others, have written extensively on the phenomenon). In the framework of a neoliberal consensus of values, Hlavajova thus advocates a revision of the *old values* of stability, continuity, and locality. While institutions can indeed still benefit from freely chosen mobility and flexibility, what is required to undermine the exigencies of the neoliberal business model and its marketing logic is withdrawal, research, and a revaluation of local work.

A further positive revaluation found in neoliberal business structures that, while not a direct product of New Institutionalism, has nonetheless found widespread application in the program design of the exhibiting activity of new institutions, is horizontal thinking. Art here is displayed, not as the culminating point of a genealogy, but in parallel with other cultural products, processes, and documentations. This type of cross-referential, communicative display is far closer to the realities of art production. In most cases, the aspects that are currently incorporated into art have relatively little to do with a backward look at developments in the field of art, and much more to do with general social processes that are also being thought in other disciplines.

Certain projects such as Elmgren & Dragset's *'Welfare Show'* at the Bergen Kunsthall (2005)<sup>12</sup> or *'Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?'* at Rooseum (2005) started a discussion – pursuing different approaches – on the subject that the idea of democracy as it is sold to us is deceptive. Indeed, a democracy fulfilling its own claims has never been realized. Instead, a pacified, passively consuming public lives on in

the belief that it is part of a functioning democracy. In their recent book, *Är svensken människa?*<sup>13</sup> ('Is the Swede human?') Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh examined the *statist individualism* of the Swedes, arguing that a precondition of individual welfare here is acceptance of the state. On this theory, to generalize, the Swedes wish to retain their belief in the state because only the state guarantees them their personal freedom. Because since the mid-1990s the neoliberal diktat has infiltrated politics even in the *model democracy* of Sweden, the masses have come to accept the logic of global capitalism as inevitable.

### Today

An ominous process of normalization has set in where Anthony Davies rightly detects an instrumentalization of art and other cultural institutions: '*Cultural institutions ... are on the frontline of an all-out assault on the way that we think, the way in which we have come to internalize and accept the "reality" of market forces as somehow inevitable, desirable even.*'<sup>14</sup>

Competing for funding for their exhibition programs and infrastructures, directors of institutions have no alternative but to present strategies, images, and modes of behavior that follow the codes of the business world. On top of which, populist interests shape the image of institutions. This makes art institutions sites in the system where neoliberalism reproduces itself, where criticism, even in the form of artistic utterances, that finds its way into the exhibition space is perverted within the context of the compliant institution. This *assault on the way that we think*, on potentially critical

points of view, functions by means of the simple mechanism of reward: *only if you play along and imitate neoliberal business conduct and its image-world do you get a piece of the cake*. Competitively conformist institutions in this sense are rewarded with sponsorship contracts. Given that from a certain size of institution on there is hardly any alternative, the mechanism becomes the prevalent strategy, in other words *normal*. Davies describes the process and its effects as a 'new politicization of business in culture,'<sup>15</sup> which he sees in the exploitation of a cultural institution's public for business interests: '*As company activities and networks became increasingly embedded and normalized through sponsorship, partnerships, and alliances, a process of politicization occurred. This is where there is a clear or latent correlation between business interests and the formulation and delivery of public sector policy: business becomes political at this point.*'<sup>16</sup> Thus, the institution's public is targeted by private sponsors' interests. Precisely this overwriting of public-engendering institutional and artistic practices with market interests is what marks the given social positioning of an art institution.

This is often the point of departure for critical institutions: the attempt to create a different public, a counter-public, as it were, and thus to modify the social significance of the institution, which is another prime concern of New Institutionalism that has lost nothing of its relevance. With reference to Michael Warner, Simon Sheikh has spoken of the idea of producing a counter-public: '*[T]he counter-public is a conscious mirroring of the modalities and institutions of the normative public, but in an effort to address other subjects and indeed other imaginaries.*'<sup>17</sup> The kind of public

being presented here does not consume but actively participates in the imagining of alternative forms of living together. It is precisely in this point that such a public differs from the art publics lined up outside the big populist exhibitions and franchise institutions that have no chance at all to go beyond passive consumption.

All in all the *new institutions* see their task as being to test out and redefine the social significance of art institutions. *What is new about the situation today? How can an institution position itself as a space for new imaginaries?* Apart from a further intensification of the economic situation in the wake of the so-called financial crisis, the world is altering fundamentally in respect of the supremacy of particular geographies and systems. The old political and cultural model is Western and is based on the assumption that the rest of the world will gradually adopt and adapt this model. But the old centers of power are dissolving and the model has ceased to function. New configurations and hierarchies are shaping up in a decentered world. Power, creativity, and ideas are following different and as yet undetermined courses. A role is played here as well by the new impotence of party politics and the potential for strengthening civil society, which since the revolutions in certain Arab countries – although the various outcomes remain uncertain – would seem closer than some years ago.

In connection with these developments I wish to point out again how important organized institutional networks can be. Elsewhere I have written at length about the potential that a globally distributed alliance of similarly minded institutions can

have for developing emancipatory forms of globalization.<sup>18</sup> This includes trans-local communication and collaboration between institutions no less than new ways of relating to their own localities. A network of confederates, even if they differ in size and orientation, offers prospects for introducing local issues into global discourse. In the case of local issues, whether political or organizational in nature, one is not forced to seek local solutions but can depart from the specifically local situation and enter a trans-local debate. In this sense, the institution functions as a platform for communicating with the world.

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<sup>2</sup> For current developments and a 'damage map' (<http://www.schadekaart.nl/page/3548/en>)

<sup>3</sup> <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en> eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/de

<sup>4</sup> 'It is worth noting that almost all of the institutions dealt with by Bode and Schmidt [in their "Spaces of Conflict" project] – Rooseum, Kunst-Werke Berlin, Museum für zeitgenössische Kunst Oslo, Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst Vilnius, Kunsthalle Helsinki, x-room Copenhagen, and the NIFCA itself – are going through a period of far-reaching alterations calling for a radical change in political line: Rooseum is to become an affiliate of the expanding Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Museum for Contemporary Art and other national museums in Oslo have been brought under the aegis of the National Museum for Art, Architecture, and Design, Vilnius is suffering drastic cuts, in many locations curators and directors are being replaced – with severe consequences for the programs of the institutions involved – and in the case of the NIFCA the entire institution has been closed. Most of these institutions seem to have been reprimanded like obstreperous adolescents.'

<sup>5</sup> <http://kunstkritikk.com/international-edition-en/schafhausen-%E2%80%93-back-to-exhibitions/?lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder (eds.), *'Concerning War: A Critical Reader'* (Utrecht/Frankfurt am Main: BAK/Revolver, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Liam Gillick, Maria Lind (eds.), *'Curating with Light Luggage'* (Frankfurt am Main: Christoph Keller, 2005).

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Hlavajova, *'How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to the Art Institution,'* in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010): 292–305, at 298.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted versions of the exhibition appeared later at the Bawag Foundation in Vienna, and in 2006 at the Serpentine Gallery, London, and The Power Plant, Toronto.

<sup>13</sup> Henrik Berggren & Lars Trädgård, 'Är svensken människa? : gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige' (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2009).

