

(New) Institution (alism)

With Contributions by

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Imprint

(New) Institution(alism)

Editorial by Lucie Kolb

✉ Gabriel Flückiger

The present issue of *On Curating* contributes to a critical re-engagement with New Institutionalism. This conceptual framework is used to encompass a series of curatorial, artistic and educational practices that, in various places around the turn of the Millennium, developed concrete ideas to change art institutions, their mandates and formats: art institutions were to function as sites of research and socially engaged spaces of debate. The fact that discussions about the function of and demands for change within art institutions have become increasingly topical in the context of the controversial and much criticized revised Swiss cultural policy for 2012-2016, and the European-wide tendency toward budget cuts, emphasizes the importance of a critical reevaluation of these artistic and curatorial practices. Although a majority of the experimentally active art institutions that were gathered under the term New Institutionalism have now been closed down or changed their orientation, thus implying that the phenomenon was bound up with a particular historical situation, its conditions, structures and implications clearly still resonate in the contemporary organization of art. For these reasons, the present issue intends to enable differentiated approaches to the phenomenon of New Institutionalism in its various forms, by including a multiplicity of voices and analytical approaches.

An introductory text by Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger considers New Institutionalism as a phenomenon of discourse, which is historically situated and evaluated as such. The text is accompanied by a self-reflexive email exchange between the authors. This is followed by a series of interviews, where involved actors such as Maria Lind, Charles Esche and Jonas Ekeberg discuss the forms and dimensions of critical institutional practice around New Institutionalism. They touch on aspects of curatorial networking as well as the problems with the concept and its effect on their various current working practices. Rachel Mader's contribution introduces two contrasting analytic positions—the institution as an actualization of dominant ideologies on the one hand, and as dynamically constituted balancing act on the other—to discuss fields of movement and agency with/in institutions. Felix Vogel reviews the problem of an explicitly curatorial historiography of the exhibition, with particular attention to the specific qualities of the speaker position of the curator and the resulting structures of discourse. Further contributions by Alex Farquharson as well as Vanessa Müller and Astrid Wege (European Kunsthalle) report on their own curatorial and institutional practices. Farquharson's text is a reflection on how experimental practices can influence the activities of a larger-scale institution, while the text by Joan Müller and Wege outlines the challenges and opportunities of institutional agency without a permanent space. A concluding conversation with Liesbeth Bik (Bik Van der Pol) deals with the potential agency of artists in art institutions and suggests strategies to activate the viewer.

With these contributions we would like to situate the critical and change-oriented efforts of New Institutionalism in a context that allows us to understand ways of thinking and speaking about the institutional organization of art as part of a fundamental discussion on the potential of contemporary art institutions.

These reflections are a first concrete output resulting from the thematic focus 'institutional studies' that has been built up and developed at the Competence Center Art and Public Spheres at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, School of Art and Design, since 2012. Through different annual topics (2013: New Institutionalism; 2014: discursive institutions) and research projects (e.g. on self-organization in art under postfordist conditions) the structural, discursive and ideological context of art production and reception is analyzed and critically reflected.

New Institutionalism Revisited

Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger

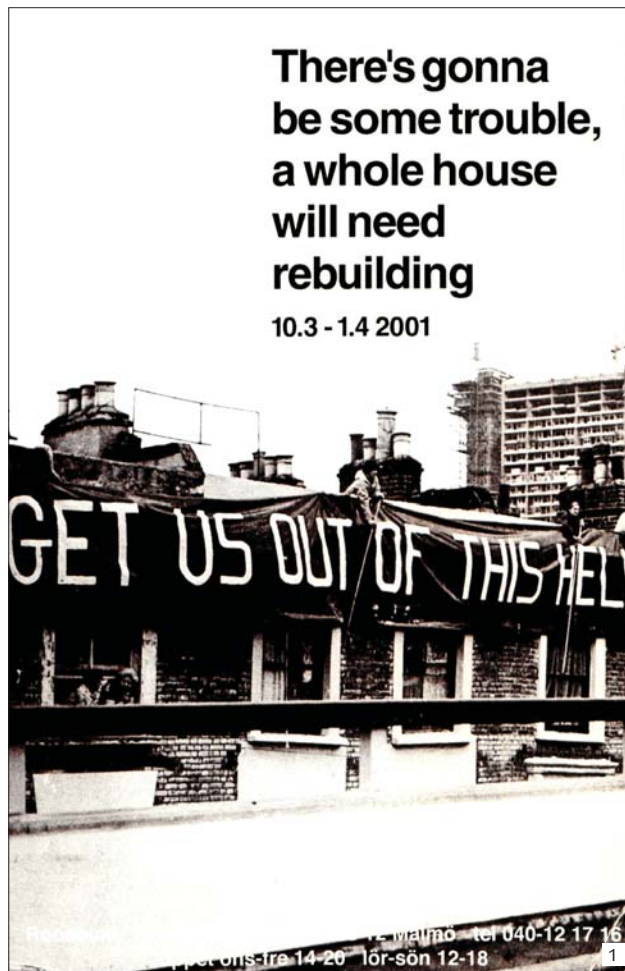
The term 'New Institutionalism' describes a series of curatorial, art educational as well as administrative practices that from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s endeavored to reorganize the structures of mostly medium-sized, publicly funded contemporary art institutions, and to define alternative forms of institutional activity. At least on a discursive level, there occurred a shift away from the institutional framing of an art object as practiced since the 1920s with elements such as the white cube, top-down organization and insider audiences.

For the projects and events that were initiated in this context, institutional practice was not confined to traditional exhibition programs (such as solo exhibitions or thematic shows); the exhibition was also conceived as a social project and operated alongside discursive events, film programs, radio and TV shows, integrated libraries and book shops as well as journals, reading groups, online displays, invitation cards, posters and residencies. The uses of these formats remained adaptable and open to change: production, presentation and reception/criticism were not successive and separate activities; they happened simultaneously and frequently intersected. Solo exhibitions on the other hand might last for a year and show just one work at a time. The art institution thus functioned as a place of production, site of research and space for debate, an "active space between community center, laboratory and academy," which artists might use as a functional tool that supplies "money for research visits [...] or even a computer."¹ Viewers are usually accorded an active role, becoming part of "artistically conceived social arenas."²

As these new curatorial forms of action and presentation became established, according to the editor of the Verksted-publication *New Institutionalism*, Jonas Ekeberg, institutional actors let go of traditional characteristics, roles and mandates, and began to treat their position in the cultural-political and social structure self-critically. For example in 2003 Maria Lind, Søren Grammel and Katharina Schlieben, in collaboration with artists Mabe Bethônico and Liam Gillick, worked at Kunstverein München on the project *Telling History: An Archive and Three Case Studies*, which explored its own institutional history by focusing on three exemplary, controversial exhibitions. Through reflexive examination of the archival material they aimed to discover what curatorial activity in an institutional context can mean, and examine its limits in further exhibitions that would also investigate how certain tendencies of institutional agency develop in particular institutional frameworks—all without leaving the institution itself.

It was not just this type of investigation of institutional frameworks that was decisive for the practices subsumed under New Institutionalism, but the expansion of institutional practice, above all toward forms of social engagement. Charles Esche perceived his role as curator at the Rooseum in Malmö from 2000 to 2005 as an attempt to turn the art institution into a place where artistic work would

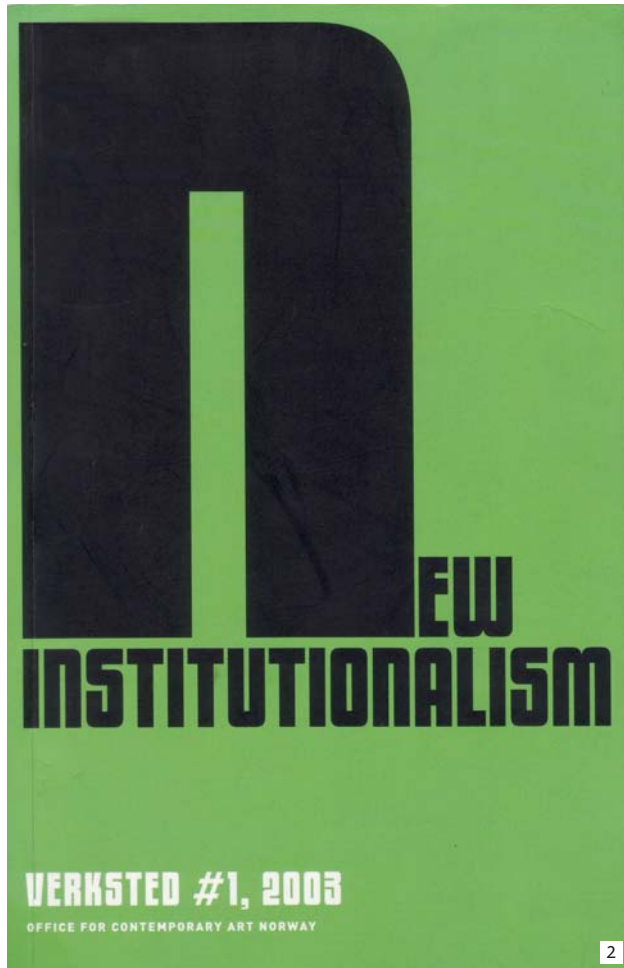
create other forms of democratic participation and thus pave the way to a “reimagination of the world.” This rhetoric was apparent in the titles of Esche’s exhibitions: his first exhibition at the Rooseum in 2001 was entitled *There is gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding*, a Morrissey quote that points to the direction he wanted to explore in his new position, which he saw as a tool to explore the key question: “can art be a useful democratic device [...] to install other forms of democracy than the ones we had?”³ Taken as a whole, many of the undertakings that are critical of institutions or focused on creating change operate with an understanding of the agency of institutions and social engagement that emerges from the political left.



New Institutionalism and its proliferation

The term New Institutionalism was introduced by Jonas Ekeberg in the homonymous first issue of the publication-series *Verksted*, published by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway in 2003.⁴ The publication contains a discussion of a series of institutions and institutional practices, with the aim of presenting “a handful of Norwegian and international art institutions” that were undergoing radical changes and could be viewed as attempts “to redefine the contemporary art institution.”⁵ The examples mentioned in the introduction and the individual contributions include Rooseum Malmö, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center in Istanbul, Bergen Kunsthall, Kunstverein München as well as the biennials of Johannesburg and Norway.

The term New Institutionalism has since found its way into the current debates of disciplines such as art theory and art education. There was an entry for it in the dictionary section of *Skulptur Projekte Münster 07* as well as the glossary of the recently published curatorial handbook *Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*.⁶ Occasionally New Institutionalism is interpreted as a new model of “curatorial practice.”⁷ However, there is still comparatively little extensive and analytical writing surrounding the concept.⁸ One reason for this is that contemporary curators themselves rejected the term and perceived it as artificially grafted onto their practice. Nina Möntmann, formerly curator at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA), an institution committed to cultural exchange, criticized its introduction without any temporal distance and that its categorizing effect stands in direct contrast to an actual artistic and curatorial practice.⁹ Søren Grammel, former curator at Kunstverein München, also suggested that what was flexible and intended to dissolve schematic approaches was immediately codified and canonized.¹⁰ Charles Esche attempted to circumvent this problem when he chose to label his own practice as “experimental institutionalism.” If the prefix ‘new’ inescapably evokes the creation of new models, Esche instead emphasized the unpredictability of the curatorial experiment within the institution.¹¹ Despite this critique, Jonas Ekeberg regards the discussion on New Institutionalism as a valuable opportunity “to focus on the relation between artistic production, public institutions and social change.”¹²



This conceptual bundling under the term New Institutionalism functions as a form of ‘cultural branding’ of various disparate practices in and with experimental art institutions. The concept itself however “was snapped out of the air” and intro-

duced by Ekeberg in a “speculative” sense, never intended as a conceptual model. In addition, there is little congruity between the practice and the discourse that shaped itself around it—the discourse does not write about the practice, and the practice does not illustrate the discourse, but rather they mutually depend on and influence each other. Ekeberg pleads that rather than rejecting New Institutionalism in favor of some other term, “perhaps we should use them all.”¹³

Institutions shape the art of today

The motivation of Ekeberg’s *New Institutionalism* to group together institutions characterized by a focus on (critical) examination of the organization and disposition of art was also shared by other protagonists and corresponded to a certain necessity, perhaps even a “coherent cultural movement.”¹⁴

An example is Jorge Ribalta, curator of the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), who conceived of institutional practice as “experiments in a new institutionality.” Ribalta spoke explicitly against valuing the exhibition above other activities, instead recommending that institutions develop workshops, lectures, publications or online activities as “alternatives to the dominant models of museums,” which are committed to a traditional view of the art object and to spectacle. His 2001 project *Las Agencias* situated MACBA as a collaborator of social movements by defining the art institution as a working space for social activists. According to Ribalta, the politicization of the institution by enabling it to become a place for collaboration with activists and thus “part of social struggles” seemed essential.¹⁵

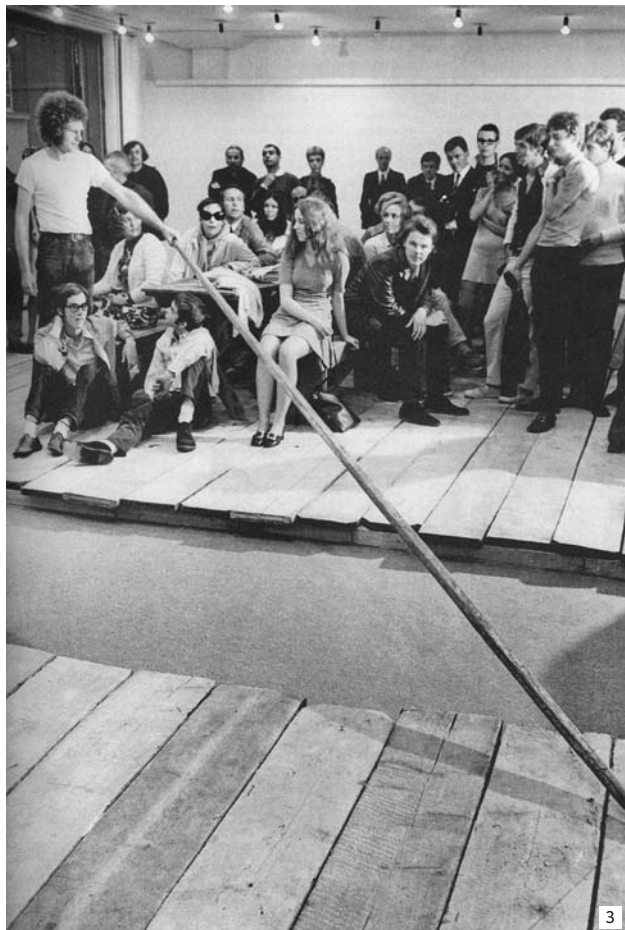
For curator Jens Hoffmann, who organized the exhibition and seminar *Institution 2* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki, in 2003, the subject of research was not so much the museum than the practice of ten European art institutions “that manifest a flexible and progressive approach to a critical engagement with art and the exchange with the public.”¹⁶ The declared aim was to explore a variety of institutional models that would illuminate the differences between institutions and their respective strategies.

The Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA) also organized a range of exhibitions and seminars on the subject of the institution under the direction of Nina Möntmann from 2003 to 2006. In close collaboration with artists and curators the conditions of production and forms of emancipatory practice in these new and progressive art institutions were analyzed. The project *Opacity. Current Considerations on Art Institutions and the Economy of Desire* for example discussed places of retreat for critical practice as opposed to the need for transparent institutions, while *Spaces of Conflict* by artists Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt in collaboration with seven institutions in Berlin, Oslo, Copenhagen, Vilnius, Malmö and Helsinki, as well as art students, dealt with physical institutional space.

We would particularly emphasize the conference *Public Art Policies. Progressive Art Institutions in the Age of Dissolving Welfare States* organized by the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) in the context of their project *republi-cart* at the Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna in early 2004. The conference reflected on the social function of state-subsidized institutions in central and northern Europe and their relation to structures of financing. In their concept eipcp outlined the situation of the art institution as an outsourced organizational form of the state apparatus that seems to be dependent on constantly new portions of critical art. The conference was intended to “explore the strategies of actors in the art

institutions for at least temporarily emancipating themselves from the grasp of the state apparatus."¹⁷

A somewhat earlier, comparable approach to the projects described is found in the 'post-reflexive turn' of museology. At the end of the 1980s 'new museology' came to describe an emerging analysis of the functions and procedures of the classical museum with close attention to their hegemonial western, nationalist and patriarchal narratives and constructs, leading to a greater awareness of the power of institutional presentation.¹⁸ Following this demand for a radical examination of the social role of the museum, the later post-reflexive turn was not confined to deconstructing the conditions and formats of the museum (such as canonized collection display or authoritarian exhibition theses), it also conceived the museum as a democratically organized 'space of action' allowing for a shared, multi-voiced practice. Exhibitions were thus often put together with the participation of multiple actors and conceived as political-discursive practices confronting controversial social questions. These approaches, often labeled 'project-based exhibitions,' 'un-exhibition' or 'non-exhibition-based curatorial activities,' saw themselves as critical practices and frequently reflected on alternative narratives of presentation in their approach to exhibition topics.¹⁹



Towards a historical context

This list remains fragmentary and represents only a snapshot of institutional self-examination around the turn of the Millennium. Why the question of the organization of art was discussed with such intensity at just this historical moment cannot be exhaustively answered here. An important aspect is that the institutional

positions discussed above renounced the contemporary tendency towards privatization and the related notion of populist publics. Artist Andrea Fraser has pointed to a strengthening of administrative structures in large US museums, such as the Guggenheim and MoMA in New York, since the 1980s. There was less trust in the independent expertise of curators and leading positions became increasingly occupied by managers without a background in art history or theory.²⁰

For our review of the discourse of New Institutionalism it is particularly interesting that these various debates were initially conducted without ties to particular disciplines. The key actors were theorists, curators and artists who discussed their own institutional practice. There was little reference to a possible history of research on institutions or any attempt to write such a history. This is linked to the fact that the historical reflection on exhibition practices only becomes more widely established around the same time as the discourse of New Institutionalism. A little later, in 2010, Charles Esche with Mark Lewis edited the series *Exhibition Histories* for Afterall Books, thus creating an important platform for the historicizing of the curatorial.

To provide a fragmentary historical background for the practices of New Institutionalism we refer to Düsseldorf Kunsthalle as an example for the transformation of institutional practice. Starting in 1969 the Kunsthalle organized the series *between*, which was an early example of the relaxation of institutional structures. This temporary format was designed to fill the transitional phases between the usual exhibitions, and while it primarily created a space for experimental short exhibitions, it also enabled the creation of installations, performances and participation in demonstrations far beyond the regular opening hours. However the motivation of the institution emerged from "reflections on a change of direction in the relationships between art institution, artists and visitors."²¹ With the new format the Kunsthalle, then under the direction of Karl Ruhrberg, reacted to a suggestion by artist Tony Morgan, who was campaigning for exhibition opportunities for contemporary artists. Another influence was the protest by local artist collective *Politisch Soziale Realität* (PSR), which demanded greater participation in devising the program of the institution.

While a (partial) transformation was thus launched in the context of artists' demands for participatory or democratic formats and a politicized articulation of critique, the emergence of the figure of the author-curator within the institution since the 1960s, whose goals might conflict with the expectations of the institution, played a central role in the examination and transformation of the institutional *dispositif*.

The dominant and repeatedly cited example for such a stance is Harald Szeemann, especially documenta 5, which he curated in 1972. With its subtitle *100 Days as Event* documenta 5 directly implied a transformed understanding of the exhibition and staged itself "as site of programmed events, as interactive space, as accessible event-structure with various centers of activity."²² The first, ultimately rejected, concept presented by Szeemann intended a complete turn away from the fixed, museum-like exhibition, and the version that was finally realized still placed a process-oriented approach center stage and operated at the outer limits of the established, canonized idea of art by examining the visual potential of pop-cultural images and socially stigmatized forms of creative authorship. Szeemann broke with the organizational structures of documenta and made the conception of an exhibition "a question of subjective assessment whose criteria need to be neither specified nor legitimized."²³

This way of working relates to other expanded forms of practice in relation to the handling and presentation of artwork, which includes catalogues, invitations, interviews and events in public space as curatorial forms of publication on an equal footing with the exhibition. Compared to the case of Szeemann, where the prominent role of the curator turned into an *exhibition-auteur* function, Lucy Lippard for example saw herself as a *critic* and sometimes as *writer-collaborator* of conceptual artists and proponents of institutional critique. Curating, for Lippard, was another form of (art-) criticism. This admixture of the curatorial and journalistic also demonstrates a desire to dissolve the hierarchies between objects, texts, and photographs, among others, and to place various artistic and curatorial methods and approaches at our disposal, to be questioned or re-imagined. Especially the dematerialization of art under the label of conceptual art was for Lippard a weapon “that would transform the art world into a democratic institution,” by producing cheap but expansive international projects that were easy to transport and communicate.²⁴

In the course of this opening of the curatorial field and the increasing delimitation of disciplines it was often alleged that the curator him or herself was in the process of becoming an artist. This criticism was leveled at Lippard as well as Szeemann²⁵, and the argument is repeated in the current debates on New Institutionalism.²⁶ Without getting further into this issue, it seems important to note that the parallel development of curatorial and artistic practice was already under way forty years ago. The adaptation of institutional formats was on the one hand regarded as a reaction to the demands of artists, on the other hand, individual protagonists were held responsible for the development of a “more experimental [...] awareness of curatorial work.”²⁷

Here, too, there are evident similarities to the debate on New Institutionalism. While institutional repositioning by protagonists of New Institutionalism was not a response to pressure, it was nevertheless represented as a reflexive reaction to certain artistic methods of work and production, or interpreted as an answer to the problem of what kinds of institution might still find a use for process-oriented, participatory and dialogical work that does not result in a final object and is not dependent on traditional white cube exhibition spaces.²⁸ Maria Lind emphasized this by asserting that the exhibition is just one of many possible ways in which an institution can frame artistic work.²⁹

On the other hand it is claimed that a “ubiquitous biennale culture” has created a whole generation of independent curators who have adopted experimental modes of handling various forms of display and models of work and who import this attitude to institutions quite independently of artistic practices.³⁰ The term New Institutionalism is sometimes also used to describe the more recent development that these independent curators have increasingly moved into management positions in art institutions.³¹ The close relationship of New Institutionalism to individual curators is linked to what has elsewhere been described as a ‘curatorial turn,’ referring to the phenomenon that the curator increasingly plays a “creative and active part within the production of art itself.”³²

New Institutionalism as new institutional critique?

