THE SELF-CONSCIOUS ARTIST AND THE POLITICS OF ART: FROM INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE TO UNDERGROUND CINEMA

Sophia Kosmaoglou, June 2012

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

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ABSTRACT

The current debates about political art or aesthetic politics do not take the politics of art into account. How can artists address social politics when the politics of art remain opaque? Artists situated critically within the museum self-consciously acknowledge the institutional frame and their own complicity with it. Artists' compromised role within the institution of art obscures their radically opposed values. Institutions are conservative hierarchies that aim to augment and consolidate their authority. How can works of art be liberating when the institutional conditions within which they are exhibited are exclusive, compromised and exploitive? Despite their purported neutrality, art institutions instrumentalise art politically and ideologically. Institutional mediation defines the work of art in the terms of its own ideology, controlling the legitimate discourse on value and meaning in art. In a society where everything is instrumentalised and heteronomously defined, autonomous art performs a social critique. Yet how is it possible to make autonomous works of art when they are instantly recuperated by commercial and ideological interests? At a certain point, my own art practice could no longer sustain these contradictions. This thesis researches the possibilities for a sustainable and uncompromised art practice. If art is the critical alternative to society then it must function critically and alternatively. Artistic ambition is not just a matter of aesthetic objectives or professional anxiety; it is particularly a matter of the values that artists affirm through their practice. Art can define its own terms of production and the burden of responsibility falls on artists. The Exploding Cinema Collective has survived independently for twenty years, testifying to this principle. Autonomy is a valuable tool in the critique of heteronomy, but artists must assert it. The concept of the autonomy of art must be replaced with the concept of the autonomy of the artist.

KEYWORDS: art, art institution, autonomy, institution, contemporary art, critique, Exploding Cinema, institutional critique, ideology, politics, political, aesthetic, agency, museum, use-value, underground cinema.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The period between the 1940s and 1970s saw a radical expansion of art into public space; it took the form of protest, confrontation and provocation. This was an international phenomenon and ranged from groups like Cobra, the Lettrists and the Situationist International in Paris to the Art Workers' Coalition in New York; the Gutai Art Association, Butoh and Angura theaters in Japan; COUM Transmissions, Artists' Placement Group and the Film-makers' Co-op in London. There was Fluxus, the Viennese Actionists, Gustav Metzger's auto-destructive art, Gordon Matta-Clark's building cuts and Richard Long, Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson's forays into the landscape.

What are the factors that have contributed to the current state of affairs, where artists seek approval and support from the very authorities they purportedly seek to challenge? Where art is ubiquitous but neatly institutionalised, safe and predictable. Art fairs supplement their commercial function with critical components in the form of panel discussions and entertainment value with the recuperation of performance art as spectacle.[1] The art world appears to be constantly transformed by the appearance of new artists, new trends and new spaces. However, the conventions of the art world and the major centres of power remain consistently the same. Andrea Fraser points out that affirmations of the positive changes that have taken place within the art world since the 1970s do not account for the persistent underlying distributions of power within the art world that are legitimated by these positive changes (Fraser, 2005, p. 104).

> …the enormous expansion of museum audiences, celebrated under the banner of populism, has proceeded hand in hand with the continuous rise of entrance fees, excluding more and more lower-income visitors, and the creation of new forms of elite participation with increasingly differentiated hierarchies of membership, viewings, and galas (Fraser, 2005, p. 104)

Paradoxically, it is critical, confrontational or experimental art exhibited in alternative, independent and artist-run spaces, which sustain the radical profile of contemporary art and the mainstream market. Even though the later thrives on the sale of established and secure investments. Since the beginning of the art-market bubble in

[1] For example, *Art Parcours* the new "special exhibition project" at Art Basel, with a line-up of "high-caliber pieces, selected by Jens Hoffmann", a performance spectacle throughout the city designed as a side-show for the market <www.artbasel.com/parcours>.

the 1980s, art is in "crisis". The conceptual artists' dematerialised critique was especially vulnerable to recuperation and the spectacular subversive complicity of the postmodernists proved particularly suited to commodification. Regardless of its oppositional premises, critical work is easily recuperated by the very structures under critique. Jean Baudrillard argues that subversive tactics are meaningless because "transgression and subversion never get 'on the air' without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralised into signs, they are eviscerated of their meaning" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 173). This paradoxical outcome is attributed to the equivocation and ironic distance of postmodernism. Jurgen Habermas argues that despite its subversive premises, postmodernism reinforces the values of bourgeois art and capitalism:

> More or less in the entire Western world a climate has developed that furthers capitalist modernization processes as well as trends critical of cultural modernism. The disillusionment with the very failures of those programs that called for the negation of art and philosophy has come to serve as a pretense for conservative positions. (Habermas, 1983, pp. 13-14)

Benjamin Buchloh similarly argues that artists' appropriation of marketing and consumer techniques effectively comes across as an affirmation of capitalism, because "even the mere thought and the slightest gesture of opposition appear dwarfed and ludicrous in the face of the totalitarian control and domination by spectacle" (Buchloh, 2000, pp. xxi-xxii). The corporate appropriation of art and the collusion between art and business has been thematised in public discussions and artists' critiques alike. Despite these developments, the art world seems to continue ever more productively with business as usual.

Interest and ambition

> What does the artist want besides subsistence? Is the artist's final goal money? If not, what is it? Love? Fame (i.e. temporary notoriety)? Immortality? (Art Workers' Coalition, 1969)

What motivates artists? Is this equivalent to asking "what is art?" Artistic ambition is usually framed as a professional anxiety. Competitiveness and competitions are inconsistent phenomena in a field that promotes the singularity of its products, but professional agendas drive artistic practice, they also however establish the fundamental values that are affirmed through art practice. In his essay *Money, Disembodied Art, and the Turing Test for Aesthetics* (1997), Julian Stallabrass surveys contemporary art: "a vista at once chaotic and strangely uniform" with a feeling that art is currently in a great deal of trouble:

> …high culture appears to have pulled up at a dead end, though somehow artists still carry on making things […] culture is stripped of the narrative of modernism, of the promise of a happy ending, and when even the liberatory promise of postmodernism has declined into market-niche relativism, it is hard to know how, where or indeed why to proceed. (Stallabrass, 1997, p. 70)

For Stallabrass, one of the valid responses to this situation is "an ethical philistinism" in the form of "a principled refusal of culture" (Stallabrass, 1997, p. 69). The art world is at once a fascinating scene of rich diversity and a tightly structured, predictable and impenetrable procession of exhibitions, distinctions and prices. Since 2008, Beaconsfield Gallery and City & Guilds Art School in London have organised a series of discussions titled *Art & Compromise* in order to address the various forms of compromise that enter into art practice, as well as the "criteria that might be used to condemn or commend these effects", the following blurb provides a background to the aims of this series:

> The 20th century concept of the artist as a politically alienated idealist has undergone significant shifts in recent years. Is there any form of moral obligation still within art's purpose? What price integrity? Can the negotiations of compromise be catalysts for creative invention? (Beaconsfield, 2011).

This conception of the artist as a "politically alienated idealist" is completely outdated, eclipsed by the increased professionalisation of art practice. The questions facing artists today do not revolve around the ambiguous demand of a "moral obligation", which is incompatible with the clearly *political* character of the autonomy of art. Whereas art continues to be defined by the concept of autonomy, the "political" turn in art,[2] suggests that we are moving into a more social conception of art. Socially-engaged practices nevertheless take place within a field circumscribed by the autonomy of art. Current debates about political art or aesthetic politics do not take the *politics of art* into account. How can artists address social politics when the politics of the art field remain opaque? Taking professional, aesthetic, institutional, social and political factors into account, this thesis provides a philosophical and practical investigation of the possibilities for critical autonomy in art practice.

It is increasingly untenable for artists to produce art in apparent ignorance of the art institution's constraining grip. Every attempt to address this problem takes the form of

[2] The political turn is evident in the current engagement with the political relevance of art in exhibition themes, art journals and in art practices described as political art, situational aesthetics, relational aesthetics, socially engaged and collaborative art practices.

rhetorical critique that remains dependent on the context of the institution. Institutional critique has shown the limits of self-reflexivity and self-critique. This paradox is especially pronounced within neo-liberal economies, as art institutions become increasingly possessive of art, its representation and the discourse that surrounds it.

Hopeful artists who appeal for entry at the gate of the art world have an idealised view of what such inclusion actually involves and brings with it: superficial and instrumentalised relationships, degrading negotiations with dealers and curators, resentment from other artists. The main problem however, is that the work of art itself is always secondary to the more important issues at stake in the professional art world: sales, exposure, competition, publicity and networking. This state of affairs redefines the notion of "ambition" for artists, prioritising professional anxiety above the formal, political or aesthetic intentions of the practice. This situation makes artists feel both impotent and confused because the artwork is unable to transcend the institutional context and assert its own conditions of possibility. It is almost impossible to express one's disagreement or to challenge this state of affairs from within the institution. The institutional context surpasses any effort by the work of art to self-consciously acknowledge or challenge the conventions of the art world effectively without being subsumed once again into the category of "art".

There is a recent surge to produce art that intervenes in the real space of everyday experience. Dematerialised and ephemeral event-like works of art proliferate in museums, galleries and virtual spaces. Art institutions however convert this concept of "free" space into one more reified commodity. The 2010 open call for proposals titled *Nomadic devices loom around the museum* for two projects in public spaces of Mataró and Vic in Spain,[3] was conceived as a research project "on the construction of mobile devices as elements of an expanded concept of the Museum or going as far as being an alternative to it" (Idensitat, 2011). The project aimed to reflect on:

> …those projects which, circulating in the public space, challenge the conventional notion of the Museum and reformulate instead the functions of the exhibition display as a nomadic platform nurturing direct and self-managed participation, development of social research and dissemination of educational experiences. (Idensitat, 2011)

[3] Curated by Marti Peran and realized together with Idensitat <www.idensitat.net>, Can Xalant Centre de Creacio i Pensament Contemporani de Mataro <www.canxalant.org>, ACVic Centre d'Arts Contemporànies <www.acvic.org>.

The organisers draw on Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1941) and Roger Filliou's *Galerie Légitime* in his hat (1962), admitting that the notion of "travelling art" has "been the object of a recent co-optation by the conventional Museum". They emphasise the "invasive phenomenon" and the "proliferation of attempts to expand the perimeter of the traditional Museum with portable structures" in order to reinforce the "expansion of the museum's narrative models",[4] and promote these "looming nomadic devices" as an understanding of "the exhibition cell as a space for reception and creation of plural and critical narratives against the hegemonic model" (Idensitat, 2011). The project is conceived as a series of events or "parkings" and hinges on the CX-R, an adapted caravan designed by Argentine architects a77 and Pau Faus in 2009 (Can Xalant, 2011):

> Its portability allows the center to expand into the public arena, establish collaborations with its environment, and expand its scope of action and repercussion. (Idensitat, 2011)

The project betrays the influence of Michael Asher's *Installation Münster (Caravan)*, first exhibited in 1977 at Skulptur Projekte Münster. Asher's concept has been institutionally appropriated and recalibrated as one more aesthetic practice, an identifiable, reproducible and regularised strategy.

De-mystification

For Seth Siegelaub, a key word in the early days of conceptual art was "de-mystification":

> …we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the production of the artwork; for example, how the size of a gallery affects the production of art, etc. In that sense, we tried to demystify the hidden structures of the art world. (O'Neill, 2007, p. 10)

Sieglaub claims that one aspect of this ambition was to reveal that public art displays are the outcome of private decision-making with significant effects on the consumption and production of art, because "the 'consumers' are also the 'producers'" (Obrist, 2008, pp. 129-130).

> …unofficial agreements are rarely exposed even though they often underwrite official cultural politics […] it is not art's supposed intrinsic qualities alone that lead to its institutional recognition, but an interplay

[4] The Serpentine Gallery temporary pavilions (2000-2010), the Temporary Guggenheim Museum in Tokyo (2001) and the Chanel Contemporary Art Container by Zaha Hadid (2008).

> of promotional, social, and institutional activities (Graw, 2006, pp. 145-146)

It is considered inappropriate to discuss the interests, social relations and private discussions that lie behind the activities of art institutions and they are excluded from the public discussions that art institutions regularly host. Stewart Martin concurs that the relationship of art "to its formation within capitalist societies is routinely methodologically excluded as an extra-philosophical concern, to be left to economics, sociology or history" (Martin, 2007, p. 15).

How does this climate of concealment nourish the ambitions of artists today? Between the extreme reactions of protest, withdrawal and complicity, what are the ambitions for artists working today? How do art institutions limit, encourage, or frame those ambitions? And how do institutions figure within the broader social and economic framework of which they are a part and on which they depend?

Hans Haacke worked as a guard and museum guide at Documenta 2 in 1959. Behind the scenes he witnessed an enormous operation with all sorts of interests in play. Walter Grasskamp relates how this early experience led Haacke to an understanding of museums as defining contexts: observing the "machinations backstage" Haacke witnessed the "enormous effort required to isolate a work of art from the everyday world and shift it into the context of an art exhibition from which it draws much of its aura" (Grasskamp, 2004, p. 30). Haacke relates that he witnessed the "stage management" of art: the intervention of the dealers, the conversations between organisers, collectors and the press, the manipulation of art and artists as commodities and their "celebrity rating among collectors". He realised that the selection (and exclusion) of artists in prestigious exhibitions is crucial for the "ranking of artists and art movements", which has a bearing on what is reported in the press and the legitimising discourses which in turn determines the reception of the work (Haacke, 2009). Observing the "machinations backstage" Haacke observed a contrast between the work and the everyday life of the viewers. Inevitably, this led Haacke to "a recognition of the artificiality of art, and what constitutes an artwork", being a student at the time this "sparked doubts about the dynamics of his chosen profession" (Grasskamp, 2004, p. 30). Haacke points out that to ignore this "inevitable aspect of exhibitions would yield a flawed comprehension of the dynamics of the art world" (Haacke, 2009), which is presented as a space of freedom which promotes non-instrumental ideals.

There continues to be a crucial need for de-mystification of art production because the concealment, distortion and misrepresentation of the functions and structures of the art institution impedes the understanding of the conditions of art production and the producers' place within them. Only with an understanding of these conditions can artists make crucial realistic and effective decisions regarding their careers and art practice.

The various prescriptive statements hurled into public discussion about the art world point out the "crisis" of art and compulsively provide answers to the question "what is to be done?". These normative speculations are unrealistic because they ignore some of the fundamental principles that motivate the actions and collective behaviour of individuals in the field, they also disregard the principles within which institutions are constituted and function and they assume that all individuals within the field have a common agenda.

Most current practices are promoted as "critical" in one way or another and dissent has become the orthodoxy as artists reproduce critical discourses while they participate in the very structures they denounce:

> Recurrent expressions of reflexive speculation about the nature of curating, the artwork and the institution by those who constitute it become ritual observances, not radical contestation […] the self-reflexive preoccupation with the identity and status of artist, curator and institution plays on the symbolic negation of these positions, but paradoxically can only do so only by sustaining them in practice. The dramatisation of the self-reflexive defers endlessly any critical debate on the actual, cultural potential and quality of definable artwork, and the authority and power of curatorial practice over the public space in which that potential is evaluated, justified and given legitimacy. (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 4)

It is necessary to look closely at these practices and their associated discourses, to read their claims and stated ambitions against their achievements, to consider their contexts, the social relationships and their sources of funding, to articulate and "demystify" the apparatus that generates the contemporary art field.

What are the expectations, ideals, ethics, strategies, stated aims, interests, investments and motivations of artists and other players in the field? Close attention to these motivational factors reveals the difference between critical practices and practices that are rooted in rhetorical and performative acts of critique, which betray a professionalized and conservative art world.

> The 'professionalization' of the art world is an understated euphemism for the 'businessification' of the art world, which has been gradually

> developing since the early 1970s. This process is nothing less than the expansion of the dominant values of capitalism into the domain of art production as art has shifted from a 'small-scale', 'cottage' handicraft to become an important sector of the cultural industry, alongside pop music, fashion, television, film and their related 'star' values. (Siegelaub, 2009)

Art history and international contemporary art

So-called "international contemporary art" is a circumscribed, specialised and self-consuming field of production (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 70) which is predicated on the set of financial and ideological hierarchies established in the western art capitals during the twentieth century. Contemporary art practice emerges from the historical discourses of western art and aesthetics, which have defined the legitimating discursive field, appearing naturalised, current and universal. Nevertheless, the art world has made every effort to shed its origins[5] and take up the mantle of "criticality" (De Duve) yet still retains what Walter Benjamin called its "aura".[6]

According to Daniel Buren, contemporary art has inherited nineteenth-century art, "its system, its mechanism and its function". This is clearly apparent in the acceptance of the "exhibition framework as self-evident" (Buren, 1973, p. 68). But it is also apparent in the enduring concept of the art object which shares its provenance with the museum artefact, forcibly displaced from its native context and isolated in a glass case it was rendered useless, it became an object for contemplation, aestheticised and admired for its 'beauty'.

The contemporary art world is not distributed equilaterally across a global network. Curatorial decisions across the globe can be traced back to the western centres of financial and curatorial power (museums, journals, galleries). The current climate of cultural production is a profitable and exclusive professional sector, which promotes its entrepreneurial activities on the fetishization of the tradition of western art. Nevertheless, the public relations face of "international contemporary art" purports to represent the entirety of practicing artists. These discourses according to Liam Gillick however "no longer include those [artists] who work hard to evade its reach" (Gillick, 2010).

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[5] While art schools increasingly replace art history with courses in critical theory, Art History departments are rechristened "Visual Cultures" to shed their western-centred associations while essentially retaining the same discourses steeped in western philosophy and aesthetics.

[6] *Frieze Masters* is a recent effort to reconnect contemporary and art history in the context of the art market <http://friezemasters.com/>.