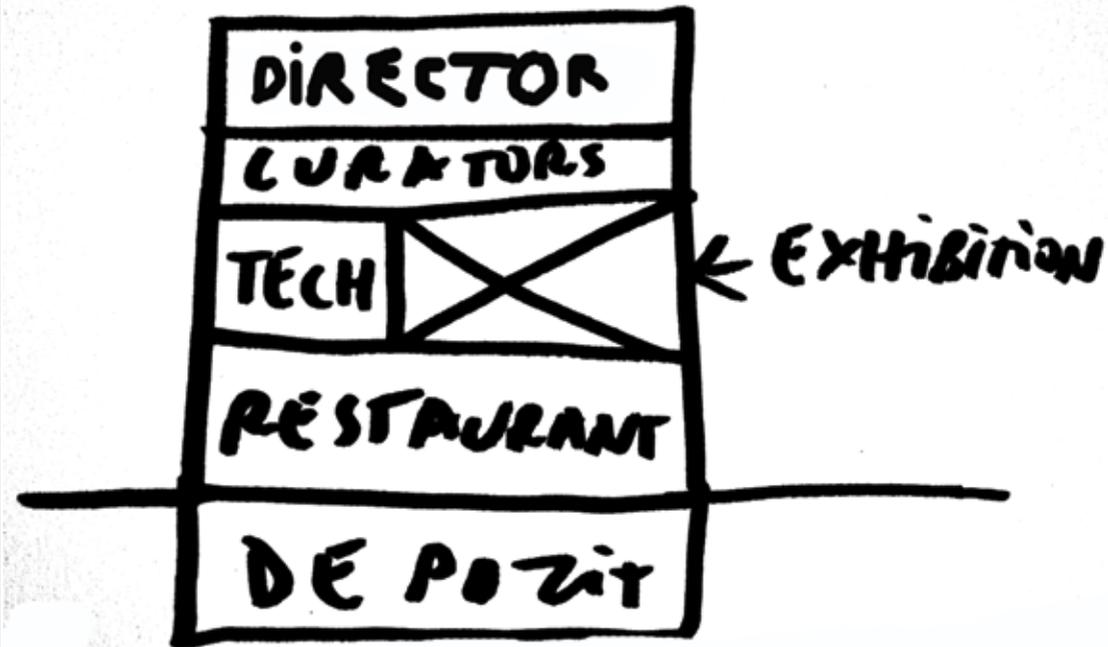
<sup>14</sup> Anthony Davies, 'Lost in Normalisation,' in Vanessa Joan Müller, Nikolaus Schafhausen (eds.), 'Under Construction: On Institutional Practice' (Cologne: Walther König, 2007): 118–22, at 121–22.

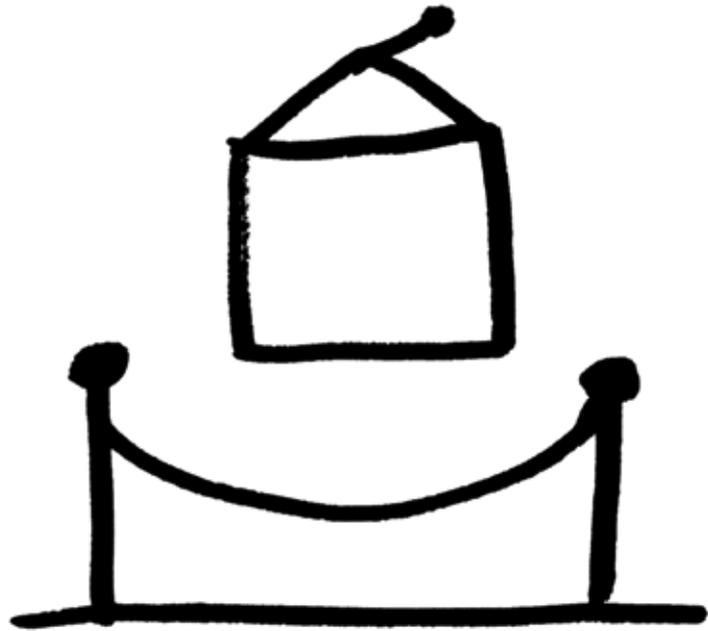
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 119–20.

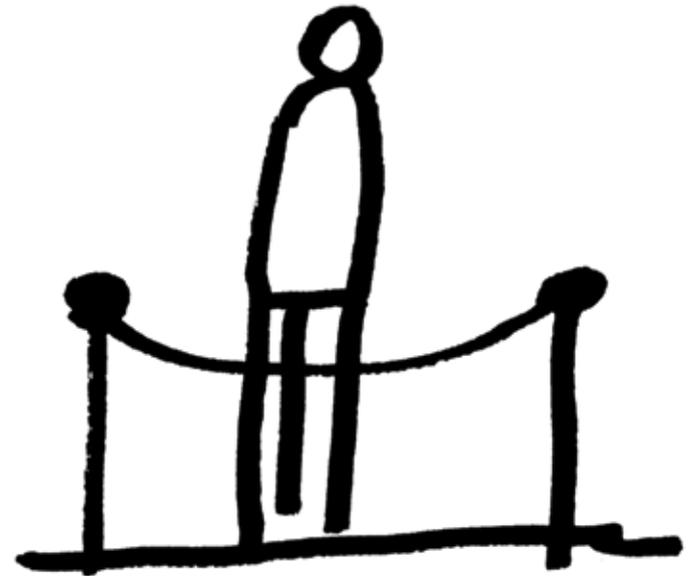
<sup>17</sup> Simon Sheikh, 'The Trouble with Institutions, or, Art and Its Publics,' in Nina Möntmann (ed.), 'Art and Its Institutions' (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 142–49, at 146.

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MASTERPIECE



MASTER  
CURATOR

# *Tough Times: the Same and Very Different*

Maria Lind

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GIANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

In a recent essay Olav Velthuis argues that in spite of the extraordinary commercial art boom of the last 15 years, the commercial art market has remained the same since its emergence in the 19th century. Small and medium-sized galleries continue to set up shop, operating within limited margins and selling to private individuals, institutions and corporations who collect for the sake of collecting. These buyers build collections and support artists and their dealers because they are interested in art, as opposed to sports, interior decoration or other lifestyle markers. And yet, there is no denying that parts of the commercial art market are entirely transformed and that those parts are blatantly visible. But they also have consequences, both for the private sector and the non-profit sector. They are intrinsic to the global structural transformations of the art world which we are experiencing right now.

Since the late '90s the commercial art market has grown enormously in terms of both volume of sales and level of prices. For example, auction sales increased eight times between 1998 and 2008. Another place where the increase is clearly felt is the art fairs, the number of which has gone from two in 1970 to almost two hundred 40 years later. The location of this growth is described by Velthuis as the *top segment* of the commercial art market, a layer floating on top of the main bulk of art business which works more or less as usual. It is within this top segment that the more obscene features of the boom appear: art as investment and lifestyle accessory. Assets and glitz fuelled by the mega-rich, who nowadays have considerable influence on how museum collections grow and how their programmes are shaped. Celebrity culture as it

has already existed for a long time within the film and fashion industries is part and parcel of this top segment, which furthermore is the section of the art world that gets almost all the attention in the current non-specialised mediascape.