While the early artistic institutional critique of the 1960s and 1970s was often based on resistance or refusal, “un déni d’exposition” intended to undermine existing authority³³, the ‘second’ phase of institutional critique from the late 1980s onwards also regarded the work of art as something that isn’t object- or image oriented and produced in the studio. But it went a step further by defining the work of art as produced in the “encounter of the demands of the place and the

methods of producers."³⁴ The structures, hierarchies as well as social functions of the corresponding institutions however were increasingly reflected critically among a community of 'fellow travelers'—institutional actors together with artists and other cultural producers. Institutional critique in this setting becomes an "analytical tool," a "method of [...] political criticism"³⁵ that consciously engages with social processes.

The reflexive examination of the conditions of institutional management of art (such as its linguistic and architectural framing) enabled by institutional critique is continued by curators associated with New Institutionalism from their positions as agents within art institutions.³⁶ In some of the literature it is even suggested that New Institutionalism should simply be regarded as a replacement for the now canonized practices of institutional critique: curatorial practices are interpreted as attempts not only to see art as "always already institutionalized"³⁷ and to act accordingly, but also to experiment with the possibility of a "pure, undiluted encounter with art."³⁸

We doubt that it is possible to claim New Institutionalism as a new form of institutional critique. For one thing, the roles and speaking positions of the actors involved have remained almost unchanged. Even though curators work more experimentally, the boundary that separates the (speaking) position of the artist from that of the curator has remained untouched. There were attempts at a shared, dialogical practice, where artists were invited to co-develop institutions conceptually and practically, be it through the design of the logo, the entrance hall or the archive, but even in these scenarios curators remained the hosts, and artists the guests.

New Institutionalism evaluated

Ten years on, how can we respond to the discussions and practices surrounding New Institutionalism? Have new institutional models been introduced? Have working conditions and structures been improved, and new audiences created?

It can be misleading to ask about concrete effects and results, since the articulation of the concept and its integration in a (art theoretical) reception history has created a largely discursive frame of reference, which presupposes certain attitudes and forms of engagement. However we can observe several intersecting and non-linear narratives surrounding New Institutionalism: on the level of non-human actors, of medium-sized institutions, New Institutionalism is represented as a failed enterprise.³⁹ As a result of budget cuts several state-subsidized institutions were closed down, the Rooseum and NIFCA among them. Other institutions, such as Kunstverein München, changed their profile as they changed curators.

The reasons for the closures were identified in the lack of support for critical attitudes by state-subsidized art institutions among the agencies and political bodies responsible.⁴⁰ This in turn is linked to the gradual turn towards neoliberal or populist cultural policies in Europe, which demanded the closure of all "leftist expert institutions."⁴¹ In the case of NIFCA, concrete requests by politicians that art should be populist and support a positivist sense of identity were not met, resulting in the closure of the institution. In Malmö social democratic politicians could not see the point of Charles Esche's idea of the art institution as community center.

We might counter-argue that this failure cannot be explained entirely with reference to hegemonial political conditions, but that institutions as agents did not manage to constitute or mobilize the (sub-)publics necessary to oppose the closure

of an institution under political pressure, and which might by their very existence legitimate the direction of the program. Since most curators are only employed on short-term contracts they often do not build the stable relationships with a local public that are prerequisite for a political project. The demand for the creation of a politicized public or counter-public contained in Charles Esche's concept of the institution as "part community center" was never fully realized, or as Alex Farquharson writes in his contribution to the present issue of this journal, New Institutionalism "fails to engage much more than a relatively small, invited knowledge community."⁴²



However, another aspect of New Institutionalism can be told as an ostensible success story. On the one hand the human actors in this narrative, particularly the protagonists interviewed by us, are all highly successful. Apart from Charles Esche, who is director at Van Abbemuseum, Maria Lind is currently curator at Tensta Konsthall after directing the graduate school at Bard College in New York. Simon Sheikh lectures at Goldsmith College in London and Nina Möntmann at the Royal Institute of Arts in Stockholm. One explanation for these success stories might be the obvious commonalities between the figure of the flexible and experimental independent curator as it emerged since the 1990s, and the ideas of new public management. The figure of the temporarily employed, geographically flexible curator fits the economic conditions of a "project-based polity" in which the structuring of contacts as a wide network and the ability to embark on new projects with a large amount of adaptability and personal dedication are highly valued.

Ubiquitous New Institutionalism?

In his role as museum director Charles Esche continues certain principles of his time at the Rooseum. He creates experimental situations the outcomes of which are not fixed in advance, in accordance with his long-standing interest in open-ended formats. The project *Play Van Abbe*, for example, investigates the potential of the museum collection as a source for social and political debate and emphasizes the social dimension of the works shown over their status as highlights. Another project, *Academy. Learning from the Museum*, also refuses the museum's logic of representation, instead initiating an open, contingent learning process with viewers. This touches on a further aspect of the above-mentioned success story, that ideas

associated with New Institutionalism have been partially implemented in large museums. We might say that New Institutionalism “spread like a bug all hrough the system and upwards in the system.”⁴³ It has become commonplace to view all aspects of the institution as related to artistic and curatorial work, and almost every large institution operates with a variety of formats, includes a project space or invites artists to engage critically with its collection.

Many of the practices emerging from New Institutionalism appear dislocated and reintegrated in other places within the art system. Yet the institutional approaches discussed here are always subject to the danger of being instrumentalized for the reproduction of the very hegemonial logics of production they critique, and it can be criticized that the rhetoric of politicized institutional acting was nothing more than a “flirtation”⁴⁴ which was not able to trouble existing conditions. Still, interventions in the structures of art institutions always contain the potential of rendering the politics of these institutions visible, and thus generating new ways of speaking and thinking about the institutional organization of the art field—changes which in turn constitute new fields of action and enable us to engage with institutions as negotiable entities.

Lucie Kolb is a Zurich-based artist and researcher. She’s interested in conflictuous undisciplinary practices in the cracks of the art field. She co-founded the radio magazine radio arthur (2007-2013) and is co-editor of the publication *This Book is a Classroom* (Passenger Books 2012).

Gabriel Flüchiger is an art historian working between theoretical approaches and conceptual artistic interventions. He has (co-)initiated several curatorial projects ([balk], ortsverein, Palazzo Wyler) and writes for the art magazine *Kunstbulletin*.

Captions

1 Exhibition poster of "There is gonna be some trouble, a whole house will need rebuilding" at Rooseum, Malmö, 10.3-1.4.2001. Design by Andreas Nordström, 2001.

2 Jonas Ekeberg (Hg.): *New Institutionalism Verksted #1*, Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway 2003.

3 Klaus Rinke, *Zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen, between 2, 1969*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Photo: Bernd Jansen, Düsseldorf.

4 Superflex, *Free Sol LeWitt*, 2010. Installation view Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Peter Cox.

Notes

1 Mats Stjernstedt and Charles Esche, "Rooseum Director Charles Esche on the Art Center of the 21st Century", in *Artforum*, 2001, <http://artforum.com/index.php?pn=interview&id=133>. Accessed 09.09.2013.

2 James Voorhies, *Exact Imagination*, Columbus College of Art & Design, Columbus, 2008, p. 10.

3 See Katharina Stenbeck, *There's Gonna Be Some Trouble: The Five Year Rooseum Book 2001-2006*, Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö, 2007; and the conversation with Charles Esche in the present issue.

4 Jonas Ekeberg ed., *New Institutionalism Verksted #1*, Office for Contemporary Art Norway, Oslo, 2003.

5 *Ibid.* p. 9.

6 Claire Doherty, "New Institutionalism," in Brigitte Franzen, Kasper König and Carina Plath eds., *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, Walter König, Cologne, 2007, pp. 421-422, see also Luisa Ziaja, "New Institutionalism," in ARGE Schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Böhlau, Cologne, 2013, pp. 174-175.

7 James Voorhies, *Exact Imagination*, Columbus College of Art & Design, Columbus, 2008, p. 9

8 Apart from the contributions by Claire Doherty and Jonas Ekeberg cited here, British curator Alex Farquharson and German curator Nina Möntmann have also produced evaluations of New Institutionalism. See Alex Farquharson, "Bureaux de change," *Frieze Magazine* (101) 2006, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change/. Accessed 10.10.2013, and Nina Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a possible future", in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice*, MayFlyBooks/epicp, London, 2009, p. 156.

9 Conversation with Nina Möntmann.

10 Conversation with Søren Grammel.

11 Conversation with Charles Esche.

12 Jonas Ekeberg, "Institutional Experiments between Aesthetics and Activism," in Stine Hebert, Karlsen, Anne Szefer eds., *Self-Organized*, Open Editions, London, 2013, p. 53.

13 Conversation with Jonas Ekeberg.

14 Ekeberg 2013, p. 55, see note 12.

15 Jorge Ribalta, "Experiments in a New Institutionalism," http://www.macba.cat/PDFs/jorge_ribalta_colleccio_eng.pdf. Accessed 16.10.2013. On the project *Las Agencias* and its consequences see Jorge Ribalta, "Welfare Museum. Die Entmuseifizierung des MACBA in Barcelona," *Kulturrisse* No. 1, 2004. <http://kulturrisse.at/ausgaben/012004/oppositionen/welfare-museum-die-entmuseifizierung-des-macba-in-barcelona>. Accessed 31.8.2013.

16 <http://www.wdw.nl/event/kiasma-institution-2/>. Accessed 31.8.2013.

17 http://www.republicart.net/conf2004/policies_concept01_de.htm. Accessed 23.9.2013.

18 See Peter Vergo ed., *The New Museology*, Reaktion Books, London, 1989.

19 Nora Sternfeld, "Kuratorische Ansätze," in ARGE Schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Böhlau, Cologne, 2013, p. 75.

20 Andrea Fraser, "A Museum is not a business. It is run in a businesslike fashion," in Nina Möntmann ed., *Art and Its Institutions*, Black Dog, London, 2006, pp. 86-98.

21 Renate Buschmann, *Chronik einer Nicht-Ausstellung: between (1969-73) in der Kunsthalle Düsseldorf*, Reimer, Berlin 2006, p. 16.

22 *Ibid.*

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24 Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997, p. 18

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39 Conversation with Simon Sheikh.

40 Conversation with Nina Möntmann.

41 Conversation with Jonas Ekeberg.

42 Farquharson's contribution in the present issue.

43 Conversation with Simon Sheikh.

44 Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "The End Of Contemporary Art's Bubble Economy," in *Texte zur Kunst* No. 88, (22) 2012, p. 86.

Writing New Institutionalism

An E-Mail Exchange between Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger

This email exchange between this issue's editors aims at reflecting and unfolding different states of the research process on New Institutionalism, the methodological challenges confronted and their inscribing effects as discursive agents.

Lucie Kolb: When we began our research on New Institutionalism over six months ago, we perceived it as a curatorial discourse, only to realize later on that it actually consists of individual actors and their practices, to which the concept of New Institutionalism was applied as a framework.

Gabriel Flückiger: Even our first draft, based on our reading of the published literature, simply presupposed the concept as given. Only in the course of the interviews did it become clear to us that almost all participants, even Jonas Ekeberg who launched the term in the first place, now distanced themselves from it to the point of critiquing it. This was not apparent in any of the published texts; the only irregularity we noticed was that the discourse suddenly breaks off around 2007. The concept ghosts through the literature without being secure in its substance.

LK: I also noticed that many of the texts are predominantly affirmative; the authors cite each other extensively and quite uncritically. Perhaps we can interpret this as a result of the fact that the writers, despite their relatively successful careers, are largely on short-term employment contracts. Is the possibility of critical distancing perhaps linked to permanent employment? Stephan Geene writes somewhere that "self-criticism is hard to come by in the shallow waters of the precariat." I'm interested in that. The model of the temporary contract is not completely unattractive, since it enables agency for individual actors within different institutions, but the consequences of the associated economic insecurity are devastating. Every form of academic or scientific exchange becomes a job interview. In this sense the working conditions of the subjects we interviewed

resemble our own: we act in the spaces between self-actualization and institutional constraint.

GF: Many of these actors in the cultural field are writers, but would resist labeling their activity as New Institutionalism. I can understand this skepticism, since this type of branding influences and perhaps anticipates later receptions, while aspects that the writer might find important are neglected. I find Jonas Ekeberg's suggestion that we operate with a plurality of concepts worth thinking about. However it is not an easy approach to implement.

LK: That's the question we want to describe, isn't it? New Institutionalism worked perfectly as cultural branding; it made a whole range of soft-core approaches to institutional critique visible and thus negotiable to us. Since we also work with a range of other concepts of practice, there are more disparate practices open to discussion. In so far as their respective references and relations to each other change in response, their significance is also continuously reconstituted. Perhaps such a plurality of concepts corresponds well to this constant repositioning and re-forging of relationships among various practices.

GF: Concerning visibility though, we have to be clear that we write about institutional practices, but we have not *seen* any of the exhibitions or practices we discuss. We are looking back on events that took place in the past and are therefore limited in our selection of examples to those either discussed in the literature or accessible via archives. Larger institutions—such as the Rooseum—also published books on their own history, which lead to their more prominent reception. This is how certain exhibitions are inscribed in a canon, and not others. The fact that we have access only via documentation reinforces the

word of the curator, who is often the main source of information. The voices of other participants and contributors (artists, technicians, visitors) are much less present if not entirely absent. Curatorial intention and interpretation thus begin to intermingle, which is problematic.

LK: We are picking up the thread of voices that speak out in a linguistically organized discourse or are mentioned within it. We hardly find progressive institutional practices that were not identified as such by the actors involved, particularly by curators. I ask myself, how could we have proceeded to find other threads? Another insight gained in the research is certainly that New Institutionalism included a rhetoric of reform, which didn't necessarily materialize as concrete results.

GF: The linguistic statements are strongly infused with a terminology of intended change, but on the concrete, actual achievements of change they are silent. As evident as the concept is, the specificity of its object remains obscure.

LK: It would be an exaggeration to claim that we developed entirely new conceptual instruments to be able to think about institutional activity "as reification of political disposition." And yet our text, as well as the others assembled here, is based on an awareness of the importance of including differential speaking positions as well as paying attention to the heterogeneity of narratives, differing depictions and their implications. A narrative of New Institutionalism that attempts to level ambivalences would never do it justice.

“The term was snapped out of the air”

An Interview with Jonas Ekeberg

Describing the genesis of the term *New Institutionalism* Jonas Ekeberg emphasizes its historical specificity and reflects on conflicts and potentials that arose with the term’s publicity as well as the social condition of experimental institutions in general and the changing characteristics of curating.

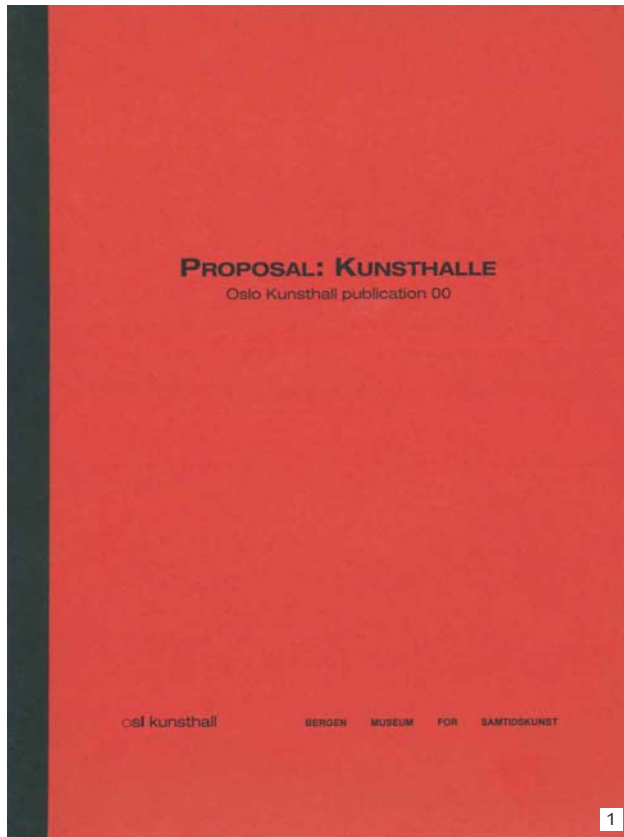
Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger: Could you mention an example from your own practice, or something that you observed, that was symptomatic for what you called New Institutionalism?

Jonas Ekeberg: First of all, let’s position New Institutionalism historically and try to describe it briefly. Even if the art institution has fostered alternative exhibitions since the Salon des Refusés, it was not until the sixties that the politics of exhibition making and the power of the institution were questioned and discussed on a more systematic and critical level. After the politicized seventies and the return to painting in the eighties, it was the nineties that saw the advent of the curator as a seminal figure in contemporary art. This came out of necessity; new project spaces, biennials and art centers sprung up all over Europe as the attention of the art world darted back and forth across the continent—first it was the YBAs, then it was Glasgow, for a while it was the Nordic Countries, then the Soros centers made an impact in Eastern Europe and so on and so forth. Contemporary art meanwhile was transformed by neo-conceptual and social practices; art, theory and politics were mixed, as were the formerly distinct roles of the artist, the critic and the curator. I would say it was a good moment for contemporary art in Europe. Out of necessity, some of these agents of the art of the nineties took the initiative to establish new art institutions while others were asked to direct programs in already established institutions. The most interesting of these curator-directors saw the possibility of transforming the art institution in the image of the new art. This was only logical. How long could they go on struggling to represent unrepresentable art? Why not simply have the art institution follow the artists? If the artists were doing work in the streets, then the institution should be on the

streets. If the artists were critical of the conservative structure of the institution, why not change that structure? Add to this the political and activist impulse that affected the art scene as the counter-globalization movement grew in visibility and importance. This was another important impetus that spurred the development of New Institutionalism. In fact, out of this grew two different strands of New Institutionalism, one aesthetical and one activist. When it comes to my own engagement with this, it was manifest in four different projects. Firstly, I started the project space Oslo Kunsthall in the year 2000. The name suggests an established institution, but we were situated in a garage and questioned what a Kunsthalle should be in the 21st century. Secondly, I was the first curator at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway in 2002. Together with director Ute Meta Bauer and co-curator Christiane Erhardter I worked on establishing OCA as a new kind of cultural exchange institution, one that was not geared towards promotion but towards engaging in current artistic and societal discourses. It was for OCA I edited the volume on New Institutionalism where the term was introduced. Thirdly, I curated the 50th anniversary exhibition for The National Touring Exhibitions in Norway, an exhibition that set out to deconstruct the institution from within—a typical feature of New Institutionalism. Fourthly, I was appointed director of the Norwegian national museum for photography, Preus Museum, in 2004. I redirected the institution from a traditional object-oriented museum to one invested in re-writing the history of photography, again aided by the insights of post-structuralism and other theories that questioned the way we were writing history.

LK & GF: When you founded the Kunsthall, were you aware of other experimental curatorial strategies?

JE: The most important inspiration came from artists' initiatives and from the flexible mid-sized institutions of Europe, places like Witte de With in Rotterdam and Kunstwerke in Berlin. These were curatorially driven spaces and we wanted to take that further, not just being part of the international art scene but also to question that art scene, both in the way it was functioning and in the way it related to the city.



LK & GF: Did you want to reach a certain public with Oslo Kunsthall, or even constitute a new public?

JE: We certainly had the hopes that we would reach new audiences, and it was backed by this kind of rhetoric. But it functioned more like a model. The actual involvement with the people of Grorud-dalen—a suburb of Oslo where we established a hub—was very meager. The people that came were from the art community and the people working with urban development in the city. We were perhaps a bit disappointed with this, but we never doubted the validity of the project. In fact, I have come to

realize that creating a model was a great achievement, thinking of the fact that we were only two people working on this, both in 50% positions. Institutions that work more professionally with community involvement, like the Whitechapel in East London, may have a department of ten people to work on community involvement.

LK & GF: What was your intention when you coined the term New Institutionalism in the publication of the same name in 2003?

JE: As I said, this publication came out of the Office of Contemporary Art Norway. We were really involved in exploring new ways in which the cultural exchange institution could operate, and at the same time we observed other institutions that were also questioning the fundamentals of how an art institution should work, places like Bergen Kunsthall, Rooseum in Malmö, Palais de Tokyo in Paris. So we conceived a publication that would both describe and circumscribe this phenomenon. It featured essays about the biennial boom, the legacy of institutional critique and about the relation between artist run spaces and the institutions' desire to co-opt these initiatives. The term itself was snapped out of the air and simple googling made us realize that the term was already in use in social sciences and Christianity. In social sciences it is used to describe a renewed belief in the effectiveness of institutions after the Second World War and in Christianity it describes a belief in the power of the church. We decided however to allow it to acquire a new meaning, that of the reformed and experimental art institution. We also liked the fact that it sounded a bit like other newisms, we thought this carried some critical potential, by way of irony.

LK & GF: How did the term come to operate?