The anxious desire to define "contemporaneity" has spurred a number of journals, panel discussions and academic courses.[7] The main consensus is that we can no longer generalise about art (Foster, 2009). For Liam Gillick "contemporary art" is the name of a "stylistic epoch", it has become historicised as "a subject for academic work" (Gillick, 2010). It is clear that "contemporary art" refers to a particular type of practice with dedicated venues and an exclusive market, evident in the particular criteria for inclusion in contemporary art fairs. Contemporary art has until recently generally referred to

> …a specific accommodation of a loose set of open-minded economic and political values that are mutable, global, and general—sufficing as an all-encompassing description of "that which is being made now—wherever." (Gillick, 2010)

Contemporary art institutions and biennials currently appear to constitute a dispersed and truly global field without boundaries. In an interview with the art critic Michel Claura, Seth Siegelaub claims that conceptual art was unique because it emerged simultaneously all over the world and it did not have a geographic centre. Prior to conceptual art, art movements emerged from local contexts in Paris, Zurich and New York: "it was impossible to be an important artist unless you lived in the 'right' city" (Claura and Siegelaub, 1999/1973, p. 287). Claura however argues that "the ideology that underlies western art seems today to subtend the art world in a much more consistent and simultaneously anterior manner" (Claura and Siegelaub, 1999/1973, p. 287). In fact, the contemporary art scene—as it comes across in museums, biennials and art fairs—is centralised and proliferates around the practices of curators with practically unlimited expertise. In his introduction to *Institutional Critique and After* (2006), John Welchman maintains that the traditional museum has become transformed into an enormous distribution centre:

> During the last decade of biennial mania and super-commuting curators who package and reassemble a core of international artists in concert with a homegrown quotient at a myriad roving locations (Istanbul, Yokohama, Cairo…), the contemporary aspect of the "museum" has been effectively re-calibrated as a global delivery system. (Welchman, 2006, p. 14)

Charles Esche argues that despite the reflexive discourses on the global effects of biennial culture, the contemporary art world continues to be centralised, evidence that the periphery must consistently appeal to the centre for legitimacy as "key institutions

[7] See Foster, 2009 and Aranda, Kuan Wood and Vidokle, 2009 and 2010.

of contemporary culture officially to sanction the 'periphery' in order to subsume it into the canon of innovative visual art (Esche and Bonami, 2005, p. 105). On the one hand, the difference between centre and periphery is maintained in terms of the unequal balance of power and authority. On the other, the global institutionalisation of art has standardised art production, eradicating the difference between centre and periphery. Although many artists develop their practice in the periphery of the art world,

> …their energy is validated and consumed by the centre and therefore the relationship between rim and hub remains in place. This is, of course, how globalisation generally operates – sometimes to the economic benefit of the patronised but rarely in the interests of maintaining their autonomy and sustainability. (Esche and Bonami, 2005, p. 105)

In fact, the contemporary art world thrives in plural localised networks, art schools and galleries provide nodal points for these networks, revealing the local character of art production, but also in many cases its institutionally predetermined character. The influence of "international contemporary art" breaks up the crucial dialogue between artists: rather than investing in local networks, artists address an "international" art audience, an illusory sphere of influence accessible only via institutions. This gives credibility to the "international" scene. In many cases, these plural networks remain disconnected in order to maintain their authority. More decades than miles separate London's west end Cork Street from Vyner Street in the east. Equally, the diverse profiles of galleries currently on Vyner Street demonstrate that a "curatorial culture of self-reflexivity and critical interrogation can coexist more or less comfortably alongside persistent orthodox forms of presentation" (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 4). JJ Charlesworth argues that this ultimately characterises a profoundly contradictory cultural epoch

> …where claims to universal and general value are treated with suspicion, but in which the institutions that previously staked their authority on such outmoded things as elite culture nevertheless continue to operate, but emptied of their previous *raison d'être* (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 3)

Hence, although institutions continue to operate and make value judgements in a climate of "business as usual", they do so despite the lack of shared values and criteria through which institutional power is mediated and legitimated (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 3):

> This pluralising cohabitation can be the only outcome of a cultural debate that has long ceased to argue over any certain definition of the function of art's institution. (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 4)

The art world is both locally and discursively produced, even though it is presented as international, global, universal and shared through the media, the journals and the publicity departments of institutions.

The problems currently faced by artists who are resistant to reigning ideologies of profit and consumption have been presaged by artists and writers since the turn of the twentieth century. These concerns have come predominantly from the left, and from writers and artists who are concerned with the subservience of art to the forces of production. By the 1980s, it was clear that the corporate infiltration of every sector of society had accelerated rapidly. Some writers expressed their despair whilst others rejoiced cynically in the apparent freedom—or the pluralism—that neo-liberalism provided. In his Glossary to *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), Nicolas Bourriaud suggests that we:

> …not without irony, borrow Hegel's formula whereby 'art, for us, is a thing of the past' and turn it into a figure of style: let us remain open to what is happening in the present, which invariably exceeds, a priori, our capacities of understanding. (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 108)

To turn Hegel's end-of-art thesis into a "figure of style" whilst continuing to practice "art" undisturbed amounts to a rhetorical strategy and cynical opportunism. We "remain open to what is happening" but we participate in, produce and reproduce it at the same time. This is why it is important that our capacity for comprehending this state of affairs is not hindered by strategic obfuscation.

CHAPTER ONE: "INSTITUTIONALISED CRITIQUE"[8]

The narrative of avant-garde art is a series of shifts in a controversy that revolves around whether artists should practice critique by withdrawing into artistic autonomy, or to abandon the autonomy of art and practice political art. Jacques Ranciere locates the conflict between political and non-political art in the clash between the politics internal to its own existence, in other words its autonomy:

> Critical art has to negotiate between the tension which pushes art towards 'life' as well as that which, conversely, sets aesthetic sensorality apart from other forms of sensory experience. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 46)

Both political art and autonomous art however, are accommodated within the institution of art. But there is a third way to view autonomy, and it involves the politics of art.

According to Donlad Egbert, this enduring dilemma for avant-garde artists emerged from the ideas of utopian writer Comte Henri de Saint-Simon and his conception of the artist's leading role in society (Egbert, 1967, p. 346). The term *avant garde* is directly derived from the language of revolutionary politics. It was one of Saint-Simon's collaborators, Olinde Rodrigues, who coined the term *avant-garde* in the essay *The artist, the scientist and the industrialist* written in 1825 (Calinescu, 1987, pp. 101-102). In a dialogue between an artist, an industrialist and a scientist, Rodrigues appeals through the character of the artist:

> Let us untie. To achieve our one single goal, a separate task will fall to each of us. We, the artists, will serve as the avant-garde: for amongst all the arms at our disposal, the power of the Arts is the swiftest and most expeditious. When we wish to spread new ideas amongst men, we use, in turn, the lyre, ode or song, story or novel; we inscribe those ideas on marble or canvas, and we popularise them in poetry and in song. We also make use of the stage, and it is there above all that our influence is most electric and triumphant. We aim for the heart and imagination, and hence our effect is the most vivid and the most decisive. If today our role seems limited or of secondary importance, it is for a simple reason: the Arts at present lack those elements most essential to their success—a common impulse and a general scheme. (Saint-Simon, 1999/1825, p. 190)

[8] Sheikh, 2006.

Artists were to be judged not only by the immediate 'usefulness' or exchange value of their work but by their contribution to the transformation of social relations.

The Situationist International and writers such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel Ragon advocated the fusion of art, life and politics, and radically contested the existence of art as a separate category. Other movements of the twentieth century have taken a playful attitude, often ending up preserving a special position for art (DeRoo, 2006, p. 45).

In the 1960s, minimalist artists broadened the critique of artistic autonomy to consider the spatial conditions of the art object. Although the minimalists rejected the transcendent formalism of Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg, formalism re-entered minimalist art with "the assumption that the places of perception are politically and socially neutral" (Deutsche, 1986, p. 22). The work of Dan Flavin and Donald Judd For example, retains its formal autonomy (Beveridge and Burn, 1975, pp. 131 ff). Minimalism insists on the materiality and specificity of its objects and the work's relationship to its "expanded field" (Krauss, 1983/1979).

A critique of the institution of art was a constituent part of many conceptual art practices of the late 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s, artists in New York began to question the status of art in society. In 1969, an early and politicised form of institutional critique emerged in New York when the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) was founded. This was a loosely structured group of artists and critics who joined in protest against the practices the art establishment. They campaigned for inclusive exhibition policies and a political stand against the Vietnam War. Conceptual art was still a marginal practice in an art world defined by Clement Greenberg's modernism and conceptual artists presented themselves as an "internal challenge" to the commodity status of art (Bolt Rasmussen, 2009, p. 43).

Clement Greenberg regarded art as the only sphere in which it was possible to articulate freedom from and resistance to pervasive capitalism. Art was to consolidate its autonomy and refrain from any direct political engagement. Marxist intellectuals of the "Old Left" privileged high culture and autonomous art as the "last defensible enclaves of political activity and dissent" (Frascina, 1999, p. 109). This position was untenable for conceptual artists who were concerned with contemporary aesthetic, social and political issues. Following in the wake of student protests, artists set out to critique the museum for its hegemonic role and its failure to denounce the war in Vietnam (Bolt Rasmussen, 2009, p. 44).

For the emerging generation of artists, social and political crises exacerbated the contradictions between modern art and its reliance on the market for production and distribution. Artists sought to question the connection between art and ideological structures. Happenings, Pop art, earth art, performance art, minimal and conceptual art often developed into demonstrations and politically explicit art. In 1970, and at a time when the relationship between art and politics intensified (Frascina, 1999, p. 112), Hans Haacke exhibited *MOMA-Poll* in the exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Visitors were asked to vote yes or no to the question:

> Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina Policy be a reason for you not voting for him in November? (Ault, 2002, p. 93)

David Rockefeller was a trustee of the Museum at the time, and although he did not call for the removal of the work, he did question whether the work in the exhibition had any "artistic content whatsoever". According to Frascina, the institution's internal correspondence "positioned the interests, identities, art practices and critiques of the protestors as 'other' but in need of ameliorating through the process of public relations" (Frascina, 1999, pp. 112-113).

In April of 1969, the AWC held a public hearing at the School of Visual Arts in New York, which was attended by several hundred artists and art workers. A total of 61 artists and critics spoke against museum policies, including Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Robert Barry, Lucy Lippard, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Michael Snow, Gregory Battcock and Barnett Newman (Art Workers' Coalition, 1969). Carl Andre and Robert Barry urged the movement to abandon the art world and develop an alternative sphere in which artists would have more control over their own work. But the artists were not willing to go that far, according to Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "It was one thing to criticize museums with their shows and acquisitions, another to abandon the institution of art". These artists were concerned with political issues, but they were not willing to abandon the institution on which they depended for their own legitimacy. Thus, the "museum remained the main focus" for their protests (Bolt Rasmussen, 2009, p. 45), and they were concerned to extract better working conditions within it. This did not prevent the ensuing accusations that the AWC was involved in the "politicization of art" (Lippard, 1970, p. 173). As a spokesperson for the movement, Lucy Lippard defended the AWC as a political movement not an artistic one; it did not take a position on the aesthetic content of the artist's work:

> …the AWC has never offered any opinions on the content or form of art, which we consider the concern of individual artists alone (Lippard, 1970, p. 173)

Although the artists of the AWC wished to take up a position in response to social and political issues, the question was how to do this without compromising their aesthetic and critical autonomy (Bolt Rasmussen, 2009, p. 46). Hans Haacke traces the emergence of institutional critique to this period (Haacke, 2007).

Conceptual artists began to address the art institution from social and political perspectives, exploring "appropriate means of intervention in institutional spaces and discourses" (Deutsche, 1986, p. 22). They interrogated the historical context of the work of art, its conditions of reception and its institutional status. Artists such as Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, Martha Rosler, Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers, Chris Burden and Lawrence Weiner, were amongst those who began to "address 'art' as a broad-based social institution whose interrelated sites included museums, studios, journals and newspapers, art-historical practice within the universities, and the marketplace". Using a variety of innovative media, these artists made evident the "dynamic and complex impact that social, economic, and physical conditions have on the creation of meaning and value" (Zelevansky, 2006, p. 173).

The diversity of art practices which can be assembled under the banner of institutional critique cannot be identified on the basis of common media or modalities of practice. How does one reconcile Daniel Buren's stripped posters with Hans Haacke's political work, exemplified by his museum visitor polls, Lawrence Weiner's architectural interventions, Michael Asher's site-specific installations and Robert Smithson's earthworks?

In *Subversive Signs* (1986), Hal Foster points out that the diverse practices of these artists[9] nevertheless have in common the fact that their investigations focus on the institutional frame, revealing the ways in which "the production and reception of art are institutionally predetermined, recuperated, used" in their critical texts and site-specific work (Foster, 1986, p. 101). Foster observes that these artists utilise spaces, representations and languages both as targets and as weapons, which amounts to a postmodern shift in the practice of art from production to the manipulation of signs. Foster admits that this shift was not new but he argues that it

[9] Including amongst others, Martha Rosler, Sherrie Levine, Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum and Jenny Holzer (Foster, 1986, p. 99).

> …remains strategic if only because even today few are able to accept the status of art as a social sign entangled with other signs in systems productive of value, power and prestige. (Foster, 1986, p. 100)

Conceptual artists thus began to acknowledge and made efforts to reveal and frustrate the institutional structures which frame the display and determine the production if art. In 1973, Lucy Lippard wrote a sobering evaluation of these efforts:

> Conceptual art has not, however, as yet broken down the real barriers between the art context and those external disciplines—social, scientific, and academic—from which it draws sustenance. (Lippard, 1973, p. 263)

She expressed her despair that the "ghetto mentality predominant in the narrow and incestuous art world" may never be able to break free from its "resentful reliance on a very small group of dealers, curators, critics, editors, and collectors who are all too frequently and often unknowingly bound by invisible apron strings to the 'real world's' power structure" (Lippard, 1973, p. 264)

It was only after this apparent failure, and not until the early 1980s, that practices of institutional critique were gathered into a coherent movement. The chief advocate was Benjamin Buchloh, who beginning with his essay *Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art* (1982), established the parameters of the term and the main protagonists, including Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and Marcel Broodthaers. Writing in 1990, Buchloh identifies in Lawrence Weiner's *Declaration of Intent* (1969), "a critique that operates at the level of the aesthetic institution", which he describes as

> …a recognition that materials and procedures, surfaces and textures, locations and placement are not only sculptural or painterly matter to be dealt with in terms of a phenomenology of visual and cognitive experience or in terms of a structural analysis of the sign […] but that they are always already inscribed within the conventions of language and thereby within institutional power and ideological and economic investment. (Buchloh, 1990, pp. 136-137)

Whilst this recognition was latent in the work of American artists such as Lawrence Weiner and Robert Barry, it was manifesting rapidly in the work of European artists of the same generation, especially in the work of Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke.

> In fact an institutional critique became the central focus of all three artists' assaults on the false neutrality of vision that provides the underlying rationale for those institutions. (Buchloh, 1990, pp. 136-137)

Theoretical discourse burgeoned around institutional critique when a second generation of post-conceptual artists emerged, including Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum, Sherrie Levine and Fred Wilson. These artists contributed to the retrospective constitution of institutional critique (Fraser, 2007).[10] In the early 1990's the term *institutional critique* was reappropriated by a third generation of artists "whose work can be read as a series of different attempts to continue and revise some of the premises of Institutional Critique" (Graw, 2006, p. 138). This third generation of artists includes Fareed Armaly, Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Clegg & Guttmann and Tom Burr (Kaiser, 2007).

Although institutional critique may seem to be a dispersed and globalised practice, on closer inspection it turns out to be a local phenomenon, which, beginning in the early 1980s, was rapidly theorised and subsequently became institutionalised. The core artists identified with all three generations of the genre have consistently co-exhibited, while artists and theorists sympathetic with the aims of institutional critique generated a substantial theoretical output. Andrea Fraser is herself a major proponent of institutional critique, she has written extensively on the subject, retrospectively mobilizing the work of conceptual artists as antecedents. Fraser acknowledges the influence of Craig Owens, Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Yvonne Rainer, Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler with whom she studied at the New York Whitney Independent Studies Program in the 1980s, where the consolidation of institutional critique is said to have taken place.[11] Her fellow students included Mark Dion, Renée Green, Gregg Bordowitz, Joshua Decter and Miwon Kwon (Fraser, 2007 and 2005, p. 101). Through Buchloh, Fraser also met Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum and Sherrie Levine who often worked together on collaborative projects.[12]

According to Philipp Kaiser, what galvanised the "loose grouping of artists" which included Christian Philipp Müller, Fareed Armaly, Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Clegg & Guttmann and Tom Burr, was the

> …inglorious collapse of the art market […] shortly before the outbreak of the first Gulf War. Almost all those present at their hour of birth

[10] Fraser acknowledges that none of the artists considered founders of institutional critique have laid claim to the term (Fraser, 2005, p. 101).

[11] Renee Green maintains that the term "institutional critique" was promoted by the Whitney Independent Studies Program (Graw, 2006, p. 138).

[12] Lawler and McCollum collaborated on an installation titled *For Presentation and Display: Ideal Settings,* 1984. Diane Brown Gallery, New York, whilst Lawler and Levine collaborated on *A Picture is No Substitute for Anything*, Wedge #2 (1982).

> agreed that it was because of the recession—then especially palpable in New York—that these hitherto marginalized, critical-theoretical artists were suddenly being accorded public space. (Kaiser, 2007)

This loose grouping of artists "connected along an axis from New York to Cologne" (Lind, 2010, p. 196), would exhibit together regularly in Europe in the 1990s under the name of *Kontext Kunst* (Context Art).[13] At this point in time, the periodical *Texte zur Kunst* and the curator Peter Weibel both "had a keen interest in proclaiming the much yearned-for new avant-garde". In 1990, art critic Isabelle Graw and Stefan Germer launched *Texte zur Kunst,* which was "devoted exclusively to conceptualist, contextualist, and political art criticism". By 1993, "there were so many exhibitions of contextual art taking place that there was talk of a paradigm shift" (Kaiser, 2007).[14]

Peter Weibel popularised the term *Kontext Kunst* as the name of a new international art movement with the exhibition *Kontext Kunst: The Art of the 90s* held at the Neue Galerie as part of the 1993 Graz Steirischer Herbst. The substantial catalogue served as a "compendium of universal validity, as the group's manifesto" (Kaiser, 2007). The catalogue features an anthology of 22 substantial essays discussing from diverse perspectives the artistic issues and social and political themes that distinguish "Context Art" from related forms of conceptual and installation art. Indeed, Weibel's heraldic prose is a parody of Situationist proclamations and a precursor to Nicholas Bourriaud's championing of the artist as social reformer:

> It is no longer purely about critiquing the art system, but about critiquing reality and analyzing and creating social processes. In the '90s, non-art contexts are being increasingly drawn into the art discourse. Artists are becoming autonomous agents of social processes, partisans of the real. The interaction between artists and social situations, between art and non-art contexts has led to a new art form, where both are folded together: Context art. The aim of this social construction of art is to take part in the social construction of reality. (Weibel in Gordon Nesbitt, 2011, p. 32)

[13] These artists included Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Clegg & Guttmann, Renée Green, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Thomas Locher and Christian Philipp Müller (Lind, 2010, p. 196).

[14] As exhibition commissioner in 1993, Peter Weibel invited the Austrian artist Gerwald Rockenschaub to team up with Andrea Fraser and Christian Philipp Müller, to design a trans-national pavilion as the Austrian contribution to the Venice Biennale. In the same year Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen and Barbara Steiner curated *Backstage* at the Hamburger Kunstverein and curator Yves Aupetitallot invited artists to engage with the site of Le Corbuisier's apartment building Unité d'Habitation in Firminy, for his *Project Unité*.

Weibel promoted *Context Art* as an exemplary departure from the self-referentiality of institutional critiques and a return to the critical practice of the 1960s and 1970s.[15] By emphasising its site-specificity, Weibel saw it as an expansion of institutional critique to a critique of society and social process in general. Maria Lind describes *Context Art* as a German version of relational aesthetics, with their common interest in site-specificity, process, interdisciplinarity and research. Though the former were "more historically oriented" (Lind, 2010, p. 196) and "more programmatically political and academic" (Lind, 2004). According to Kaiser, Weibel subsumed diverse practices into an apparently coherent movement by promoting the discourse around *Context Art.* For Kaiser, this was nothing less than an "ideological co-opting of what was then a new artistic phenomenon […] whose genealogical origins were emphasized by James Meyer much later"[16] in an essay titled *The Fate of the Avant-Garde*.[17] By the mid-1990s, Stefan Germer pointed out that merging these contextual practices eventually emphasised that they were fragmented right from the start (Germer in Kaiser, 2007).

Critique and its vicissitudes

For theorist Peter Bürger and artist Hans Haacke, the concept of critique depends on an ideal of critical distance. The younger generations of artists practicing institutional critique however, are informed by an awareness that the assumption of critical distance has always been a fiction, and their work proposes "a renegotiated notion of critique based on the admission that 'ritical distance' is compromised a priori" (Graw, 2006, p. 147). Andrea Fraser in fact goes further to maintain that there is no outside to the institution (Fraser, 2005, pp. 282-283), effectively eliminating this distance.

> Has institutional critique been institutionalized? Institutional critique has *always* been institutionalized. It could only have emerged *within* and, like all art, can only function *within* the institution of art. The insistence

[15] This nevertheless included established artists such as Fareed Armaly, Tom Burr, Clegg & Guttmann, Meg Cranston, Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Louise Lawler, Thomas Locher, Dorit Margreiter, Christian Philipp Müller, Hirsch Perlman, Adrian Piper, Mathias Poledna, Stephen Prina, Julia Scher, Rudolf Stingel, Lincoln Tobier and Christopher Williams.