Similarly the economy of art institutions such as museums, kunsthallen, kunstvereine and other art centres in Western Europe has gone through palpable changes. Like a non-identical twin of the commercial sector, this non-profit sector of the art world has certainly not seen a boom but it is generally experiencing decreasing budgets during the same period of time. Reduced subsidies or more recipients sharing existing resources are the main reasons for this development. If the institutions have not bought into the idea of art as spectacle and easily digestible entertainment, that is. If so, they have most likely been able to find revenue in entry tickets, sponsorship deals and various kinds of lucrative partnerships. In order to continue functioning, the others have to find additional funding through foundations, funds and private donors. In the face of such changes those institutions continue to exist, often limping along but remaining in operation.

Some parts of the world are better equipped for the construction with additional funding than others. Furthermore the degree of demands on and possibilities of broadening the sources of funding vary from country to country. There are contexts where foundations supporting contemporary art are rare or even non-existent and where private donors are a nascent phenomenon, because the non-profit sector is still primarily structured according to the borders of nation states. In the lingo of the public sector of a place like Sweden this is

termed 'broadening the sources of funding'. If you are successful in 'broadening', or generating money from other sources, in the city of Stockholm or if you attract many visitors, especially children and youth, you are rewarded with additional *tip money* at the end of the fiscal year. This ideologically charged stimulation has turned out to de facto help increase budgets.

Whereas on the surface such small-scale visual arts organisations might look the same as always, the way they are run on a day-to-day basis has changed considerably since the '90s. They struggle to make ends meet with public funding often only covering structural expenses such as rent and salaries for the post-Fordist contract workers. If they are lucky. In addition, funds for programming have to be generated from fewer regular supporters by the underpaid staff itself. Importantly, these institutions' activities don't generally fit accepted terms of assessment under neoliberalism. They don't have impressive amounts of visitors or mentions in the media. Instead their value is not as straightforward as mere numbers and is more complicated to measure. Their way of generating value typically means delays of up to 15 years. In the present they tend to create positive effects in local neighbourhoods, as gathering places, points of reference and as shapers of identity. Their investment in the present, for instance in commissioning new work from emerging artists and testing new curatorial models, only give results decades down the line. At that point bigger institutions and the commercial sector pick up and cash in on their experiments and invite the very same artists, using those very curatorial models, thereby attracting money, visitors and media attention. In the meantime the small-scale visual arts organisations have

precarious working conditions, with low salaries and virtually no possibilities to invest in infrastructure.

On the topic of changes, one characteristic of the recent boom in the commercial art market is that the arenas for showing and selling art have shifted. The boundaries between primary and secondary art markets, between galleries and auction houses, have blurred. Auction houses incorporate galleries into their structures, literally combining primary and secondary operations in one organisation, and artists sell work directly through them. Galleries sell less from their physical home bases and more while temporarily visiting other often faraway contexts through art fairs. Small and medium-size galleries team up and create networks through which work by certain groups of artists circulates, in addition to the large powerhouse galleries who monopolise artists on a global scale. Globalisation is certainly a catchword here but upon closer inspection it can hardly stand up to its claims. If anything, it is possible to talk about growing regional markets, like China and India, but they lean towards trading in art from their own home turf, rather than from elsewhere. Western galleries mostly prefer to stick to art from the Western hemisphere.

Consequently, the conditions of art production are changing. In order to create a supply suiting the new demands, corporate studios with up to one hundred employees are becoming more common, as are waiting lists for collectors who absolutely need work by specific artists. Numerous artists with more modest production situations also repeat themselves endlessly when they realize that they have a profitable brand. Outside of regions with public support this remains a beaten track. Understandably, these artists

want to make a living and earn a reputation. As a parallel, good old teaching continues to make many artists into employees. Simultaneously the academic formalisation of so-called practice-based research provides more and more artists with a source of income and an arena for production and distribution of their work. With PhD grants, and research grants from the academic world later on, they can survive and make work at the same time. But they also run the risk of being entangled in new problematic systems of evaluation and confirmation. If the so-called educational turn refers to self-organised initiatives where knowledge production is tied to educational models like schools, universities and academies, whose traditional forms and procedures are questioned, the *discursive turn* is more inclusive. It can also imply pedagogy more generally. The discursive turn describes an embrace of spoken exchange which can take the shape of a symposium, a seminar, a workshop or a discussion. All of them can be conceived as art projects but they can just as well be considered curated projects, in addition to formats such as an exhibition. Most of the time they are difficult to make a living from.

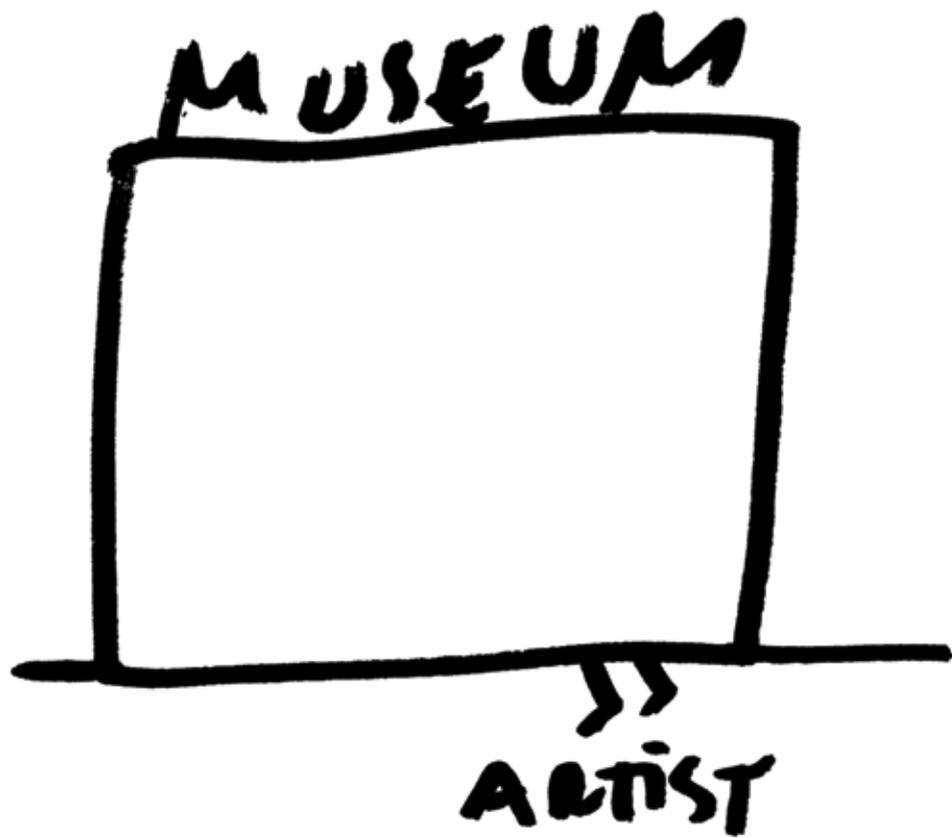
While some artists live lavishly from the boom in the commercial market other artists are neither involved nor interested in this profit-driven set-up. They reject the idea of entertainment and commerce, opting for more self-determined practices with less potential for sensationalism. Hence, we can speak of a polarisation, or better, a bifurcation between a commercial, largely object- and image-based art and self-organised, artist-driven activities that tend toward the less material, or at least *difficult-to-contain* kind of work. Discourse is key in

the latter, on many levels, but not unknown in the former. The so-called educational turn, as well as the documentary turn, play an important role here, functioning as a sort of powerhouse projecting ideas and ways of working. Participatory practices sit somewhere in between the two, with one side lending itself to fun and reassuring activities and the other side offering more challenge in the form of debates and research.