JE: At first it operated like a kind of cultural branding, it created a focus and an attention on the phenomenon of the experimental art institution. Then, rather quickly, the term came to be contested. There were also other terms floating around. Charles Esche of Rooseum had the term 'Institutional Experimentalism' and Jorge Ribalta of MACBA proposed 'Relational Institutionalism.'

LK & GF: Could a parallel be drawn to the argument of Simon Sheikh that institutional critique became more of a tool or a way of working than a historical genre? Would you apply this to New Institutionalism?

JE: Yes, I agree, institutional critique really became operative from within the institution. The term New Institutionalism however should be used specifically and historically rather than as a general term. There were also people who rejected it more directly, especially the ones that were deeply involved in anti-capitalist critique. Theoreticians like Gerald Raunig, who said that it sounded too much like New Public Management or neoliberalism. He proposed in turn his own term, *Instituent Practices*. So in a sense it became a term of conflict, which I find to be productive actually. And I am not sure that New Institutionalism is the term that we want to continue to use. Perhaps we should use them all.

LK & GF: How would you characterize the conflict of New Institutionalism?

JE: The conflict of New Institutionalism is firstly historical and secondly strategic. Historically we need to discuss the relation between New Institutionalism and criticality as such: Was or is New Institutionalism a radical project or does it in some unconscious way carry too much of the ideology of neoliberalism? In my opinion it is definitely a radical project, even though there are some similarities between the figure of the open, creative, flexible and experimental curator of the 1990s and capitalism of the information age. It is characteristic for the nineties that there were these structural similarities between critical and entrepreneurial positions. But this does not mean that New Institutionalism is a neoliberal term nor that the curators that practiced within that paradigm are neoliberals! This construction of alternative and mini-institutions should rather be seen in continuity with alternative and grassroots methods. The strategic conflict follows from this: How should we phrase or position progressive art institutions in order for them to be most effective, artistically and politically? In order to do this I think that we need to think institutional continuity and institutional experiments in tandem in a way that perhaps was not apparent in all the institutions that were labeled New Institutionalism ten years ago, and perhaps not even in the term itself.

LK & GF: How did you decide on the different examples of institutions in the book? Was it a network that already existed with other curators that you were in contact with?

JE: My list in the first publication was not a list that had been made through research. I just took some institutions that I knew of. It was very lightly

written and edited. We did not want to make a fixed list, we just wanted to make a proposal and perhaps that was productive in a sense. At that moment Jens Hoffmann was also making this exhibition *Institution 2* with the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art for KIASMA. Actually it all overlapped. It is not unusual that such ideas come up in many places at the same time. But I think the overview of curatorially driven, experimental art institutions in Europe at the turn of the century is yet to be written.

LK & GF: Going back to a practical level, one point we discussed is that many institutions were closed down and didn't get funding anymore, e.g. NIFCA. What are your thoughts on this narrative that the experiment is not wanted, or criticism is not allowed?

JE: The experiments of New Institutionalism were made at publicly funded institutions. As the phenomenon grew, there was also a political shift in Europe, a turn towards neoliberal or populist cultural policies. This was also apparent in the Nordic countries, most visible at first in Denmark, where Anders Fogh Rasmussen came to power in 2001. For Fogh Rasmussen and other neoliberal politicians, critical and activist art institutions were a thorn in the eye, and they set out to shut down all such "leftist expert institutions." With NIFCA they actually managed to do just that. In Malmö Charles Esche met another kind of conservatism, that of the labor politicians. His idea of a discursive institution, opening up to the community, wasn't approved, not even by the social democrats. They were mostly interested in the quantitative effect: stick to the budget and reach the audience. Later, New Public Management affected many parts of the art institution and limited the creative and political potential of an institution like Iaspis in Stockholm, for example. So in this sense you are right, the space for institutional experimentation has been diminished. However, there are also other cultural and political impulses affecting the legacy of New Institutionalism. We can say that we entered a post-curatorial moment when the art fairs grew in importance towards the middle of the 00s. This put the galleries and dealers back in contemporary art. Not that they had been invisible, but they became less dependent on the curators. A neo-modernist impulse in contemporary art also meant that artist-run, non-curated spaces grew in importance. At this moment, the anti-capitalist lobby of contemporary art also started to cater to the idea that activism was more important than the art institution, and more than one writer discussed the strategy of nega-

tion, e.g. the idea of leaving the art institution altogether. To advocate change, you have to work outside of the institutions—this was the argument. At this point we reach the limits of New Institutionalism. New Institutionalism is all about believing in the institution's ability to change, not about leaving the institution.

LK & GF: We were interested whether you see other 'new institutional' practices today that continue in other institutions, with other instruments and tools. What's its legacy?

JE: On the one hand, you have the negation of the curator and of the institution as you find it in parts of the neo-bohemian and activist art scene. On the other hand you have the professionalization of it, in curatorial programs all over Europe. Neither of this gives me much hope, to be honest. In the 1990s, curators were critics or artists; they were not trained as curators. It was a position that you took and it was a statement. Nowadays people come out as curators, they're trained in project management and they had just enough art history in order to phrase their project almost interestingly. I am very skeptical of this trend. I think a two-year curatorial program is usually not enough to become an interesting curator. On the other hand, I am very impressed with people who, perhaps more traditionally, manage to pull off the double feat of both catering to the legacy of the institution and practice critical curating. Charles Esche's project Picasso in Palestine with the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is a really good example. In Stockholm, Maria Lind has an interesting program at the Tensta Konsthall and also Konsthall C is doing good work. In Copenhagen I have great hopes for Kunsthall Charlottenborg now that Jacob Fabricius has taken over; he has a light hand with political art, but is very efficient in everything he does. He carries in my mind the spirit of the nineties in the sense that he insists on the correlation between aesthetic and political intervention. In Oslo, I must say that Marta Kuzma did a really good job with the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, continuing to question the role of the cultural exchange institution while at the same time creating some great results for the Norwegian art scene. Will Bradley at Kunsthall Oslo—which is not to be confused with my own project, Oslo Kunsthall—also does a good job at working politically in the least likely of places, which is embedded in a completely commercially driven real estate development project. Tone Hansen does also a good job at the Henie Onstad Art Centre. So there is hope in many parts of the Nordic art world.

As you understand, I am over-informed about the Nordic scene at the moment. My next project will be to turn to Europe.

Jonas Ekeberg is a curator and critic based in Oslo. He was founding director of Oslo Kunsthall in 2000 and a curator at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway from 2002-2004. From 2009 to 2013 he was the chief editor of the Nordic online journal *Kunstkrikk*. Ekeberg is currently working on a book- and exhibition project on the rise and decline of a Nordic art scene.

Captions

1 Oslo Kunsthall publication 00. Proposal: Kunsthalle. With contributions by: Lars Nittve, Gary Bates/Spacegroup and Manuel de Landa. Editors: Gardar Eide Einarsson, Jonas Ekeberg and Matias Fadbakken.

“We were learning by doing”

An Interview with Charles Esche

Reviewing the last years Charles Esche touches on aspects of curatorial networking, the pursuit of redefining the institution and its inevitable necessity to affront people, as well as his notion of *Experimental Institutionalism*, which echoes in his current directorship at Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger: We thought a possible starting point would be the situation you found yourself in when you started at Rooseum and the formats you developed.

Charles Esche: When I started, that was in 2000, the concept of an institutional solidarity and that we’re trying to change institutions together was not really so apparent to me. There were certain individuals that were interested in similar questions, but in most cases they weren’t really in charge of an institution. Biennales and larger temporary events were the things a few friends and I had access to, rather than institutions. We were concerned with a wider—what I would call then but not now—leftist, understanding of what institutions could do in terms of emancipation, in terms of community engagement, in terms of art as a potential way in which the reimagining of the world could take place. I saw the institution as a tool to investigate this question. Can art be a useful democratic device? A device to install other forms of democracy than the ones we had? From the beginning, the entrails of social democracy in a country like Sweden were immediately fascinating.

LK & GF: Would you say that this vision was already established when you were at Tramway, a Scottish art space—or asked differently: was it connected to certain places?

CE: When I started at Tramway in 1993, it felt like Scotland had been largely removed from the cultural-political economic map, more or less from the Second World War onwards. It was marginal and most of the ambitious artists left for London. Yet, a new generation was more conscious of wanting to make Glasgow an active place. So the main topic was how to get noticed and how to constitute an experimental Scottish art community, which wasn’t simply a regional outpost of an English cultural discourse. I

came from England but quickly felt at home, maybe because of my German family and working-class origins. In the mid-1990s, I felt part of a team that was working to build a situation where art could flourish. I worked with great pleasure with my own generation, but I have to say that the political interventions by artists whom I invited, such as Allan Sekula or Stephan Willats, were less understood and not that well received. It’s a complicated path, but this was a sign to me that I needed to formulate my relation between art and politics in a different way.

LK & GF: Would you say that the exhibitions at Tramway had the form of rather conventional exhibitions and then at Rooseum you also started to focus on other formats?

CE: For sure. I wasn’t the boss at Tramway. I had the charge only of the exhibition program. I would have done things in Tramway differently, if I had been able to structure it fully, though I am proud of a project like *Trust* that engaged artists as curators in a team. The questions that came to me once I took up the director position at Rooseum were new, however. They involved structuring a whole institution, marking it out from others and also doing what I really believed in. I didn’t want to answer the usual expectations in a traditional way, where you basically wheel in the material from outside, put it into the room in a nice way and open the door. I wanted it to be a place of what we then called knowledge production.

LK & GF: What does this mean?

CE: We developed different platforms; we worked with Critical Studies and the local academy, we had a thing called Open Forum that tried to create links with certain communities and activists, we developed a *Future Archive* of musical, filmic and literary influences on artists and we had residencies

and studios. I think people who came to Rooseum got very involved. At the same time, we alienated other people who liked the old 'modernist' Rooseum. At the time it hurt, but nowadays, I'd say you have to have people that are really pissed off with you and say that you destroy the organization in order to know you are achieving something. If you don't have that, you're probably not really doing your job as director. Your job requires you to bring in new impulses and a new direction to a situation while there are many people for whom this is simply not necessary.

LK & GF: What about the institution's relation to the public, did you attract a group of visitors or even a new public that didn't exist before?

CE: There is this quote from Vito Acconci that I very often used, which is that "a gallery could be place where a community can be called to order, called to a particular purpose." That still appeals to me. I like the idea that you do indeed create a public through your activities and I have seen that emerge in Malmö. I recently talked to a few old colleagues and I have to say that people from that time in Rooseum seem to look back with great fondness on the projects we did. Also, I don't think you would be here today if it hadn't had an effect. Yet that public we created was not the one with sufficient influence to shape the city council's opinions. It was a younger public, not politically active for all the right reasons of cynicism about 21st century politics. Yet, as all social democratic art institutions, we were dependent on political patronage for survival—and in this case local political favors. It is a complicated story because Rooseum was founded by a neo-liberal collector, but then became dependent on the social democrats, who in many ways hated its origins. This was all before my time but it was a legacy I had to deal with. What I asked for, very naively, was far-sighted politicians with an interest in art as a way to think about and act out social change. Unfortunately they didn't exist in Malmö (or many other places). Also, the art community can be very isolated or internally focused. In Malmö, for instance, there was no relationship between the small activist community and the art community at that time, so we didn't have good routes into local political networks. I think this was failure of our approach and something I tried to address differently in Eindhoven. The other important issue, looking back, is that it seems an urgent public probably only forms in a moment of tension, like it was formed in Istanbul during the demonstrations this summer (2013).

But often this public is a very incoherent group of people and the question is how to sustain it. A public also formed around the Van Abbemuseum last year, when we faced the opposition (again) of the social democrats; they wanted to reduce our funding very severely in order to control and popularize the program. This time we could mobilize and successfully resist, because it directly concerned the museum. At the Rooseum, in the early 2000s, the tensions of today still seemed far away. The city was hardcore social democrat, the economy was growing, optimism about the new bridge to Denmark made everyone quite content. The major issue that was brewing was identity of course. We did a project called *In 2052, Malmö will no longer be Swedish* which consisted of residencies and productions. It included Esra Ersen, Yael Bartana, Can Altay—a group of artists who could reflect on this from different perspectives. But it was not really picked up in the media or in politics at the time, again because things were still just too sweet to bother or because an art institution was confined to the cultural and entertainment pages. Again, I think the lessons of this went into the project in Eindhoven.

LK & GF: Could you name certain projects or exhibitions at Rooseum that were successful?

CE: Fundamentally, I think those years were about trying to shift the map of the place of art within the social framework. There wasn't a real space for social critique in northwestern European society; social democracy is a sort of totalizing system in an odd way, in that it embraces critique to nullify it. We wanted to change that, given the apolitical condition post-1989. I think we succeeded to the extent that 'institutionalism' and what to do with art institutions became a topic in general cultural discourse. It was no longer 'do your job well' but more 'what kind of job do you do?' I think our publication *Rooseum Provisorium* is a rich source for these debates. The other map that I think we were trying to shift was the geographic, which in early 2000 was still a cold war map in which the socialist states were not really recognized. There was still a reluctance to recognize that a Polish or Latvian artist is as competent as an American or a German artist in a place like Sweden. So we needed to recognize our immediate Baltic region for instance, or art's new capacity to intervene in the social after the end of liberal autonomy as a progressive discourse. Those changes seemed to be important, shifting the place of art within the map of social democracy and shifting the map of art itself within art historical narratives.

Thinking about the most successful projects, I'd list a few solo shows like Superflex and Nedko Solakov, group shows like *Baltic Babel*, or *We—Intentional Communities*, and also the Critical Studies course. There were also some great residencies by artists like Luca Frei, Serkan Özkaya or Lynn Löwenstein.

LK & GF: How was the relationship to the board and the financial backer?

CE: None of it really worked. We had a board that didn't really function. There was a board of two people, nobody else wanted to be on the board. When I took on Rooseum it was more or less bankrupt. We had one moderately rich collector who was on the board, Lars Tullin, and he was the main person who supported us with bank loans. We also got money from the city and some foundations in Sweden but it was not much. To the extent that we were smart enough and aware enough we would identify certain funds that had an agenda and then try to join our agenda to theirs. There was a Stockholm-based Future Fund for instance that funded us three times and then said they couldn't do it regularly. But we weren't great at fundraising, to be honest, so sometimes I couldn't pay my salary for a month. In that sense, it was a constant struggle. But somehow you put things together and you survive. I don't think money is the main issue, when you have a sense that you are trying to achieve something, you find the means to do it. It was experimentalism that we were interested in and that drove us. We couldn't sell experimentalism to a company and we couldn't really sell it to a newspaper. Perhaps because we weren't good at sales—I think it's my great weakness as a director—but also because they're interested in short-term results above processes. Nowadays we know that the neoliberal model ignores 70% of human needs—yet even so it is still dominant. I think in those days that idea of failure wasn't something people understood yet. There were no challenges to neoliberalism then, only moderators.

LK & GF: Did you follow the institutional work of other people, e.g. Ute Meta Bauer or Roger Buergel?

CE: We were a bit young and naive and weren't that connected. The artists locally were very important to me. People like Superflex, Jens Haaning, Luca Frei, Alexander Gutke, Anna Ling, Kajsa Dahlberg as well as curators like Simon Sheikh or Gertrud Sandqvist. Catherine David, after she did *Documenta*, I had huge respect for. Maria Lind for sure,

and Vasif Kortun, of course. More than any other individual. Adam Szymczyk and Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, an independent space at that time, were a crucial link for me, as were the beginnings of whw in Zagreb. I was looking East mostly, while keeping Scotland in mind. It was also more about peripheral places. The centers—London, Paris, even Berlin—just didn't feel right. They were already too occupied with the market, and Rooseum or Malmö were an irrelevant inconvenience to them. Or that's how it felt. I guess you link with people who are hospitable in the end. Also, I like the provinces, you are less under the microscope and can develop things. I think the impact of Rooseum was less immediate but more lasting because of that.

LK & GF: Did you follow a certain vision with your institutional practice?

CE: What's important with that sense of New Institutionalism, or *Experimental Institutionalism* as I would prefer to call it, is that education or relationships with small, just forming communities were very important for us. I think all of the places that fall under that umbrella were interested in small and deep, not wide and shallow, in terms of audience engagement. We needed to work with the public, to turn them from audience to collaborators, to switch the idea from passive reception to people becoming active shapers of that institutional message. That meant that you reduce in a sense the scope of who you really want to talk to, and the danger was that you start to talk to the people who share an interest with you and close off to the rest. We could move more quickly than if we had to carry the mass of the public with us, who did not quite understand what we do—and we weren't very good at or interested in explaining it to them, because we were busy with the experiment.

LK & GF: What was the size of Rooseum's audience?

CE: Maybe 30.000, depending on the years, but probably between 25.000 and 33.000. But we did get committed people, and there were art press articles, I would be interviewed by *Artforum*, *Frieze* etc. There was a certain awareness of what we were doing. What I was learning to do was how to talk about it in an academic way, rather than popularizing it. When I came to Eindhoven, I was determined to learn from that and do things differently in terms of a broader public.

LK & GF: Concerning the discourse and people writing about New Institutionalism, the historical context or the historicizing isn't really present. There are some examples, but they're not making a genealogy or the like.

CE: That's why New Institutionalism bothers me, because I think we were in an experimental phase and I don't think we were conscious or striving to be 'new.' We were learning by doing, it was really pragmatic in that sense. Let's find out how things work, but on our terms. I don't feel happy about the word 'new' because it is such a neoliberal term. It sounds like "new, improved washing powder" or whatever product to me, and that's not what it was really about. It was not a marketing tool and I think this is why it failed within the contemporary framework of economic attention in a sense, although it did clearly establish a certain identity. Nevertheless I want to put the emphasis on an Experimental Institutionalism, because I think this releases you from the idea of creating a grand narrative of 'newness' which implies that now all institutions should become like this—it was not the case that there was an old institutionalism, but now there's a new one that will replace it. Rather we said times have changed since the modern age and the institutions don't know how to behave, so let's push them and see what happens.

LK & GF: Did the discourse around institutional practice have a legitimating or catalytic function?

CE: Definitely, if you speak about things they become real. It was about what the institution could be—again, the experimental nature of it meant that the statements you were making were also speculative or aspirational. This is where we wanted to place ourselves, working with a form (the institution) in a place (Malmö, München, Rotterdam or wherever) and asking what it meant in 2000 to be doing this. We wanted the institution to become an active place and it felt like we could learn from other institutions while maintaining the traditional right to free space and experimentation that we inherited from the avant-garde and the Cold War. We looked at the community center, the library, the laboratory, even the church, as models to eat up and reuse. These institutions were part of that comfortable northern European ecology that needed reformulating, abandoning, reshaping. So that's why I said at the beginning that we could be part community center, part laboratory, part school and not so much the showroom function that traditionally belonged to the art

space. To create waves and movement—that was experimental institutionalism for me, to move in existing society. So it also felt like the school, the laboratories and the community center would have to make room for us—and that was definitely an aspirational statement.

LK & GF: How did you perceive the 2003 publication *New Institutionalism* by Jonas Ekeberg that coined the term?

CE: I know Jonas and I like him a lot. But as I told him, I don't like the 'new' bit, though I liked the -ism. I wanted my work not to be judged as a proposal for what could happen generally, but as experiments that produced an analysis. If we look now, we see that the things we called New Institutions didn't actually produce anything stable and lasting as 'new institutions.' But they did produce experimental results, which certainly informed what I've been doing here at Van Abbemuseum and I think informs what other people like Maria Lind or Vasif Kortun, for instance, have been able to do elsewhere. But it wasn't that it became the new model. Which is again why I think that the name is wrong.

LK & GF: How were you connected with other curators at that time?

CE: We had a small informal group with Barbara Steiner and Bart de Baere called 'Leipziger Gruppe.' I also tried to form a closer alliance with Catherine David at Witte de With. But she left, then I left, and the work took more shape in Eindhoven. We weren't claiming those strategies as collective or combined, but there were joint learning experiences. There were two NIFCA conferences—*Stopping the Process* and *Changing the System*—that were important to connect us, but I think we were all just responding to what we saw. The question I asked in that last exhibition at Rooseum, *What happened to Social Democracy?*, was something that we shared; it meant that we wanted to build different kinds of institutions that could address the world as we saw it and not the world as the social democratic authorities saw it. But I think people like Jonas and Alex Farquharson actually made us more conscious that we were doing similar things and I am for a comparison of these institutional experiments, as I think they each result in different outcomes. It is absolutely necessary now to write a historiography of that time and to understand what happened in order to build on it and experiment anew. It's vital to analyze its strengths and weaknesses. When it's not writ-

ten down it's lost. Perhaps we need to be historicized by another generation, by you who weren't involved and who need to come along and validate (or not) through your own experiences.

LK & GF: If you reflect on your momentary position, can you still apply the term experimental to it?

CE: Van Abbemuseum is a bigger platform. But fundamentally, it's the same question: What can you do with the museum in the 21st Century? Can it be the source of social and political questions, which visitors can investigate through the exhibition, rather than a treasure chest where you just show some beautiful jewels? This still seems experimental to me, in the sense that we don't know how to answer that research question. I think as long as you maintain that methodology you're still experimenting. The moment you know the answer, you become an institution reproducing its own power. I feel that the experiment is still urgently needed. As I said, we know now that neoliberalism doesn't work for the 99%, which we didn't know in those Rooseum days. We know that the system of capital reproduction serves only a very small number of people at the top and that trickle-down is actually trickle-up away from the poor. We know that the systems that have been put in place as globalization allow economies to grow, while demolishing social cohesion. We're much more critical of the current situation than we were back in 2000. But we still don't have any answers or any bigger political projects. In that sense we're still in the experiment.

Charles Esche is a curator and writer. Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and has been appointed as curator for the Sao Paolo Biennial 2014. Co-founder and co-editor of *Afterall Journal and Books* and the *Exhibition Histories* series. Between 2000-2004 director of Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art in Malmö.