[16] In a move similar to Nicholas Bourriaud's appropriation of another set of diverse practices in the mid-1990s, Kaiser states that the *Kontext Kunst* exhibition catalogue was "symptomatic of Weibel's tendency to claim this new art as 'his' discovery, if not 'his' invention—something of which Germer was publicly very critical" (Kaiser, 2007). Maria Lind concurs that the term *Kontext Kunst* was "highly contested by particularly the Cologne-based leftist art scene" (Lind, 2004). Relevant discussions on the work of these artists had been published in the journal *Texte zur Kunst*, before the *Kontext Kunst* exhibition, while "a number of those involved felt that Weibel and some of the other curators had hijacked their project" (Lind, 2010, p. 196, note 31). See Germer, 1995.

[17] Meyer, 2000.

> of institutional critique on the inescapability of institutional determination may, in fact, be what distinguishes it most precisely from other legacies of the historical avant-garde. It may be unique among those legacies in its recognition of the failure of avant-garde movements and the consequences of that failure; that is, not the destruction of the institution of art, but its explosion beyond the traditional boundaries of specifically artistic objects and aesthetic criteria. (Fraser, 2005, p. 104)

Institutional critique reveals the antinomies of artistic autonomy, raising critical questions about the institution of art and the role of the artist within it. However, this is often achieved inadvertently; works of art that stage paradoxical subversions within the insitution come across as ambiguous rhetorical strategies, which prompt questions about the work's critical efficacy, if not confusion about its intentions. As viewers, we are forced into a position of passive complicity, because our only response can be an ironic smirk in acknowledgement of this unmasking. Wlliam Powhida's unflattering drawings of the art world are an example of this kind of work. His drawing, *How the New Museum Committed Suicide with Banality* was commissioned by the Brooklyn Rail for its November 2009 front cover. The title of the work is from a blog of the same name by James Wagner (Wagner, 2009). The work, subtitled *Or How to Use a Non-profit Museum to Elevate Your Social Status and Raise Market Values* is a caricature denouncing the cronyism involved in the controversial New Museum exhibition of work from the collection of Dakis Joannou, who is also a trustee of the museum. The exhibition was curated by Jeff Koons, close friend of Joannou, who owns the single largest collection of Koons' work. Wagner complains that "aside from the self-serving aspect, it looks a lot like insider-trading" and Linda Yablonsky writes in the *Art Newspaper* that this exhibition "raises a potential conflict-of-interest" (Yablonsky, 2009):

> New Museum director Lisa Phillips says the debate over such issues is one good reason to pursue the show. "We want to push the conversation forward," she says, adding that the museum is assuming all costs associated with the Joannou exhibition… (Yablonsky, 2009)

Powhida's drawing is in an edition of 20 prints. Dakis Joannou, bought one of these for $1,500 (Neyfakh, 2010). Jeffrey Deitch, long-time collaborator of Dakis Joannou and Jeff Koons:

> …smiled at Mr. Powhida's critique. "The irony is that by exposing art celebrity culture, he's becoming a celebrity himself," he said of Mr. Powhida. "So hats off to him" (Cave, 2009)

Artist Lisa Beck maintains that the caricature is a tribute rather than a critique:

> I don't think that the power structure has exactly trembled… In fact, I know that some of the figures he makes fun of take delight in being included in his work. It's like being the subject of a roast at Caesar's—a tribute, or mark of their importance. (Beck in Neyfakh, 2010)

Powhida responded to the criticism that work generated in an article published on the Art 21 blog by explaining that both the museum's and his own dependence on patronage is the only defence against political censorship:

> We share the same paradoxical over-dependence on a limited number of wealthy individuals to maintain our independence from political and ideological interference. Assuming public funding, even from the NEA, can bring unwanted political scrutiny of the moral content of the art. This is a paradox the art world faces in its efforts to make art accessible, while remaining free from the kind of traumatic, political interference caused by the politician Jesse Helms, who famously tried to cut funding from photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in the 1980s. (Powhida, 2010)

Raising the spectres of censorship, "governmental regulation and political interference" and reiterating a number of clichés about art and the art world, Powhida paints a black and white picture featuring the heroic artist as social critic and representative of minorities:

> Artists are an educated class of cultural producers who routinely challenge "moral authority" and share a tolerance for minority perspectives. That this vision is supported by a wealthy elite is also paradoxical, but there aren't many alternatives at this point in our late-capitalist democracy. (Powhida, 2010)

Isabelle Graw is sceptical of the support that institutions extend towards artists' critique, because it can "become a reified practice that feeds capitalism's all-consuming appetite" (Graw, 2006, p. 148):

> …the more seemingly self-evident critical functions that can be attached to a work of art, the better its promotional value. There are works that facilitate such critical labelling—think only of Santiago Sierra's current popularity. (Graw, 2006, p. 141)

For the same reasons, Craig Owens maintains that practices which attempted to "subvert this nexus from within, addressing the invisible mechanisms which define art in our society" failed in their ultimate goal to "counteract those forces which work to alienate artists from their production" (Owens, 1992, p. 260) and were absorbed into the culture industry:

> …ephemeral and site-specific works had been effectively reinserted into the circuits of commercial distribution and exchange via photography; and artists who attempted to maneuver within institutional precincts

> seemed ultimately to confirm the (liberal-democratic myth of the) elasticity of those institutions—their ability to tolerate even their own most hostile opposition. (Owens, 1992, p. 260)

For Andrea Fraser institutional critique is defined by a particular methodology, which she describes as a "*critically reflexive site-specificity*" (Fraser, 2006, p. 305). Institutional critique is thereby distinguished from site-specific practices that deal with "physical, formal, and architectural" sites:

> Institutional Critique engages sites above all as social sites, structured sets of relations that are fundamentally social relations […] a site is a *social* field of relations. (Fraser, 2006, p. 306)

Fraser's condition of "reflexivity" indicates that, amongst the various relations that define a site, there are both "our relations to that site and the social conditions of those relations" (Fraser, 2006, p. 306). Fraser considers institutional critique to be a "political practice" with "transformative intentions […] aimed, first of all, at forms of domination at work in its immediate field of activity". She argues that the relations which constitute the artistic field interact with relations in other fields. Institutional critique scrutinises these relations in terms of their problematic "encroachment and instrumentalisation (e.g., corporate sponsorship), but also in terms of homologies of structure and interest (e.g., the corporatization of museums, galleries, and even studios)" (Fraser, 2006, p. 306). Therefore institutional critique is critical in the sense that "it does not aim to affirm, expand, or reinforce a site or our relationship to it, but to problematize and change it". Fraser maintains that institutional critique transforms

> …not only the substantive, visible manifestations of those relations, but their structure, particularly what is hierarchical in that structure and the forms of power and domination, symbolic and material violence, produced by those hierarchies (Fraser, 2006, p. 306).

In fact, institutions are resistant to change. Museums change incrementally to accommodate shifts in art practice, museum attendance, new technologies and new funding conditions, but they do not change in response to artists' provocations or appeals. Although institutional critique has problematised the museum in academic contexts, it has also effectively affirmed the museum's authority; it has augmented its power by reinforcing the museum's claim to "cutting edge" practice, controversy and criticality. This has contributed to the museum's expansion and thereby entrenched its hierarchical structure.

Nevertheless, for Fraser the only way to accomplish such change is "by intervening in the enactment of that relation". This condition also addresses the "ambivalence" identified with institutional critique:

> …because to intervene in relations in their enactment also always means *as you yourself participate in their enactment*, however self-consciously (Fraser, 2006, p. 307)

Gerald Rauning denounces this self-consciousness as "self-obsessed self-critique", he casts doubts on its critical efficacy by pointing out that it "substantializes one's own involvement in the institution and crowds out the horizon of change" (Raunig, 2009, p. 173). JJ Charlesworth concurs, adding that self-critique within the institution can only have a symbolic function, which in turn is dependent on the institution:

> …the self-reflexive preoccupation with the identity and status of artist, curator and institution plays on the symbolic negation of these positions, but paradoxically can only do so only by sustaining them in practice. (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 4)

What is the "institution of art"?

There is a sense, when speaking of resistance to the co-optation of art or the subversion of repressive institutions and the commodification of art, that one is fighting an invisible enemy. Who or what are we referring to when we speak of the "institution"?

Institutions are centres of social intensity that provide legitimation, but institutions are also characterised by particular discourses, or ways of thinking and speaking. Institutions are hierarchically ordered, social structures which are resistant to change because they tend towards stability. Institutions are therefore both ideological and conservative. Institutions are social apparatuses, which become especially problematic when they are mistaken for the goal rather than the means.

The "institution of art" acquires several meanings throughout the twentieth century and it is often difficult to extract the one from other. The term can stand for any one or a combination of the following definitions:

(1) The first is the limited topological sense of the institution of art as the site of its presentation, such as the museum or gallery. This notion of the institution is encountered in Daniel Buren's writing. For Buren "institution" is synonymous with "museum" and the function of the museum is to frame, isolate, define, validate and naturalise works of art (Buren, 1973). Andrea Fraser defines this narrow sense of the

museum in terms of "bureaucratic organisations that contain and present and preserve and consecrate artworks" (Fraser, 2007).

However, according to Isabelle Graw, this limited notion of the institution facilitates a "*fixation* on the art apparatus", whereas in fact the institution has "lost much of its former authority" (Graw, 2006, p. 146):

> Fixation on the art apparatus seems strangely nostalgic today, especially in relation to the new definitional power of the art market, which has taken over from the museum as the chief administrator of value through a network of often invisible global transactions in the primary and secondary markets. (Graw, 2006, p. 146)

(2) Hence, the second definition of the institution includes the broader network of social institutions that accommodate the production, display and reception of art, such as museums, galleries, journals, biennials, foundations, art schools, studios, funding bodies and the art market.

> …but we can also think of institution in the much broader sense, […] as a social tradition, a set of customs and practices that are established within a particular culture or society (Fraser, 2007).

(3) Thus, the third and broadest concept of the institution of art refers to the historical and contemporary discourses on art, which enable us to recognise and speak about art. According to Arthur Danto:

> To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld (Danto, 1964, p. 580)

Danto defines the art institution as a value system and the tradition of art in the west as an ideological system. According to Peter Bürger, "works of art are not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks and conditions that largely determine the function of the works". Bürger defines the institution of art as the "framing conditions" which regulate the "commerce with works of this kind in a given society or in certain strata or classes of a society" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 12).

> The concept 'art as an institution' […] refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22)

In her article, *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005), Andrea Fraser outlines an expanded concept of the art institution:

> From 1969 on, a conception of the "institution of art" begins to emerge that includes not just the museum, nor even only the sites of

> production, distribution, and reception of art, but the entire field of art as a social universe. In the works of artists associated with institutional critique, it came to encompass all the sites in which art is shown—from museums and galleries to corporate offices and collectors' homes, and even public space when art is installed there. It also includes the sites of the production of art, studio as well as office, and the sites of the production of art discourse: art magazines, catalogues, art columns in the popular press, symposia, and lectures. And it also includes the sites of the production of the producers of art and art discourse: studio-art, art-history and, now, curatorial-studies programs. And finally, as Rosler put it in the title of her seminal 1979 essay, it also includes all the "lookers, buyers, dealers and makers" themselves. (Fraser, 2005, p. 103)

The institution of art is defined broadly by Fraser to include everything, even the public. This definition of the institution, however is too broad and therefore becomes meaningless. It fails to draw any distinctions between art practice, selection, mediation, representation, display, distribution, exchange and professional or public reception. The art institution is not inclusive and we do not all have the same measure of responsibility in it. It is therefore problematic to equate the wider field of art as a social institution—including the public—with institutions and institutional practices themselves. Hence, a more precise definition of the institution is necessary in order to discuss the institution of art without mystifying it.[18]

We can consider the art institution in the terms of another definition by Fraser as a "network of social and economic relations" (Fraser, 2005, p. 103). Fraser locates this conception of the institution in the work of Hans Haacke, especially his installations *Condensation Cube*, (1963-65), and *MOMA-Poll* (1970) where:

> …the gallery and museum figure less as objects of critique themselves than as containers in which the largely abstract and invisible forces and relations that traverse particular social spaces can be made visible. (Fraser, 2005, p. 103)

The institution of art can be differentiated longitudinally along the different roles played out in the institution (artist, museum curator, dealer, critic and audience) and latitudinally, across the various networks and types of institutions, large and small,

[18] Arthur Danto (Danto, 1964) and George Dickie (Dickie, 1974) have contributed to an "institutional theory of art" and the "artworld", which however useful, remain generalised definitions of the "art institution" that fail to take factors such as the relationship of art to capitalism, the commodity and popular culture into account. John Searle (Searle, 2006) provides a definition of institutions based on the primary institution of language, discussed in chapter three. Pierre Bourdieu has written extensively on the institution of art from a sociological perspective, discussed in chapters one to three of this thesis.

traditional and contemporary. The relative importance of a museum or gallery depends on its role within the field. For example, new galleries do not have the same influence as established galleries. Established galleries have demonstrated their credibility on the market and accrued a substantial amount of cultural capital over the years from their collaborations with artists, curators, museums, critics and other galleries. Artists who have established their value on the art market will effectively increase the cultural capital of a new gallery by exhibiting there. In fact, an ambitious young gallery will often pay a large amount of money in advance to an established gallery in exchange for the solo exhibition of an established artist. In this way, galleries effectively function as pimps. This is what Fraser demonstrates with her video *Untitled* (2003). For this video, Friedrich Petzel Gallery arranged a sexual encounter between Fraser and an unnamed collector. If it was somewhat embarrassing to watch Fraser and the collector have awkward sex on a hotel bed, it was interesting to observe the puzzlement of the visitors who regarded this uneventful and bland 60 minute video on a small monitor in the middle of the exhibition *Pop Life, Art in a Material World* at Tate Modern (2009). Using a conventional single-shot still bird's eye-view of the hotel room without audio, the video allegorises the relationship between artist, dealer and collector. Fraser describes her intentions in an interview with Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey of *Praxis*:

> …the question I'm interested in posing is whether art is prostitution—in a metaphorical sense, of course (Bajo and Carey, 2004)

However, instead of elucidating this relationship, the work is a further mystification of the terms of its own production: a limited edition with stringent conditions attached to its sale, the first of which is sold to the collector for an undisclosed sum (Tate Modern et al., 2009). The contractual agreement is an important element of this work because the "conditions of production of "Untitled," the relations of exchange, are obviously central to it" (Bajo and Carey, 2004). Far from demystifying the exchange between artist and collector via the dealer, the video functions as a vulgar figure of speech, an ironic trope or flippant vignette, which obfuscates its admission of complicity.

What remains hidden in Fraser's *Untitled* video, is the fact that the dealer is not merely a pimp and galleries are not just commercial spaces. Together with other players in the "network of social and economic relations" that constitute the field of art, galleries perform the vital function of legitimising artworks and artists. Pierre Bourdieu describes the ritual of institutional legitimation fittingly as a form of "consecration" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38). *Degree specific consecration* is the artistic prestige, or the degree of recognition "accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38). There are degrees

of cultural consecrations as well as varieties, one can consecrate an art object, an artist, a gallery or an entire movement.[19]

Consecration is a ritual of initiation and it can only be performed by individuals or institutions that are themselves consecrated and therefore authorised to bestow this recognition upon newcomers. Bourdieu argues that reputations in the art world are made, not by individuals or institutions, no matter how influential they are, but by the entire field of production (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 78). Consecration is a performative ritual, founded on a system of belief sustained by the entire field. Bourdieu notes that the consecrated artist or writer is in turn authorised "to win assent when he or she consecrates an author or a work—with a preface, a favourable review, a prize, etc." (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42). This ritual also maintains cohesion in the field as a whole where the stakes include the struggle for the authority to grant this legitimisation:

> …the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42)

In other words, at stake within these struggles is "the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42). In fact, Bourdieu argues that it is the "incessant, innumerable struggles to establish the value of this or that particular work" that generate the belief that underlies the value of works of art in general, which in turn provide the basis of the value of each particular work (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79).

It follows therefore that Fraser's video *Untitled*, is merely chipping at the tip of the iceberg because a work of art is a commodity as well as a symbolic object, and as such it operates in two relatively independent economies:

> …these struggles never clearly set the 'commercial' against the 'non-commercial', 'disinterestedness' against 'cynicism', they almost always involve recognition of the ultimate values of 'disinterestedness' through the denunciation of the mercenary compromises or calculating manoeuvres of the adversary, so that disavowal of the 'economy' is placed at the very heart of the field, as the principle governing its functioning and transformation. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79)

[19] The exhibitions *When Attitudes Become Form,* Kunsthalle Bern, 1969, curated by Harald Szeemann and *Information*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970, curated by Kynaston McShine were instrumental in establishing conceptual art as a movement.

This disavowal of the economy in the art world is institutionalised in the figure of the dealer, who mediates between money and the artist. The artist should never be seen to accept money directly. In fact this is the most enshrined, albeit tacit rule in the relationship between artists and galleries. As Bourdieu points out, dealers form a "protective screen" between artists and the market, but they also link artists to the market (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79). The dealer however does not merely represent the commercial exchange of art, the dealer is authorised to:

> …proclaim the value of the author he defends […] and above all 'invests his prestige' in the author's cause, acting as a 'symbolic banker' who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 77)

It is the dealer's investment that introduces the artist into the "cycle of consecration" by demonstrating his "disinterested, unreasoning passion for a work of art" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 77). Bourdieu describes the practices of art businesses as "practical *negations*, [which] can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing", because in the art world, to succumb to commercial ambitions is to "sell-out". Bourdieu observes that art dealers are reduced either to disinterestedness or self-interest, which conceals their essential duality or duplicity. The art market can only function "by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly 'economic' interest" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 74). The pursuit of economic profit is therefore carried out in *conjunction* with the accumulation of symbolic capital, both of which depend on the disavowal of the commercial interests and profits derived from disinterestedness. Hence, the pursuit of prestige or recognition is the only economically viable and legitimate form of credit in the art world:

> For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 75)

Fraser casts Friedrich Petzel Gallery in the role of the pimp, herself in the role of the prostitute and the collector is the customer, who pays to satisfy his desire for possession. However, a surplus of value is also generated in this transaction, in the form of cultural capital.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between two principles at work within the field of art. On the one hand, the specificity of art is defined by the "autonomous principle" whereby art "fulfils its own logic as a field" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39). Bourdieu describes the autonomy of artistic production as the equivalent of a guild for professional artists

> …who are less inclined to recognize rules other than the specifically intellectual or artistic traditions handed down by their predecessors, which serve as a point of departure or rupture. They are also increasingly in a position to liberate their products from all external constraints, whether the moral censure and aesthetic programmes of a proselytizing church or the academic controls and directives of political power, inclined to regard art as an instrument of propaganda. (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 112-113)

The dominant "heteronomous principle of hierarchization" in the field of art is official success and would dominate the field unchallenged if the field lost its autonomy and became subject to ordinary laws prevailing in the economic and political field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38). In these terms, it becomes apparent that the field of power—which dominates both art and society—functions like a barrier between the field of art and the forces of society.

The institution of art is thus divided within itself, but this dividing line is drawn in the sand. Institutions or individuals with the authority to legitimise or "consecrate" art do not always explicitly censor or exclude artists, instead they set up the conditions whereby artists self-censor themselves willingly. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, critique is not unwelcome in the hallowed halls of museums, as long as it is carried out as *art* (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 68). The museum thus brackets art's critical potential while it lays claim to the critical appeal of the work of art.