We can think of this bifurcation as a territory with *major* and *minor* strands, both as in linguistics and in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's discussion of *minor literature*. They refer to Kafka's writing in German, which managed to create a sort of subversive imaginary space in a context where the Czech language was dominant. It is something marginal but powerful, with an ability to shift the terms of engagement. The bifurcation is of course a schematic picture of the current situation for contemporary art, leaving out many nuances and hybrids. Nevertheless, it identifies some influential changes and persistent features. It is essential to mention that interesting and relevant work is being made along both tracks, despite everything. Artistically and curatorially. It tends to be the kind of work which retains a speculative aspect, whether through materialism or magic.

Speaking from my own perspective, in the last year and a half in Stockholm it seems as if the bifurcation is getting wider by the month. The way the daily newspapers in Sweden write about contemporary art is astonishingly shallow, a downward curve already known in many contexts. The local exhibitions (and it is almost only exhibitions, and not other

kinds of curated projects, which are in effect more *of our time* than most exhibitions) that get covered are not only provincial but also *pretend art*. A benefit of the previous documenta is its firm curatorial stance that insists that art is a necessary corollary to science and culture. Art was indispensable as a trigger for developments in those fields in the immediate post-war period, and it is today as well. At the same time, this documenta is a defence of art's autonomy and its structural importance in and of itself, but also recognises that when it is allowed an unleashed existence it starts to stimulate thinking and acting elsewhere. As someone who spends 80% of the work week fundraising, this year's documenta seems to offer a good chance to argue for the lost agreement between the Western European nation states and their citizenries. After the Second World War, an agreement was struck which says that culture should be an independent force in society, standing free from political and other interference. It also says that the state should pay for this, in order to guarantee independence. Since the '90s this agreement has eroded and is now on the way to disappearing. As the severe budget cuts in the Netherlands show, radical changes in the funding system may be motivated more by ideology than by economics. Even if autonomy is a philosophical as well as empirical impossibility, we can still speak of spaces in which to manoeuvre. We need to work hard to create them here and now, in order to allow art and artists to exist under reasonable conditions, and to be able to work with and around them, without resorting to economic determinism. Some things change and others remain almost the same.



# Invitation to Manuela Villa Acosta for the Giant Step survey

Manuela Villa Acosta and vessel

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GIANT STEP | Reflections and Essays on Institutional Critique

**De: vessel**

*Enviado el: viernes, 15 de marzo de 2013 15:33*

**Para: Manuela Villa Acosta,  
Head of Art Projects of Matadero Madrid**

*Asunto: Invitation to the Giant Step survey*

**Dear Manuela,**

We are inviting you to join our conversation, as an inquiry into creative practice. We would like to include your insights in relation to our questions below in our upcoming publication for our project, Giant Step. As Vessel's project for the past year, it is a curatorial discourse about the place of the institution within contemporary culture. It is a critical mediation on ways to change the current model of the institution and explore new possibilities.

At the end of this email is a list of questions that are relevant to the Giant Step project. Please take some time to look them over and send us your feedback as a reply to this email. Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions or concerns. We truly appreciate your help and hope to hear back from you within the next two weeks.

**From: Manuela**

Date: Mar 26, 2013 5:10 PM

**To: vessel**

Subject: invitation to the Giant Step survey

Dear vessel:

Please, find my answers below.

**1. Given that the art field is structurally articulated by processes of institutionalization, how is it possible to re-imagine the notion of the institution, as our minds and bodies are the places in which the institutionalization imposes its pervasive necessity to produce economic values?**

I would like to think that there is not a single model of institution, even though, in the past years, we have seen how in Europe, the public institution is going towards a more and more privatized model, very much so in Spain. There is still a big difference between public and private institutions. I am saying this because I still believe in the necessary role that public institutions have as public services, as part of the commons. This is very different from the role that private institutions can have, where success is more likely to be valued in terms of production of economic values.

Having said this, I don't really know how you think the notion of the institution on a macro level, but as everyday politics, I think in terms of experimentation and strategies. I do not believe that there is an outside of the system, not at least right now, therefore I try to work in the pleats (a concept borrowed from Deleuze) that the system – pictured as a monochromatic platform – leaves. For example, in terms of programming, I know that I have to do big, more mainstream events in order to be able to organize smaller and more experimental events. I get the money and the political recognition from these big events in order to be able to do smaller scale actions, more rooted in the community but less politically and economically profitable.

The question of the mind and the body is, nevertheless, the big issue that I cannot seem to solve right now. As the teams and the salaries are constantly shrinking, this precariousness is for me the main source of anxiety and lack of freedom within the institution, or at least in the Spanish institution. And this is right now the main reason that restrains us from assuming a passive and non critical role within the institution.

**2. How can institutions stimulate and encourage the cultural dynamics of a location or society, particularly in areas with a less prominent critical audience?**

Some people are spending years answering to this precise question, so I don't really know where to start from. Let's see... I have had two bars in my life. And, at least in Spain, such places do not have to deal with this problem at all. This is why I like programming in bars, because contrary to the cultural institution, good bars are placed right in the heart of the community, they do not need mediators, they are not imposing other cultural models, there are no differences between high and low cultural models, they are defined by the audience in an everyday basis, there are no curators deciding what people should experience, there is food and drink and they are fun. I always have this in mind when programming.

**3. What is the role of collaboration within the determinants of the functioning of contemporary institutions (i.e. influence of cultural policy, hierarchies and strategies of government, economic constraints, information policy as well as the historical and geographical context)?**

This is a very difficult question. Institutions are like the limbs of a complex bureaucratic body which involve all these issues you mention. To be able to move, you need work conjointly with the political, economic, social and historical spheres. If you do not do so, you will not be able to move at all. It is again a question of strategies.

**4. How can exploring topics rooted within specific locations serve to enhance the critical potential of creative practice?**

The only way to be critical is to be rooted in reality.

**5. How is the mandate of an international institution affected by its local community? And/or vice versa: How is the local community affected by its international institutions?**

As I have already stated, I think that institutions, being them local, national or international, should be affected by their local community. I don't understand Art as something independent from Society, therefore from its social context. And this should be applied to institutions, of course.

Communities should be affected in a positive way by international institutions, but I am afraid this does not always happen. One of the local consequences of the location of an international cultural institution is a process of gentrification which usually affects positively only to a certain part of the population. We all know what happens with the rest.

**6. How can institutions respond to local needs and reflect the contexts of their specific location as well as maintain relevance within an international discourse?**

First of all, I would like to know what you mean by *an international discourse*. Is there such thing as *an/one international discourse*? I would like to think that there are many. I will therefore rewrite the question: How can an institution be affected by its local community and maintain its relevance within the dominant international discourse? Ideally, I don't think this should be an objective for the institution. I think that when you are doing something really connected with your local community, then, your discourse becomes relevant per se, also internationally (glocally). If this is reflected in your institutional network, it might be a question of things such as the budget you can spend on communication, the trips abroad that you can pay to your workers, or the geopolitical interests of the moment. I also think that it makes more sense to create networks with institutions that are localized in similar contexts. For example, it might make more sense for a Spanish institution to establish relations with Italy, Greece or Turkey (the Mediterranean area) than with North American or Northern European institutions.