“We want to become an institution”

An Interview with Maria Lind

Maria Lind reflects on how concerns of New Institutionalism became more accounted for and widespread during the last ten years, arguing that some practices that arose in this process are too institution-centered. In her current position at Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, she focuses on a curatorial practice that aims to establish a long-term institutional continuity.

Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger: How do you relate to the label ‘New Institutionalism’ for practices like yours?

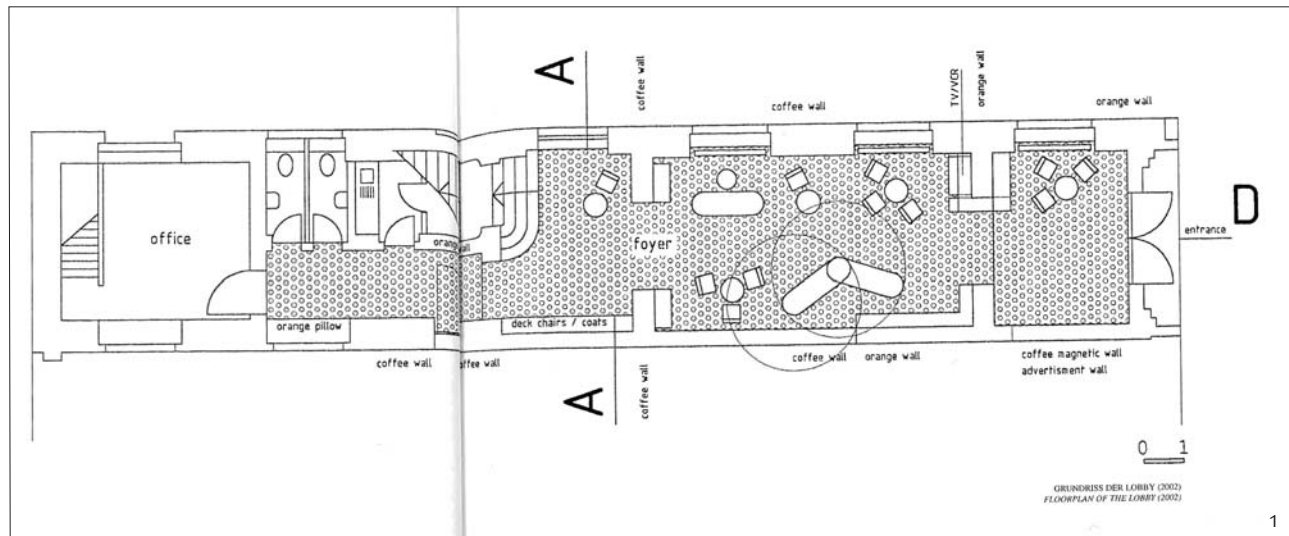
Maria Lind: It is like a nickname; it came from other people’s thoughts and opinions. I think it’s similar to what happened to some of the artists associated with Relational Aesthetics, which is not the artists’ own term, but all of a sudden it took over the reception of their work in a rather strange way. It is not completely inappropriate to speak about New Institutionalism, as we did indeed try to reimagine the functioning of art institutions, but it’s a bit limiting. The issue with any label that gets widely used during a short period of time is that it facilitates seeing the phenomenon as ‘consumed.’ It is supposed to be something that is ‘over.’ However, this is of course not the case. What Charles Esche, Annie Fletcher and the rest of the team at the Van Abbemuseum are doing, and what the team and I are doing at Tensta Konsthall now (currently the team consists of Fahyma Alnablsi, Emily Fahlén, Ulrika Flink, Asrin Haidari, Hanna Svensson and Hedvig Wiezell) is clearly related to what we did ten years ago. At the same time it is also different. In the early 2000s neo-liberalism and certain effects of globalization were becoming more and more palpable, at the same time as the social welfare state of Northern Europe was being dismantled. Those changes played into some of the thinking around and working with institutions, such as the ones mentioned, but also for example Witte de With under Catherine David.

Maybe it is helpful to think about New Institutionalism as an example of how deferred value is created, in the sense of how Sarah Thalwell discusses it in her 2012 report *Size Matters*, commissioned by

Common Practice in London. She describes how a number of small-scale visual arts organizations in London are producing a lot of value, but it does not become palpable until ten to fifteen years after the ‘investments.’ These small organizations work with artists who are not yet established and they develop new curatorial and educational models—they therefore take a lot of risks. However, it is not these organizations who can benefit from the value that this creates, instead it is the commercial sector on the one hand and the mainstream institutions on the other hand, who down the line pick up artists and methods supported and created by others. We can now see that a lot of what is described as the concerns of New Institutionalism is becoming accepted and used much more widely.

LK & GF: Would you say it could be a catalyst, or that the moment of labeling serves to establish a wider sensibility and visibility?

ML: New Institutionalism gave a name, albeit a limiting one, to certain developments that had already gone on for a decade. All of a sudden they were accounted for in a different way. It is good to remember that when I did Moderna Museet Project (1998-2001) for instance, there were hardly any reviews. It was really not in the eye of the media, nor did it have enormous amounts of visitors. The program at Kunstverein München (2002-2004) was not very well publicized either. However, today many people seem to be aware of what we did in both places back then. Which is a nice discovery and thanks to New Institutionalism among other things. When you mention that NI helped make visible certain institutional practices together with curatorial practices, I need to underline that it is a concern



and worry when those things come too much to the foreground, leaving art and artists in the background. I would like to see more detailed studies of the art works, projects, exhibitions etc. that came about then, discussed in relation to curatorial and institutional approaches alike. Only then can we understand what NI actually did.

LK & GF: Could you give us an example that was crucial, which could exemplify problems that one encounters as a curator, and how institutional practices should react to such problems?

ML: The program that I put together with the team (Sören Grammel, Katharina Schlieben, Ana Paula Cohen, Judith Schwarzbart, Tessa Praun and Julienne Lorz) at Kunstverein München, and how we worked there operationally, must be seen in light of the particular characteristics of that institution. It was a particular point in time as well. A Kunstverein is a membership organization, which since the Second World War has typically been a site of experimentation of different kinds for artists, curators and directors. Together, with me at the helm, the team shaped a program that reflected this legacy. But more than anything, it was to do with trying to follow the lead of art and artists to think about how an institution could be more sensitive to them, to be in the service of and in an interesting dialogue with artists. My way of working even before was to try and be sensitive to artistic practices—not lenient, but sensitive. This also includes answering back, returning the challenge. Because every artwork is a challenge in the best sense to institutions and other people working with art. A direct consequence of that was how we came to work with four different rhythms simultaneously, thinking a lot about the logic and the sensibility

of certain practices, trying to accommodate them. Monthly screenings, a yearly video festival, commissioned work and the Sputniks—which was a long-term engagement with a group of artists, curators, critics who were fellow travellers with the Kunstverein. The latter was a way of thinking the relationship between artists and institutions differently. The agents at the recent Documenta reminded me of the Sputniks, or the generals at Art in General in New York when Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy was a curator there.

LK & GF: Regarding the format of Sputniks, it seems that it is also a challenge for artists to develop a practice that may be different to how they usually work.

ML: We thought about it like that. We asked the Sputniks to give us input into what an institution of contemporary art could be and should be, and simultaneously they were invited to make a new work, which could take any shape and form. Some artists were a bit disappointed by that because they wanted a time-slot with set budgets etc. and they, in most cases, didn't do anything. Others jumped at this and came out with brilliant work, like Carey Young, Apolonija Šušteršič, and Deimantas Narkevicius.

LK & GF: Did you intend to blur the roles of 'artist' and 'curator' with the Sputnik project?

ML: That was not my intention. I've never been interested in blurring the boundaries between curators and artists. If it is part of the logic of the artwork then I can be on board, so to speak. My personal drive is to look at art, to think about art, to take care of and use the potential that is in art, by

thinking about how it can exist in the best possible ways. 'Best' in this case also means challenging and stimulating. A lot of the formats and methods that we see limit the art, rather than allowing it to blossom. I take my function to be to detect some of this and suggest how it can be teased out and combined with other works, places, people, questions, contexts etc. This is what I mean by "working curatorially," which also includes the horizon of not accepting the status quo. Furthermore, institutions have to support art that doesn't sell, and doesn't have other kinds of support, in terms of production.

LK & GF: You mentioned that the program at Kunstverein München was not very well publicized...

ML: We had a core group of locals who came to almost everything that we did, a bit like a fan club. The difficulty was the local art scene and the provincial critics in the Munich newspapers. Most of them thought that our program was neither relevant nor meaningful. One objection was that it was quite process-oriented and several program lines were running at the same time. We often heard things like: "It's too much, you can never grasp everything." As if that is the point, to be able to catch everything that is going on in an institution.

LK & GF: Did you have references or certain other curatorial or artistic practices in mind when working in that way?

ML: Primarily artistic practices. Work by people like Philippe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Matts Leiderstam, Elin Wikström and eventually people like Marion von Osten and Hito Steyerl. I did not know the work of the latter two when I started; they were introduced to me by Sören Grammel. We continue to do things together to this very day. Curatorially speaking, there are some colleagues that I've always admired and respected, Lynne Cooke and Ute Meta Bauer for example. I also found Jens Hoffman's work stimulating in terms of formats, particularly early on when the formats had not taken over and overshadowed the work. Like *A Little Bit of History Repeated* at Kunst-Werke, which was a project on the history of performance art without traditional documentation. Instead, each historical work was freely reenacted by a younger artist, which was inspiring. This must have been one of the first reenactment projects in the wave which later ensued.

LK & GF: In terms of historical examples, is it completely obsolete to speak of institutional critique for instance?

ML: As a general approach to things it is important, but I was never very engaged with Andrea Fraser's or Fred Wilson's work. Robert Smithson is an exception because I co-curated a Smithson retrospective at Moderna Museet. And yet, Smithson filtered in more through the practice of the artists I was working with. For example the kind of transportation, site- and non-site, logic of Ann Lislegaard and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster.

LK & GF: In the beginning you mentioned that your practice now is still very much related to what you did when you were at Kunstverein München or at Moderna Museet, but also different. In what way would you say is it different? How did your practice at Moderna Museet inform your practice at Kunstverein?

ML: I could have stayed at Moderna Museet for the rest of my life. It was a permanent job and it was fantastic to do Moderna Museet Project. David Elliot, the director, was supportive of more or less everything I suggested, but I felt that the institution was too big and too heavy. It was hard to convince the staff members, for instance the technicians and the administrators: for most of them it remained strange to work with production, adapting to artists and their methods. It was too fordist for me, like a conveyor belt with one exhibition after another produced the same way. I wanted to try something else, where I could influence the methodology. I informed the director that I was going to leave at the end of the year but I didn't know where to go. In the meantime the Kunstverein came up.

LK & GF: The Tensta Konsthall is a much smaller and less heavy institution than Moderna Museet. There are different formats and sites, e.g. exhibition spaces, lobby, discursive programs, posters and the website, where different artistic projects parallel one another. It seems that a conceptual approach to institutional formats is an important methodological tool for you. At Kunstverein München you worked closely with artists, designers and architects on the concept and design of the logo (Christoph Steinegger) and lobby (Apolonija Šušteršič). How do you handle the institutional framework here?

ML: We are working with Metahaven, an Amsterdam-based design duo. I've always worked closely with designers: Christoph Steinegger in Munich, Åbåke at Iaspis and Project Projects at CCS Bard. It's important for me to work with people who are inventive and daring in terms of graphics and communication. When I started here I asked Metahaven how we could organize communication. Tensta Konsthall is a private foundation founded in 1998 and funded primarily by the city of Stockholm, a little bit by the state and all kinds of other sources that we have to find ourselves. These days we live in a culture of persuasion where we, as institutions, constantly have to talk about how we are the best, the biggest, the bravest and the most beautiful in the world. Of course we need to communicate in ways that make our program appear interesting and relevant. My question to Metahaven was: how can we do that without being completely immersed in that logic? Furthermore, how could we potentially communicate without a classical logo, to not be in the midst of today's branding frenzy? They suggested that we work with a mark. The mark has so far been a square, but that can change. Inside the square it always says Tensta Konsthall, but it's written in different ways, as it is taken as a facsimile from specific places where it has been mentioned. The way we look is affected by our infrastructure in terms of where we are mentioned, which means that it's also constantly changing, and the square can also change into something else. Metahaven's idea is influenced by how the architectural infrastructure of Centre Pompidou in Paris is revealed, as a necessary support mechanism. Today, the immaterial and communication-based infrastructure is as important as the architectural one, if not more so.

LK & GF: Are the flags only on display here in the café?

ML: Yes. This is another result of a close communication with the graphic designers because we started out with posters. A poster is usually mass-produced and you are supposed to plaster it everywhere, but we could never afford to do that. We ended up printing five of each and then using them only inside the space. In this way they became more like signs, which led us to talk about that we should do a sign instead of a poster. Metahaven suggested that we print it on textile, and it is brilliant. They become contemporary tapestries. Our café is rather domestic, and we want to be welcoming, particularly for women, as most of public space in Tensta is very male dominated. Metahaven designed our main sign

at the entrance too. It is made of concrete, which grew out of our discussions that one of my ambitions here is for Tensta Konsthall to become an institution. So far it has been run as a project. In a place like Tensta it is extremely important to create continuity, stability and agility. Almost everything here is run as a project, creating a completely fragmented society. I want to be able to say that Tensta Konsthall will surely exist in ten years time, that it is a continuous place. Another way of saying this is that we want to become an institution. Metahaven's response was that to put this across, the sign absolutely had to be made out of concrete.

LK & GF: To finish, we could talk about the situation in Tensta. How do you interact with people living here?

ML: Tensta is located twenty minutes by subway from the city center of Stockholm. It was built in the late 1960s as part of a big housing scheme called 'The Million Program,' whereby between 1965 and 1975 one million housing units were constructed across Sweden. Tensta happens to be one of the single biggest ones, with 5600 apartments. Today around 19,000 people live here, roughly ninety percent of whom have a trans-local background. The average income is lower than in the rest of the country, and average unemployment is higher. Over the last fifteen years a lot of societal services have been removed. The situation is not unlike many rural areas: there is no bank anymore, there's no liquor store. The local city administration is now housed in an industrial area in the middle of nowhere, rather than in the middle of the neighborhood where people live. This creates tensions. Just like in the inner city of Stockholm, which is strikingly white, Tensta is a place where segregation is visible. To have a Kunsthalle with an excellent program here is extremely important—I wish there were theatres, research institutes, and other kinds of institutions as well.

LK & GF: What's the history of the Kunsthalle in Tensta? What do you want to achieve here?

ML: In fact, Tensta Konsthall is a grass roots initiative that coincided with a regeneration scheme of the city of Stockholm, and from the outset the mission was to have an active relationship to the neighborhood. This has been performed in different ways by the different directors and teams. It is a private foundation, which today gets approx. 50% of its funding from the city of Stockholm and the state. These are grants which we apply for every year, and

which have to report every year. The other 50% come from collaborations, foundations—mostly beyond Sweden as there are basically no foundations supporting contemporary art in the country—EU-grants and private donations. I for myself want to make a program of contemporary art that speaks to people like yourselves, to other artists and other art professionals, that is really part of a discussion about what contemporary art is and what it could be. This is similar to the thinking in Munich. But I want that to be mediated in ways that are meaningful in Tensta, which means that we work a lot with mediation. However, it is always small-scale and it is tailor-made in relation to particular individuals or groups, where we try to identify certain shared concerns and through that establish what we could call a third space, or semi-public space. The notion of the ‘production of space’ comes from Henri Lefebvre and has been elaborated in interesting ways by people like Simon Sheikh. At its best, this is how I hope it works here.

LK & GF: Could you give some examples of how you produce space in that sense?

ML: The café is the most important point of mediation. We are too small to run it ourselves so it is run by a local social company. There are places where you can buy tea and coffee in Tensta, but not really a café. On top of that, those places are very male dominated. When I began working here we started something super basic, which turned out to be efficient: we visited almost all associations, work places and organizations in Tensta, often in the form of us having our staff meetings on their premises and then asking them to tell us about their activities. We told them briefly about the Konsthall and invited them to visit us, promising a guided tour. We also asked how the Konsthall could be interesting, meaningful and even useful to them. Some of them did not reply; others immediately had ideas, like the Women’s Center who told us that they wanted to hold tea and coffee salons in our café. Since then we collaborate every other month on salons in the café. In addition, we collaborate with them in a number of other ways, public as well as non-public, including having hired one of their members as our receptionist.

The Fashion Project, organized and run by our mediator Emily Fahlén for two years, is another example. It involves young women from the local senior high school who on a weekly basis during the school year meet at the Konsthall to work practically

and theoretically on fashion, style, life-style and identity. The activities range from workshops with designers and lectures on fashion history at the Center for Fashion Studies at the Stockholm University to discussions about their own choice of clothes and makeup, and exhibits with their own work at the Culture House at the city center. Some of the participants remain, others change, but there is an interesting continuity here.



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Maria Lind is a curator and critic. Since 2011 director of Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; 2008-2010 director of the graduate program, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; 2005-2007 director of Iaspis; 2002-2004 director of Kunstverein München; 1997-2001 curator at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; 1998 co-curator of Manifesta 2.

Captions

1 Apolonija Šušteršič, This is a testing area for a better world, in: Maria Lind, Schlieben, Katharina, Grammel, Soren, Schwarzbart, Judith, Cohen, Ana Paula, Lorz, Julienne, Praun, Tessa: Gesammelte Drucksachen, Frankfurt am Main: revolver Publishing 2004. pp. 406-407.

2 Tensta konsthall, Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden, 26.10. 2013-18.5. 2014, Flag designed by Metahaven, Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

3 Tensta konsthall, Spring 2013 13.6–29.9 2013, Flag designed by Metahaven, Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

4 Tensta konsthall, Cafe 2013, Logo designed by Metahaven Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

How to move in / an institution

by Rachel Mader

The current debates about the institutional condition of the art world are varied in their argumentation as well as their assessments—perhaps they are more accurately characterized as divided and frequently controversial. The reasons for the highly divergent evaluations of the current situation lie within the hybrid constellations that have become part of the everyday reality of all kinds of art institutions. They are hybrid not only in relation to funding bodies and financing models (so called public-private partnerships are an example here) but also more basically with regard to the way different institutions conceive of themselves and their respective role in society (we might ask, for example, whether today's off- or off-off spaces still pursue a counter-cultural agenda). These present and constantly changing phenomena¹ prove difficult to categorize and are correspondingly subject to political discussion.² In various forums, including conventional formats such as texts, conferences, or exhibitions, as well as more innovative models such as international networks or interdisciplinary research platforms, these developments continue to be analyzed and/or criticized, while generating discussion about possible scenarios for the future of institutions and possible forms of agency within them. Regardless of the extent to which ideas diverge on these points, the intensity of the current debate itself demonstrates the urgency that this issue represents for the art system.

There is largely consensus in these texts, however, about the various global and specific developments that these hybrid constellations have produced. Large-scale privatization and deregulation in the course of neoliberal politics radically shook the foundations particularly of the more traditional, state-owned institutions, with effects extending indirectly to those farther from state influence. In the field of art these changes were marked not only by budget cuts but also by more or less urgent calls for the acquisition of third party funds. Simultaneously, labor conditions were flexibilized and the pressure to develop a market-oriented profile increased substantially. Additionally, the art market, which since the 1980s has been flourishing in previously unknown ways, did not develop as a separate, but rather as an invasive, phenomenon. Hardly any aspect of the art system today can organize outside the logic of the market or its effects (such as the demand for blockbuster exhibitions)—a circumstance which paradoxically also generated the success of publications that explicitly deplore these developments, such as Chin-Tao Wu's pointedly titled *Privatizing Culture*.³ In the field of cultural policy a variety of discourses emerged as a result of these developments. While the political left in particular practices a fundamental critique of the economization of creativity⁴, government cultural policies have largely missed the opportunity to initiate a fundamental examination of their activities under contemporary conditions.⁵ Apart from those developments dominated by financial aspects and rooted in global processes, changes within the art system itself have also contributed significantly to the process of hybridization. The ideas of institutional critique as well as a continuously expanding concept of art have undermined and challenged the self-image of

traditional institutions. So-called 'biennialization' has placed artistic production in a situation dominated by tensions between site-specific engagement, the event machine, and location marketing; and the increasing discursivity of the art world was confronted with accusations of lacking popularity and accessibility.

In accordance with the complex coordinates and processes that determine the current situation of confusion, the debate emerges from numerous different disciplines and fields of practice, and operates with very divergent ideas and concepts—about what an institution is, how it functions, what its social responsibility can or must be and most importantly how we, as agents, can handle these complexities and act within them. The conclusions reached by different writers about the relation between the structural framework (the institution) and its agents is as varied as the conceptual vocabulary used to examine specific aspects of this constellation. The following notes attempt in a first step to bring some order to the descriptions and outlines of institutions in the relevant literature.⁶ Building on this they will sketch the relationship of the institution to the social context, while a third part will investigate how the interaction between an institution and its agents is conceptualized in the current debate. In the process, questions or themes will arise that require clarification or at least closer examination for future research on institutions in the field of art. For it is evident even from a rough overview of the literature that this has become an issue of some urgency as a result of recent political developments and their latent destabilization of institutional bonds.

What is/makes an institution?