Bourdieu argues that a work of art cannot be recognised and valued as such until it is "socially instituted as a work of art" by figures who are themselves consecrated with institutional competence and authority. But even then, the qualities of a particular artist or work of art do not suffice to render this judgement (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 229). Because "the 'subject' of the production of the art-work—of its value but also of its meaning—is […] the entire set of agents engaged in the field", this includes artists, critics, dealers, collectors and curators:

> …in short, all who have ties with art, who live for art and, to varying degrees, from it, and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a world view but also a vision of the artworld is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art. (Bourdieu 1993, p. 261)

The production of the value (and meaning) of the singular work of art is therefore concomitant with the production of the value of art. The art institution is thus more than just a "network of social and economic relations", the art institution is a self-governing ideological value system. It has the potential to be constantly renewed by the diverse practices that it represents. This potential however, is stunted and

redirected by the most heteronomous and most powerful agents, who set the standards of inclusion and achievement within the field. The institution of art can thus be defined narrowly to include only those institutions or individuals that have the authority to legitimise art as such.

Fraser argues that once we have conceived the institution of art as a social field "the question of what is inside and what is outside becomes much more complex", adding that institutional critique consistently engages with those boundaries (Fraser, 2005, p. 103). On the one hand, this is true as far as the audience also internalises the projections of the institution of art, the audience however does not share the responsibility of artists, curators and institutions in constructing and promoting practices and representations of art. Fraser admits that:

> There is, of course, an "outside" of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics. It is only what, at any given moment, does not exist as an object of artistic discourses and practices. (Fraser, 2005, pp. 281-282)

There *is* therefore an outside to the art institution, it is whatever is ignored, marginalised, excluded and appropriated. The interminable questions that revolve around the question of the distinction between art and non-art—which would also provide the definition of art—demonstrate that there is an outside to the institution. Like ideology, the institution is not apparent when one is on the inside, because one cannot see that one is inside. The art world is not inclusive of all artists and practices. There is an outside position to speak from because the inside is not inclusive. Isabelle Graw argues emphatically that "it is simply not the case that 'there is no outside' or that even the most outrageous proposition will inevitably be absorbed by institutions". She argues that in order to construct an institution

> …a constitutive outside is not only needed, but inevitable. Some things will always be left out, often deliberately: structurally speaking, every centre produces its periphery. (Graw, 2006, p. 143)

The public is on the outside too, because "consecration" is performed by experts and because this process is intentionally mystified. In reality, the public has the power to confer the status of art onto an object by popular consensus. The popularity of Tate Modern, however is not a demonstration of this sort of consensus, instead one would have to trace its popularity to cultural and economic policies and the media.

The centralised power structure of the art institution alienates both artists and the public, evidence the critical attitude of the public as well as that of artists, critics and even collectors.[20] At the same time, excluded artists uphold the fetishised value of the art world even more ardently than those consecrated by it, precisely because they are on the outside, looking in and seeking inclusion.

Today we speak of the "expanded museum"; beginning with the independent curator, the museum gradually became externalised, increasingly reaching out to public spaces and social networks. As Fraser points out, art practices which aspire to "escape" the institution, actually take it with them:

> It is artists—as much as museums or the market—who, in their very efforts to escape the institution of art, have driven its expansion. With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, to redefine art or reintegrate it into everyday life, to reach "everyday" people and work in the "real" world, we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape it. (Fraser, 2005, p. 104)

The art institution as a discursive formation

> The white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions. (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 42)

The ubiquitous question "Yes, but it is art?" is usually a provocation for a debate about what art *is*, in apparent ignorance of the fact that if works of art serve any purpose at all, it is to keep posing this question anew. Andrea Fraser argues that art is defined as such "when it exists for discourses and practices that recognize it as art, value and evaluate it as art, and consume it as art" (Fraser, 2005, p. 103). The purpose of the art institution is to define art and it does so via an ensemble of discursive functions. These usually include exhibitions and art reviews, catalogues and monographs, panel discussions and conferences, art school critiques, textbooks and journals. Our concept of art is therefore essentially a social convention, which Fraser identifies as the *institution of art*:

> The institution of art is not something external to any work of art but the irreducible condition of its existence as art. No matter how public in placement, immaterial, transitory, relational, everyday, or even invisible, what is announced and perceived as art is always already institutionalized, simply because it exists within the perception of participants in the field of art as art, a perception not necessarily

[20] See Saatchi, 2011.

> aesthetic but fundamentally social in its determination. (Fraser, 2005, p. 103)

It follows that, if the institution of art is socially determined, then it is also "internalized and embodied in people":

> It is internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as art, whether as artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors, or museum visitors. (Fraser, 2005, p. 103)

The significance of this, as Fraser argues, is that "above all" the institution of art "exists in the interests, aspirations, and criteria of value that orient our actions and define our sense of worth" (Fraser, 2005, p. 103). The institution of art is therefore entwined with our own investments and ambitions, and maybe more importantly, it is entwined with our identities and values. According to Pierre Bourdieu, art is an institution in the sense that the "work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35). Hence, the notion of artists "becoming" institutionalised is a fallacy. Prevailing artistic, aesthetic, art-historical or critical discourses do not merely enable us to recognise art; they constrain what we recognise as *art* in two ways. In the first case, the production of discourse is a condition for the production of art, by insinuating, contextualising, interpreting or legitimising it (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35). And secondly, the institution limits and controls the production of discourse by administering its possibilities and over who are authorised to produce this discourse:

> All critics declare not only their judgement of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 36)

The role of the critic, the curator or the scholar who translates practice into discourse, is objectively more influential in the production of discourse on art than the work of the artist because discourse has material effects. Michel Foucault argues that discourses are not merely "signifying elements referring to contents or representations", discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1989, p. 54). Foucault is concerned with the material effects of discursive structures that maintain dominance and status quo in any field:

> …in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope

> with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (Foucault, 1986/1971, p. 149)

The materiality that Foucault refers to amounts to the actual effects of discourse. Amongst these effects is the power to influence the art and institutions of the future. Foucault argues that although we can discern in the plurality of discourses and the "infinite resources" available for their production, this potential is available at a price, because disciplines and discourse are essentially "principles of constraint" (Foucault, 1986/1971, p. 155):

> They become embodied forms of knowing and they are just as systematic and structured and every bit as constraining as the more obvious structures of control, perhaps more so, because they are taken for granted and embodied. (Foucault, 1986/1971, p. 155)

In other words, individuals speak through pre-existing narratives but they are just as much "spoken by" these naturalised and embodied discourses. The curator, according to Paul O'Neill is "an important agent within the global cultural industry" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 16). In fact, for Boris Groys the curator embodies institutional authority: "a curator does not need to be part of any fixed institution: he or she is already an institution by definition" (Groys, 2009). The rising power of the curator, according to O'Neill has less to do with the power structures of the art world and more to do with "inherited cultural significance (and capital)". He argues that in order to be considered an element of the institutional superstructure, "curating had to be articulated as part of art discourse" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 19). O'Neill characterises the discursive as an "ambivalent way of saying something *vis-à-vis* doing" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 20) and argues that curating produces the required level of esteem for the entry of art works into the superstructure:

> Practice alone does not produce and support such esteem, rather distinct moments of practice translate into a hierarchical 'common discourse' of curating as it is understood through its discursive formations. While internationalism is now at the core of practice with the biennial industry, its accompanying curatorial discourse functions to maintain the superstructure of the art world on a much wider scale than ever before. (O'Neill, 2007, pp. 20-21)

Benjamin Buchloh foregrounds the role of the curator as one essentially of converting discourse into practice, contextualising and decontextualising practices and artists successively. Buchloh regards this "procedure of abstraction and centralisation" as an "inescapable consequence"—but it is also an inescapable condition—of the work's entry

into the "superstructure apparatus" (Buchloh in O'Neill, 2007, p. 19).[21] Therefore, a circular relationship transpires in the field of culture, where practice is translated into discourse, which in turn produces "more equivalent practice, which enables the maintenance of the existing superstructure" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 19).

> [Exhibitions are] contemporary forms of rhetoric, complex expressions of persuasion, whose strategies aim to produce a prescribed set of values and social relations for their audiences. As such exhibitions are subjective political tools, as well as being modern ritual settings (O'Neill, 2007, p. 16)

In his classic series of essays *Inside the White Cube* (1976), Brian O'Doherty argues that, at its most serious, "the artist/audience relation can be seen as the testing of the social order by radical propositions" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 41). However, and for the most part, discourse serves to reinforce and sustain the status quo, by facilitating the "successful absorption of these propositions by the support system—galleries, museums, collectors, even magazines and house critics—evolved to barter success for ideological anaesthesia" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 41).

Aesthetic judgement is the belief system that sustains the institutional selection, dissemination and promotion of artists, practices and discourses. The professional field of art is legitimised by this subjective and unverifiable but naturalised concept of value, which is disseminated throughout the art world and periodically updates the legitimate values and aspirations of art. In his essay *When Form Has Become Attitude - And Beyond* (2005/1994), Thierry de Duve traces the historical paradigm shifts in the modalities of art-making in terms of their institutional definition, particularly in art education. The academic tradition of the eighteenth century emphasised "talent" within the paradigm of *mimesis.* Art in this period is classified in terms of what de Duve calls "*metier*", defined as the canon or tradition of art with its specialised rules and skills (De Duve, 2005/1994, pp. 19, 22, 23). Modernism and the avant-garde initiated a shift towards the emphasis of *creativity*: art within modernism is classified according to "medium" and thus the paradigm became *invention* (De Duve, 2005/1994, pp. 20, 22, 23). Both of these models are obsolete (De Duve, 2005/1994, p. 22)[22] and have been replaced with the latest shift, which occurred in the 1970s:

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[21] Buchloh, Benjamin (1989). Since Realism there was... (On the current conditions of factographic art). In *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties.* ('s-Gravenhage, SDU uitgeverij: Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, pp. 96–121.

[22] Though as de Duve points out they are still active in varying degrees (De Duve, 2005, p. 25).

> …the most progressive art and art teaching of the Seventies thought that art had to be willed, whether it aligned itself with some political programme bathed in revolutionary rhetorics, or whether it saw itself as the relentless critique of the dominant ideology. […] Thus another concept took the place of creativity, that of "attitude". A concept that is a blank, actually: a sort of zero degree of psychology, a neutral point amidst ideological choices, a volition without content. (De Duve, 2005/1994, p. 26)

De Duve argues that in the 1970s, the two former models "the academic model, talent-metier-imitation, and […] the Bauhaus model, creativity-medium-invention" were replaced by "a new triad of notions: attitude-practice-deconstruction" (De Duve, 2005/1994, p. 26).

Contemporary practice is converted into historical (arte)fact through discourse, which is traditionally the purpose of the museum and the discipline of art history. However, the circulation of art depends on the circulation of discourse. In the contemporary orgy of international exhibitions and events, an overview of current practice is impossible. Discourse thus becomes indispensable in the popularisation of artists, art works and trends in journals, publications, conferences, panel discussions and art schools.

According to Fraser, the institutional critique of the museum as an apparatus is equally a critique of artistic practice (Fraser, 2005, p. 102), the critique of the institution of art is thus not aimed just at museums, but constitutes an attack on the internalisation of the orthodoxies within the community of the art world as a discursive institution (Fraser, 2005, p. 103). Fraser suggests that the internalisation of these orthodoxies is problematic, because they predetermine our perceptions and actions. And because they are implicit, these ideologies are very difficult to oppose and reinvent. A critique of these orthodoxies however would require us, as artists, to define "our sense of worth" (Fraser, 2005, p. 103) for ourselves, and to shed the orthodoxies that determine the art world and its functions to replace them with discourses that represent our own values. But these orthodoxies are impossible to extract from the way we think about art and our identities as arts.

If institutional critique is a critique of the internalisation of ideology, then instead of problematising institutional sites such as the museum or art fair, while subscribing to their value-systems, it might be more appropriate to either problematise institutions that are formative in our shared discourses on art, such art education, or to redefine their discourses affirmatively.

Critique within the institution

In his 1966 essay *Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences*, Jacques Derrida maintains that the epistemological presumptions of western metaphysics constitute the "structure" of philosophical discourse and infect ordinary language. Derrida questions these discourses by revealing their reliance on an origin or centre:

> The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance, and organise the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganised structure—but above all to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. By orienting and organising the coherence of the system, the centre of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. (Derrida, 2005/1966, p. 352)

The centre permits the play of elements because it provides them with a context. Nevertheless, and for the same reason, "the centre also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible" (Derrida, 2005/1966, p. 352). This is essentially the problem of any discursive formation, i.e. an institution. Daniel Buren describes the art institution as "the centre in which the action takes place and the single (topographical and cultural) viewpoint for the work" (Buren, 1973, p. 68). So for example,[23] the question: "What is art?" predetermines any possible answers by the assumption that "art—the word, the concept, the thing—has a unity and, what is more, an originary meaning, an *etymon*, a truth" (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 20). Derrida points out that, in seeking for this meaning of art, one would be seeking for a singular meaning which would "inform from the inside, like a content, while distinguishing itself from the forms which it informs" (Derrida, 1987/1974, pp. 21-22). Derrida's notion of centred structure reveals the orienting effect of institutions as centralised structures, whether ideologically (on a universal level), or methodologically (on a local level):

> The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (Derrida, 2005/1966, p. 352)

Derrida's theory of the centred structure which limits play describes the central organisation of discursive or institutional systems which ultimately strive for stability,

[23] For another example of centred structure see Hollier, 1998, p. 42, on the scholastic subdivision of knowledge into a scheme that can be condensed into a summary. Hollier points out that architecture and the text have a common origin in the notion of summation and the notion of grasping the whole work in one glance.

thus the limit on "play" is also the limit on the amount of change these systems are willing to undergo. Derrida insists that even "destructive" discourses find their footing within the parameters defined by the centre of discourse because the idea itself of "discourse" is dependent on these inherited structures:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (Derrida, 2005/1966, p. 354)

This is precisely the contradiction of institutional critique: the problem of the prevailing ideology of the institutions within which contemporary art is produced and circulated. Artists practicing a critique of the art institution are caught within the terms they are trying to unsettle. On the one hand, they seek recognition and rewards from the institution, on the other, they seek to challenge the very legitimating structures of the institution.

According to Derrida: "The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigor with which this relation to […] inherited concepts is thought" (Derrida, 2005/1966, p. 356). In other words, in our own practice, we cannot circumvent or do away with the persistence of metaphysics—which is what the avant-garde movements attempted—we can only knowlingly insert ourselves into this intertextual mesh. This argument supports Fraser's thesis of institutional critique as a "critically reflexive site-specificity" (Fraser, 2006, p. 305), and suggests that as artists we must accept our complicity within ideology.

Conceptual art and deconstruction appear to follow a parallel trajectory. Benjamin Buchloh emphasises the shift into the space of language-based discourse predisposed by the linguistic propositions of conceptual art:

> …the proposal inherent in Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as analytic proposition), it thus constituted the most consequential assault on the status of that object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution. (Buchloh, 1990, p. 107)

Derrida maintains that the decline of the concept of the transcendental signified, which was codetermined by the decline of grand narratives, has brought about an intensification of discourse; extending the play of signification infinitely:

> This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin,

> everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification infinitely. (Derrida, 2005/1966, pp. 353-354)

This may provide a starting point from which we can begin articulating new ways of thinking and acting but it is an unsatisfactory condition in itself and it is not sustainable. In the following quotations, it is apparent that Derrida and Buren are essentially referring to a similar strategy of cynical complicity or accommodation within oppressive and alienating structures:

> The work in progress has the ambition, not of fitting in more or less adequately with the game, nor even of contradicting it, but of abolishing its rules by playing with them, and playing another game, on another or the same ground, as a dissident. (Buren, 1977, p. 73)

> It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of *economy* and *strategy*. (Derrida, 2005/1966, pp. 356-357)

Burden and Derrida both suggest that we have little choice but to cut our own dresses from the same old cloth, the difference is just a matter of style. In her historical and critical account of the Situationist International *The Most Radical Gesture* (1992), Sadie Plant raises a pertinent question about the difference (or connection) between forms of critique and ways of life. Plant argues that one of the paradoxes of the Situationist project was that contrary to their categorical condemnation of the spectacle as an alienating force, their activism suggested that "pockets of post-revolutionary consciousness can somehow arise in the pre-revolutionary present" (Plant, 1992, p. 89-90).

> When Vaneigem declared: 'I want to exchange nothing—not for a thing, not for the past, not for the future. I want to live intensely, for myself, grasping every pleasure',[24] he was not merely giving an account of how life should be, but declaring his intention to take it in the here and now as a means of achieving a world in which such supreme self-satisfaction would be realised. (Plant, 1992, p. 90)

According to Plant, the critique of the spectacle "as a dehumanising force is in danger of falling into self-contradiction if it admits that it is possible to play and enjoy some

[24] Vaneigem, 1983, p. 86.

autonomy and control over one's own life within capitalist society" (Plant, 1992, p. 90). Plant asks whether the Situationist tactics (for example, the sabotage of labour on the one hand and alternative worker's organisations on the other) were:

> …means of coping with capitalism or destroying it? Were the situationists more concerned with finding ways for real life to survive within the spectacle, or with the contestation of the spectacle itself? (Plant, 1992, p. 90)

The question is relevant to the ultimate aspiration of institutional critique and to critical art in general. What is the end of critique? If Buren's critique is a form of play, the Situationist project aimed at nothing less than revolution. Plant argues that the Situationists recognised the capacity of capitalism to absorb critique but insisted that all activity should uncompromisingly precipitate revolutionary change. The Situationists condemned forms of activism towards a habitable present as ineffectual reformism that is susceptible to recuperation (Plant, 1992, p. 91). Plant quotes a scathing critique of the Situationists by Jean Barrot from his book *What is Situationism* (1987). According to Plant, Barrot expresses his reservations concerning the contradictions of Situationist critique as a form of consciousness within and against capitalism, which could only lead to repression or reformism (Plant, 1992, p. 90):

> Either one huddles in the crevices of bourgeois society, or one ceaselessly opposes it to a different life which is impotent because only the revolution can make it a reality. (Barrot in Plant, 1992, p. 90)

Plant concludes that although there are obvious benefits in making improvements to a flawed society one would prefer to abolish, nevertheless "people's attempts to live in the here and now must also undermine the system which condemns them to survival". Plant, cites the Situationists' role in the May events of 1968 as an example (Plant, 1992, p. 94). However, the idea of revolution as a radical schism in society, from a pre-revolutionary condition of unfreedom and inequality to a post-revolutionary society of freedom and equity has historically proved elusive. Society is a web of relationships, networks of power and conflicting interests which cannot change from one moment to the next without great upheaval and instability. Sedimented structures, conventional practices and power relationships do change incrementally over time. We can contribute to the type of society we want by making changes on the local level in which we operate. If we build small models of the type of society we want, in artist-run spaces, collective projects and local communities we will can make improvements in the present and these will function more effectively to undermine the *status quo* than any negative critique.

The defence of autonomy

> I understand Institutional Critique much more as a defence, this may seem contradictory, but as a defence of the institution of art, in the broad sense, of the field of art, of art as a social field. A defence of the institution of art in society as a site of critique, as a site of dissent and critique and contestation, in society and culture. (Fraser, 2007)

For Andrea Fraser, unlike movements of the historical and neo avant-garde, which challenged art institutions and the autonomy of art (Fraser, 2007), institutional critique developed as a defence of art and art institutions against exploitation, reification, instrumentalisation and commodification. Fraser cites the work of Buren, Asher, Broodthaers and Haacke to support her thesis (Fraser, 2006, p. 307). Excluding Broodthaers, the other three artists, to varying degrees, sit comfortably within institutions of art that provide the centre of meaning and purpose of their work. None of these artists has proposed significant alternatives. As a negative critique of museum practices, their work is inextricably embroiled in a dialectical relationship with these institutions. This is because their identity as artists is also inextricably tied up with the art institution and the claim to autonomy.