**7. Can grounding theoretical discourse within a specific location help to increase the relevance and effectiveness of these practices? How is this kind of contextualization beneficial or detrimental when considering artistic practice?**

I don't believe in *grounding theoretical discourses*. This is for me a, somehow, colonial practice in which intellectuals give an interpretation of reality without taking into account the visions of the people that are part of that reality. To begin with, we tend to impose certain methodologies, such as the scientific method, as the only legitimate ways of producing knowledge. I believe that Art can contribute in opening up these processes of reflection, making them more democratic and closer to reality somehow. I prefer to think in terms of *theorizing practicalities*. This is, analyze the context and, instead of trying to impose a theoretical view or strategy on it, give resources to the members of this same context to reflect and produce knowledge, not only about themselves but about the world that is around them. This is more or less the classical division between deductive logic (top-down) and inductive reasoning (bottom-up). As a curator, therefore, I establish curatorial frameworks and work horizontally with other Art workers (creators, educators, art writers, curators, etc.) in creating the adequate environment to explore the production of Art and its emotional relationships.

# *Dialogical approaches: Vessel and Bari. Facts, failures, limits and possibilities.*

by Vessel: Vivianna Checchia,  
Vlad Morariu, Anna Santomauro;  
and participants:  
Bruno Barsanti, Doppelgaenger,  
Antonella Marino, Fabio Santacroce  
and Francesco Scasciamaccia.

**Giant Step** was born as a response to the Bari local authorities' interest in building a contemporary art museum in the city, *BAC-Bari Arte Contemporanea*. The project's ambition was to gather all the issues and urgencies from the local community in order to develop a more bottom-up process for the creation of that museum. From the beginning we asked ourselves what vessel could do to further the local citizen's ability to participate or even intervene in these decisions which span social-cultural-and-political values

We wanted to be a bridge between the local context of Bari and what was happening elsewhere on an international scale. This method allowed us to conceive of a project that was both local and international. The intent was that of initiating generative dynamics for the Region of Puglia and its community through exchange, analysis and dialogue with other contexts: including more peripheral places in the contemporary art world, such as Galeria Labyrinth in Lublin, Poland, but also internationally well-known institutions, such as the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Before structuring the project, with the help of Vlad Morariu, Vessel co-curator and researcher on Institutional Critique, we made an attempt to activate an open platform for sharing ideas and issues related to the creation of BAC – mainly to include all the local cultural operators but also the local community.

We deliberated on how this could happen, but more importantly, which method we should adopt in order to achieve this goal. We wanted a method that could be

inclusive but that at the same time could generate theoretical knowledge on the topic, an element that we saw as inescapable for developing the tools and vocabulary that could potentially trigger effective actions.

After various considerations, we thought that creating reading groups with the local context could be a way to discuss the BAC, starting from selecting theoretical texts on what it means to 'critique the institution', on what it means today to respond in a critical way to the institution, and how it is possible to 're-think' the institutional model, as an ideal model for our society.

After the reading groups, we began to see what the limits were to such an ambitious project. We genuinely thought that this was the best method, but as soon as we started with the process of reading groups, we realised that something was not working with the format. Firstly, the level of the selected texts was highly academic, and secondly, there was much difficulty with the use of English amongst some of the participants. But also, the errors could also lie in the fact that what we perceived as a matter of urgency was not a shared concern felt by many of the local citizens.

Beyond the reading groups we wanted to conduct some interviews with local cultural operators on the idea of BAC in order to gather information on what was currently happening in the city. Unfortunately, this process never achieved a proper result, it was at least as we expected.

### **The event of Giant Step, at least for what concerns Bari:**

After several attempts to facilitate a collective process that could potentially facilitate a critical position towards BAC or that simply could activate an active engagement of the locals into this process – which ended in a three-day symposium in which experts, researchers and curators presented their papers on a chosen title: 'Enter the Artworld? Marginal Establishment, Cooptation and Resistance'. The symposium, from one side, helped understand how to proceed and be more aware of what could be an institution nowadays, but from the other it didn't engage the local community in this process as we expected.

*Francesco, as member of vessel involved in the project and citizen of the region, what do you think about this?*

### **Francesco Scasciamacchia:**

At that time I had just become a member of vessel so I did not participate to the creation from the beginning of the Giant Step project. I was involved in it when the project already started and I helped with the selection of some texts for the reading groups. I thought this format was a great way to activate a dialogue on the subject of BAC in Bari that would also involve the local people.

As someone from the region, I suspected from the beginning that there would be a language issue in the use of English for the symposium. My other doubt was that over all mission of Giant Step had not yet unfolded. While being involved in some of the discussions pertaining to Giant Step, quite often, we

concluded with the same question: “What is the purpose of all of this, if not to have an intellectual conversation between us?”

Regardless of the doubts, what was stronger was my enthusiasm as a researcher for the topic of the project, the academic level of the discussion and the competencies that the project gathered in Bari. So, I landed in Bari in June as one of the invited presenters for the symposium.

During the event, I started to realize that we were missing an opportunity: one of intervening in an effective way in the city, one of facilitating a process of the formation of a public institution for Bari.

I don’t know if the format was appropriate, I don’t know if in reality the language was the obstacle, or if the hierarchical architecture of Cineporto—a conference hall where the presentations were held—was what effected the participation of the local community.

Since the beginning, Giant Step was an optimistic attempt to create alternative model to what was happening in Bari, which was a top-down museum plan, a case like many others across globe. This attempt is something that I hope won’t end!

Then I ask to myself (I don’t have an answer yet), and I ask to all of you:

- What could we do?
- Is this a true need?
- How can vessel use what happened with Giant Step to deploy a more efficient strategy in the future?
- What tools do we have at our disposal, all together, to claim for an ideal institution in Bari?
- How to mingle our desire as “art-lovers” with the ones of the community of Bari?

### **Doppelgaenger:**

All the attempts meant to nourish the debate about the creation of a museum of contemporary art are worthy. With the format of the symposium, possibly a critical platform which uses academic tools to investigate the relationship between art and institutions was too ambitious a goal for a three day event. This initiative could have seemed as if it was coming from above, a top down perspective.

Anyway, I find it very useful to continue the debate.

In order to go through the issue of the contemporary art museum in Bari it is important that the choice of the ideal institutional model is shared by the community (cultural agents and institutions) and that it is structured according to a feasible plan that takes into account the difficulties and the social structure of our region.

The site of where the museum would be built is crucial, as there shouldn't be serious logistical issues and conservation problems that would then take huge investments of money. I think that funding should be used for *program content* and not for the building itself; this is just a matter of optimising resources.

(The wonderful Margherita Theater would be a suitable space for special projects.)

The selection of the museum's artistic director should be disconnected from the politics that have little to do with the art world. I know what I say may sound obvious to some, but I still think it is good to keep this idea in mind. The artistic director of the museum has a political commitment towards the citizens that can be satisfied only through a strong program meant to tackle the curiosity of people. It is better to invest money in the choice of a director that could shape the soul of the museum rather than in the architect that will design the skeleton of the building.

It is also necessary that the City and the Regional Council agree on the project otherwise it would not be strong and constant enough. **Having a common goal in this sense is the most important thing we can do.**

## Antonella Marino:

I believe that Bari needs a stable institution for contemporary art. Not necessarily a structure as rigid as a museum (namely, because the regional council would not be able to support it, and the big Italian models like Maxxi and Madre have revealed their weakness), but a flexible and fresh art center that could create a dialogue with the international context. The BAC project seemed to be willing to work in this way, and even if in this statute it was conceived by a small group of promoters it promised to activate the relationship with the territory before the operative management phase. I do use the past tense because as you know the process of creation of the Foundation promoted by the City Council has been stopped also because of the lack of support from the Regional Council. I don't want to talk about the pros and cons of the initiative, which is perhaps one of the many missed opportunities...