The diversity of concepts in recent discourse is revealing about the direction of the debate in at least two ways. Not only does it point to the evident lack of a common terminology that might act as a reference point for the discussion, the occasionally innovative vocabulary also testifies to the potential contained in the current concern with institutions. Terms like 'progressive institutions' or 'radical institutions'⁷ imply the possibility of a future-oriented entity that is open to experimental practices, both politically and in terms of content. Publications such as *Mögliche Museen (Possible Museums)*, edited by Barbara Steiner and Charles Esche, present some "models ... of institutional experimentalism" since the 1960s, and thus substantiate theoretical projections with reference to actually existing projects.⁸ And the project European Kunsthalle, with its mission of developing the "concept and potential of the Kunsthalle model," testifies to the continued interest in the possibilities of institutional change in the field of art that is also found in many other institutions.⁹

As an adjective, the word 'institutional' appears in diverse contexts and with correspondingly different orientations and emphases. At an international conference organized in 2010 by a network of "contemporary art institutions" with a noticeably expanded concept of the institution (Comité van Roosendaal), there was discussion of 'institutional behavior' or 'institutional attitude'¹⁰, which implies an understanding of institutions not merely as a structural framework, but that this structure requires actors with dispositions and attitudes. Philosophers Gerald Raunig and Stefan Nowotny advance a definition similarly centered on action when they speak of "instituent practices" as a way to describe a "movement of flight" that can and should resist the power of institutionalizing processes.¹¹ Their thoughts offer a decidedly critical engagement with and continuation of one of the most central concepts of institutional self-examination in the art world of the last few decades, that of institutional critique. The hardly linear but yet connected artistic and critical intentions that have been gathered under this term since the 1960s are at the root of an inclusive and fundamental examination of the institu-

tional conditions of artistic production as well as its forms of presentation and reception.¹²

More recent debates mostly operate with a less specific conception of what an institution in the art world is, or what might be implied in any particular idea of it. Rather, as if it were a matter of course, they rely on a very broad definition, such as that offered in a dictionary of sociology: “Based on general linguistic usage I. refers to an establishment (organization, agency or company) per se, which fulfills a particular function according to particular rules, such as operational procedure and the distribution of functions among cooperating staff, in the framework of a larger organizational system. In a basic sense I. as a sociological term refers to any form of consciously planned or organically developed stable, lasting pattern of human interaction that is enforced in society or supported and actualized within generally legitimated conceptions of order.”¹³ Such a broad definition of a concept is typical for an emerging field of research. It is a situation that results either in case studies that center on a specific institution¹⁴ or in numerous attempts to encompass and order the so far only latently constituted field through more general themes or questions. Most of the publications and events that appeared within the last few years belong to this latter category, even though the political debate mentioned above has led many of these texts and opinions to take on a particular texture. What they share is a critical attitude toward those institutions perceived as traditional, as well as the conservative constellations active within them. Examples include historically oriented fine art museums, a top-down practice of art education, the passive position of the viewer, or the repression of the problematic entanglements of individual institutions with the private sector economy. Despite these commonalities, we can identify two fundamentally different approaches to the way the construct of the institution is conceived, which may be summed up with reference to two concepts from very different texts of structuralist political theory and academic art history respectively. While the one group tends to consider the institution as an ‘ideological state apparatus’ (Althusser),¹⁵ the other group’s ideas are closer to the concept of the institution as *Ausgleichserzeugnis*, the dialectical product of a struggle to balance a variety of different interests and tendencies, as it is described in Martin Warnke’s seminal study *The Court Artist* (1986) (the institution in his case being the early modern court)¹⁶. Although only very few of the texts refer to these two discourses explicitly, I would argue that this typology is useful as a way to frame the current debate, since many of its participants share with one or the other of these positions clusters of basic assumptions about what an institution is and how it functions.

The institution as actualization of the dominant ideology

Althusser places cultural institutions in the category of so called “ideological state apparatuses” that, complementing the “repressive state apparatuses,” educate citizens to function within dominant ideology and to uncritically reproduce its values within the confines of their position in the social structure. Dominant ideology is thereby understood as an overbearing power to which individuals are subjected in all areas of society. Correspondingly, a critical attitude must always position itself in opposition to and never within the particular, equally hegemonic institution, since the latter is without exemption implicated in implementing and enforcing the dominant ideology, with no allowance for any effective form of self-reflection. Thus the institution swiftly becomes representative of state-political power and superiority, in relation to which the subject must be submissive and obedient or else insist on a position of refusal and rejection. Critical agency within hegemonial structures is considered nearly impossible, since they are only interested in the extension of their own power. In this paradigm, the institution is largely

an inflexible, anonymous construct determined by political processes.¹⁷ Of course none of the current texts contain all the above-mentioned criteria, since most of the authors extend their analysis by including further critiques of the institution by Foucault or Gramsci. Nonetheless the conceptualization of institutions in the examples sketched out below is dominated by elements that Althusser considered characteristic of ideological state apparatuses. Historical analyses of the institution in particular tend to generalize in their exposition of the structures, mechanisms and functions as well as the contextual and ideological conditions of institutions. Exemplary for this approach is Australian sociologist Tony Bennett's seminal study *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), in which he circumscribes the museum landscape with the phrase "exhibitionary complex," differentiated as "vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the message of power (but of a different type) throughout society."¹⁸ Similarly, certain younger authors' arguments present power relations as unambiguous and absolute, particularly where the focus is on the condition of cultural policy: "It is 2015. Art is almost completely instrumentalized—regardless of whether its financing is private or public. Art services either national or European interests, where it is especially useful on the construction or reinforcement of specific identities." So art historian and curator Maria Lind begins her introductory statement to a 2005 publication that projects a future European cultural landscape for the year 2015.¹⁹ In much of her writing she applies this perspective to other parameters of the art system, for example she perceives the range of agency as increasingly narrow, or describes privatization as an unstoppable trajectory, while critical institutions disappear.²⁰ A similar lament is raised by her colleague Nina Möntmann concerning developments in the years following the Millennium: the oppositional attitudes of so called progressive institutions are undermined by funding cuts, the traditional art museum has been replaced by a "corporate institutional logic" that favors a mass public over committed audiences and in which the budget determines the program.²¹ And even the concept of 'instituent practices', so strongly argued for by Raunig and Nowotny, is based on an act of delimitation that in turn presumes the institution as a dominant power, the escape from which is the central criteria for all action.²² In general these analyses conceive of the institution as a stable, monolithic entity that—almost as if it were an independent agent²³—aims to preserve or even extend its inherent power. Accordingly, acts of institutional critique must aim for a fundamental destabilization of the respective structure as well as its enabling conditions. Most of these texts also share a critical cultural-political attitude, which attempts to redress the lack of research in this area with reference to current issues.

A dynamic equilibrium in and through institutions

Oliver Marchart's case study on the phenomenon of politicization in art, using the example of the documenta exhibitions dX, D11 and d12, partially builds on the above reflections, but posits a very different conception of the changing nature of institutional structures. Referring to Gramsci, Marchart describes institutions as dynamic constellations in which there is a constant struggle for predominance (hegemony) "between rival powers."²⁴ Warnke's concept of the institution as *Ausgleichserzeugnis*, the product of a struggle for equilibrium among different actors and social forces, also conceives of the institutional structure as flexible, subject to constant negotiation between the actors involved. Warnke's basic approach, which he describes in his analysis of the artist in the institution of the court as "a science of conditionalities that also makes use of the history of cultural institutions," starts from the premise that in contrast to traditional, commission-based patronage "institutions are mediating entities in which divergent needs, norms and strategies of action arrange themselves; the institution itself is already product of an equilibrium of interests of various subjects."²⁵ While Marchart argues for a "counter-

hegemonial" effect of the "tectonic shifts" he observes within documenta exhibitions, regarding the aspects of politicization, decentering of the west, the rise of art education and the prevalence of theory, a comparable understanding of the institution has emerged in various forms of institutional critique over the last few years.²⁶

Interest groups such as Comité van Roosendaal (which organized the conference *Institutional Attitudes* in 2010)²⁷ or Giant Step (an international project for research on contemporary art institutions)²⁸ center their activities on potential shifts within institutional structures and the conditions that enable such shifts. European Kunsthalle (since 2005) or the activities of Barbara Steiner at Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig (2001–2011) are attempts at using forms of critical appropriation to liberate the institution from its rigid traditional functions and provide it with new impulses. In England numerous organizations were founded in the past few decades whose declared goals include not only to support innovative and experimental artistic practices, but also a critical reflection of the roles and functions of institutional settings in the art world.²⁹ The term 'New Institutionalism', introduced to wider usage in the homonymous 2003 publication by its editor Jonas Ekeberg, captures efforts on a discursive level "to redefine the contemporary art institution."³⁰ While Marchart and Warnke use exemplary institutional constellations as sites to chart changes, their underlying conditions, the agents responsible for them and to a certain extent the resulting effects, the discourse arising particularly in the vicinity of New Institutionalism must also be understood as an appeal not to abandon existing institutions to their fate, respectively the forces of hegemony, but to comprehend and use them as sites of strategic importance.

What is the place of the art institution in contemporary society?

Both the above positions question the place of art institutions within contemporary social structures. And just as there are various different conceptualizations of what an institution is, there is a wide range of ideas about what social demands art institutions are required to meet and, more fundamentally, there is little agreement about what promise they retain. For years, cultural pessimist voices have been diagnosing an increasing adaptation of cultural institutions to the spreading logic of the market, which attacks and marginalizes traditional values and responsibilities. This argument casts the economy as a dominating ideology and consequently it is found mainly among those positions which, following Althusser, operate with the assumption of rigid, all-encompassing power structures. From this follows the thesis that the once central duties of any state subsidized cultural institution—collection, preservation and education— have been eroded under the pressure to increase third party funding and audience numbers, and that even independently organized structures are pressured by demands for efficiency and rentability.³¹ The latitude available to actors within these institutions has changed fundamentally in the course of these developments and in some cases— according to the resigned evaluation of individual protagonists—has been radically limited: " ... almost all players on the art field feel instrumentalized today," deplores Maria Lind, referring to the altered working conditions within institutional settings.³² Without completely rejecting these assessments, but employing a considerably more nuanced argument, authors Beatrice von Bismarck and Nina Möntmann also attempt to describe the current situation. Both insist on the ambivalence of the current state of affairs, in which the 'economization of creativity' has become an almost hegemonic topos, but is resisted by a resounding number of critical voices within artistic institutional critique and the work of progressive cultural institutions.³³ A pragmatic expression of this assessment may be found in the response of English curator Alex Farquharson, currently director of Nottingham Contemporary, to a question by his colleague Maria Lind about the causes of the crisis in the cul-

tural sector. Not only does Farquharson doubt the very existence of this crisis, in the course of the conversation he also repeatedly points to critical and innovative initiatives by progressive institutions whose goal is not so much to change society as a whole, but which have achieved improvements in the programming or working conditions of individual institutions and were able to create tangible alternatives.³⁴

The institution as promise?

These differing evaluations underscore the difficulty of determining the place, function and responsibilities of cultural institutions today. While the intensity of current debate confirms Mary Douglas' thesis that institutions are important social support structures, because they regulate both remembrance and forgetting,³⁵ the question of what significance society attaches to this fact has become the subject of axiomatic debates. The increasing flexibilization of institutional structures as expounded in Richard Sennett's analysis of global contexts in *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2005) is considered a threat to the individual. In a similar vein, Paolo Virno concludes that in times of global deregulation and the increasing loss of stable relationships, institutions offer a continuity and reliability desperately needed by people and communities.³⁶ In emphasizing the positive, gainful aspects of institutions Virno is well aware of the long history of criticizing them as centers of power that generate exclusions. These considerations in turn are in critical dialogue with currently also widely and controversially debated aspects of political theory that use the concept of hegemony to think the possibilities of critical agency under neoliberal conditions, a question that is quintessential to progressive institutions. Just as the political effects of these institutions' activities are hotly debated, political theory struggles with the question of whether "neoliberalism is hegemonic" and what consequences this assumption has for the individual's scope of agency within social structures.³⁷ Theorists such as Alex Demirovic or Chantal Mouffe, following Gramsci and distancing themselves from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, insist on the possibility and sometimes the desirability of a critical appropriation of hegemonial institutional structures.³⁸ As mentioned above, Oliver Marchart's analysis of three recent documenta exhibitions exemplarily demonstrates the flexibility of institutions within constellations of hegemony as postulated by Demirovic and Mouffe.

I would argue that these theoretical reflections underpin several positions within the art field that refuse to frame institutions as static or overpowering. In fact, their strengths are interpreted as a force field negotiated in a struggle with other social dynamics, thus ascribing to institutions some limited utopian potential. Farquharson cites the curator of a 'progressive' art institution, Charles Esche, who frames this institution as a "forum of possibilities," a "radically democratic space for free-form discussion on how things could be otherwise"—admittedly a very optimistic description, which may serve Esche as a vision for his curatorial work.³⁹ However, Simon Sheikh also closes his thoughts on the "tasks of progressive art institutions" with a call to conceive of the art institution as a "place of democracy and its everlasting antagonism" that forges a connection between art and society.⁴⁰ And although sociologist Pascal Gielen's statement that new institutions should represent a space for the imagination appears only as a wishful ideal, he does insist on the possible reality of such projections. However, he frames this skeptically in relation to recent social developments touched on in our discussion of Sennett and Virno, which Gielen describes in terms of the "non-engagement" of institutions, or rather their principal agents: curators for example only stay in any one place for a few years, and biennials have institutionalized this with their regular turn-over of curators. That this supports and enhances individual careers rather than underlying structures is a consequence the implications of which have rarely been analyzed so

far.⁴¹ Initiatives such as Comité van Roosendaal or more recently Giant Step can however be read as reactions against these developments.

To serve or to shape? Perspectives of institutional action

The conception of the institution as *Ausgleichserzeugnis* (Warnke), or as a site of necessary and actual struggle for hegemony (Marchart), requires actors who are able to effectively shape and influence, who are not subservient to or at the mercy of a structural entity. In order to find out how institutions and agents interact, we must undertake an internal close examination of these processes, something that has rarely been done with reference to concrete situations. On a theoretical level considerations of the relationship between individual and superstructure have been subject to intense scrutiny in connection with Foucault's concept of governmentality.⁴² However, these ideas have rarely been applied to art institutions, especially not as an analytical instrument to examine the actions of individuals within institutional structures.

Gerald Raunig for example explicitly refers to Foucault's ideas on governmentality in his conceptualization of 'instituent practices'. He enlists Foucault in support of his position since the 'movement of flight' from the dominance of institutionalization that he calls for is echoed in Foucault's demand of "not (wanting) to be governed that way."⁴³ Raunig's text produces a critical overview of institutional critique's repeated and varied incarnations in art practice since the 1970s. His concept of 'instituent practices', as a demand for critical agency across social and disciplinary boundaries, results in harsh judgments on many instances of institutional critique by artists. His exemplary criticism is of Andrea Fraser, based not so much on her work, but on a close reading of her texts, which reflect on her artistic interventions with reference to a wide body of theory. Raunig predictably attacks Fraser based on her fatalistic-sounding statement that there is precisely no fleeing from the institution: "It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves."⁴⁴ The configuration of this argument reveals much about the problematic jostling of positions that determines this debate as a whole and points to a lack of reflection on the interactions and struggles between different actors in their respective institutional dispositions. And so we should acknowledge that artistic institutional critique from its very beginnings was aimed at destabilizing the institution, regardless of its subsequent inclusion in the canonical debates of art history and the resulting factual disempowerment of its critical intentions. And yet it is precisely the practices of institutional critique that turned art institutions into negotiable entities, and its diverse interventions often refused to conceptualize the institution as a powerful and static adversary, instead extracting from it transparency, flexibility or openness, depending on the specific goal of the intervention.⁴⁵ Ironically Andrea Fraser herself, in the very text cited by Raunig, points out that the establishment of institutional critique has become the foil before which all new critical activity must now prove itself. To negate the recognition achieved by institutional critique, continues Fraser, would signify a lack of responsibility toward the context that determines critical agency.⁴⁶

It thus seems urgent to concisely examine agents' engagement with and movement within institutional settings, while closely attending to artistic, curatorial and administrative practices within art institutions. The theoretical reflections discussed above already go some distance to offer important conceptual and analytical reference points. However, they also generalize to the extent that they cannot do justice to the productive emancipatory endeavors of individual actors. Institutions are not merely abstract formations that are either dominant or marginal, but remain rigid opponents to the agents within them. They are more like antago-

nistic force fields in which agency is balanced with other social fields. Some clues to what this might mean in practice are offered by the speakers at the above-mentioned conference *Institutional Attitudes*, which was concerned precisely with this question of agency in institutional contexts. Alex Farquharson, who we discussed above, proposes to make 'hospitality' a basic principle of collaboration, thus equalizing the power balance between organizers and guests. This approach, argues Farquharson, must be possible in various formats that do not conform to the demands of institutions but are instead focused on projects. Simon Sheikh's appeal for a reflective agency on the various levels involved in institutional action follows directly from this: not only should curating follow less canonized rules and the central role of art education be properly acknowledged, he also demands a less hermetic expert language and an architecture that is adaptable to purpose instead of primarily staging itself.⁴⁷ These proposals target levels of agency for which Marchart's analysis introduces the term 'molecular politics': "... hegemony, as Gramsci says, is a molecular process, consisting of successive combinations of ideological molecules into larger formations." Shifts in hegemonial structures are a protracted process; in painstakingly small steps, Marchart suggests, the ground is prepared until there comes a point where art institutions can turn from "hegemony- into counter-hegemony machines."⁴⁸ Future research would do well to acknowledge this approach and work on the level of molecular politics, tracing and evaluating its impact. For a good deal of critical practice operates and conceives of itself within this framework and should be interpreted accordingly.

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Notes

1 I am working here with a broad concept of the institution that contains not only fixed and sanctioned structures, but also the multiple organized attempts to enable innovative artistic activities. See the chapter 'What is/makes an institution?'

2 These ambivalent constellations are the basis of American art historian Martha Buskirk's most recent publication *Creative Enterprise. Contemporary Art between Museum and Marketplace*, Continuum, New York, 2012. In contrast to numerous other texts that—usually by reference to specific situations—attempt to level the complexity of institutions for the sake of clarity and unambiguous evaluation, Buskirk is more concerned with revealing the mechanisms of the contemporary art system. See esp. her introduction, pp. 1-23.

3 Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatizing Culture. Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, Verso, London, 2002. One aspect of these paradox or hybrid constellations is that when subject to critique, the criticism follows the very same logic and an ambivalent position is inescapably inherent to it. Artist Andrea Fraser describes this in a text that questions the assimilation of artistic institutional critique by the institutions themselves. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in John C. Welchman ed. *Institutional Critique and After*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2006, pp. 123 - 135. Originally published in *Artforum*, September 2005.

4 See for example Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig eds., *Kritik der Kreativität*, Turia + Kant, Vienna, 2007.

5 This statement should be read as a generalization, intended to summarize an overall tendency. For a more detailed account, we must differentiate between European states, which would unearth considerable differences in terms of the self-reflexivity of instruments of subsidy for art and culture. For example, the research project on public arts policy and funding initiated by the British Arts Council, now ongoing for several decades, is to my knowledge unique in Europe. For more information see <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/research-and-data/>. Accessed 24.10.2013.

6 It seems less meaningful to research or discuss definitions. Except for lexical articles none of the texts analyzed here explicitly attempt to define the institution or to approach their subject by way of a universally valid definition.

7 The phrase 'progressive institutions of art' is used by Nina Möntmann in her writing on art institutions as well as art historian and theorist Simon Sheikh in his essay "Public Spheres and the Functions

of Progressive Art Institutions", published online at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0504/sheikh/en>. Accessed 30.10.2013. The quotation marks he places around the term 'progressive' (not retained in the title of the English version) testify to his own skepticism about this project, which is nonetheless considered desirable and worth working towards. 'Radical Institutions' is the term preferred by English curator Alex Farquharson, in the context of a talk on the occasion of the conference *Institutional Attitudes* that took place in Brussels in April 2010 and which attracted speakers from very different fields related to the study or practice of culture. Video recordings of all presentations and round table discussions are available online via the website of Comité van Roosendaal or directly on vimeo.com. See www.comitevanroosendaal.eu. Accessed 30.10.2013.

8 Barbara Steiner and Charles Esche eds., *Mögliche Museen*, Jahrbuch für moderne Kunst, Jahresring 54, Walther König, Cologne, 2007. Among the institutions presented in this book are the Dia Art Foundation in New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven as well as MACBA in Barcelona and Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana.

9 Further information on the European Kunsthalle is available on their website <http://www.eukunsthalle.com/>. Accessed 24.10.2013. There are also links to various resources such as events and publications concerned with questions of institutional practice.

10 Natasha Ilic at the round table "Beyond Criticality," part of the conference *Institutional Attitudes*, see note 7.

11 For the basic concept of 'instituent practices' see the first three chapters of Gerald Raunig and Stefan Nowotny, *Instituierende Praxen: Fliehen, Instituieren, Transformieren*, Turia + Kant, Vienna, 2008, pp. 11 - 49. In English see Gerald Raunig "Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming" and Steven Nowotny "Anti-Canonization: The Differential Knowledge of Institutional Critique", both in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray eds., *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, MayFlyBooks/eipcp, London, 2009, pp. 3-12 and pp. 21-28 respectively.

12 An excellent and reflexive introduction to the themes and questions of institutional critique is the reader *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. by John C. Welchman (see note 3). In his introduction, Welchman emphasizes that the discussions surrounding institutional critique often happen at a surprising remove from the developments in the institutional landscape. Christian Kravagna has assembled a

collection of "writing on institutional critique by artists," see Christian Kravagna, *Das Museum als Arena*, Walther König, Cologne, 2001.

13 Entry on the institution in Karl-Heinz Hillmann ed., *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*, Alfred Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1994, p. 375. Translators note: own translation. For a comparable definition in English see John Scott and Gordon Marshall eds., *A Dictionary of Sociology* (3rd rev. ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, p. 360.