According to the idealist concept of the autonomy of art, art is perceived as being "distinct from the social, and the museum is defined as a neutral, nonsocial, apolitical institution". The work of art thus appears to be entirely different to other forms of social production (Germer, 1988, pp. 64-65). In his article *Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys* (1988), Stefan Germer argues that more successfully than any form of censorship, the institutional neutrality of artistic practice constrains and depoliticises the work of artists:

> Only in a generalized and unspecific way is "outside reality" accepted into the museum space; the boundary between art and society is thus kept intact (Germer, 1988, p. 65)

The concept of autonomy has been highly contested. Theodor Adorno and Peter Bürger believe in the critical value of autonomy because it releases art from the imperative of use-value in a society where everything is subjected to functional demands. However, the explicit functionalisation of art by museums, corporations and governing bodies evacuates this argument.

The autonomy of art has become indissociable from the institution of art, which is essentially composed of institutions that carry out the work of regulating the production and dissemination of art (art fairs, journals, galleries, museums). In claiming that institutional critique does not want to destroy the art institution but to

defend it, Fraser is essentially playing out her investment and belief in the institution. According to Pierre Bourdieu, participation in the field of art is consubstantial with a certain investment in its values; artists have a collective investment in the values, or the *illusio* of the art world. *Illusio* is the "belief in the game, interest in the game and its stakes" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 227). Artists are profoundly invested in the values and meaning of art:

> Being interested means ascribing a meaning to what happens in a given social game, accepting that its stakes are important and worthy of being pursued. (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 92)

According to Bourdieu, the "struggles for the monopoly of the definition of the mode of legitimate cultural production" necessitate a sustained reproduction of the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 227). As Buchloh points out, avant-garde practice mobilises it own resistance within this struggle:

> …a continually renewed struggle over the definition of cultural meaning, the discovery and representation of new audiences, and the development of new strategies to counteract and develop resistance against the tendency of the ideological apparatuses of the culture industry to occupy and control all practices and spaces of representation. (Buchloh, 1984, p. 21)

These observations indicate that there is a considerable conflict of interest involved in the practice, display and dissemination of art, which goes beyond what is usually discussed in publications and public debates on art. It also reveals what Graw describes as the "regulatory role of the art institution, its ambition to reward 'good' artists" as an integral part of this struggle (Graw, 2006, p. 144).

For Fraser, Haacke's work exemplifies the practice of institutional critique. She argues that in his critique of the museum, Haacke's intention is to defend the "autonomy of art institutions from instrumentalisation, from exploitation by […] political and corporate interests" and equally to defend art institutions:

> …as potential sites of critique, as sites for another set of values, that aren't those political and economic and market values that are driving those corporate interests and those interests of trustees and governments, as they use art to polish their image. (Fraser, 2007)

At the same time, however, Haacke's work continues to provide art institutions with the necessary criticality and controversy that has long been associated with art and which amounts to its cultural capital and "cutting edge". Fraser additionally defends institutional critique as a liberating practice: "in making that critique", she argues, "one

is also practicing that autonomy, practising that critique. So as to preserve it […] as an element of the field of art" (Fraser, 2007).

In Fraser's words, institutional critique emerged with the recognition that "all art works, no matter how aesthetically autonomous, can be exploited for economic and symbolic profit—and often not in spite of but *because* of their autonomy" (Fraser, 2006, pp. 306-307). It therefore seems paradoxical that Fraser would defend the autonomy of the art institution. According to Buchloh, such a defence is misinformed:

> Anyone taking the implications of the situational esthetics developed in the late 60's and 70's into account as an irreversible change in the cognitive conditions of art production would have to realize that any return to an unconditioned autonomy of art production would be mere pretence, lacking in historical logic and consequence. (Buchloh, 1982, p. 48)

Buchloh's assertion is predated and influenced by Peter Bürger's analysis of the paradoxical character of artistic autonomy in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (2007), originally published in 1974. Bürger claims that "the contradictoriness of the category 'autonomy'" is a necessary component of the definition of art in bourgeois society (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 35). Bürger defines "autonomy" as "the functional mode of the social subsystem 'art': its (relative) independence in the face of demands that it be socially useful" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 24). Art becomes autonomous when it is released from the requirement to fulfil a social function. The category of the autonomous work of art, which describes the detachment of art from social practice in bourgeois society "carries the taint of ideological distortion" and functions by concealing its origin (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 35):

> The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 46)

Bürger points out the vicissitudes of the autonomy of art: on the one hand, when art is released from its social function it turns inward, the autonomy status results in the self-criticism of art. On the other, autonomy also means art's ineffectuality:

> …the autonomy status certainly does not preclude the artist's adoption of a political position; what it does limit is the chance of effectiveness. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 26)

Bürger applies the distinction that Karl Marx makes between "system-immanent criticism" which functions within a social institution, as the criticism of specific ideas in the name of others,[25] and "self-criticism", which "presupposes distance from mutually hostile […] ideas" and a mounts to "a fundamentally more radical criticism". The self-criticism of art "addresses itself to art as an institution" (Bürger, 2007/1974, pp. 21, 22):

> …with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism. Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that precede it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22)

Avant-garde artists did not take issue with museums or particular practices of interpretation, circulation, selection or exclusion within the art world; they took issue with the entire concept of art and its role in bourgeois society:

> The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22)

The concept of autonomy distinguishes art from other social activities and sets it apart as an object of aesthetic contemplation. This is why it does not matter what artists do:

> …museums and other institutions of the artworld really do not care *what* [artists] do. The institutions of cultural power are not threatened by what the artist creates, so long as it is done within the authorised, artworld space. (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 68)

It therefore becomes apparent that art institutions, which control the distribution and validation of art, do not overtly censor the work of artists but act assertively to encourage the production of work that conforms to the institutions' expectations (Graw, 2006, p. 142). For Susan Buck-Morss the autonomy of art is a neutralisation of critique, "artistic 'freedom' exists in proportion to the artists' irrelevance" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 69):

> Today's art is "free," because it obeys no laws of judgement, taste, or relevance, submitting only to the decisionism of the artist, who can be scandalous, playful, boring, shocking, or whatever – modes of *being* that have no social or cognitive effect. (Buck-Morss, 2003, pp. 69-70)

[25] For example, Michael Fried's criticism of minimalist art in the name of Kantian disinterestedness and the formal autonomy of art.

According to Bürger, the avant-garde attack on the autonomy of art has proved to be no more successful. The intention of the avant-garde was the "abolition of autonomous art, by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 54). Avant-garde artists regarded the dissociation of art from life praxis as the defining characteristic of art in bourgeois society, what they proposed therefore was the "sublation of art—sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in changed form" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 49). In the meantime, as Bürger points out, this sublation has ostensibly taken place, but it was a "false sublation":

> …the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 50)

Bürger however is sceptical about the value of the avant-garde project to sublate art. He regards the reintegration art and life as a "profoundly contradictory endeavour" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 50) and suggests that the distance between art and life may provide a uniquely "free space within which alternatives to what exist become conceivable" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 54). For Bürger, the autonomy of art is a precondition of criticality, because only if art is perceived as privileged enclave set apart from "the means-end rationality of daily bourgeois existence", can it practice a critique of this existence (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 10):

> An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 50)

But for art to provide this space it must *function* differently. Artists' experiments with mass production and the increasingly surreal prices of the art market are casting doubts about the value of art even in the minds of a public that is largely uniformed about the function of the art institution in society.

Critique and the instrumentalisation of art

Andrea Fraser and Isabelle Graw find the paradoxical conjunction of the terms *institution* and *critique* problematic. Like the word "institution", the term "critique" has undergone "semantic shifts and practice-oriented reconceptualizations" (Graw, 2006, p. 147). For Fraser the term appears even less specific, "vacillating between a rather timid "exposing", "reflecting", or "revealing", on the one hand, and visions of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing museological order on the other" (Fraser, 2005, p. 280).

Isabelle Graw's major reservations with the term *institutional critique* lie in its normative assumption that art has an epistemological function. Most works included within the canon utilise some form of "critique", "analysis, "investigation" or "research", while artworks become "interventions" or "propositions" (Graw, 2006, p. 140). Graw argues that when institutional critique is defined as investigative, this implies a functionalisation of art (Graw, 2006, p. 140):

> The concept of Institutional Critique as applied to art is based on the assumption that art is able to *do* something (Graw, 2006, p. 137)

Graw acknowledges that the epistemological functionalisation of art presents a strategic advantage because it breaks with the dominant idealist and restrictive perceptions of art that derives its value exclusively from its intrinsic qualities. She thus emphasises art's "inscriptive legibility", in other words "the actual *relation* of art to social conditions and the attendant possibility of *renegotiating* them" (Graw, 2006, p. 140). On the other hand, this function becomes subverted when it "serves as a license to reduce complex artistic propositions to a seemingly unambiguous epistemological function or meaning" (Graw, 2006, p. 141). Graw conveys her scepticism regarding the attribution of criticality to works of art, "as if it were almost self-evident":

> …this criticality is usually asserted rather than defined, and assumed rather than made operationally specific, the result is often the neutralization of the very possibilities for a truly critical art practice—critical, that is, in the sense of raising objections and causing problems in a particular situation. (Graw, 2006, p. 139)

Institutional critique has increasingly come under fire for its apparent institutionalisation. The strategies of institutional critique are often merely rhetorical devices which amount to "critique of an institutional nature" (Graw, 2006, p. 141). This is especially true of the self-critical character of institutional critique, which is often esoteric and unintelligible to the uninitiated, comprehensible only to artists, theorists, historians and critics. Due to its sophisticated discourse on art and society, like any specialised form of knowledge, it often marginalises or alienates viewers. But if we grant that art can carry out this critical function successfully, as is apparent in the work of Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers, the question which follows is whether this stated "functionalisation" does not reveal another unstated and more insidious functionalisation or instrumentalisation of art, which critical art endeavours to resist and counteract. In dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu, Hans Haacke states that:

> I believe that Senator Jesse Helms taught artists, and other people who care about free expression, an important lesson. He reminded us that art productions are more than merchandise and a means to fame, as

> we thought in the 1980s. They represent symbolic power, power that can be put to the service of domination or emancipation, and thus has ideological implications with repercussions in our daily lives. (Bourdieu and Haacke, 2005, p. 2)

Since the early 1970s, Hans Haacke's work has exposed the relationships between art institutions and their corporate partners, at the same time revealing that museums strategically lay claim to cultural autonomy. Haacke's installation *On Social Grease* (1975), exhibited at the John Weber Gallery in New York, consists of six plaques engraved with quotations on the corporate involvement in the arts. The work is explicitly critical of the cultural legitimisation of business through art. One of the quotations by David Rockefeller, who was at the time chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank and vice-president of the Museum of Modern Art, reads:

> From an economic standpoint, such involvement in the arts can mean direct and tangible benefits. It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a brighter public reputation, and an improved corporate image. It can build better customer relations, a readier acceptance of company products, and a superior appraisal of their quality. Promotion of the arts can improve the morale of employees and help attract qualified personnel. (Haacke, 1982, p. 141)[26]

For Haacke, the relationship between museums and their corporate sponsors essentially amounts to an exchange of symbolic capital for financial capital (Bourdieu and Haacke, 2005, p. 17). To understand the impact of institutional practices on the production of art, we must also consider the impact of economic and political conservatism on art institutions. Richard Bolton carries out such an investigation in his essay *Enlightened Self-Interest: The Avant-Garde in the '80's* (1998). According to Bolton,

> …art provides the corporation with a way to speak of the public good, even as the corporation furthers its self-interest. Art is used to normalize the power of the corporate class. To this end, corporations have taken over support of the arts from the government. Museums and arts organizations depend upon corporations for survival. (Bolton, 1998, p. 34)

Outlining the political and cultural shifts that took place between the 80's and 90's, Bolton observes that developments in art and politics led to "Fame for critical artists, accompanied by diminished opportunities for change" as corporations expanded their

[26] Rockefeller, David (1966). Culture and Corporation's Support of the Arts. Speech to the National Industrial Conference Board, 20 September 1966.

control in the rise of conservatism and unregulated, aggressive capitalism (Bolton, 1998, p. 23). Bolton examines the impact of the art market, corporate patronage, marketing strategies and the media on the function and meaning of contemporary art, revealing the "*adaptability* of capitalism as it confronts challenge—with a sense of the way that power works through the cultural sphere to control dissent" (Bolton, 1998, p. 23). Bolton's premise is that "Inevitably, those with power in a society will strive to create a culture that reflects their interests and aims",[27] and he argues that ruling elites anticipate and circumvent challenges to this power not through repression but by establishing hegemony:

> A crucial part of this legitimacy is gained in the cultural sphere, for culture cloaks power with invisibility. Culture provides the ruling class with subtle opportunities to enter the public imagination, with ways to legitimate the agendas of the ruling class by associating them with the "universal" human spirit. (Bolton, 1998, p. 24)

Simon Susen states that the functionalisation of culture is a crucial strategy in late capitalism, where economic domination is increasingly mediated by cultural domination. Culture, he argues, is used both as an instrument and as a source of power. Because it functions as a legitimising force and as a commodity at the same time, culture subtly penetrates every sphere of society more efficiently than totalitarian strategies of coercion (Susen, 2011, pp. 194-195).

Corporations put "culture to work" by using art as a marketing strategy, whilst most patronage is handled by marketing departments which practice "strategic philanthropy" (Bolton, 1998, p. 30). In these circumstances, the autonomy and the values of the individual work of art are either negated entirely or become subsumed and distorted in their subservience to capitalist strategy and ideology. Corporate support for the arts effectively results in "a public realm brought under corporate control" (Bolton, 1998, p. 28). For George Weissman, chairman and chief executive of Philip Morris until his death in 2009, business interest in the arts is self-interest:

[27] Whether this is intentional or not is beside the point, art's buying public naturally appreciates works of art that mirror its own values. Bourdieu argues more broadly that culture does not abolish economic divisions in society, it substantiates them: "art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 7).

> Let's be clear about one thing. Our fundamental interest in the arts is self-interest. There are immediate and pragmatic benefits to be derived as business entities. (Weissman in Bourdieu and Haacke, 2005, p. 8)[28]

In the language of corporations, this is known as "enlightened self-interest" (Bolton, 1998, p. 30). Philip Morris International, "the leading international tobacco company", which owns Marlboro and six other cigarette brands (Philip Morris International Management SA Website, 2008) has sponsored the arts since 1965, largely to redeem its unpopular image (Bolton, 1998, p. 32). In recent years, corporations have a growing interest in building art collections, primarily of work by emerging artists. Deutsche Bank claims to

> …promote young artists who with their creative work give society orientation, shake things up, or redefine. We aim to internationalize the collection even further and to incorporate the developing countries to a greater extent. (Deutsche Bank AG website, 2010)

Noble intentions and grand claims for art, however the boom in the art market demonstrated that so-called "emerging artists" provide a high-return investment. Corporations also claim to make art more accessible, according to Deutsche Bank:

> Encountering and engaging with art is also possible outside of established cultural institutions. Making Deutsche Bank Collection more accessible to the interested public is a goal that we have firmly pursued for almost 30 years. […] In 1979, we took a key first step in making our collection more accessible with "Art at the Workplace." Since then, rotating exhibits from the collection have been on display in many offices and conference rooms, and not just in executive suites. Clients and visitors can admire works in our Bank buildings. (Deutsche Bank AG website, 2010)

These art collections are, strictly speaking, not accessible to the public unless they are business clients with access to particular corporate spaces. Art collections offer corporations "great public relations value", while they simultaneously "further the institutionalization of art *as a corporate activity*" (Bolton, 1998, pp. 32-33).

> The corporation has used its enormous power to rob the arts of their role as a space of dissent, as a possible site of uncommodified experience. The museum becomes the site of affirmation of the corporation's project. (Bolton, 1998, pp. 33-34)

[28] Weissman, George (1980). Philip Morris and the Arts. New York: Philip. Morris, Cultural Affairs Department. Reprint of speech delivered at the First Annual Symposium, Mayor's Commission on the Arts and Business Committee for the Arts. Denver, 5 September 1980.

The cooptation of artists' dissent is not possible without the artist's consent. Hans Haacke's installation *On Social Grease* (1975), which is unequivocal in its criticism of corporate involvement in the arts, was originally acquired for the Gilman Paper Company Collection. The plaques mimic the monumental severity of corporate insignia and, as Travis English claims, they "fit more perfectly within the lobby of a multinational corporation's headquarters than within a gallery or museum" (English, 2007). In the corporate collection, the plaques can function either way; taken at face value, they embody corporate ideology. Read ironically, they promote the company's transparency and socially responsibility. For Chin-Tao Wu, the Gilman Paper Company has "actively, and radically, redefined the very meaning of the piece" (Wu, 2002, p. 267). *On Social Grease* was resold at Christie's in 1987, subject to Siegelaub and Projansky's notorious *Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement* (1971). The *Agreement* stipulates, amongst other clauses covering the loan and exhibition of the work, that the artist is due a 15% royalty fee if the work is resold. This has always been viewed by the establishment as "good for artists in principle, but bad for business in fact" (Smith, 1987). At the time, Roberta Smith claimed that

> The sale might be seen to affirm once more the official acceptance of Conceptual art and to suggest, as well, that Mr. Haacke's work can be co-opted and commodified as thoroughly as any other successful artist's. It might also be seen to imply the reverse: that Mr. Haacke's work, which takes the exploitation of culture as one of its subjects, knits so well with the thinking behind the contract that it almost becomes part of his own esthetic. Mr. Weber maintains that the desire to own a Haacke work in the first place "tacitly implies agreement with its socio-political posture". (Smith, 1987)

The most elementary conclusion that one can draw from the histories and legacies of Haacke's work is that works of art have the potential to become perpetual signifying devices. The "relational" structure of Haacke's work interacts and mutates in different contexts, literally testing the social order, "always testing, failing through the rituals of success, succeeding through the rituals of failure" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 41).

Businesses evidently have an interest in the symbolic value of art, which serves to promote and market their political, social and financial agendas. Nevertheless, the work of art is rarely attractive to institutions and businesses in its own right; it is almost exclusively valued according to its accumulated cultural and symbolic capital. The ubiquitous disregard within business and institutional practice for the individual work of art poses a fundamental clash of interests between artist and institution.

The utopian and idealist character of art is associated with its claim to autonomy. For Herbert Marcuse, the autonomy of art amounts to the ineffectuality of art. In his essay *The Affirmative Character of Culture* (2009) originally published in 1968, Herbert Marcuse describes the contradictory nature of art; while art creates positive models against a reality that it protests, these can only assume a utopian character because they are aestheticised and detached from reality. Hence, while art reveals underlying truths about reality, these are taken as a matter of fact, subsumed within the institution and their critical role is thus either neutralised or serves as a consolation:

> What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art. There affirmative culture has displayed the forgotten truths over which 'realism' triumphs in daily life. The medium of beauty decontaminates truth and sets it apart from the present. What occurs in art occurs with no obligation. (Marcuse, 2009/1968, p. 84)

Although art in bourgeois society provides "at least an imagined satisfaction of individual needs that are repressed in daily praxis" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 12), this experience cannot be integrated into life. This lack of tangible effects does not signal the functionlessness of art, instead it "characterizes a specific function of art in bourgeois society: the neutralization of critique" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 13).

> …aesthetic experience is the positive side of the process by which the social subsystem 'art' defines itself as a distinct sphere. Its negative side is the artist's loss of any social function. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 33)

The negative aspect of aesthetic experience amounts to what is essentially a blind spot concerning the subjugation of art in bourgeois ideology:

> These institutions, which determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation. (Buchloh, 1990, p. 143)

The most significant consequence of institutional mediation on art is the overriding ideology of the institution, which impinges on the space of the work, rendering all the work in the institution homogenous.

Art in bourgeois society serves many functions; the most subtle of these functions are ideological and therefore largely unarticulated. The institutionalisation of art as an exclusive field severs art's connections to the world and conceals the functionalisation of art at the service of political and economic interests. The concept of the autonomy of art originates in Kant's description of art as an aesthetic activity that is *purposive but without purpose.* This concept is furthermore consolidated in Adorno's argument that the critical function of art is its *functionlessness*. At the same time, art is put to use in

biennials to attract tourism and community projects to carry out government policies. Art is instrumentalised in museums on behalf of corporations and functionalised in art fairs and auction houses as a form of investment. In all but reputation, art is a formidable industry trading in all forms of culture.