Now, we should clarify if the goal of Giant Step and vessel is either to offer a critical and theoretical contribution to the problem or if the objective is to concretely talk about Bari: in this case it would have been necessary to go through the local cultural policy and its historical and operative dynamics.

It is clear that this would address two different targets, thus the choice of methodologies of encounter, themes and speakers should be made accordingly. Anyway as your goal is to involve the citizens and you notice self-critically, the inadequacy of the feedback, it is then necessary to rethink the communication and relational strategies. You should define on time and on the basis of a wide mailing list

communication addressed to local newspapers, tv, radio broadcasts and social networks. You should also think about its connection with the territory and establish direct relationships with art critics, writers, journalists and opinion leaders.

The second issue concerns the structure of the meetings. An academic and theoretical framework cannot attract general audiences, it excludes them from the beginning. You should have tried to involve people who are active in the territory in the official cultural institutions (University, Academy, schools, cultural departments) or in the freelance field. In order not to have ephemeral results you should have produced records to share with external interlocutors and with the local institutions. It is necessary to involve the associations and organizations connected directly or indirectly with the contemporary art system: galleries and art critics in primis.

The reading groups could be replaced by working sessions, and the use of English language does not work not only for practical reasons (English on a specialist level is not very common in the South) but also because it excludes a direct relationship with the culture of the territory. The presence of international speakers is suitable but it requires translation.

The objective can be reached only through the knowledge about the debate developed on the territory, with documents and materials, and by involving its protagonists, trying to finalize the process with operative proposals and possible alternatives.

It is possible that this sort of framework would require a more complex organization and more economic resources. But this should not be considered as a limit: often a well structured project can access more easily to public or private funding.

### **Bruno Barsanti:**

It is an urgency which belongs to a very small group of people – approximately the people who took part in vessel's reading groups – and certainly not the citizens of Bari. A historical collective awareness, related to the topics you are touching upon, lacks in town. Even if we want to believe there are the conditions to create it now, it should be worked on for years and discussed between the people (audience). The best thing to do would have been to concretely look for the people of Bari in their own cultural environment instead of inviting them into unknown scenarios (like for instance the symposium on institutional critique and the use of English).

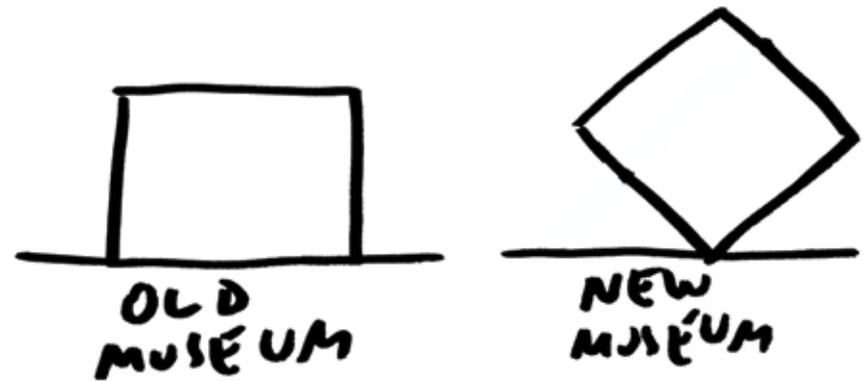
Vessel should absorb entirely the criticism that came out during the first edition of Giant Step and should try to change its formula (strategy) to avoid the effect 'corpo estraneo' (alien body). The use of Italian language can encourage a process of approach but it is not enough. The analysis of international situations should be placed next to a deep historical analysis of the artistic and cultural context of Bari (for instance the complex and tormented history of the theatres in Bari).

I believe is too early to speak about an 'ideal institution' within a context like the Bari one which is totally empty of artistic institutions even "not ideal ones"...

First of all: why is “*art lovers*” within quotation marks?  
 One solution could be to step outside the concept of “contemporary art” as a closed and auto-referential discipline, perceived by most of the people as an unaccessible discipline, and to devote ourselves to a deep studium [analysis] of the territory. This would allow us to perceive the essential characteristics. To start from those, and work towards the definitions of cultural-artistic policies calibrated on the peculiarities and potentialities of the community of the city of Bari. Basically: try to avoid another process (I can’t find the word here...it is the opposite of bottom-up!).

### **Fabio Santacroce:**

I believe the answers to these questions have been already given within the introduction text. Giant Step appeared immediately as a project model too much structured and too theory based to be activated and welcomed in such a short time and, above all, managed “academically” –remotely with sporadic incursions on the territory. All this resulted as unproductive above all, in relation to the BAC which was at that time, unclear and fast consuming.



## Selected Biographies

**Bruno Barsanti** is an Independent curator, who holds a degree in Arts Management (Bocconi University, Milan). In 2013 he participated in the first edition of the Curatorial Programme Campo, promoted by Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino. In 2013 he co-curated the exhibition NOISE, a Collateral Event to the 55. Venice Biennale. In 2011 he conceived and directed the public art project amarelarte, which took place in the old harbour of Bari, with the contribution of Regione Puglia (Bollenti Spiriti). In 2008 he took part as assistant curator in the exhibition Subtle Energies of Matter, a group show travelling in China and South Korea. He also conceived and curated exhibitions in non-traditional venues such as a warehouse of an art carrier (Handle with Care, Magazzini Arteinmovimento, Torino, 2010) and an empty flat presently used as a cinema set (ULAZ, Cavallerizza Reale, Torino, 2012). In recent years he worked for art galleries and private art institutions (Galleria Continua - Le Moulin, FIAC Paris).

**Dave Beech** is an artist, writer and lecturer. He is a member of the Freee art collective, teaches at Chelsea College of Art, London, and writes regularly for Art Monthly. He studied Fine Art at Leicester Polytechnic, MA in Cultural Theory at the Royal College of Art and has taught for Goldsmiths, the Slade, Central St Martins, the Open University, Birkbeck, the Royal Academy and the RCA.

He has had solo exhibitions (some with Freee) at **Sparwasser HQ, Flag Gallery, Collective Gallery, 1,000,000 mph gallery,**

**International Project Space** and key group exhibitions, including 'Nought to Sixty' at the ICA, 'On Joy, Sadness and Desire' at SMART, 'Dorm' at The Model, 'London in Six Easy Steps' at the ICA. He has also been selected for the **Liverpool Biennial (2010), the Second Guangzhou Triennale (2005), East International at Norwich Gallery (2006) and Zoo Art Fair (2009).**

He co-authored the Verso book 'The Philistine Controversy' with John Roberts (2002), edited the MIT/Whitechapel anthology 'Beauty' (2009), and edited a special issue of **Third Text** ('Art, Politics and Resistance?' Vol 16, Issue 4, No.6).

He co-curated '**We Are Grammar**' at the **Pratt Institute, Manhattan** with Paul O'Neill in 2011, curated '**What's Wrong?**' At **The Trade Apartment, Brixton** in 2001 and co-founded **Floating ip gallery** on Manchester with Graham Parker which ran between 2002-2005.