14 Studies of institutional history examine individual museums, their emergence and development, while more recent publications tend to refer to examples only cursorily and there is little sound work on single institutions. Oliver Marchart's study of the shifts in hegemonial discourse of the last three documenta exhibitions represents an exception. See Oliver Marchart, *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld. Die documenta-Ausstellungen dX, D11, d12 und die Politik der Biennialisierung*, Walter König, Cologne, 2008. For essays by the author covering some of the same issues in English see Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic shifts and the politics of biennialization," in Marieke van Hal, Solveig Ovstebo and Elena Filipovic eds., *The Biennial Reader*, Hatkje Cantz, Ostfildern/Berlin, 2010; Oliver Marchart, "Curating Theory (Away): The case of the last three documenta shows," *oncurating.org* No. 8, 2011.

15 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (1971), new edition with an introduction by Frederic Jameson, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2001.

16 Martin Warnke, *Hofkünstler. Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers*, DuMont, Cologne, 1996 (1985), p. 12. Published in English as *The Court Artist. On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist*, trans. David McLintock, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. Translator's note: in the following all translations from this source are my own. The term *Ausgleichserzeugnis* remains untranslated to retain it as a single concept. Its literal rendering would be something akin to 'product of a balance of interests'.

17 It is surprising that Althusser, while he does refer to Gramsci's analysis of the state and its apparatuses in a footnote, discards the latter's thinking as fragmentary and incomplete. This is surprising particularly because Gramsci's writing later constituted the basis of a theory of hegemony that did not cast the state as a monolithic opponent but as a territory defined by continuous struggle. Gramsci's concept of hegemony is the explicit reference for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's seminal publication of contemporary political theory, *Hegemony and*

Socialist Strategy: Towards Radical Democratic Politics, Verso, London, 2001 (1985).

18 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, Routledge eds., London/New York, 1996, p. 82 (essay first published in 1988).

19 Maria Lind and Raimund Minichbauer eds., *European Cultural Policies 2015. A Perto with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe*, eiccp/IASPIS, London /Stockholm /Vienna, 2005, p.4.

20 See Maria Lind and Alex Farquharson, "Integrative Institutionalism: a Reconsideration", in Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen eds., *The New Administration of Aesthetics*, Torpedo Press, Oslo, 2007.

21 Nina Möntmann "Art and its Institutions," in Nina Möntmann ed., *Art and its Institutions. Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, BlackDog, London, 2005, p. 10.

22 Raunig and Nowotny, 2008, see note 11.

23 Oliver Marchart's analysis of documenta does work on the assumption of an independent life of institutions, but cautions to not set this up as absolute or defining (see Marchart 2008, as in note 14). By using the concept of the 'actor' I am referring to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, which seems particularly useful in this context, since his insistence on the agency of non-human actors enables us to think of institutions as entities that may be and even should be accorded the potential for agency. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an introduction to actor-network theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford / New York, 2005.

24 Marchart, 2008, p. 10, see note 14.

25 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, p. 12, see note 16. Warnke's analysis is concerned primarily with the reconstruction of historical conditions, and as such his texts do not demonstrate the political texture that is particular to more recent studies, although he does have an interest in the politics of knowledge.

26 Marchart, 2008, p. 10, see note 14.

27 See note 7.

28 For detailed and up to date information see <http://www.giant-step.org/giant-step-project/>. Accessed 30.10.2013.

29 I am engaging with these issues in the context of an ongoing research project (until 2014) entitled *Organizing Innovation: Artistic Practice and Cultural Policy in Postwar Britain*, for further information see <http://www.ifcar.ch/?id=96&lang=e>. Accessed 24.10.2013.

30 Jonas Ekeberg ed., *New Institutionalism*, Office for Contemporary Art Norway, Oslo, 2003, p. 9.

31 This “image- and structural shift” according to Christian Kravagna follows decades of critical reflection on behalf of cultural institutions, which were initiated mainly by artists in the early 20th century and that continued in various forms and contexts; see Kravagna 2001, p. 7, as in note 12.

32 Maria Lind and Alex Farquharson, “Integrative Institutionalism: a Reconsideration,” in Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen eds., *The New Administration of Aesthetics*, Torpedo Press, Oslo, 2007. See also note 19.

33 Möntmann 2006, p. 8-16, see note 21. Beatrice von Bismarck, “In Stellung bringen,” in *Kritik der Kreativität*, Gerald Raunig and Uld Wuggenig eds., Turia + Kant, Vienna, 2007, p. 237-243.

34 Maria Lind in conversation with Alex Farquharson, see note 20.

35 Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1986. Douglas employs a very wide definition of the institution and in her examples she also refers to societal conventions that conceive of themselves as institutions. Her thoughts are nonetheless useful for the present context, as many of the basic claims of informally organized institutions are also found in fixed structures.

36 Alexei Penzin’s interview with Paolo Virno is available at: <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-soviets-of-the-multitude>. Accessed 11.08.2011.

37 Alex Demirovic, “Is neoliberalism hegemonial?,” in *Widerspruch* No. 62, 2013, pp. 127-138.

38 In conversation with Markus Miessen Chantal Mouffe repeatedly and decidedly distances herself from Hardt and Negri’s “anti-institutional view”: “They think that we could reach a perfect democracy in which there will no longer be any relation of power, there will be no more conflict, and no more antagonism. It goes completely against the point that I want to defend and which is at the basis of most of my work, which is precisely the fact that antagonism is ineradicable. It can be tamed, this is what agonism tried to do, but we will never arrive at the point where it has definitely been overcome.” Chantal Mouffe in conversation with Markus Miessen, <http://roundtable.kein.org/node/545>. Accessed 28.10.2013.

39 Esche cited in Lind and Farquharson, 2007, see note 20.

40 Simon Sheikh, “Public Spheres and the Functions of Progressive Art Institutions,” published online at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0504/sheikh/en>. Accessed 28.10.2013.

41 Pascal Gielen in his contribution to the conference *Institutional Attitudes*, see note 7.

42 Foucault’s concept of governmentality goes back to the late 1970s and was mainly elaborated in the context of a series of lectures at the Collège de France. They remained fragmentary, however. Nevertheless since the turn of the Millennium so called ‘governmental studies,’ which develop Foucault’s ideas theoretically and empirically, have become increasingly prominent.

43 Foucault paraphrased by Gerald Raunig, in Raunig and Nowotny, 2008, p. 22, see note 11.

44 Fraser cited by Gerald Raunig, in Raunig and Nowotny, 2008, p. 24, see note 11.

45 In his overview text Johannes Meinhardt ascribes an unambiguously political self-conception to the activities of institutional critique. See Johannes Meinhardt, “Institutionskritik,” in *DuMonts Begrifflexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, Hubertus Butin ed., DuMont, Cologne, 2006, p. 126-130.

46 Fraser, 2006, see note 3.

47 Alex Farquharson and Simon Sheikh in their respective presentations at the conference *Institutional Attitudes*, see note 7. Alex Farquharson’s contribution is reprinted in an edited version in this issue.

48 Marchart, 2008, p. 24/25, see note 14.

Notes on exhibition history in curatorial discourse

by Felix Vogel

In 1999 the Clark Institute organized a much-discussed conference entitled *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*¹, the theme of which was the supposed gap between art history in museum and university contexts respectively. The organizers intended to examine the prejudice that academic art history is interested too much in theory and neglects the object, while the museum is primarily occupied with questions of funding and audiences, creating low expectations of its research. Whether this situation has since improved or intensified is not a question I am able to answer, instead I would like to speak about a related problem that concerns not art history as a whole but which, following the Clark conference, we might refer to as *The Two Exhibition Histories*. What concerns me here is mainly the discourse surrounding the exhibition which has established itself beyond the university, but also largely outside of the museum, and which I will provisionally entitle the 'curatorial discourse of exhibition history'.²

It is striking that the topic of the exhibition—and thus also its history—has only been properly established as a subject of research in the last twenty years, and particularly within the past decade, both within art history and in related fields. Publications, conferences, research projects, university courses and journals testify to this. Since 2011 Central Saint Martins College in London even offers a postgraduate MA course in 'Exhibition Studies'. Each academic year six or seven students study on the program, only a fraction of them with a background in art history, and many from the fields of fine arts, design or curatorial studies.

This extensive interest in the history of exhibitions may, as Bruce Altshuler states,³ certainly in part be due to the interest of the so called 'new' art history in context-specific and socio-historical approaches, although this would indicate a remarkable belatedness. Unquestionably, the increasing visibility and transformation of the exhibition since the 1960s has motivated a deeper engagement with its history. On the one hand this refers to the foundation of new biennials and institutions for the exhibition of contemporary art, the expansion of the art market with its countless gallery shows and art fairs, as well as the increasing temporalization of the museum: besides renovations and extensions built to increase temporary exhibition space—not least due to economic and marketing related factors—a critical or artistic engagement with the collection has become almost a necessity for any museum. While these approaches are always based on the permanent collection, the forms of presentation increasingly resemble those of the temporary exhibition, replacing the supposedly rigid, authoritative and atemporal collection display. On the other hand the exhibition is transforming itself to the extent that we must consider a whole new repertoire of typologies that dissolve the traditional formats of solo, group, and thematic shows. We might mention exhibitions in the category of 'relational aesthetics', which according to Nicolas Bourriaud become an "arena of exchange,"⁴ or the kind of project- or research-based exhibitions that revolve primarily around the production of discourse. In this context we must also

consider the development of artistic practices such as conceptual art or institutional critique, that is, the displacement of the (autonomous) work of art by questions of context and conditions of production, with increased focus on the exhibition itself. Peter Osborne mentions that it is the “exhibition-form” that “fulfils the requirement of providing meaning,” i.e. the exhibition as a “unit of artistic significance, and the object of constructive intent.”⁵ A further and in my view the most important reason is the establishment of curatorial studies programs—since these are conceived as places for practical training as well as theoretical research. The curatorial studies programs on offer sporadically since the late 1980s and early 1990s, but more intensively since the early 2000s, emerged not merely on the foundations of the new and increased function of the exhibition, but also reflected it, in a sense they required a knowledge of their object of study in order to construct it in the first place.⁶ To put it differently: the professionalization and subsequent formalization of the curatorial field presupposed a sense of its own history.⁷ It is thus unsurprising that it is not art history itself that contributed the bulk of publications on the history of exhibitions over the past decade—rather these emerged from the environs of curatorial studies.⁸

If in what follows I will limit myself almost exclusively to the history of exhibitions in curatorial discourse, this is not primarily intended to create a distinction of judgment between this discourse on the one hand, and that of academic art history on the other. Rather, it is a necessary limitation to strengthen and focus my argument. Such a focus can render territorial strategies more visible, which means asking precise questions such as: who defines concepts and terminologies? Who determines the canon and therefore *the* history of exhibitions and in what ways? I also suspect that an exhaustive examination of this discourse on the exhibition provides some clues to the issue of the homogenization of exhibition formats, which also allows us to draw some retrospective conclusions about the supposedly transnational format of the large-scale international exhibition since the end of the 1980s.

Where, then, does this discourse of exhibition history become manifest? In what publications and in what ways was exhibition history practiced in curatorial discourse? In the past few years for example a series of exhaustive studies on Harald Szeemann have been published.⁹ Such publications, one part archival material, one part biography—sometimes resembling hagiography—of a single curator have now appeared not just for *über*-curator Szeemann but also for other comparable figures. A large chunk of the discourse is shaped by collections of interviews, such as Hans-Ulrich Obrist’s eleven interviews with important curators¹⁰ published in 2008 as *A Brief History of Curating*¹¹, which is now in its fifth edition and constitutes the single bestselling publication of publishers JRP Ringier. In its preface and afterword, as well as in individual interviews, this publication presents itself as a decisive contribution to the history of exhibition making. A further example is the journal *The Exhibitionist*, which has appeared bi-annually since spring 2010. The journal claims to be the first¹² explicitly dedicated to the theme of curating, and in large parts its topic is the history of exhibitions.¹³ Further there appeared a multitude of anthologies (mostly with rather generic titles such as *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, *Curating Subjects* or *Everything you always wanted to know about curating: but were afraid to ask*) that are dedicated to the curatorial field, as well as lectures, conferences, podiums with curators about (their own) exhibitions. In what follows I will attempt to outline this phenomenon more precisely and investigate what conception of exhibition history underpins this discourse.

A first shared feature of the above mentioned publications are the speaker position from which exhibitions are discussed and the forms of speech used to do

so. It is almost exclusively curators themselves that appear in positions of authorship, leading to a situation where the curator speaks of and for the object that he/she has produced. Even when curators do not speak about their own exhibitions, they nevertheless speak from a position that is not that of a supposedly objective outsider. This is one reason why the interview—which is usually understood, or at least wants to be read, as a form of oral history—is such a popular format.¹⁴ In Obrist's book as well as in other anthologies of interviews¹⁵ the curator becomes the chief protagonist of a discourse about the exhibition, and within its historiography he/she is both subject and object. *A Brief History of Curating* is less about the history of curating suggested in the title, than it is a story by and about curators told in first person perspective. The form of the interview, as a seemingly unmediated form of speech, underlines the supposed authenticity of statements and constructs a form of authority that in turn legitimates the curator as author of the exhibition. Such gestures of authenticity are less about the documentary truth of a speaker, and more about a kind of justification, an emphasis on authority in order to legitimate speech acts.¹⁶ The tone of such interviews is casual, harmonious and strictly affirmative. People know each other, cite each other, and criticism is perceived as inappropriate. The interviews at least implicitly assume that the curator him- or herself is the best interpreter of his/her work. Following Isabelle Graw's comment on the artist interview, we might describe this as "faith in intention."¹⁷ To exaggerate somewhat, this means that curators' statements themselves are already considered to constitute a history.¹⁸ It is therefore less the statement itself that is problematic than the way it is framed.¹⁹

A similar speaker position is found in the journal *The Exhibitionist*.²⁰ Its editor, Jens Hoffmann, the editorial board²¹ and the authors are recruited from the 'Who's Who' of the international curating scene, which is why the journal may stand exemplarily for curatorial discourse. It does not contain interviews, but in the section 'Rear Mirror' curators write about their own, often quite recent exhibitions, while another section aptly entitled 'Curator's Favorites' is dedicated to the analysis of historical exhibitions, once again by curators. While the texts about curators' own exhibitions in the best cases can expand on the contexts of a show, clear up possible misunderstandings, and describe the exhibition in the context of its reception, we should not forget that the speaker position is tied to concrete intentions. The statements made here may oscillate between self-critical castigation and unabashed self-praise, but they reveal more about the speaker than about exhibition history. The section 'Curator's Favorites' also does not manage to achieve any in-depth analysis, and certainly this is not its intention in any case. Here, too, we find out more about the speaker and his or her investment in a particular history than about the object under investigation. That curators are both the speakers as well as objects of their own analysis is both symptom and cause of curatorial discourse.

In connection with the position of the speaker and forms of speech we can also determine the object of exhibition history in curatorial discourse. Primarily it centers on the curator him/herself and not on the material exhibition itself, although the latter is determined by multiple human and non-human actors; in accordance with actor-network theory we might consider not merely the exhibited work but also, to name just a few randomly picked from an endlessly extendable list: plinths, the unpaid interns, the art handler. We might continue this line of argument by reflecting on the concept of work—something that goes unmentioned in *The Exhibitionist* as well as the monographs and anthologies mentioned above, although it has been the subject of investigation in other areas of curatorial discourse. What is required, then, is an examination of work that would situate the

activity of the curator within a discussion of immaterial labor²², or respectively as part of a 'project-based polity'²³, and which would therefore necessarily include the production of a self-reflexive discourse. This must by no means exclude the creative, artistic or authorial part of curatorial work, but should situate it within a critique of the political economy of the culture industry.

The authorship-function of the curator and its possible relationship to anachronistic concepts of genius is an issue I cannot consider here.²⁴ It is also unproductive to pit the position of the artist against that of the curator.²⁵ What is important for now is to simply establish the centrality of the figure of the curator for this discourse of exhibition history.

The intensive interest in the pivotal place of the curator for the exhibition is further underscored by the establishment of concepts and pseudo-theories such as 'the curatorial'—a phrase that in some places has come to replace 'the exhibition'. The implications of the rather young verb 'to curate' itself are telling, since it refers to an activity by a curator that contrasts with the formerly distanced relationship to the artistic process. Maria Lind defines the concept of the curatorial, which she develops following Chantal Mouffe's differentiation between politics and the political, as "a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas and so forth, a presence that strives to create fiction and push new ideas."²⁶ Compared to the 'curatorial' 'curating', for Lind, is only the technical aspect, the mere organization and administration of an exhibition. Although Lind constantly speaks of exchanges and relations as the essence of the curatorial, there is a hierarchical order in place, dominated by the curator and reinforced through Lind's choice of vocabulary.

Apart from this focus on the figure of the curator there is a notable tendency to present exhibitions as singularities. Of course this problem also occurs in academic exhibition histories, and it does not mean that there is no analysis of the local, political or social contexts of exhibitions. By 'singularity' I mean that there is very little analysis of exhibitions in connection with other exhibitions, although such synchronic comparison would make sense for several reasons. We could analyze not just similar exhibitions, such as *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Op Losse Schroeven* in Christian Rattemeyer's excellent study *Exhibiting the New Art*²⁷, but also include other exhibitions taking place at the same time, such as *Tucuman Arde* in Buenos Aires and Lucy Lippards *Numbers* exhibitions, thus creating an understanding of the ambivalence of conceptual art. Or we could include Konrad Fischer's exhibition *Konzeption - Conception* in Leverkusen, which included many of the same artists as the shows in Bern and Amsterdam, with very different results, and which is also of relevance to the emergence of the art market.

We can also observe an increasing „phobia of artworks,"²⁸ to use Julian Myers' rather self-critical expression, in the discourse of exhibition history. This phobia in turn implies a particular concept of the work of art developed in and through exhibitions, which is however rarely understood and framed as such.²⁹ There is also a lack of description and analysis of the curatorial notion of production and more generally no typology of exhibition formats. Probably the most difficult task the exhibition presents to us is how to approach its ephemerality. Even if we have photographic and video documentation as well as floor plans, which enable us to know in part which art works were exhibited, in what relation to each other, and how they were staged, this can only provide the background for a necessary in-depth analysis and interpretation—for which we lack definitive terminologies and concepts. Instead of addressing these shortcomings and searching for ways to

overcome them, which would imply undertaking a theorization³⁰ of the object 'exhibition', the authors of curatorial discourse retreat to platitudes, positivist description of art works and a use of curatorial concepts to guide their reading of exhibitions. As a result the actual development and concrete manifestation of an exhibition appears as a natural and unchangeable imperative. Rather infuriatingly that there is no engagement here with corresponding efforts in the fields of art history and museum studies as well as institutional critique, which have developed more critical approaches to museums and comparable institutions. Of course exhibitions are by no means identical with museums, however this very differentiation could be the work of an emerging body of theory.

The question of the object of exhibition history also includes that of its canon, which we will touch on only briefly here. The exhibition canon of curatorial discourse is different to that of academic art history, meaning that here too we must speak of a plurality of canons. For exhibitions too, the criteria for integration in the canon are that they must on the one hand stand out above other exhibitions of their particular time and place while at the same time achieving universal significance.³¹ One problem with curatorial discourse is that it focuses almost exclusively on exhibitions from the 1960s onwards. This limitation shows on the one hand that the concept of the exhibition in curatorial discourse is tied to the curator, while it distances itself from exhibitions in traditional museum contexts, or those founded on collections. On the other hand it points to a denial of the historicity of the exhibition. Although there have been radical innovations in the field of exhibition making since the 1960s—both as a result of the appearance of curators as well as due to the new challenges posed by the ('dematerialized') work of art—these innovations are only recognized as such when situated in and delimited by a larger tradition beginning at the latest in the 18th century. I would therefore plead for a *longue durée* of exhibition history committed to working through its various continuities and ruptures. By contrast the question of who is admitted to the canon and whether to establish a counter-canon seems of little interest to me. It is much more important to analyze who has the right to write the canon, what position this happens from and what objects or practices the canon is attempting to legitimize.³²

This relates to our next point, about the strategic function of exhibition history in curatorial discourse. Hardly surprisingly I would argue that this function can be described as a kind of legitimation or self-legitimation, which finally seems to imply a genealogical model. Fittingly, Daniel Birnbaum's afterword to Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* describes the curators gathered in the book as Obrist's 'parents' and 'grandparents'.³³ The curatorial discourse of exhibition history thus constructs a tradition that determines the practice of its authors, while that practice in turn determines historical precedents and the objects that constitute a history of exhibitions. Exhibition history here means the establishment, in a first step, of a supposed tradition, only to inscribe oneself within that tradition in a second step. Simultaneously commitments are established that imply a kind of standardization for students of curatorial studies, and though they do not necessarily lead to imitation, they do nevertheless make engagement with certain ideas, exhibitions and practices a prerequisite.³⁴ We must thus always ask, who speaks, and from what strategic position of power these speech acts are performed. Further we must reflect on what they covertly suggest, including those things that remain unsaid.

By way of conclusion I would like to include a few thoughts on the standardization and homogenization of exhibition formats. The curatorial discourse of exhibition history as sketched above conceives of its object, the exhibition, explic-

itly as global, transnational and transcultural, thus claiming a universalist model of the exhibition. Although it is acknowledged that exhibitions can contain and operate with value judgments and contribute to the establishment of hierarchies—MoMA's *Primitivism* exhibition of 1984 is a prominent example for this—the exhibition itself is viewed as a neutral form. The format of the biennial³⁵ and other large-scale exhibitions are considered the paradigmatic manifestation of this model and the transnational curator as its principal actor. When conventions are constructed by an exhibition history that considers itself transcultural, these conventions in turn are defining of and have a normative effect on this supposedly global form of exhibition making. This feedback loop happens quite directly, since the authors of curatorial discourse are themselves important decision- and exhibition-makers.