This *contradictoriness* or *ambivalence* of autonomy which Marcuse, Bürger and Benjamin highlight, provides a useful perspective on the development of the dialogical relationship between artist and audience, the complexities of this relationship, the evolution of the goals of artists and the effectiveness and limitations of the strategies they have employed. It also points to the conflict between the *perceived* ineffectiveness of art and the *functionalisation* of art: its compensatory role and its recuperation and instrumentalisation by museums and corporations.

Critique of institutional critique

> The history and achievements of Institutional Critique have to be considered as successfully canonized at this point (Graw, 2006, p. 143)

In her article *From the Critique of Institutions, to the Institution of Critique* (2005), Andrea Fraser defends institutional critique against criticisms that it has become 'institutionalised'.[29] The critical claims of institutional critique have come increasingly under question at a time when artists such as Daniel Buren, "have become art-historical institutions themselves" (Fraser, 2005, p. 100).

Fraser has consistently engaged with representations of the figure of the artist through her work and in her writing, often undertaking to defend institutional critique against the charges of "contradictions and complicities, ambitions and ambivalence" (Fraser, 2005, p. 101). She contends that in "an art world in which MOMA opens its new temporary-exhibition galleries with a corporate collection, and art hedge funds sell shares of single paintings" there is a nostalgia for "a time when artists could still conceivably take up a critical position against or outside the institution" (Fraser, 2005, p. 100). Fraser asks rhetorically:

> How, then, can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-

[29] In his *New York Times* review of Buren's solo exhibition at the Guggenheim in 2005, Michael Kimmelman accuses Buren of "preaching white-box clichés to a converted audience of insiders [which] invariably depends on the largesse of institutions like the Guggenheim". Kimmelman extends his critique to the exclusivity of the art world, or what he calls "special access to special information: privileged ideas circulated within a closed system, the art world's traditional currency" (Kimmelman, 2005).

> encompassing apparatus of cultural reification? (Fraser, 2005, pp. 278-279)

For Fraser, the critique of institutional critique's institutionalisation and obsolescence is based on a misconception. She argues that the assumption that institutional critique opposes "art" to "institution" and the associated assumption that the institution "incorporates, co-opts, commodifies, and otherwise misappropriates once-radical—and uninstitutionalized—practices" (Fraser, 2005, p. 102), is a fallacy because the site-specific interventions of Asher, Broodthaers, Buren and Haacke are a way of both reflecting on and resisting institutional forms of appropriation. Fraser argues that institutional critique does not affirm the contested site of the institutional apparatus and our relationship to it, but problematises and transforms the structure of this relationship: "particularly what is hierarchical in that structure and the forms of power and domination, symbolic and material violence, produced by those hierarchies" (Fraser, 2006, p. 306). For Fraser the only way to accomplish this transformation is "by intervening in the enactment of that relation" (Fraser, 2006, p. 307). Fraser argues that this condition also addresses the "ambivalence" identified with institutional critique, "because to intervene in relations in their enactment also always means *as you yourself participate in their enactment*, however self-consciously" (Fraser, 2006, p. 307).

What makes this participation self-conscious is our degree of complicity with the structures under critique. Andrea Fraser's work *Little Frank and his Carp* (2006) at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a case in point. The work parodies the market-driven ideology and performative self-promotion of the contemporary museum, but the critique is ambiguous, what were the conditions of the work's production, did she sneak secretly into the museum? When we find out that the work was in fact commissioned by the museum, the ambiguity is ameliorated but the work is even more difficult to grasp, what were the conditions of the commission? If the Guggenheim felt threatened in any way, would it have commissioned the work in the first place?

The argument that artists can infiltrate the institution and subvert it from within is either naïve or intentionally misleading. Institutionalisation does not happen from one moment to the next, it is a process of internalisation and it is exploitative of subjective values, desires and personal relationships. Although artists practicing institutional critique maintain an ostensibly critical attitude toward the art world in their work, institutional critique reproduces established critical models as well as institutional conventions. Most artists currently practicing institutional critique function without

causing friction within the institution, erecting a professional career along institutionally established routes:

> Finally and familiarly, this practice runs the risk of reduction in the gallery/museum from an act of subversion to a form of exposition, with the work less an attack on the separation of cultural and social practice than another example of it and the artist less a deconstructive delineator of the institution than its "expert." (Foster, 1986, p. 103)

Institutional critique takes place within the value system it claims to challenge, working with and upholding the very same values and means that it critiques, the aim of institutional critique therefore is to perpetuate the institution.

Epilogue of institutional critique

How has the art world changed after institutional critique? How have museums coped with the criticism? Institutional critique has generated a great deal of discourse in the form of exhibitions, publications and panel discussions. The title of the book *Institutional Critique and After* (2006), edited by John C. Welchman, suggests that it has been superseded. The current phase of institutional critique, exemplified by the practice of artists such as Carey Young, is a critique on the entire apparatus of the art world from an insider's perspective. As an after-thought to institutional critique, a number of artist-run institutions have tried to maintain a relative independence from major institutions without however challenging them in any way. Since the 1990s, institutional critique sits comfortably within art institutions, and artists are explicitly invited by museums to perform this critique. In *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (2009), the editors Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray state that the canonisation of institutional critique "proceeds on a terrain that is quite orderly, operates by clear rules and borders, and is characterized by a certain amount of depoliticization and self-reference" (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p. xv).

Raunig and Ray demarcate two crucial lines of further inquiry. The first is the "line of art production" which in the current phase of institutional critique is a combination social critique, institutional critique and self-critique as institutions invite artists to contribute to their self-definition, which only reaffirms the institutionalisation of institutional critique (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p. xiii). For Simon Sheikh, in response to the expansion of institutional critique beyond art to other forms of institutionalisation "the institutional framework became somewhat expanded to include the artist's role (the subject performing the critique) as institutionalized" (Sheikh, 2006). Consequently, the second area of investigation that Raunig and Ray recommend is the "line of art institutions", which take up critical functions themselves. This development is seen

mainly as a defensive manoeuvre against a backdrop of "repressive cultural policies" and "neo-liberal populist cultural policies". Raunig and Ray recommend further inquiry into "counter-strategies [and] new forms of the organization of critical art institutions" (Raunig and Ray, 2009, p. xiii-xiv).

Simon Sheikh postulates an "expanded notion" of institutional critique. He argues that institutional critique is not a historical movement or genre, but "an analytical tool":

> …a method of spatial and political criticism and articulation that can be applied not only to the artworld, but to disciplinary spaces and institutions in general. (Sheikh, 2006)

Sheikh argues that this "institutionalized critique" is internalised by the museum, and does not merely question the function and role of the institution, it also "becomes a mechanism of control within new modes of governmentality", providing the model for "critical art institutions" (Sheikh, 2006). Institutional critique, he claims, is currently practiced by institutions with the production of academic discourse and discussion panels (Sheikh, 2008). This has come to be known as "new institutionalism" and it describes the practices of institutions that emerged in the 1990s including the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, the Depot in Vienna and the Kunstraum Luneburg. Isabelle Graw argues that this new type of institution adopted principles and strategies associated with institutional critique, such as research, documentation, teamwork, transparency and communication, all of which are completely "in accord with neo-liberal values" (Graw, 2006, p. 142):

> …artistic competencies usually associated with Institutional Critique (research, teamwork, personal risk-taking, and so on) actually feed, sometimes quite perfectly, into what sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have described as "the new spirit of capitalism. (Graw, 2006, p. 139)

Institutions welcome and accommodate artists' critique within their diversified functions, in fact artists' critique provides the means whereby institutions adapt to the conditions of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER TWO: THE VICISSITUDES OF AUTONOMY

The concept of the autonomy of art lays claim to the appreciation of art *as art.* Devoid of any practical function, works of art are evaluated aesthetically and independently of any instrumental imperatives (social, moral, economic, pedagogic etc.). Autonomy characterises the work of art as an aesthetic experience, it therefore also characterises works of art and the criteria for the judgement of art. Ultimately, the status of autonomy extends to the artist and the institutions of art as well. The concept of the autonomy of art is historically constructed and serves to establish and legitimise what we call the "institution of art" in western culture.

Autonomy is an empowering concept for artists but it is also constitutive of the false idealism of art and serves to conceal the connection between culture and hegemony. Autonomy privileges artworks as self-contained objects of aesthetic contemplation—with timeless and universal appeal—not as cultural artefacts implicated in complex social and historically inscribed relationships.

Since the early twentieth century, artists have articulated a self-conscious ambivalence regarding the autonomy of art. Whilst many artists continued to question and challenge popular and essentialist notions of the artist in their practice, artists like Josef Beuys sustained these contradictory notions. Beuys often delivered his famous slogan "every human being is an artist" (Beuys, 1974, p. 48), to suggest that creativity is not the privilege of artists. He nevertheless cultivated a myth around his persona as an artist through the messianic symbolism in his work, in references to his miraculous survival in World War II, in his characteristic attire and rhetorical posture.

The autonomy of art is historically defined through five distinct phases and their associated meanings:

(1) The concept of autonomy is initially an ideological category originating in the late eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy of Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Judgment,* originally published in 1790. Here the concept of autonomy refers primarily to the faculties of aesthetic judgement (or *taste*) as *disinterested pleasure* or *purposiveness without purpose*. In his essay *Kant and the Autonomy of Art* (1989), Casey Haskins argues that Kant "never speaks of *art*—as opposed to the faculties of judgement and taste—as autonomous" (Haskins, 1989, p. 43). Kant's autonomy thesis applies to

aesthetics in general and not to art in particular.[30] Once he has defined the judgement of taste, Kant then superimposes these characteristics onto the work of art.

(2) The concept of autonomy was updated in the nineteenth century with the struggle for the independence of art from social institutions and from claims of morality and social utility.[31] The original concept of autonomy opened up a domain of freedom for art, limited only by the "principle of the unity of the work" (Bürger, 1998, p. 177). Walter Benjamin defines the artist's autonomy as the "freedom to write whatever he pleases" and the decision "in whose service he is to place his activity" (Benjamin, 1969/1934, p. 220).

(3) The artists' historical emancipation from patronage culminated in Aestheticism and the concept of art-for-art's-sake. Thus in the modern era, the value of purposelessness or disinterest is extended to include the critique of society. The concept of autonomy henceforth takes on the meaning of self-jurisdiction because art is not accountable to external rules or values. Peter Bürger defines autonomy primarily on the basis of the separation of the aesthetic sphere from life praxis:

> Under the impression of the irreconcilability of art and modern society, this position is now radicalized in such a way that the work of art may only express its own impossibility. (Bürger, 1998, p. 177)

(4) In the mid-twentieth century—and in tandem with the increasing professionalisation of art—the concept of autonomy is reasserted and taken to its ultimate conclusion in the formalist programmes of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. The concept of autonomy is thus associated with an anachronistic concept of "high art" as a unique object with timeless and universal appeal, the work of a genius.

It is important at this point to consider Casey Haskins' reading of Kant in order to establish the meaning of the term "aesthetics" in this thesis. Casey Haskins distinguishes between two forms of autonomy: a non-instrumental "strict autonomism" associated with Greenberg, which maintains that the evaluation of works of art is limited to their artistic or aesthetic properties. The other view, which Haskins calls "instrumental autonomism", is associated with the pragmatist and Marxist traditions

[30] Haskins states that Kant "stops considerably short of holding that art follows laws of its own, a doctrine which would come into fashion only with the teachings of Hegelian-influenced art historians such as Riegl and Wolfflin" (Haskins, 1989, p. 43, note 3).

[31] In *The Rules of Art* (1996), Pierre Bourdieu argues that the struggles of Manet, Flaubert and Baudelaire against Salon refusals and obscenity trials was an effort to achieve their autonomy from institutions such as the Salon, the Academy, the church and the courts. These artists thus contributed to the emergence of the autonomous field of artistic production (Bourdieu, 1996).

(Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, John Dewey and Monroe Beardsley). This viewpoint emphasises the unique capacity of the artwork to do what other kinds of objects cannot do in the same way and introduces alternative criteria into this judgment. For example, it ascribes criteria of value to works of art that are instrumental to knowledge or education and thus provides a more inclusive framework for ascribing value to works of art. Haskins points out that Kant affirms an instrumental notion of autonomy (Haskins, 1989, p. 43). Kant defines the work of fine art as:

> …a mode of representation which is intrinsically purposive, and which, although devoid of an end, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication. (Kant, 2007/1790, §44, p. 135)

Thus for Kant, the contemplation of artworks does not necessarily appeal *only* to the aesthetic properties of a work of art. The purpose of art is social cohesion through a nondiscursive form of communication. The ultimate goal of this social function is to refine the senses in order to bring about the ethical reign of reason.

> …taste is, in the ultimate analysis, a faculty that judges of the rendering of moral ideas in terms of the senses (through the intervention of a certain analogy in our reflection on both); and it is this rendering also, and in the increased receptivity, founded upon it, for the feeling which these ideas evoke (termed moral sense), that are the origin of that pleasure which taste declares valid for mankind in general and not merely for the private feeling of each individual. This makes it clear that the true propaedeutic for laying the foundations of taste is the development of moral ideas and the culture of the moral feeling. (Kant, 2007/1790, §60, p. 183)

According to Haskins, aesthetic ideas for Kant correspond in their function to produce "systematic discursive thought even though they range […] over a larger universe of discourse". For Haskins this contains the implication that "aesthetic ideas provide us with a proto-knowledge, and to this extent [Kant] regards fine art as instrumental toward a cognitive end" (Haskins, 1989, p. 48).

(5) The fifth aspect of autonomy is the autonomy of the art institution. It consists of the internal rules of art and the interdependence of the players in the field; art is produced in response to other art and to discourses within the field. They come from other artists, curators, critics, the public, administrators, dealers, collectors etc. This is what Peter Bürger refers to when he says that "it is not in and of themselves that works of art have their effect but rather that this effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the works function" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 31). In the twentieth century, this claim will have critical consequences for artists' practice and the

control of meaning in their work. By the end of the twentieth century, forms of institutional critique revealed the pervasiveness of the art institution and the illusory character of autonomy. Autonomy remains a valuable though problematic, controversial and contested concept. The problem of autonomy confronts artists who set out to produce a "political" critique of capitalist ideology from a position of plausible neutrality, one that is circumscribed by the privileged and fortified autonomous institution of art itself.

A self-conscious institution

> …artists, the emblems of freedom, are present in the museum experience in a ghostly fashion, as traces of creative work, as wish-images of non-alienated labour, playing an imaginary role (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 69)

The role of art in western society has undergone major shifts since the eighteenth century, when art was consolidated as an institution. This transition occurred within the conditions established by the concept of autonomy and at roughly the same time as the French Revolution, when the bourgeoisie was in the process of asserting its power (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 26).

> The insights formulated in Kant's and Schiller's[32] aesthetic writings presuppose the completed evolution of art as a sphere that is detached from the praxis of life. We can therefore take it as our point of departure that at the end of the eighteenth century at the latest, art as an institution is already fully developed.[33] (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 26)

For Bürger, autonomy "defines the functional mode of the social subsystem 'art': its (relative) independence in the face of demands that it be socially useful" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 24). Once art was released from the requirement to fulfil a social function, it turned inward to engage with its own conditions of possibility, culminating in the *l'art pour l'art* movement at the end of the nineteenth century. With the historical avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century, "the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism", and it is only when art enters the stage of self-criticism that "the 'objective understanding' of past periods of the development of

[32] Kant, 2007/1790; Schiller, 2001/1794.

[33] The British Museum in London was founded in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759. The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which had been open to visitors upon request since the sixteenth century, was officially opened to the public in 1765. The Belvedere Palace of the Habsburg monarchs in Vienna opened in 1781. The Louvre Museum in Paris was the first public museum, it opened in 1793 during the French Revolution when the National Assembly decreed that the Louvre should be used to display the nation's treasures.

art become possible". The self-consciousness of art is here the precondition of the historical avant-garde and its programmatic efforts to transcend the institution of autonomous art and to integrate art into everyday life with the aim of bringing about utopian social change. Hence, "Dadaism […] no longer criticizes schools that precede it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22). According to Benjamin Buchloh, "one of the essential features of Modernism [was] its impulse to criticize itself from within, to question its institutionalization, its reception, and its audience" (Buchloh, 1982, p. 50).

Thus, in the modern era, art by definition questions its existence: the work of art asks "what am I?" (Hinkle, 1979, p. 28). This radical uncertainty is the only guidance for artists. The promiscuity of art, its unpredictable forms and appearances testifies to this principle, yet at the same time art is proscribed, defined, limited and circumscribed by the institution of art itself. The moment of self-consciousness of art is also the moment of the coming into being of the institution of art. At this moment, it also becomes possible to differentiate between the work of art and its institutional function and designation. A distinction emerges between the singular practices of artists and art as a social institution with a legitimising cultural discourse that enables us to recognise and talk about works of art:

> Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is (Hegel, 1835/1975, p. 11)

In her essay *A Global Counter-Culture?* (2003), Susan Buck-Morss states that in the legitimating discursive field of art history the "very definition of what art *is* involved making critical judgements about the material world" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 66). The question "what is art?" is central to art practice which—rooted in the epistemological criterion of aesthetic judgement—contains the "possibility of aesthetic experience as critique" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 67).

The critical function of autonomous art

> Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived. […] Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 6)

In *Aesthetic Theory* (2002/1970), Theodor Adorno describes the emergence of the autonomous work of art as part of a historical process: western art before the Enlightenment served various social functions. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, artists could no longer rely on religious and aristocratic patronage so they

began to address the market. They were now free to decide what the work would be about. Adorno identifies the autonomy of art with its emancipation from patronage and its subsequent "appropriation of the commodity character, through which art gained the semblance of its being-in-itself" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 239). The dialectical development of autonomy and commodification involved various processes including the development of an art market and the founding of museums and art galleries. "Bourgeois" art emerged when artists established themselves in Europe's burgeoning capitalist market of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After the revolutions of 1848, the bourgeoisie was no longer the revolutionary class, reacting to the ills of modern industrial society, *l'art pour l'art* withdrew from social engagement:

> …commodification became a prison rather than a liberation for the artist. With "art for art's sake", art withdrew from political action; in the modernist era that followed, progressive art lost its self-confidence and turned against the bourgeois culture which produced it. (Hamilton, 2008, p. 289)

Bürger concurs that the failure of the 1848 revolution in France created a political climate wherein "social engagement became as good as impossible", and this "crucially encouraged the radicalization of the autonomy of art". However, he adds that at the same time, there were other interpretations of the autonomy of art, including the formal experiments of Gustav Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarme, and the idea of the "work" which breaks off the semantic relations between the work of art and social reality (Bürger, 1998, p. 177).

In his essay, *Adorno and the autonomy of art* (2008), Andy Hamilton argues that Adorno develops and qualifies Kant's concept of the autonomy of the aesthetic in conjunction with his concept of *purposiveness without purpose*, and his account of genius, through the Hegelian concepts of truth-content, intellectual import and the historical conditioning of artworks (Hamilton, 2008, p. 289-290). Whereas for Hegel, the relationship between art and society is affirmative, Adorno stresses its critical role (Hamilton, 2008, p. 295):

> Progressive art embodies and exists within late bourgeois culture whilst denying by its truth-content that very culture; it deconstructs late capitalism as a false totality. (Hamilton, 2008, p. 290)

Adorno argues that while autonomous art is a commodity, it is not simply a function of bourgeois ideology because it also serves a critical function (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 194). The central dichotomy and paradoxical ambivalence of Adorno's aesthetic theory lies in the opposition between Kant's concurrent emphasis on the autonomy of form

and the commodity status of art. This problem was also addressed by Marx, who emphasised art's social determination (Hamilton, 2008, p. 290).