**Alfredo Cramerotti** is a writer and curator working across TV, radio, publishing, media festivals, writing and exhibition making. He directs MOSTYN, Wales' leading contemporary art institute, and is Head Curator of APT Artist Pension Trust. In 2010 he co-curated Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, and in 2013 the Maldives Pavilion and the Wales Pavilion at the 55th Venice Art Biennial, as well as the 4th Triennale Ladina in South Tyrol. Alfredo is Research Scholar at the eCPR European Centre for Photography Research, University of Wales, Newport, and Editor in Chief of the Critical Photography series by Intellect Books. His own

publications include the book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* (2009).

**Viviana Checchia** is a curator, critic, and PhD candidate at Loughborough University (UK). She lives in London and Bari, where she co-founded vessel with Anna Santomauro. As Assistant Curator at Eastside Projects (UK) she researched and assisted in curating **Abstract Cabinet Show** and Liam Gillick **Two Short Plays**, edited Declan Clarke & Paul McDevitt's *Fuck Book* (2009), and presented Eastside Projects' **National Network: A View - Limited Edition Prints and Print Portfolios** at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her projects as an independent curator include **In Dialogue**, a project co-curated with Heather Connely and Rhiannon Slade at Nottingham Contemporary, UK (2012); **Back to Rome**, a solo show by Angelo Castucci (2010); and **There's something to this (but I don't know what it is)**, a solo show by Helen Brown at Nitra Gallery, Slovakia (2010). She participated in the European Course for Contemporary Art Curators organized by the Province of Milan and the Fondazione Antonio Ratti (2009), the AICA International Summer Seminar Program of Art (2009), the Gwangju Foundation Course for International Curators (2010) and the ICI Curatorial Intensive **From 'Official History' to Underrepresented Narratives** at Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Derry~Londonderry. She is currently part of the Agora, 4th Athens Biennale curatorial team.

**Antonella Marino** born in Bari graduated in Humanities (art history path) holding diplome of specialisation in Art History

at the University of Urbino. She teaches Contemporary Art History and also 'New Trends' at Accademia di Belle Arti di Bari. As journalist she is responsible of the art section of the local edition of the Newspaper La Repubblica and correspondent of the national magazines such as *Segno* and *Flash Art*. She is also author of texts for exhibition catalogues and of the volumes *L'arte e la macchina e La pittura di paesaggio in Puglia*, ed. EdipugliaBari. As curator she is interested in emergent languages and in the relations between creative research and new technologies. She curated both solo and group exhibitions, in collaboration with private galleries and public institutions.

**Nina Möntmann** is a curator and professor of art theory and the history of ideas at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. She curated 'If we can't get it together: Artists rethinking the (mal)functions of communities', Power Plant (Toronto, 2008/09); 'The Jerusalem Show: Jerusalem Syndrome', (with Jack Persekian, Jerusalem, 2009); and Harun Farocki's 'A New Product,' Deichtorhallen (Hamburg, 2012). She also curated a program of Farocki's films at Moderna Museet (Stockholm, 2013). She has edited publications including 'Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts', 'Critique and Collaborations' (Black Dog Publishing, 2006); 'New Communities' (Public Access, 2009); *Scandalous. A Reader on Art & Ethics* (Sterberg Press, forthcoming 2013), and a Reader on Harun Farocki's Film 'A New Product' (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, forthcoming/2013). She is a regular contributor to *Artforum* and other international art magazines.

**Vlad Morariu** (b. 1983) is a theoretician, curator and art

critic based in London. He is educated in philosophy and is currently finishing his PhD research at **Loughborough University School of the Arts**, writing on the present conditions and possibilities of institutional critique. He translated in Romanian **Arthur Danto's Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art** (Idea, 2012), and published texts and interviews in collective editions such as **Atlas of Transformation**, JRP-Ringier, 2010; **Romanian Cultural Resolution**, Hatje Kantz, 2011; **Crisis, Rupture and Anxiety**, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. He is a collaborator of the **Idea Art + Society** magazine and member of the vessel team since 2011.

**Rachel Pafe** is an artist and curator from Washington, DC. She has worked with vessel since 2011, first as intern and later as assistant curator. Her research focuses on the redefinition and exploration of the exhibition as a means of discovering new possibilities for critical socially engaged practice in marginal/conflicted areas. She is currently earning her MRes in Exhibition Studies at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London.

**Dan Perjovschi** (born 1961) lives and works in Bucharest and Sibiu Romania. His solo exhibitions include: **Unframed** at Kiasma Helsinki (2003), **News from the Island** at Reykjavik Art Museum in 2012, **Not over** at MACRO Rome in 2011, **Late News** at Royal Ontario Museum Toronto in 2010, **What Happen to US?** at MoMA New York and **I am not Exotic I am Exhausted** at Kunsthalle Basel in 2007, **The Room Drawing** at Tate Modern London, **On the Other Hand** at Portikus Frankfurt and **First of May** at Moderna Museet

Stockholm in 2006 and **Naked Drawings** at Ludwig Museum Cologne in 2005.

He participates at group shows like Paris Triennial 2012, Dublin Contemporary in 2011, **Freedom of Speech** at Nbk Berlin, Hamburg Kunstverein in 2010, Lyon Biennial in 2009, the Sydney Biennial and Fifth Floor at Tate Liverpool in 2008, **The Magelanic Cloud** at Pompidou Center Paris the 52nd Venice Biennial and the Moscow Biennial in 2007, **New Europe** at Generali Foundation Vienna and the 9th Istanbul Biennial in 2005. Perjovschi received the George Maciunas Prize in 2004 and ECF Princess Margriet Award in 2013 (with Lia Perjovschi).

**Victoria Preston** is the Founder/Principal of Cultural Capital Consultancy <http://culturalcapitalconsultancy.com>. She is completing a PhD on the curatorial aspects of institutional critique at **Birkbeck College, University of London**.

**Anna Santomauro** (Italy, 1983) is a curator and art writer. She has collaborated with neon>campobase, a non profit organization devoted to contemporary art in Bologna, where she has curated a 3-years video program. She has recently curated the group exhibition For an Ecology of the Museum at Museo di Villa Croce in Genoa. In 2012 she co-curated the radio program Work in the Field as part of the project Aelia Media by Pablo Helguera. She is co-founder and co-curator of vessel, non profit art organization in Bari, Italy.

**Fabio Santacroce** is an artist born in Bari (Italy) in 1980. He lives and works in Bari.

**Alessandra Saviotti (1982, Ravenna, Italy).** (b. 1982) is a curator based in the Netherlands. Her work aims to realise projects where the public is actively involved and ordinary space gains new value thanks to the temporary incursion of art. Her reflection is taking into consideration participatory and collaborative processes in order to present interdisciplinary interventions. She is co-founder of the art collective Aspramente (2006) and since 2009 she has been developing a critical discourse – in collaboration with Marianna Liosi – about the relationship between art practices and the transformation of protest movements. She writes for *digicult.it*, a cultural platform that examines the impact of digital technologies and sciences on the arts, design, culture and contemporary society. She currently has a research position at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (NL).