The claim to universalism of global and transnational exhibitions is problematic in at least two ways. Firstly the implicit claim is hardly realized even on a superficial level. Obrist for example interviews exclusively white and western curators, of whom only two are women, and of the exhibitions discussed in *The Exhibitionist* almost all took place in the United States and Europe. On the other hand the notion of a transnational discourse implies not only that exhibitions in, say, Dakar or Berlin are comparable, but supposes their complete commensurability. Just as with the neoliberal idea of globalization, inequalities and hegemonial dominances are simply disregarded. How can we deal with this problem? I would go further than even the critics of exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre*, who recognize the positive intention of making an exhibition with a global concept of contemporary art, but interpret it as a failure because, as Christian Kravagna expresses it, the exhibition “only moved from modernist primitivism to the neo-exoticism of post-modernity.”³⁶ A statement such as this requires an in-depth theorization of the exhibition, which goes beyond examining the construction of alterity or equality through the exhibition to an analysis of how the exhibition *as such* is a hegemonial form. In the face of contemporary demands for a global art history we should question not only the ideological—that is, political, economic and cultural (essentially colonial)—foundations on which the idea of the ‘global’ rests,³⁷ but in the same context produce an ideological critique of the form of the exhibition and the discourse of exhibition history.

This text is a slightly reworked version of a paper which was delivered in summer 2013 at the 2. *Schweizerischer Kongress für Kunstgeschichte* (Second Swiss Congress of Art History) in Lausanne, in the section *Handling Exhibitions – Konvergenzen zwischen Praxis und Theorie*. Many thanks to the numerous respondents to the paper as well as to Felicity Grobien and Samuel Korn for important pointers.

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Notes

1 The conference proceedings are published as: Charles W. Haxthausen ed., *The two art histories: The museum and the university*, Yale University Press, Yale 2002.

2 To speak of only 'two' exhibition histories is doubly presumptuous. Firstly, there is never a history, histories are always plural and the two fields mentioned—academic art history and curatorial studies—are each internally heterogeneous, and they frequently overlap both with each other and adjacent fields. Still I would argue that certain disciplinary tendencies can be grouped together. Secondly, an exhibition history divided into only two spheres is also deficient. We might look at artists' engagement with historical exhibitions and display formats (starting with artists of so-called institutional critique right up to contemporary positions such as Martin Beck, Walter Benjamin or Joseph Dabernig), as well as reconstructions of exhibitions (e.g. *When Attitudes Become Form. Bern 1969/ Venice 2013*, 2013 at Fondazione Prada in Venice), as artistic or 'material' forms of exhibition history.

3 See Bruce Altshuler, "A Canon of Exhibitions," *Manifesta Journal* No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 5.

4 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les presses du réel, Dijon, 2002, p. 18.

5 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 167.

6 An analysis of the intentions, the objects, the (teaching-) methods, the political implications and the way knowledge is produced in and through these programs would be a worthwhile independent study.

7 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 15.

8 That is not to say that there are not excellent publications and ambitious research projects on these questions within academic art history. We might mention the following examples: Mary Anne Staniszewski's, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1998; Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Abrams, New York, 1994; I.d., *Exhibitions That Made Art History, Vol. 1: Salon to Biennial 1863-1959, Vol. 2: Biennials and beyond 1962-2022*, Phaidon, London, 2008 and 2013. Also the series *Exhibition Histories* published by Afterall on exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form*, *Magiciens de la Terre* or Lucy Lippard's *Numbers* exhibitions. Another example is the extensive study, directed by Beat Wyss, on the

Venice Biennial at the Swiss Institute for Art Research in Zurich.

9 Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Ausstellungsmacher*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2006; François Aubart and Florence Derieux eds., *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2007; Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957-2005*, Voldemeer, Zurich, 2007.

10 Anne d'Harnoncourt, Werner Hofman, Jean Leering, Franz Meyer, Seth Siegelau, Walter Zanini, Johannes Cladders, Lucy Lippard, Walter Hopps, Pontus Hultén and Harald Szeemann.

11 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2011.

12 This is not quite accurate however; earlier examples include *Manifesta Journal* (since 2003), *Displayer* (2006-2012) or *ONCURATING.org* (since 2008). Further curatorial journals founded after *The Exhibitionist* include: *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, *Red-Hook* und *Well-Connected* (all since 2012).

13 *The Exhibitionist* appears in an edition of 3000—by comparison, *October* has a total circulation of 1650—but it is only rarely found in library catalogues and is seldom cited. In the first instance this may be down to the short existence of the magazine, however, *The Exhibitionist* is also not intended for reception in academic circles. The aim, as the first editorial states, is to make a journal "by curators for curators" (see Jens Hoffmann, "Overture," in *The Exhibitionist*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 3-4, p. 3), which suggests a separation of the discipline of curating from that of art history.

14 The problem of oral history and the various implications of the interview format cannot be dealt with in this context. See Dora Imhof and Sybille Omlin eds., *Interviews. Oral History in Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst*, Verlag Silke Schreiber, München, 2010; Michael Diers, Lars Blunck and Hans Ulrich Obrist eds., *Das Interview. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Philo Fine Arts, Hamburg, 2013.

15 E.g. Carolee Thea ed., *Foci: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, Apex Art, New York, 2001; I.d. ed., *On Curating: Interview with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P., New York, 2009; In Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating But Were Afraid to Ask*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2011, Obrist is himself interviewed about 'his' story by over a dozen other curators, authors, artists and architects.

16 See Michael Wetzels, "Artefaktualitäten: Zum Verhältnis von Authentizität und Autorschaft," in Susanne Knaller and Harro Müller eds., *Authentizität. Diskussion eines ästhetischen Begriffs*, Fink, Munich, 2003, pp. 37-54.

17 Isabelle Graw, "Reden bis zum Umfallen. Das Kunstgespräch im Zeichen des Kommunikationsimperativs," in Michael Diers, Lars Blunck and Hans Ulrich Obrist eds., *Das Interview. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Philo Fine Arts, Hamburg, 2013, p. 298.

18 An further analysis, which we cannot attempt here, should compare statements by curators, the type of questions asked and the construction of subject positions with artist interviews or artist biographies—one would find obvious parallels and even borrowings between the two forms of self-presentation.

19 See also an essay by Julia Gelshorn, who examines this issue with regard to artist interviews and their use in art history. Julia Gelshorn, "Der Produzent als Autor. Künstlerische Theorie als kunsthistorische Herausforderung," in Verena Krieger ed., *Kunstgeschichte und Gegenwartskunst. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft*, Cologne, 2008, pp. 193-211.

20 I want to emphasize that *The Exhibitionist* is not an art journal and I would not regard mere exhibition reviews primarily as part of exhibition history. The *Exhibitionist* never attempts critical judgments in this sense; rather the exhibitions discussed there are relevant grounds for curatorial practice.

21 Christov-Bakargiev, Okwui Enwezor, Kate Fowle, Mary Jane Jacob, Constance Lewallen, Maria Lind, Chus Martínez, Jessica Morgan, Julian Myers, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Paul O'Neill, Adriano Pedrosa, Dieter Roelstraete and Dorothea von Hantelmann.

22 The beginnings of such an approach are found in Magda Tyzlik-Carver, *Interfacing the Commons: Curatorial System as a Form of Production on the Edge*, <http://darc.imv.au.dk/publicinterfaces/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Tyzlik-Carver.pdf>, Accessed 07.11.2013; *oncurating.org* No. 16, 2013, <http://oncurating-journal.de/index.php/issue-16.html#UmUYSJQ2y3w>, Accessed 07.11.2013, as well as the research and event project *Projekt Europa* (Kunstverein München, 2004). Many thanks to Sabeth Buchmann for the reference to Tyzlik-Carver.

23 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 2007, particularly pp. 147-210. Oliver Marchart refers to the above in his analysis of the curatorial subject, see Oliver Marchart "The Curatorial Subject. The figure of the curator between individuality and collectivity" in *Texte zur Kunst*, No. 86, (22) 2012, pp. 29-41.

24 For more detailed analysis see Felix Vogel, "Autorschaft als Legitimation. Der Kurator als Autor und die Inszenierung von Autorschaft in 'The Exhibi-

tionist'" in Sabine Kyora ed., *Subjektform Autor? Autorschaftsinszenierungen als Praktiken der Subjektivierung*, transcript, Bielefeld, 2014 (forthcoming February 2014).

25 See Anton Vidokle, "Art Without Artists?" in *e-flux Journal* No. 15, May 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/136>, Accessed 04.11.2013; "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's 'Art Without Artists?'," in *e-flux Journal*, No. 18, September 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/172>. Accessed 04.11.2013.

26 Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in Brian Kuon Wood ed., *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2010, p. 64.

27 Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, König, Cologne 2010.

28 Julian Myers, "On the Value of a History of Exhibitions," in *The Exhibitionist* No. 4, 2011, p. 27.

29 That exhibitions are composed of material objects (in art exhibitions usually works of art) sounds more obvious than it appears in exhibition history. We might ask questions for example about the effects of an exhibition concept on the work of art, on the relations with other works and the respective shifts in reception and interpretation. Peter Osborne comments that „such works are intrinsically double-coded: they have their own [...] significations and modes of experience, and they have the more fully 'post-autonomous' meanings that accrue to them as a result of their place within the overall [...] logic of construction of the exhibition. This is a logic that is itself contradictory: divided between the presentation of the collective exhibition-value of the works and their putative use-values as models within a speculative program of social construction. Such programs are uneasy amalgams of art, economics and politics." Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 162.

30 "Theories become functions of science, because the sciences work through the problem of the inadequacy of the world with the help of theory—in positive and concrete terms, because the sciences delegate the task of securing their objects to theories that pose the central questions[.] [...] The surprising effect is that such theories pretend to find the object, while they actually constitute it as an object in the first place. Concisely put: theories deliver the objects of science!" Oliver Jahraus, „Theoriethorie," in Mario Grizelj and Oliver Jahraus eds., *Theoriethorie. Wider die Theoriemüdigkeit in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Fink, Munich, 2011, p. 29. (Translators note: own translation, the German term Wissenschaft has been

replaced with 'science' and is understood to include forms of knowledge production beyond the natural sciences.) Attempts at a 'theory of the exhibition' are found for example in Ludger Schwarte, "Politik des Ausstellens," in Karen van den Berg and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht eds., *Politik des Zeigens*, Fink, Munich 2010, pp. 129-141.

31 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 14.

32 See Luisa Ziaja, "Ausstellungsgeschichten. Ansätze der Historisierung im Kunstfeld," in ARGE schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Cologne et al., 2013, pp. 23-34, p. 31.

33 Daniel Birnbaum, "The Archeology of Things to Come," in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Ringier, Zürich, 2008, p. 293.

34 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 15.

35 The term 'biennial' is here less associated with the Venice Biennial and the system of national pavilions, than with large-scale periodic exhibitions in general. Today's biennials are less oriented towards Venice; their genealogy is more accurately traced to the first documenta (Kassel 1955) or the first documenta with an artistic director (1972), as well as the increasing globalization of this format for example after the second and third Havana Biennial (1984, 1989).

36 Christian Kravagna, "Postkoloniale Ausstellungen im Kunstfeld," in ARGE schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Böhlau, Cologne, 2013, p. 52.

37 See Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Art History and Globalization," in James Elkins ed., *Is Art History Global?*, Routledge, New York and London, 2007, pp. 202-207.

Institutional Mores

by Alex Farquharson

1.

In this text I want to reconsider some of the practices and theories associated with new institutionalism, as it came to known, and then loosen and broaden the terms of that debate in light of more recent experience and different potentialities. This was a debate that began to be codified around 2003 based on the practices of several art institutions at that time. By 2006, some of the curator-directors associated with these developments felt they were in crisis and were being subjected to governmental and bureaucratic repression— funding cuts, forced merger, and closure. For some the answer was to, in a sense, de-institutionalize, to work small, with small numbers of participants, in situations that involved little money, and therefore relatively little political scrutiny; to, perhaps, follow the lead of self-organized groups, often led by artists, whose principle medium was dialogic research and experimental collective learning systems. Activist networks that shared some of the same theoretical reference points were also looked to.

Instead of this exit or exodus from the mainstream, I want to consider how these critical and experimental practices may have proliferated and multiplied amongst more mainstream institutions, and how through this expansion they have acquired different political, ethical and poetic coordinates. I have in mind institutional practices of a certain scale that speak to publics of a certain size —kunsthalle-sized institutions and certain museums of contemporary art.

My initial interest in new institutionalism stemmed from experimental exhibition making—specifically, what happens when the kinds of curatorial innovations brought to bear on individual exhibitions are transposed to the whole institution. What are the stakes for those institutions and their publics? What does it mean for an institution to internalize and commit long term to critical and experimental ways of working with artists, with publics and on itself? How, as a consequence, is the triangular relationship between artist, institution and their publics reconceived, restructured and politicized in these situations, and how might that redefine the publicness of institutions of contemporary art?

I was conscious, then, as I am now, of the my geocultural distance from many of these phenomena and debates. There was little at that time of this kind occurring in Britain (there is more now), and the politics of arts funding in Britain has been very different from those of the social democratic countries of Europe where these practices and discourses have been concentrated. I remain conscious of these circumstantial differences as I re-enter this debate, this time not in an independent capacity, but as an institutional practitioner —as the director of a medium-sized, kunsthalle-type institution in a medium sized, post-industrial city in the UK, which opened four years ago in a new building: Nottingham Contemporary. Later in these reflections I will occasionally draw on our experiences in Nottingham in the hope that they may have some general application to the situations of other more or less like-minded institutions in other regions. While our institution is unique as an assemblage, its constituent parts are variously shared with others and have some precedents.

2.

Inspired by the institutionally-reflexive practices of some artists associated with Relational Aesthetics, as well as successive waves of institutional critique, new institutionalism developed important ways of reconceiving the socio-political function of the art institution. In general terms, this represented a move away from a consumption-based model towards a more discursive one that linked institutional practice to the formation of a critical and plural public sphere. Under new institutionalism the cycle of exhibition programming was no longer the privileged format around which all others revolved. Instead, as Charles Esche wrote on the late Rooseum's website in 2001, the new institution aspired to be "part community centre, part laboratory and part academy, with less need for the established showroom function." In new institutions, closed workshops, artist-designed foyers, longitudinal research projects and performatively-installed archives have been as visible as exhibitions. Exhibition catalogues gave ground to readers and institutional journals. As in the term 'new institutionalism' itself, the prefix 'art' was often absent, and discourses were more often drawn from political philosophy and the social sciences than art history and art theory.

The practical limitation of new institutionalism in its more distilled forms is that it often fails to engage much more than a relatively small, invited knowledge community. New institutionalism often conceives of the social agency of institutions in far wider terms than most conventional art institutions, and yet the actual take-up by these publics, imagined as pluralistic and agonistic (after Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe), is often small and uniform in practice. There is the sense that new institutionalism has a model-like quality, that it is a prototype for a far larger kind of social production that may always remain deferred. In practice new institutions often only engage relatively small constituencies, whose politics and subjectivities remain more or less aligned to those of the institutional actors. Their scale allows them to be highly focused and uncompromising.

There is value in this, I would want to maintain: their small scale and considerable autonomy enables them to work in critically- and experimentally-developed ways, uncompromised by the expectations of large, unknowing audiences and the scrutiny of political stakeholders. Other larger institutions, in turn, may benefit from their experimental and often far-reaching critical work. There should always be room in the infrastructure of public spaces for institutions able to work in laboratory and research-centre like conditions.

But generally speaking, what interests me more is the possibility of working on larger scales, achieving greater visibility, engaging larger and more diverse publics with varying degrees of knowledge of art and its intellectual contexts, and having the opportunity to influence the immediate social environment in which the institution operates. With this scale, come all kinds of expectations and demands: from audiences, non-audiences, funders, tourism administrators, the local media, etc.—all the various social and governmental actors that feel they have a stake in what you do as a consequence of how you are funded. What they might want from you might be quite different from your own motivations and ethics. What follows from this is a continuous process of turning necessity into desire, and this involves a continuous process of negotiation and transformation.

It also means devoting considerable energy to the more mundane areas of a larger institution's infrastructure. It means running a shop or a café well; it means efficiently communicating quite basic visitor information, as well as keeping a large building clean; it means publicizing what you do in and around your city; it means

seeking sponsorship, building partnerships, responding to the reporting regimes of the political structures you are accountable to – all the everyday functions of larger scale institutions; the essential operating system on which the artistic, discursive and participatory work of the institution constantly depends.

3.

What follows is a series of attitudes and techniques that I find helpful when looking to intervene in more mainstream institutional situations and more intense political contexts. Some relate to new institutional approaches, others don't. They all relate to the situation of a medium-to-large scale art institution under some political and bureaucratic scrutiny. They are drawn from observation, relate to current experiences, and are written in the form of maxims in a rather speculative way:

Work on different scales to create spaces for participation. Build those spaces into your program, into your building, for more developed exchange. Do what small, experimental institutions do but in pockets or cells of the larger organization whose other forms of mediation may be orientated towards a larger, more diffuse public. It's through these more intense encounters—varying from, say, five to fifty-five people in a room—that audiences become participants, collaborators even, in the development of what constitutes the institution. Feedback occurs, and the institution can become a mutual learning system—viewers, listeners, become producers. An exhibition, an institution, may listen to its publics. The intellectual work of an exhibition need not finish when it goes live; projects can learn from themselves once public. They can acquire new, unanticipated meanings through the opening up of spaces for exchange in and around them. This process is dynamic and unpredictable, sometimes arising from unexpected subjectivities—very old, very young; people with quite different lives, but with 'equal intelligences' (as Jacques Rancière would put it). This gives rise to new perceptions, as the disciplining of thought and the hierarchizing of identities is undone.

Hospitality. One that Esche and Van Abbemuseum, in particular, have advanced. Be welcoming, particularly if you want to work critically, and you want what your institution produces to challenge normative wisdom, to open up new regions of thought. Try to make people feel welcome—whatever they are, whatever they are—by communicating generously. All we should look for in return for hospitality is curiosity and an open mind. Work on the assumption that everyone is invited, and what you do is for anyone at all; that art, and the thinking it gives rise to, cuts across the ways societies are segmented as markets, bracketed by class, known by power. I try to work from the assumption that the reception of art, at its best, undoes forms of identity overly determined by power, whether corporate or governmental; that it gives rise to new subjectivities and conditions of inter-subjectivity.

Generosity follows on from hospitality and the publicness of publicly-funded institutions. We are living in a new era of Enclosure: enclosures of knowledge, information, language, signs, culture, plant species, DNA and digital space. As public institutions we should be true to our publicness by distributing knowledge that has been publicly paid for. Like many other institutions these days, at Nottingham Contemporary we distribute the knowledge produced by and for the institution freely, whenever we can—by recording and uploading our talks, seminars and conferences along with the writing we commission. In this way websites can function as second venues, offering access to the knowledge the institution produces beyond the constraints of geography and time. A Commons approach can also be extended to the physical spaces and resources of art institutions, putting at people's disposal the

backstory, the research tools, that inform the conception of a given project. By situating all the books and journals we use in our research in The Study—our resource room adjoining our exhibition spaces—we share the same space as visitors when we research; front and backstage meet and the customary divisions between the producers and publics of institutions dissolve a little.

Transdisciplinarity: art isn't just 'post-medium' anymore (as Donald Judd put it), it is 'post-discipline' (as in the writings of Dan Graham and Robert Smithson, for example). For Rancière the two go hand-in-hand: "contemporary art is, quintessentially, art defined by the erasure of medium specificity, indeed by the erasure of the visibility of art as a distinct practice [...] [It is] particularly receptive to thought that shatter[s] the boundaries that separate specialists—of philosophy, art, social sciences, etc." Art since at least the 1990s has acted as a dissolving agent on disciplinary and professional borders.

The consequences of art's post- or transdisciplinarity are far reaching for institutions. In following the lead of artists, institutions can open up public platforms for intellectual exchange of virtually unlimited social reach. By working alongside academics and universities, art institutions can open up public spheres for intellectual energies otherwise confined to the heterotopia of campuses. By following art across the divisions of disciplines, and by doing so multiplying the number of an institution's interlocutors, debates can occur on a complex horizontal level, as opposed to a vertical pedagogic axis, with the institution above and the public below, based on relative knowledge or ignorance of a single discipline.

Yes: As an art institution, exceed what is expected of you, but do it in your own way, and according to your own values. Exceeding expectations is the most certain way of evading instrumentalization and gaining relative autonomy—you may even be turned to for solutions. The imposed goals and targets, in themselves, are often in themselves desirable anyway (such as large audience figures and socio-economic stimulus); it's what form that action then takes and what it can be made to mean that becomes critical. Try to say 'yes' to political or public expectations whenever you can, but convert these agendas to something more radical and unexpected. Achieve large new audiences, for example, through what it is you do: the art you work with, the knowledge you produce, the debates you engender, the spaces for participation you open up, rather than succumbing the logic of the retail and entertainment industries. In doing this, introduce different ways of thinking into the larger life of your city or local environment, to those with power and the wider populace. Adopting the principle of the Trojan horse—again, following the lead of artists—smuggle something inspired into normative and predictable ways of doing things. Choose your battles carefully and sparingly. Try to harness larger energies, and convert them from conservative to progressive ones.

Popularity: Finally, don't be afraid of popularity, and don't confuse it with populism. In being critical, let's not forget pleasure.

This text is slightly edited from its initial publication in Pascal Gielen ed., *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2013, pp. 219-228. It is based on a paper given at the conference *Institutional Attitudes* organized in Brussels in 2010 by Comité Van Roosendaal.