The autonomy of art, "its growing independence from society", according to Adorno, "was a function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom that was itself bound up with the social structure", because at the time, "the idea of a fundamentally oppositional art was inconceivable" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 225). Adorno provides an account of the artwork's necessary and illusory autonomy as "the social antithesis of society", which is the key to modern art's social dimension (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 8). Adorno's main claim is that art's autonomy and its commodity status are in dialectical opposition:

> The double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context—is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic *and faits sociaux.* They require a double observation that is no more to be posited as an unalloyed whole than aesthetic autonomy and art can be conflated as something strictly social. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 252)

For Adorno the social function of autonomous art in the era of modernism is social critique (Hamilton, 2008, p. 293). Autonomous art is critical in two ways; in the first instance, autonomous art is a critique of heteronomy. Art resists heteronomy by insisting obstinately on its own values and rules. Art sublimates reality's governing principle of self-preservation. By subsuming its subjects into its "self-identity", art releases things from the homogeneity that is foisted on them:

> Aesthetic identity seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality's compulsion to identity. […] Artworks are afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 4)

Adorno's argument is that since art no longer fulfils a social function, it can create its own logic, unconstrained by external imperatives. It is through its refusal of any social function that, according to Adorno, autonomous art acquires a critical function. In a society where everything has been instrumentalised and subjected to the principle of exchange, autonomous art performs a social critique. In this way, autonomous art is more critical than political art.

What would Adorno say if he witnessed the current instrumentalisation of this very function? How would Adorno negotiate the potentially priceless value of art as an object without purpose and the cultural capital this status accrues for the institutions

and corporations that invest in its value? The defence of the autonomy of art glosses over the social and political dimensions of the production of art and the relationship of art to social institutions. Adorno's concept of autonomy proposes to solve this problem by conceiving the autonomy of art as a critical practice on its own terms.

The second critical function of art for Adorno is its functionlessness, whereby it resists the logic of capitalism. Expressing his reservations concerning the critical value of political art, Adorno reconfigures Kant's articulation of the aesthetic as *purposiveness without purpose* (Hamilton, 2008, p. 289) to functionalise its lack of social function. Although works of art are socially situated, they have no social function. To put it more precisely, the function of art, as a critique and resistance of the instrumental logic of capitalism, inheres in its functionlessness:

> What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. Its historical gesture repels empirical reality, of which artworks are nevertheless part in that they are things. Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 227)

For Adorno, the relationship between art and society is not limited to the "insertion of objective elements", which works of art "borrow" from the empirical world. Art's relationship to society is defined by the "unsolved antagonisms of reality [which] return in artworks as immanent problems of form". Thus, works of art represent society without imitating it (Adorno, 2002, pp. 6, 5). Hence, the purpose of autonomous art is to serve no obvious purpose as the apparent negation and critique of functionalism.

Autonomy and heteronomy

Theodor Adorno considers commodification to be the founding moment of art in capitalist society (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 239), therefore commodification in and of itself does not necessarily compromise the critical function of the work of art. In his *Critique of Relational Aesthetics* (2007/2006), Stewart Martin points out that for Adorno the autonomous work of art is "inherently entwined with its commodity form" (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 374).

> …the trademark of consumer goods appropriated by art by means of which artworks distinguish themselves from the ever-same inventory in obedience to the need for the exploitation of capital, which, if it does not expand, if it does not—in its own language—offer something new, is eclipsed. The new is the aesthetic seal of expanded reproduction, with its promise of undiminished plentitude. […] The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 21)

Adorno conceives autonomous art as a concentrated form of commodity fetishism which exposes the inherent contradiction of the commodity because, ultimately, it is *uses* that are exchanged. For Martin this formulation defines the autonomous work of art in terms of its "resistance to being subjected to capital". For Adorno art is thus an "immanent critique of commodification" (Martin, 2007/2006, pp. 374-375). It follows therefore that the critical potential of art does not hinge on challenging its commodity status (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 378), if anything the focus on commodification is merely a distraction.

Stewart Martin argues that for Adorno the critical dimension of autonomous art lies in its critique of the illusion that nothing is valuable in itself, independently of its exchange value, an illusion intensified within a universally commodified culture (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 374). This however suggests that all art is critical of commodity fetishism, regardless of the intentions of the artist or their effectiveness. Martin argues that this is precisely the reason that "autonomous art must incorporate criticism of itself into itself if it is not to function ideologically". Despite Adorno's claim for the essentially critical dimension of autonomy, he does not claim that art is actually autonomous from society, as this would be a fetishisation or illusion (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 375):

> Hence the necessity of autonomous art's anti-artistic or heteronomous dimension, whereby art must criticise its presupposition of received conceptions of autonomous art if it is to avoid suggesting that this autonomy is literally independent of its social constitution. (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 375)

Over and above the internal uncertainty or self-criticism of art (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 2), Adorno indicates that if the autonomous work of art is to function critically in society, this self-criticism must be achieved through mediation with a heteronomous dimension (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 248). Hence, by exposing its internal contradictions, art highlights social contradictions, thus art remains critical despite its complicity. For Adorno, the unavoidable tensions within works of modern art express the conflicts within the larger social and historical processes from which they arise and to which they belong. These tensions enter the artwork through the artist's struggle with social and historically laden materials, and they elicit conflicting interpretations, many of which misread either the internal tensions of the work of art or their connection to conflicts in society as a whole:

> In artworks, the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the

> fissures that occur in the process of integration. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 7)

Bürger describes Adorno's concept of the self-criticism of art in the most precise way, he sees art as a "vacant arcanum" and the autonomy of art as a "game", a convention, which was radicalised in response to the failure of the 1848 revolutions when "social engagement became as good as impossible" (Bürger, 1998, p. 177). Bürger's critique points out that art and autonomy are provisional ideas:

> …the postulate of autonomy in the last third of the eighteenth century responds to central problems of incipient bourgeois capitalist society, and for this reason retains its validity in the two centuries to come, however disputed that validity will come to be. The problems to which this new definition of art reacts are called forth by the transition from a traditional to a modern society and by the changes in attitudes and patterns of life that this conditions. (Bürger, 1998, p. 176)

Bürger characterises these problems as a loss of meaning coupled with alienation amongst individuals who are directed towards increasingly selfish goals. To individuals thus divided in themselves and from their environment "autonomous art opens a world that lets [them] experience perfection as reality, although only at the cost of the strict separation of this from any life praxis" (Bürger, 1998, p. 176).

The historical avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century were "unanimous in their fundamental questioning of the autonomy of art" (Bürger, 1998, p. 177), for them, art was no longer merely a question of material production, but of revolutionising life. However, the historical avant-garde failed both in their attempt to sublate art and in their ambition to revolutionise everyday life. Instead, their anti-art has been recuperated as art. This, according to Bürger, affected "less the relation of art and life than the self-understanding of art". Duchamp's *Fountain* initiated the question of what a work of art *is*, as a necessary moment of art production. For Bürger, artists cannot uphold the autonomy of art without betraying the avant-garde project, neither can they reactivate the avant-garde project because it has failed (Bürger, 1998, p. 178). This is the dilemma in which artists of the twentieth century have been caught, the dilemma theorised but not overcome, Adorno defines this dilemma thus:

> If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. The social totality appears in this aporia, swallowing whole whatever occurs. That works renounce communication is a necessary yet by no means sufficient condition of their unideological essence. The central criterion is the

> force of expression, through the tension of which artworks become eloquent with wordless gesture. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 237)

Bürger, who rejects Adorno's *Theory of the Avant Garde* in favour of Marcuse's critique of aesthetics,[34] suggests that in order to overcome the aporia, artists must attempt to

> …bind the mutually contradictory, that is, to create works, but in such a way that these latter be absorbed in an intention that goes beyond them [they] must invent a new place for art, which is neither within nor outside of art, but on the edge that separates artistic action from other forms of social action. (Bürger, 1998, p. 178)

Strictly speaking, this controversial[35] place is already accommodated in the space of autonomy, described by Adorno as the "double character of art":

> …something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 252)

For Adorno this paradoxical character of art:

> …is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic *and faits sociaux.* They require a double observation that is no more to be posited as an unalloyed whole than aesthetic autonomy and art can be conflated as something strictly social. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 252)

Adorno thus identifies Bürger's concept of "a new place for art, which is neither within nor outside of art, but on the edge that separates artistic action from other forms of social action" (Bürger, 1998, p. 178) and presents the notion of autonomy as a necessary illusion:

> Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived. […] Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 6)

For Bürger this is an "impossible place, which exists nowhere, but rather must in each case be created in the moment" (Bürger, 1998, p. 178). Adorno's thesis of the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy assigns to the status of autonomy a duplicitous

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[34] Bürger's critique underlines the incompatibility of Adorno's theory with central Marxist postulates, illustrated by Adorno's disagreement with Benjamin on the subject of political art.

[35] The incessant question posed by philosophers, art historians and critics as "what distinguishes art from non-art?" Following Adorno closely, Ranciere argues that in avant garde art until the 1960s "the play of exchanges between art and non-art served to generate clashes between heterogeneous elements and dialectical oppositions between form and content […] In this way, art's self-critique became involved in the critique of mechanisms of state and market domination" (Ranciere, 2009, p. 51).

role, whereby art can preserve but also conceal its commodity character. Autonomy is a fetish, a socially constructed ruse. It is a position of complicity but the pay off is substantial: works of art are critical because they protest against the instrumentalisation of everything in capitalist society (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 227). Adorno is critical of the homogenising effect of the culture industry, not of popular culture as such. Adorno fears the potential devolution of the art institution into the cultural industry, a potential outcome that inheres within its autonomy (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 5):

> If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 237)

In both cases, art can potentially revert to entertainment through reification. Adorno is sceptical towards the avant-garde ambition to reintegrate art and life, not because of the manifest failure of the historical avant-gardes to achieve this goal, but because of their inadvertent success.[36] Adorno's contempt for Jugendstil stems from his belief that it opened the floodgates to the commodification and reification of art in capitalist culture through its attempts to reintegrate art and life and served as a prelude to the culture industry (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 239). Today this process takes place with the intervention of the legitimising institutions of art, which administer art on behalf of the public.

Adorno's defence of the subversive potential of autonomous art endures today in the conventional narratives about art and the figure of the artist. Art appears as a space of freedom and inclusivity. Art appears to be apolitical in a way that allows it to be political in its own terms, beyond the dogmatism of political organisations:

> The work that desires nothing, the work without any point of view, which conveys no message and has no care either for democracy or for anti-democracy, this work is 'egalitarian' by dint of its very indifference, by which it suspends all preference, all hierarchy. It is subversive, as subsequent generations would discover, by dint of its radical separation of the sensorium of art from that of everyday aestheticized life. A contrast is thereby formed between a type of art that makes politics by eliminating itself as art and a type of art that is political on the proviso

[36] Peter Bürger argues that the sublation of art was achieved but not in the way intended by the avant-garde, Huyssen similarly points out that "In a sense never intended by the avantgarde, life had indeed become art—in the fascist aestheticization of politics as mass spectacle as well as in the fictionalizations of reality dictated by the socialist realism of Zhdanov and by the dream world of capitalist realism promoted by Hollywood" (Huyssen, 1983, p. 28).

> that it retains its purity, avoiding all forms of political intervention. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 40)

Artists thus implicitly assume a political position through negation. By inhabiting an alternative lifestyle, they demonstrate that other realities are possible. Representations of artists in the media reproduce this bohemian figure of the artist.[37] But in fact, professional relationships in the art world are ritualised, antagonistic and alienating, and artists are essentially producing unique and expensive commodities. The art world effectively functions just like any other competitive and commercial sector of society.

What is the value of artistic autonomy?

> This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead. (Adorno, 2007/1962, p. 194)

Although autonomy is essentially a normative concept, it nevertheless describes the current condition of art accurately: we experience art in dedicated spaces, we regard artworks attentively, we value them more than commodities and we expect artists to prioritise aesthetic values over those of the market. However, since the turn of the century, we increasingly see more social and political content in works of art, artists increasingly expand our notions of the work of art, institutions branch out into the community and into public spaces with a social agenda and governments increasingly encourage and provide funding for community art projects. If the autonomy of art is still a valid concept, then how do we explain the current popularity of political art and the dematerialisation of art into social practice? How does the "ethical turn" affect the autonomous regime of art?

Art practice is no longer outside, no longer high, no longer avant-garde. Art is a culture industry. Autonomy is identified with an outdated formalist idea and rejected. But the problem may lie precisely in the fact that we can no longer lay claim to this autonomy.

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[37] *Basquiat* (1996) directed by Julian Schnabel, reinforces the romantic clichés associated with artists: success, publicity, parties, hangers-on, egotism, isolation and paranoia. *Great Expectations* (1998) directed by Alfonso Cuarón, is an adaptation of the novel by Charles Dickens and relocates the story in 1990s New York, where Finn (Pip) makes it in the art world. The film rehashes all the clichés associated with the heroic artist of post-war America, the enormous expressionist quasi-abstract canvasses accommodated in the studio-loft, the solo exhibition sold out on the opening night, fawning dealers and collectors. *Spaced* (Channel 4, 1999 and 2001) is a British situation comedy written by and featuring Simon Pegg and Jessica Hynes, and directed by Edgar Wright. The character of Brian Topp (Mark Heap) is a caricature combining many popular and often contradictory characteristics associated with artists; he is a conceptual artist but also paints in an abstract style, he is unsuccessful and ambivalent about art, he is eccentric, angst-ridden and obsessive, but also shy and romantic.

The notion of autonomy persists, but only as a fetish. Autonomy has passed from the artist and from the spectator to the institution. What becomes of art in an instrumental, global neoliberal economy?[38] Can art in this context escape the instrumentalisation that converts it into an indifferent commodity? Does the notion of artistic autonomy provide a space of freedom, a way of operating within the conditions that have impoverished both work and life?

Can the notion of autonomy—which the avant-garde rejected in a radical critique—become useful as a critical tool? The avant garde wanted to destroy art. Conceptual artists did not really want to destroy art; they wanted to be artists. The Situationist International wanted to destroy art, to annul it by reintegrating it with life and to bring it to a conclusion as the end point of this reintegration. Artists no longer wish to destroy art; on the contrary, artists wholeheartedly wish to be recognised and included within the canon of art.

Terry Eagleton argues that the aesthetic is a "bourgeois concept" but it aught not to be automatically condemned as "bourgeois ideology" in favour of "alternative forms of cultural politics". The enlightenment, he argues, has after all provided the conditions that enable us to critique it: the "contradictoriness of the aesthetic"—an "amphibious concept" with "real historical complexity"—can only be encompassed by a dialectical kind of thought (Eagleton, 1990, p. 8). Eagleton points out that on the one hand, from a radical political viewpoint, the notion of autonomy within aesthetic discourse is disabling:

> …art is thereby conveniently sequestered from all other social practices, to become an isolated enclave within which the dominant social order can find an idealized refuge from its own actual values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possessiveness. It is also, rather more subtly, that the idea of autonomy—of a mode of being which is entirely self-regulating and self-determining—provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operations. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9)

By emphasising the subjective character of aesthetic autonomy, the museum does not have to justify its operations, curators do not have to justify their selection, and museums do not have to justify their exclusions. Strictly speaking, however the autonomy of art characterises the artist's judgement and the autonomy of the aesthetic characterises the judgement of the public or the critic, not the judgement of

[38] Relational aesthetics in this context is both complicit with neo-liberalism and a means of revealing the contradictions of neo-liberalism.

the bureaucrat or administrator. On the other hand however, and because the concept of autonomy "is radically double-edged", it also emphasises "the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes […] the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9):

> The aesthetic is at once […] the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought. It signifies a creative turn to the sensuous body, as well as an inscribing of that body with a subtly oppressive law; it represents on the one hand a liberatory concern with concrete particularity, and on the other hand a specious form of universalism. If it offers a generous utopian image of reconciliation between men and women at present divided from one another, it also blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards such historical community. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9)

The theoretical category of the aesthetic concerns the "most gross and palpable dimension of the human", it thus constitutes "the first stirrings of a primitive materialism" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 13). Eagleton supports aesthetics (a "science of sensibility") as "a response to the problem of political absolutism" in the face of which the bourgeoisie was ineffectual (Eagleton, 1990, p. 14).

The flaw in the argument that Adorno and Eagleton put forth, namely that art is not necessarily bourgeois ideology, is that the incentives for artists are narrowly bourgeois incentives, motivations that appeal to a bourgeois mentality. If the ambition that motivates the production of art is bourgeois, then how can art be a liberating force? This blind spot in Adorno and Eagleton is probably due to their hesitation to cast off all art as bourgeois, and in fear of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Jacques Ranciere's timely reconceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between heteronomy and autonomy expands on Adorno's theory of autonomy. Ranciere does this primarily through his conception of the dialectics between aesthetics and politics, thereby providing an empowering counterpoint to Adorno's pessimism. He however does not go far enough to stress the value of autonomy. Ranciere's redefinition of the autonomy of art intervenes in the debate over the category of modernity and of the place of art and aesthetics within that category.

In *The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes* (2002), Ranciere reads the fifteenth of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (2001/1794), as the promise of a new regime in art and in life. Following Schiller, Ranciere maintains that *the aesthetic* is a historical regime for the identification of art. The aesthetic regime inaugurates the autonomy of art by suppressing the boundaries between art and life and positing free

aesthetic play as the promise of the "aesthetic revolution". The aesthetic is therefore also something else; it is a way of life. Play in the form of the aesthetic as a "specific sensory experience […] holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community" (Ranciere, 2002, p. 133). Ranciere's aim is to recover *modernism* and *aesthetics* from their detractors. For the most part, he believes they have been misconstrued. He challenges Bourdieu's thesis that the "aesthetic illusion" only serves to mask the reality of class domination, he also challenges Benjamin's notion of the aesthetisation of politics under totalitarian regimes and Adorno's critique of the aestheticisation of every day life by the culture industry as a mechanism of capitalism. So we are left with the question:

> How can the notion of 'aesthetics' as a specific experience lead at once to the idea of a pure world of art and of the self-suppression of art in life, to the tradition of avant-garde radicalism and to aestheticization of common existence? (Ranciere, 2002, p. 134)

According to Ranciere, "aesthetic experience" will both ground the autonomy of art and make way for a new life. Significantly, the "autonomy staged by the aesthetic regime of art" is not that of art, but of the aesthetic as the experience of heterogeneity (Ranciere, 2002, p. 135).

> Understanding the 'politics' proper to the aesthetic regime of art means understanding the way autonomy and heteronomy are originally linked in Schiller's formula. This may be summed up in three points. Firstly, the autonomy staged by the aesthetic regime of art is not that of the work of art, but of a mode of experience. Secondly, the 'aesthetic experience' is one of heterogeneity, such that for the subject of that experience it is also the dismissal of a certain autonomy. Thirdly, the object of that experience is 'aesthetic', in so far as it is not—or at least not only—art. (Ranciere, 2002, p. 135)

Ranciere thus arrives at the relationship between autonomy and heterogeneity via aesthetic experience. For Adorno, although the autonomy of aesthetic experience was established by Kant, this was a progressive step for the autonomy of art which he traces to the mid-nineteenth century and to the rise of the bourgeoisie.