**Antonella Spano and Michele Spinelli** owners and directors of *doppelgaenger* gallery in Bari.

## Credits

**GIANT STEP** is a project by: **vessel (Italy), Van Abbemuseum (The Netherlands), MOSTYN (Wales), and Galeria Labyrint (Poland)**

Graphic Designer: Vincenzo Estremo

Communication manager: Fabio Gnali and Ilse Cornelis

Fundraiser: Andrea Vara

Media support: Undo, Blog Stream

### REPORTS

#### *Istanbul Report*

Research team: Nicoletta Daldanise, Berçin Damgacı

Participants: Caravansarai, Derya Demir, Didem Özbek,

Elif Bursalı, Galeri NON, Giant Step, Istanbul,

Julie Upmeyer, Pasajist, Pist, SALT, Seçil Yaylalı,

Suna Tüfekçibaşı, Vasif Kortun, Zeynep Okyay

#### *Rome Report*

Researcher: Tiziana Terranova

### READING GROUPS

#### **Reading Groups #1 (Bari)**

Moderated by Vlad Morariu with the support of Anna Santomauro and Viviana Checchia.

Attended by Fabio Santacroce, Michele Spinelli,

Bruno Barsanti, Alessandro Bucci, Roberta Fiorito,

Giuseppe Bellini, and, via skype,

Francesco Scasciamacchia, Alessandra Saviotti

and Nicoletta Daldanise

Hosted by BLUorG gallery (Bari)

## Reading Group #2

Moderated by Corina I. Apostol and Vlad Morariu with the support of Viviana Checchia, Jerlyn Marie Jareunpoon and Francesco Scasciamacchia

Attended by Cristina Bogdan, Jaime Mary Davis, Lisa Mazza, Goncalo Sousa Pinto, Carolina Rito, Anca Rujoiu, Claire

Louise Staunton, Mihaela Varzari, Vittorio Visciano and via skype Victoria Preston.

Hosted by Flat Time House, London

### SYMPOSIA AND WORKSHOPS

#### **Giant Step #1: Enter the Artworld? Marginal Establishments, Cooptation and Resistance (Bari)**

Curated by the vessel team (Viviana Checchia,

Vlad Morariu, and Anna Santomauro) with the support of

Francesco Scasciamacchia

Assistant curator: Rachel Pafe

Project Assistant: Bori Szalai, Robin Wallis Atkinson

Video and photo documentation by Elke Roelant

Audio technician: Luca Pellicani

Logistics manager: Antonio Parente

Facilitators: ArtLeaks, Dave Beech, The Bureau of

Melodramatic Research, Galit Eilat, Charles Esche,

Viktor Misiano, Dan Perjovschi, Nia Roberts,

Francesco Scasciamacchia

Speakers: Antonia Alampi, Rebecca Birch & Rose Lejeune,

Luchezar Boyadjiev, Adeola Enigbokan, Tom Estes, Jaime

Marie Davis, Carmen Ferreyra, Florin Flueraș, Simone

Frangi, Fort-Da (Philipp Sack & Carolin Knebel), Charlie Fox,

Henna-Riikka Halonen, Chelsea Haines, Samantha Jones,

Veda Popovici, Victoria Preston, Nada Prlja, Claire Louise

Staunton, Kuba Szreder, Adnan Yildiz, James Voorhies, Patrick Waldo.

Hosted by: Cineporto- Apulia film commission

Supported by: Apulia Film Commission, E.D.I.S.U. Bari, Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research – Venice

### **Giant Step # 2 – The Centre of the Periphery & The Periphery of the Centre**

Curated by Alfredo Cramerotti with the support of Nia Roberts, Siân Green and Brian Jamieson

Speakers: Alfredo Cramerotti, Alistair Hudson, Annie Fletcher, Askeaton Contemporary Arts, Beacon Art Project, Culture Colony, Emrys Williams, Fernando Garcia-Dory, Francesco Scasciamacchia, Grizedale Arts, James Green, John Plowman, Michele Horrigan, Nia Roberts, Nicola Streeten, Pete Telfer, and Viviana Checchia  
Hosted by MOSTYN

### **Giant Step # 3 – And what if... Institution: Alternative Scenario**

Curated by Anna Smolak and Magdalena Ujma with the support of Magdalena Linkowska  
Participants: Anna Ostoya, Anna Smolak, Francesco Scasciamacchia, Gemma Medina Estupiñán, Karolina Breguła, Magdalena Linkowska, Magdalena Ujma, Marianna Hovhannisyan, Milan Mikuláščík, Milovan Farronato, Saša Nabergoj, Siân Green, Waldemar Tatarczuk, Zuzana Bodnárová  
Hosted by Galeria Labirynt

### **Giant Step #4 Critical Regionalism: Eindhoven as a Common Ground**

Curated by Van Abbemuseum with the support of Robin Wallis Atkinson and Alessandra Saviotti.

Eindhoven based participating organisations: Ateliordorp and Kelderman en van Noort, Baltan Laboratories, Collaboration-O, De Fabriek, La Città Mobile, MU, Onomatopee, PEK, Studio Formafantasma and TAC.  
Speakers: Fucking Good Art, Maria Bella, Alfredo Cramerotti, Dave Beech, Freek Lomme, Annie Fletcher, Kristy Trinier, Heinrich Nicolaus, Karmin Carasic and Charles Esche.

Workshops led by Annie Fletcher, Galit Eilat, Nick Aikens with the participation of Bisan Hussam and Dren Maliqui  
Hosted by Van Abbemuseum

### **PUBLICATION**

Arranged by Jerlyn Marie Jareunpoon-Phillips  
Eds. Jerlyn Marie Jareunpoon-Phillips, Vlad Morariu, Rachel Paarman, Francesco Scasciamacchia  
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Co-curated by Viviana Checchia, Vincenzo Estremo, Vlad Morariu, Rachel Pafe, Anna Santomauro, Francesco Scasciamacchia.  
Contributions by: Robin Wallis Atkinson, Dave Beech, Alfredo Cramerotti, Maria Lind, Nina Möntmann, Vlad Morariu, Rachel Pafe, Victoria Preston, Dan Perjovschi, Alessandra Saviotti, Francesco Scasciamacchia, Manuela Villa Acosta, Vasif Kortun,

Thanks: Willem Smit, Christiane Berndes, Marco Altini, Steven Ten Thije, Fabio Santacroce, Anna Arezzo,

## Mission Statement

vessel is a platform for the development of a critical discourse related to current cultural, social, economic and political issues. Defining our practice as politicized, we approach our themes of interest by using the tools that art and culture offer. We are interested in exploring socially engaged practices in relation to their context of emergence, to their geographies and psychogeographies, to their imbrication into fixed political ideologies; we are also eager to investigate how social imagination could be enhanced and how its concrete products could articulate strategies of critical resistance against the current dominant neoliberal order. In order to develop our practice we will adopt a methodology that will make an effort to incorporate a broad range of disciplines such as geography, political science, anthropology and sociology. Through this strategy we aim to facilitate interaction and exchange between different subjects envisioning the creation of a multi-centered body of knowledge that can put emphasis on the limits and criticality of working unilaterally (or uniquely) in the contemporary scenario.

vessel is aware that a multi-layered conceptual approach, as the one described above, will require also the necessity to incorporate different media and strategies that will suit, case by case, the issues on investigation and will facilitate a development of a more imaginative aesthetic layer in which a series of possible alternatives can be tested.

The aim of engaging into social practices and politicized art is not that of creating a definitive solution or outcome: we are rather interested in enlarging, through their means, the even more limited space for 'questioning'.

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