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Kunsthalle: A Model for the Future

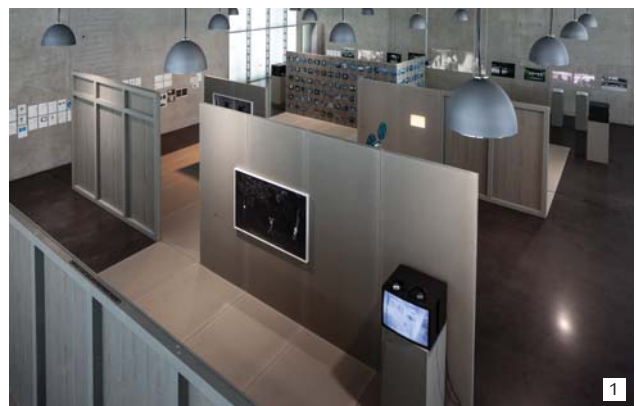
by Vanessa Joan Müller
✉ Astrid Wege

The European Kunsthalle was and remains an institution with no permanent space and is independent of any local government mandate. It defines itself as a Kunsthalle to appropriate the potential of this particular form of institution, but also to revise it critically. Having emerged from a specific situation—the demolition of the Josef-Haubrich-Forum in the city center of Cologne—the European Kunsthalle conceives of itself as a project that traces and examines the conditions and structures of an institution of contemporary art without being bound to a permanent space or location.

When the Josef-Haubrich-Forum was demolished in 2002 in favor of a multifunctional cultural center, citizens of Cologne organized their protest by forming a society. Founded among others by Rosemarie Trockel, Kasper König and Marcel Odenbach, this society in turn initiated the project European Kunsthalle. The intention was to investigate the conditions and practices of curating and exhibiting contemporary art beyond its factual situation in urban space, and to actively participate in the discussions about the transformations of public space, social bonds and political agency as part of the conditions and practices of a newly founded Kunsthalle. The Josef-Haubrich-Forum, opened in 1967, had created a space where the vision of an open forum that fulfills its democratic function in an urban context was successfully practiced for decades. In the urban fabric of Cologne this Kunsthalle functioned as a social site. During the initial phase of the European Kunsthalle project, one of its most important tasks was therefore to formulate the conditions of a new Kunsthalle for Cologne as part of the public sphere, and as a field of possibilities for today's heterogenous realities.

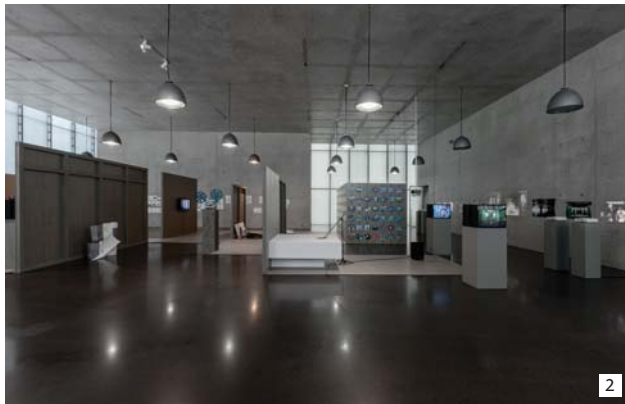
Since the summer of 2005 the institution European Kunsthalle has tested models of curatorial thought and action as ways of dealing with contem-

porary art through various formats and exhibitions. The question of what institutional formats work in contemporary cultural and political conditions was central to this. Neither politically authorized nor bound to a specific space, the initially virtual exhibitions—but functioning institutional structures—of the Kunsthalle offered the opportunity to initiate a research process beyond the specific situation in Cologne. The changed conditions of curatorial activity and the shifting cultural and urban structures were therefore as much subject of the initial phase of the project (planned for two years) as were the possibilities of an expanded European context. That the European Kunsthalle includes a European dimension as the horizon for its activity is not merely metaphorical for the constitution, networking and establishment of a new institution located in western Germany, which needed to position itself internationally. More importantly, 'Europe' stood for discussions about a context that poses as many questions as it offers possibilities.



From the beginning, the central theme of the project was not the site-specific adaptation of the Kunsthalle model, but the development of an institutional model that opens perspectives for an urban society beyond the nucleus of the art field. Concrete activities such as the one-month event *Under Con-*

struction¹¹—which gathered representatives from art, architecture, sociology, economy and politics for lectures, discussions and presentations in different places across Cologne—contrasted with the more immaterial research of teams of architects on stable and unstable spaces, the results of which were summarized as a publication.²² With the two-year project *European Kunsthalle c/o Ebertplatz (2008/2009)* the Kunsthalle shifted its emphasis following the initial nomadic phase. Located in an artist-designed spatial structure by Dorit Margreiter, the Kunsthalle model temporarily operated in a central, vibrant inner city square. The project questioned how an existing space becomes an ‘art space’ and how it can offer extended possibilities of function and perception. The minimalist, modular structure by Margreiter framed the various exhibition projects, for which artists mostly created new work and reacted to the specific situation they were confronted with.³³ In parallel, between August 2009 and Mai 2010 European Kunsthalle curated the program of the exhibition space Ludlow 38 at the Goethe Institute in New York. During this time it organized a series of exhibitions with internationally renowned, mostly European, artists that had rarely been shown in New York.⁴⁴



The current orientation of the European Kunsthalle focuses more explicitly on decentralized action and cooperation. As an institution without a permanent space, European Kunsthalle is intended as a performative presence and exists wherever its projects take place. Collaborations with Academy of Media Arts Cologne and Kunsthau Bregenz resulted in the development of exhibitions that at first glance didn't appear very different to the usual exhibitions at these institutions, but which enabled an immediate reflection on the form of the institutional through the (co-) authorship of the Kunsthalle. What, for example, is the significance of only organizing exhibitions by invitation, or when one has found a partner for an idea? Why is it easier to acquire funds for projects

than for an institutional foundation? What expectations are laid on an institution that acts the part in terms of its program, but doesn't fulfill the basic criteria for an institution and therefore itself resembles a project?

That the flexibility of a loose institutional structure like European Kunsthalle is quickly suspected of conforming to the neoliberal call for more self-reliance is a fact we as directors are very aware of. Public institutions need financial security for their planning process, enough subsidies even for the realization of less popular projects, and an appropriate staff and infrastructure to fulfill their key responsibility of acting in ways that are not primarily based on external interests or investments—but these very conditions are increasingly under pressure. We therefore see one of the main opportunities of the European Kunsthalle model precisely in its lack of an externally defined mandate. However, we don't conceive of this nomadic model as a competition for or improvement on the 'permanent' institution. In the end, the cooperation with other institutions makes it clear that institutional agency always involves finding a balance between various organizing structures, as well as a discussion to define the important questions in a particular time and place—which may mean reflecting on the importance of public art institutions as discursive spaces for non-instrumental forms of thought and action. An institution without a space and without its own funding, European Kunsthalle is a friendly parasite, dependent on the hospitality of others. And like any good guest, it comes with gifts, such as new ideas, impulses and contacts.

Astrid Wege is a curator and writer and lives in Cologne, Germany. She has edited and authored numerous publications on contemporary art and writes regularly for *Artforum* and *Texte zur Kunst*. She has taught at Universities in Bochum and Cologne and is one of the artistic directors of the European Kunsthalle.

Vanessa Joan Müller is an art historian, curator and writer, who lives and works in Vienna. She is Head of Dramaturgy at Kunsthalle Wien and, together with Astrid Wege, artistic director of the European Kunsthalle.

www.kunsthalle.eu



Notes

1 The project is documented in Vanessa Joan Müller and Nicolaus Schafhausen eds., *Under Construction. Perspectives on Institutional Practice*, Walther König, Cologne, 2006.

2 See Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, Markus Miessen and Matthias Görlich eds., *Institution Building. Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2009. See also Vanessa Joan Müller and Astrid Wege eds., *European Kunsthalle 2005 2006 2007*. Download online at <http://www.kunsthalle.eu> under 'publications.'

3 The project "C/o Ebertplatz" is documented in *A Prior Magazine* No. 19, 2009.

4 The activities of European Kunsthalle in New York are documented in Tobi Maier, Antonia Lotz, Stefan Kalmar, Daniel Pies, Rike Frank, Anders Kreuger, Astrid Wege and Axel J. Wieder eds., *The first 3 years of Ludlow 38*, Spector Books, Leipzig, 2011.

Captions

1-3 *On the Move*. European Kunsthalle at the KUB Arena, Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 27. 4. - 30.6. 2013. Yane Calovski, David Maljkovic, Nick Mauss, Charlotte Moth, Stephen Willats, Johannes Wohnseifer. Photograph by: Markus Tretter, Courtesy of Kunsthhaus Bregenz.

3 Detail: Yane Calovski, *Recount Redrawn*, 2013. Photograph by: Markus Tretter, Courtesy of Kunsthhaus Bregenz.

“Both a radical and mild change”

An Interview with Liesbeth Bik

The conversation with Liesbeth Bik (Bik Van der Pol) deals with the potential agency of artists in art institutions and suggests strategies to activate the beholder, whereby *The Bookshop Piece* serves as example of how Van der Pol’s intention to change institutions from within takes shape and what differentiates a public viewer from a public user.

Lucie Kolb & Gabriel Flückiger: When Maria Lind was director of Kunstverein München from 2002 to 2004 you participated as Sputnik, a special format of collaboration that Lind established in Munich. What did your contribution look like?

Liesbeth Bik: When Maria started working at Kunstverein München she asked different artists, curators, critics and writers to be one of her ‘Sputnik’ group: like fellow travelers or a board of advisors, but under a different name, thus more conceptual. At the Kunstverein we met all the other Sputniks and we talked about the program and the direction she wanted to take. It was a brainstorm gathering by a group of people who knew her practice and whom she knew and trusted, which she could use as a sounding board to test her ideas. Most people who were Sputniks also worked with her later on. For the first exhibition *Exchange and Transform (Arbeitstitel)* (2002) Maria Lind asked Apolonija Šušteršič to design the space on the ground floor, to transform it into a cafe and a more welcoming space, where people could hang out, have a coffee, look into magazines and other material. When Maria invited us to make a work for the show, we proposed to copy Apolonija Šušteršič’s design as a 1:1 model and put it in the exhibition space, where it also could be used. As part of our proposal, after the exhibition the piece would be moved to Budapest where it would be installed in the space of the Organization of Young Artists. *Lobby/Office Piece*, as we entitled the installation, connected spaces and energies. Long before to the invitation of Maria Lind, Barnabás Bencsik from Budapest asked us to think about a project for the Organization of Young Artists. This is an organization that supports Hungarian artists, where curators and other visitors can research the archives, and where public meetings take place. It is located in a classical building, and at the time it looked old, not very well maintained, and not really welcoming. We

proposed to Barnabás that we would rethink this space to make it more welcoming and functional. So in a way, the *Lobby/Office Piece* started during our first visit to Budapest. Our decision to copy the design from Apolonija’s proposal has to do with the fact that we are not designers, and that our conversation with Barnabás on what would be needed to make the space more practically useful and more welcoming, was similar to what came out of the conversation Apolonija had with Maria. Instead of creating new ideas and a new design, *Lobby / Office Piece* for Budapest emphasizes principles of circulation and reciprocity as the basis of economic and artistic exchange. The involvement of all parties, physical or financial, became part of the project and therefore indispensable: Kunstverein München that invited us to participate in this exhibition; Apolonija Šušteršič who designed the lobby of Kunstverein München and who generously supported the project by allowing us to copy her design and install it in the exhibition space; the physical work that was done in collaboration with Budapest based artists Gabor Kerekes, Gergo Kovacs and Tamás Kaszás; the Centre of Visual Arts in Rotterdam; and the Mondriaan Foundation that supported the research and production of the project. Finally, after the end of the exhibition in Munich, the Organization of Young Artists transported the piece to Budapest, where we all joined forces, thoroughly renovated the space and installed the piece to be taken into operation.

LK & GF: There were lists of demands. How far were you obliged to fulfill them? We suppose you also had freedom to work...

LB: As for the Organization of Young Artists, we observed what was happening and what didn’t happen. When you look at a space, you get a sense of where it is not working, and we thought about why and what should be improved. So we put together a



list of necessary changes in discussion with Barnabás. We would say this was also the case between Apolonija Šušteršič and Maria Lind. First you look at a space, and then a list of things that should happen there is developed in dialogue: there should be a coffee bar, book shelves, storage space, it should be mobile and flexible and it should also be a space for projections, presentations, and so on. These necessities should be very practical and efficient, but also have their very own presence.

LK & GF: Do you think something like the Sputniks is nowadays established as an institutional practice, or is such a concept bound to the individual passion of a curator? Have institutions in general become self-reflexive and do they work with a certain flexibility and openness in terms of formats and the status of exhibitions?

LB: Over the last five or ten years we have seen big powerhouses such as some museums, biennials, and art fairs, incorporating many of the practices that started in the small offside spaces. Art fairs and museums started discursive programs, performances, and other things that perhaps were not part of their core business until recently. Museums are still seen as institutions that collect and store objects and show them publicly. On the other hand they had to develop their public tasks enormously, and artistic practice has also moved from sculpture and painting towards different media and forms of participation; for some practices the art fair or museum is perhaps not the best place, so artists turned away from these institutions. Or institutions turned away from these practices. This is especially true for practices that are process-based, with an uncertain outcome, or no outcome whatsoever, that can also fail—these have a certain inherent risk. But if a contemporary art institution considers the contemporary as ‘their business,’ then they have to reflect on that, and incorporate such practices somehow. And you can see that happening, perhaps too slowly.

LK & GF: How do you experience the relationship with institutions within your own practice? You’re doing projects that are self-initiated as well as invitation based.

LB: The first two projects that started our collaboration also marked the move out of the studio. We wanted to set aside the studio as a place where artistic practice happens, and critically dispute this through our work. *The Kitchen Piece* (1995), *The Shower Piece* (1995), and *The Bookshop Piece* (1996) were works that did not need the studio to be conceived and produced. *The Bookshop Piece* was produced in the museum workshop, and via fax and telephone; you don’t need a studio for that. These first pieces were a straightforward resistance towards the institution of the studio; we think that’s an institution too. These works stepped away from it. So the institutions—museums, biennials—that invite us have become the space of production. We work with the respective technical teams, curators or other fellow workers to realize our work. For us, working with institutions, which is always the people in those institutions, is a very productive and empowering situation. We develop our work in dialogue, at first between ourselves, then with the people that invite us. We always have discussions with curators about our ideas: how we do it, what we need, and so on. This is a collaboration that also depends largely on the curator or the director of an institution, on how they want to work with us. There are curators that have a very object-oriented—not an artistic-practice oriented—approach. So they don’t necessarily want to work with the artist. Then there are curators who are very invested in working with artists. In such a situation you are really able to build a constructive and critical relationship with someone, one that is fruitful and dynamic, that ideally brings you and the work further, but which brings the institution further as well.



LK & GF: Wouldn't you say that some of the institutions associated with this latter type and with New Institutionalism failed in the sense that they've been shut down (e.g. Rooseum) or because budgets were massively cut? That this type of engaged or dialogic practice by curators now has a more difficult stand or has even disappeared in some places?

LB: Some artistic and curatorial practices are more difficult: for politicians, and perhaps also for the public. Discursive practices, performances, exhibitions that take a long time to experience or that you have to return to because a work slowly changes. These works demand time and effort, and it is clear that such practices are difficult for politicians, because they feel they represent the taste or the expectations of the public and they think the public needs immediate digestion, immediate results. So they tend to reject these practices. However, the issue is: should a museum or an institution give the public what they want, and if the public does not get what it wants, should budgets then be cut? A common argument is that these practices are too difficult, too complicated for people to understand. But the same argument could apply to an impressionist painting: that in order to understand what you see, or even to see it at all, you must understand its time and tradition, in the context of other traditions that came before or after it. Of course you can look at the picture and say this is nice, nice color and so on—but then you only experience a fraction of what it is. I think the people who invest their whole life and energy into making, organizing, thinking and discussing art also have the right to see, to experience, challenging exhibitions, that meet *their* expectations. If every exhibition has to accommodate the needs of a general public who refuses to invest more than three seconds in looking at a painting, then people who have invested more time in thinking about these things will never be satisfied. So what will they get out of this?

LK & GF: We like what Charles Esche said, that nowadays, you need to have people that are really pissed off with you in order to know you are achieving something, for example that they engage with what you do.

LB: Yes, perhaps it's better to make people slightly irritated to say the least because then there is a minimum chance they will start wondering what they are looking at. I think recent attacks on art have to do with this attitude: people in general refuse to do something; if they see something, they refuse to

engage because they have delegated decision-making processes to the politicians. So they vote once, and then somebody else has to do it. Then they can be angry from the sidelines because it's never what they wanted. This is a cynical form of democracy.

LK & GF: What's your stance on institutional critique, is it an important reference for you? Maria Lind wrote that artists like Apolonija Šušteršič who work in collaboration with the institution are part of a new phase of institutional critique, which comes not from the outside but mostly from within. Do you see yourselves in this tradition?



LB: I would say so. Institutional critique from the outside didn't prove to be very efficient, very effectual. The institutional critique from the 1970s didn't change the institutions; the institutions incorporated this critique in their collection, turned it into an object, an artifact. You cannot escape this. Changing or adjusting course within the context of an institution, not throwing stones, but by proposing things from within, perhaps works better. When we showed *Sleep with me* (1997) at the Rooseum in 2003, it was necessary that the museum would be open at night, because the people should sleep there during a projection of Andy Warhol's film *Sleep*. So the museum changed its usual opening hours, and other logistics. When we showed *Sleep with me* in the Tokyo art gallery in 2000 the film reels had to be changed, all day, by the staff. The work had a big impact on the staff, because film *Sleep* consists of 5 reels to be changed every hour, they had an alarm clock in the office, which went off every 15 minutes, and they had to run and change the reel. This is a different responsibility towards a work than with a piece that stands or hangs in a space and finally you take it away after 6 weeks or so. We also did another piece at the Rooseum with previous director Bo Nilsson, involving sleeping cabins and a library (*Capsule Hotels for Information, Dreams, Brilliant*

Thoughts and Other Things, 1999). For this piece people should be able to go back to the library, grab a book and sleep or eat with that book. So the museum developed a card that meant visitors didn't have to pay the entrance fee every time they wanted to come. They could come whenever they wanted, which is both a radical and a mild change to the door policy of the museum.

LK & GF: At least in the framework of the piece.

LB: Not only. With the card they could also see the whole group exhibition (*On The Sublime*) that the piece was part of. What we do with our work is to lure people in and not to smash them in the face. *The Bookshop Piece* for example was critiquing a cultural climate in a city as well as a museum like Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. No proper bookshop existed in this museum, actually in the whole city of Rotterdam there was not a proper bookshop, I would even argue that in the whole Netherlands there was not a proper bookshop. This means that there was no availability of knowledge. We are talking pre-internet. We were often in London and often visited the ICA bookshop there; a very exciting bookshop where you did not find the books, the books would find you. So together with our collaborator at the time, Peter Fillingham, we decided to copy this bookshop and bring it to Rotterdam. I wouldn't say that this piece *radically* changed the institution because there's still the regular bookshop in the Boijmans with Taschen, key hangers, and so on. But I think it does change the *notion* of different institutions and museums, not only in the sense of what sort of bookshop they want to have, but how they want to make knowledge available, what they make visible. This is really important. Is it only exhibitions, or is it also research, thinking? Pieces like *The Bookshop Piece*, but also works by other artists that focused in a similar way on issues of visibility and information, have the potential to change the thinking, positioning and performance of institutions.

LK & GF: Your projects are often remembered very differently by individual beholders or participants. You mentioned for example that people sometimes remember *The Bookshop Piece* as an artwork, sometimes as a bookshop. Is the audience reaction something you also document?

LB: We don't record it. You don't need to document everything. Often an artist tends not to spend a lot of time with his or her work after the opening. But for pieces like *The Bookshop Piece* and *Sleep with*

me, we were present; we were there to inform the public and sell the books, we changed the reels of the film *Sleep with me*. We were the ones who actually saw and felt how the public was dealing with it. For *The Bookshop Piece* it was interesting that initially visitors had this regular museum posture, they usually walk with hands on their back and are looking for the card that explains what they are looking at. *The Bookshop Piece* looks like a piece of minimal art from the back; walking around to the front it becomes the bookshop. It was fascinating to see how the body language changed completely—this leads to the observation that the public *performs* being public. Moving from the back to the front of this piece, they turn from public viewers into public users, and if they're lucky they become enthusiastic public users, and this is when they want to have the books. In the case of *Sleep with me*, people slept with the film. But of course they didn't sleep immediately. At first there's this kind of excitement, reminiscent of youth hostels and puberty, maybe even erotic excitement. All the beds and the floor are occupied, this is sleeping *together* also, not only sleep 'with me.' It's sleeping together as well as experiencing that film, seeing and understanding that it is a very early example of copy-paste, copy-paste; the technique Andy Warhol used to make this film is a very hands-on copy-paste activity. But of course after two hours they fall asleep. Then you only hear snoring and the rattling of the film projectors transporting the celluloid. Beautiful.

Bik Van der Pol (Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol) work collectively since 1995. They live and work in Rotterdam. Bik Van der Pol explore the potential of art to produce and transmit knowledge. Their working method is based on co-operation and research methods of how to activate situations to create a platform for various kinds of communicative activities. www.bikvanderpol.net

Captions

1 Bik Van der Pol, Lobby / Office Piece for Budapest, 2002. First presented during: *Exchange & Transform (Arbeitstitel)*, Kunstverein München. Installed in Budapest in November 2002.

2 Bik Van der Pol in collaboration with Peter Fillingham, *The Bookshop Piece*, 1996. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

3 Bik Van der Pol, *Sleep With Me*, 1997 Duende, Rotterdam. 30 people were invited to spend the night in one of the exhibition spaces (9 m x 13 m) where we installed 30 beds and where people could stay and watch Andy Warhol's 6 hour film 'Sleep' (1963).

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