In *A Singular Modernity* (2002), Fredric Jameson addresses the distinction between art and the aesthetic to account for the "operations whereby the notion of autonomy is constructed in the first place, the enabling act that is its precondition". Unlike Ranciere, Jameson rejects the proposition that the autonomy of art comes about through the separation of art from non-art. Rather, autonomy is achieved by a "radical dissociation within the aesthetic itself: by the radical disjunction and separation of literature and art from culture" (Jameson, 2002, p. 176):

> For what is called culture in all its forms is rather an identification of the aesthetic with this or that type of daily life. (Jameson, 2002, p. 177)

Jameson thus also concludes that the aesthetic category is a mode of sensory experience, and the object of that experience need not be limited to autonomous art. For Adorno, art is as different to nature as nature is different to society, he argues that the domination of nature in early modern society brought about a state of affairs whereby nature ceased to be an "object of action" and became an object of the disinterested gaze:

> Like the experience of art, the aesthetic experience of nature is that of images. Nature, as appearing beauty, is not perceived as an object of action. The sloughing off of the aims of self-preservation—which is emphatic in art—is carried out to the same degree in aesthetic experience of nature. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 65)

The autonomy of the aesthetic that characterises the sensory condition of modernity is not the autonomy of art but the "autonomy of the experience" (Ranciere, 2002, p. 136). Jameson argues that "culture,[39] from Schiller and Hegel on (and as late as Eliot), is pre-eminently the space of mediation between society or everyday life and art as such" (Jameson, 2002, p. 177):

> Culture thus stands as the blurring of the boundaries and the passages and movements back and forth from one level or dimension to the other (Jameson, 2002, p. 177-178)

For Ranciere the consequence of the aesthetic revolution is that:

> …everything becomes artistic […] the process of exchange, of crossing the border reaches a point where the border becomes completely blurred, where nothing, however prosaic, escapes the domain of art. (Ranciere, 2002, p. 146)

Institutional autonomy

Autonomy is a necessary requirement for art's claim to the privileged realm of the aesthetic (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 23), thus the institution of art too is defined by the concept of the autonomy of art. This goes a long way to explain that the concept of autonomy survives because the institution of art would be powerless without it. In practice therefore, it appears that artists sanction the institution, rather than the other way around. The art institution clings to the status of autonomy, which guarantees art's symbolic value. It is this symbolic value which the institution trades for economic

[39] Jameson's use of the term "culture" is inclusive of the "aesthetic".

and political forms of value. According to Arthur Danto, once art becomes a commodity and is directed towards ideological and financial interests, it is more vital than ever for the museum to maintain its status as the autonomous realm of the aesthetic, "requiring the ideology of disinterestedness" in order to disguise the fact that the museum "has been transformed into a showroom for classy investments" (Danto, 1998, p. 133):

> The museum's spiritual authority is essential if the corporation is to enjoy any of the economic benefits of its investment in culture. Small wonder that museum directors and curators must insist on the purity of their institutions! Small wonder the museum must represent itself as the shrine of "objects of pure creativity"! It could not serve the end of crassness if it were perceived as crass in its own right. (Danto, 1998, pp. 134-135)

The aesthetic is mobilised by museums and corporations for the production and dissemination of commodities, it thus becomes one more commodity in the exchange process of global capital. When the symbolic value of art is thus compromised, it becomes vital for the museum to adhere to its status as the autonomous realm of the aesthetic. However, as the work of Hans Haacke reveals, the role of autonomy in the institutional monopoly on the definition of art has consequences beyond the barter of cultural capital.

Hans Haacke has provoked the defensive reaction of institutions on numerous occasions. For the exhibition *PROJEKT '74: Kunst bleibt Kunst* at the Wallraf-Richardz-Museum in Cologne, Haacke made *Manet-PROJEKT '74*. He documented the chronological history of collectors who had owned Manet's paining *Bunch of Asparagus* (1880), which was in the museum collection since 1967. Ten panels detailed personal information on each owner, including Max Liebermann, who was barred from working in 1933 due to his Jewish background. Another owner was Hermann J. Abs, Chairman of the purchasing committee of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and log-term chairman of Deutsche Bank who had held an influential position in the economic politics of the Third Reich. The work exposed the widespread practice of concealment of the National Socialist past in the Federal Republic of Germany (Buchmann, 2007). Predictably, Haacke's piece was banned. The museum director forced the exhibition curators to exclude Haacke's work from the show[40] (Grasskamp, 2004, pp. 53-54).

[40] In protest of the censorship, Daniel Buren hung photocopies of Haacke's Manet Project in his section of the exhibition, these were subsequently removed by the museum. Marcel Broodthaers and the gallerist Paul Maenz also expressed their solidarity. This experience

According to Travis English, Hans Haacke's work denies the autonomy of aesthetic experience and the cultural autonomy of the museum as a neutral space by denying the privilege of aesthetic experience through his appropriation of the "typically non-aesthetic" (fact sheets, advertising banners and corporate plaques). Once the museum is denied its "institutional differentiation" the museum "becomes yet another relational space of everyday life" (English, 2007). English draws a distinction between Haacke's appropriation of non-aesthetic objects and the articulation of the readymade tradition initiated by Marcel Duchamp and developed by pop and neo-avant-garde artists. Duchamp's *Fountain* "actually serves to legitimize the aesthetic context of art" because once it is allocated a place in the museum, the readymade becomes transformed:

> …it no longer exists in the world of use value, but is now elevated to the realm of the aesthetic, where it is imbued with all of the symbolic value of any traditional work of art. Art, as Duchamp brought to our attention, is not about precious materials, artistic genius, originality, etc., but about the context into which it is placed, that of the aesthetic. (English, 2007)

Departing from the assumed separation between cultural and social fields, Duchamp demonstrated that it was not the specific quality of an object but only the place and form of its presentation that decided its status. Haacke insisted on the continuity between cultural and social fields, thereby unmasking the interests of the seemingly neutral museum space, and the political use of culture: "While Duchamp used the concept of the autonomy of art, Haacke attacked it" (Germer, 1988, p. 65). Thus although Duchamp's readymade emphasised the difference between the *rule* and the *move* and initiated a new language-game in art practice, the readymade ultimately became subsumed into aesthetic discourse as one more artistic medium, losing its potential for rupture.[41] This is precisely the rupture that Haacke's work performs, and thereby "shows us that the legitimacy of the autonomous aesthetic realm only exists if we cling to the illusion that the museum is a *space in itself*, set aside and apart from the spaces of everyday exchange" (English, 2007). These periodic ruptures are absorbed within the tradition of art through institutional discourse.

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reinforced Haacke's "mistrust regarding the alleged independence of cultural institutions and contingent guarantees of artistic freedom" (Grasskamp, 2004, pp. 54, 56).

[41] Helen Molesworth concurs that "Far from destroying art, Duchamp's profound challenge ultimately served to create an enormous field of aesthetic possibility. It helped liberate artists from conventional modes of working, contributing to a climate that permitted and rewarded an increasingly porous idea of art's possibilities" (Molesworth, 2003, p. 28).

Haacke was making systems art and social critique up until his solo exhibition *Systems* (1971, Guggenheim Museum, New York). The exhibition was cancelled after Haacke refused to withdraw his work *Shapolsky et al Manhattan Real estate Holdings. A Real-Time Social System. As of May 1, 1971* (1971), which shed an unfavourable light on one of the museum trustees. In a notorious incident, the museum cancelled the show when Haacke refused to exclude two documentations of Manhattan real estate holdings and a poll of the museum's visitors.[42] In a letter to the artist, Thomas Messer, the museum's director, justified the cancellation:

> We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. On those grounds the trustees have established policies that exclude the active engagement toward social and political ends. It is well understood, in this connection, that art may have social and political consequences, but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalized, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not as you propose, by using political means to achieve political ends, no matter how desirable these may appear to be in themselves. We maintain, in other words, that while art cannot be arbitrarily confined, our institutional role is limited. Consequently, we function within such limits, leaving to others that which we consider outside our professional competence. (Messer, 1971, pp. 248-249)

According to this logic, Haacke is using "political means" with "ulterior motive", and his work is therefore judged inappropriate for inclusion within the museum, which is characterised as institutionally limited to pursuing neutral "esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient".[43] According to Arthur Danto, Thomas Messer found himself in the:

> …desperate and unaccustomed position of formulating a philosophical theory to keep out of museum precincts a work that might be taken to call into question a corporate presence that, as Haacke was to recognize, *constitutes* the atmosphere of the museum today. (Danto, 1998, p. 132)

The claim of the non-instrumental value of autonomy is misleadingly used to disguise the political and ideological function of the institution. According to Stefan Germer,

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[42] Thomas Messer, director of the Guggenheim Museum 1961-1987, "also discharged the curator, Edward Fry, for persisting in championing an art indexed as unsuitable" (Danto, 1998, p. 129). In the same year, Buren's installation at the Guggenheim International Exhibition was removed. In 1974, the museum removed Haacke's installation *Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees*, 1974.

[43] For an analysis of the ideological foundations of Messer's argument see Alberro, 1997.

"the museum is defined as a neutral, nonsocial, apolitical institution" and the work of art "is expected to confirm this fiction" (Germer, 1988, p. 64). The work is thereby also expected to confirm that art is ontologically different to other forms of social production. According to Stefan Germer, this conceals another, much more subtle function of the institution:

> Far better than any restriction of content, this institutional insistence on the specificity of artistic practice neutralizes all political implications of an artwork, since it forces the artist to depoliticize his work in his choice of means. Only in a generalized and unspecific way is "outside reality" accepted into the museum space; the boundary between art and society is thus kept intact, while the social determination of the artwork remains unreflected and the political character of museum decisions unacknowledged. (Germer, 1988, p. 65)

The museum's threat of exclusion thus brings about a regime of self-censorship. Messer may have sincerely tried to preserve a privileged space for art, because—as we are constantly reminded—if art does not occupy a space outside the normal functions of society then art is just another node in the process of production and consumption. If the ambiguous designation "art" is consigned to a profession within the general economy then its products cannot command a special status. However, according to English, Haacke's provocation demonstrates that "the aura of the aesthetic is not only illusory, but that it is used strategically by institutions—both the museum and the corporation—to maintain their power and to sublimate the reality of their relations" (English, 2007). The alliance of art with totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century rendered art with overtly political objectives vulnerable to the criticism of externally determined purposes and charges of propaganda, which negate the value of art. The posture of neutrality that institutions maintain raises them above any such suspicion.

Autonomy and philosophy

> Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 23)

Theodor Adorno and Jacques Ranciere suggest that essentially, it does not really matter what artists do, their work is critical by the very fact of its existence. But in an administered world, where everything is commodified, subsumed into spectacle and valued heteronomously, how does art manage to perform this critical role merely by

existing? How does Adorno's thesis of art's opposition to society fare today when art functions just like every other professional field?

> By interacting with the global economy art subjects itself to external value measurements via monetary value, celebrity capital, redefinition through criticism, the specifics of purchase, sale, government grants and any other manner by which it perpetuates itself. (Zimmerman, 2012)

For Ranciere, the work is critical due to the autonomy of aesthetic experience: it is "as an autonomous form of experience that art concerns and infringes on the political division of the sensible" (Ranciere, 2009, p. 32). Following Adorno, Ranciere maintains that art is political not because of its manifest content but because of its aesthetic constitution and the distance it takes from society's functions (Ranciere, 2009, p. 23).[44]

> …the specificity of art consists in bringing about a reframing of material and symbolic space. And it is in this way that art bears upon politics. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 24)

This description however would seem to guarantee that all art is political. Additionally, although artworks assume a "distance" from social functions, the art world itself does not. The problem of the affirmative character of art and its relationship of complicity with what Ranciere calls "consensus" still persists. For Adorno if art is critical it is because of the autonomy of the artist's activity:

> By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as "socially useful," it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticize the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined. Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 226)

Contemporary art however is entirely integrated within the political and financial power structures of "a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 226). This includes the entire spectrum of art production, whether it is relational art, socially-engaged art, biennial art, museum installations, commercial art or critical art, which Ranciere defines as "a type of art that sets out to

[44] This definition would normally exclude relational aesthetics, which Nicholas Bourriaud defines as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 113).

build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation" (Ranciere, 2009, p. 45). Other functions of art range from the production of wealth and tourism (the market, regeneration), the production of cultural capital (institutions, corporations), fulfilling state social policies (socially-engaged art, community projects) and political agendas (activist art, abstract art[45]).

Art that is institutionalised—whether in the gallery and museum circuit, the market or by public funding bodies—is instrumentalised, functionalised in one way or another and therefore heteronomously defined, not autonomous. The values of neo-liberalism are the values of the institution of art. In order to acquire visibility in the art world an artist must make the right career choices, like any other aspiring professional:

> Fewer and fewer professional artists are "outsiders" who acquire their artistic education through romantic involvement in "life" and then go on to invest that productive power. Generally speaking, the *curricula vitae* of artists increasingly resemble those of highly qualified specialized workers. Hence, it is becoming almost impossible to reinforce the exceptional status of the art object—which has often been transfigured but also irrationalized by reference to the exceptional lives of the artists as bohemians, freaks, and other *hominess sacri*—in this way. (Diederichsen, 2008, p. 34)

These developments suggest that we need to take seriously Danto's notion of the end of art, or more precisely, of the end of a way of thinking about art. Art has not so much become neutralised by being cut off from the social conditions that made it possible, art is a cultural industry, and even art that seems to serve no practical end, does serve to promote the illusion that art is still an autonomous practice. It is the institutions of art—which legitimise art—that have taken over this autonomous function, both by promoting autonomy as a legitimating concept and by undertaking the role of legislator in place of the artist.

Adorno and Ranciere both fail to mention the role of the institution of art as the legitimating apparatus of the art field. For Ranciere, "art" designates "the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such" (Ranciere,

[45] Diederichsen argues that "it was precisely when [artists of the New York school] became more individualistic that their work became especially useful to the state" (Diederichsen, 2008, p. 35). This demonstrates that abstraction is subject to any accretion of value, e.g. decoration (Adorno, 2002, p. 29). It must be asked why the most vocal and influential voice in the defence of the autonomy and purity of art subjected it to the most insidious instrumentalisation, and whether Greenberg's thesis was really a misreading of Kant after all. On the promotion of abstract expressionism by Greenberg with CIA funds see Saunders, 2000.

2009, p. 23). We might assume that this space is an abstract space of discourse, although equally it may designate the institution of art. Ranciere continues:

> …what links the practice of art to the question of the common [and here we anticipate that the institution must play at least a partial role] is the constitution, at once material and symbolic, of a specific space-time, of a suspension with respect to the ordinary forms of sensory experience. (Ranciere, 2009, p. 23)

Ranciere is not referring to the aesthetic suspension of normal forms of perception which is not the exclusive domain of art, but to the suspension of ordinary forms of relating to the world OR IS HE?

This meditative condition of suspension is not accommodated in the real world, but in the contemplative space of the museum. Kant understands the aesthetic as "the domain of disinterested, distanced contemplation, involving a special attitude, the preserve of experts or 'aesthetes'" (Hamilton, 2008, p. 290). Although it is true that one requires at least time and a receptive disposition to enjoy works of art, this does not necessarily mean that the experience of a work of art should take place under specific conditions, or that the viewer must be in a particular frame of mind to enjoy a work of art. As Hamilton argues, "the aesthetic does not involve a special attitude, the preserve of experts or "aesthetes", but is a ubiquitous and democratic phenomenon" (Hamilton, 2008, p. 290). Adorno acknowledges the egalitarian character of art and then proceeds to prescribe the limits, the function, the aim and the strategies of art. Ranciere too says that art is defined by what it is not, but also proceeds to pronounce judgements on art in terms of the theoretical categories in which he has placed it. Unlike George Dickie's and Arthur Danto's pragmatic, institutional theories of art and Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of art, aesthetic theory is always declaring prescriptive statements on art. Bourdieu and the pragmatists, on the other hand provide descriptive statements about the status of art in society. A truly critical approach would have the task of *investigating* whether art is in fact subordinate to practical ends, such as the pursuit of knowledge or social status the exchange of capital, the fulfilment of social policies, corporate publicity, cultural tourism and profit.

CHAPTER THREE: Great Expectations

The institution of art is articulated through dominant forms of art practice, discourse, pedagogy, modes of display, dissemination and reception. The institution of art produces artists as well as museums, archives, galleries, markets, journals, art schools and audiences. These institutions undergo paradigm shifts in response to the new territories explored and established by artists, but they also respond to shifts in the production of knowledge and shifts in society as a whole. These institutional paradigm shifts are then neatly historicised as shifts of the entire chaotic and asynchronous field of art. However, what changes during these revolutions is not so much the work of the artists, but the practice of institutions. Anticipating Jacques Ranciere's "regimes" of art, Bürger points out that "periodization in the development of art must be looked for in the sphere of art as institution, not in the sphere of the transformation of the content of individual works" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 31). For example, art institutions recuperate the precedents set by artists in the 1960s and 1970s, some of these were singular practices, marginalised and trivialised at the time, others were very particular to their location. They were experimental and critical practices, they were purportedly dematerialised, critical of the fetishism and commodification of art, critical of the institution of art, critical of the primacy of the visual, critical of authorial authority, critical of the elitism and exclusivity of art, critical of the spectacle and critical of representation. These repudiated practices are subsequently vindicated by assimilation into "art's ontological norm" (Deutsche, 1986, p. 20), historicised into coherent movements and captured by the institutions. Art institutions, which lag behind the times and avoid controversy because they are inherently conservative, nevertheless become identified through association with the practices they have recuperated. Institutions furthermore appropriate artistic strategies by making them the subject of themed exhibitions, panel discussions, conferences, talks and workshops.

These institutional shifts have a decisive and broad impact on emerging practices because they always represent the current status of art. They define the programme of museum and exhibition displays and practices. They define the criteria for entry into art schools and the curricula and structure of art schools. Along with government policies, they define the criteria for public funding of art production and dissemination. They define art as such, retroactively, until the next shift.

In the intermediate periods, artists have consistently since the end of the nineteenth century expressed their disagreement with the dominant institutional practices that claim to represent them. Artists' critiques of the institution have taken the form of non-

participation, strike, activist demonstration and alternative institutions. More significantly, artists have incorporated their critique into their own work with strategies of evasion, including resistance to the art object, to theorisation, to authorship, to genius and the cult of the celebrity artist etc. And the cycle begins anew. Since the avant-garde initiated a critique of the institution, artists have elaborated countless forms of institutional critique.

According to Boris Groys however, "artists working after the emergence of the modern museum know (in spite of all their protests and resentments) that they are working primarily for museum collections […] These artists know from the outset that they will be collected—and they actually want to be collected" (Groys, 2002). A deeply entrenched ambivalence thus characterises artists' regard for institutions of art.

> It certainly seems to be the case that many contemporary artists have a lightly diffident but strangely enmeshed relation to art institutions, which, in turn, grant them almost unlimited permission for their ambivalence. (Welchman, 2006, p. 14)

Whereas artists continue to stage exhibitions and events in non-art spaces, artists without broad visibility in the art world cannot participate in the competitive arena of contemporary art. Museums incorporate the studio and together with art journals, they set the themes for current art debates. Institutions select, display and promote art; they establish practices and perceptions of art. Institutions organise, fund and promote exhibitions, competitions, discussions, debates and exchanges between artists, intellectuals and the public. Auction houses, biennials and art foundations establish systems of value and systems of circulation. Museums and galleries, according to Dave Beech, "do not only threaten practices, they also sustain them" (Beech, 2006, p. 10). Indeed, what would art be without institutions?

One can scarcely imagine art without museums, art schools, galleries and myriad other institutions that define not only the discursive field of art, but the productive field as well. There is scarcely an aspect of artistic practice and identity that does not now depend on one or more institutions for its articulation and legitimisation. Pierre Bourdieu discerns three levels of institutionalisation: (1) the institutionalisation of the aesthetic gaze as a pure gaze, capable of considering the work of art in and for itself; (2) the institutionalisation of art *as an object of contemplation* and (3) the institutionalisation of galleries and museums with the role of conserving the work of art materially and symbolically (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 36). In fact, rather than following artistic production, institutions now claim that they are at the forefront of experimental and innovative art production. Small alternative spaces and artists' collectives are

institutions as well, their overall short-term impact within the field is however negligible unless they establish alliances with dominant institutions.

In his article *Institutionalisation for all* (2006), Dave Beech comments on what he calls the "largely unspoken and unexplained distaste with institutionalisation", and observes that evidently, "Something vital is ostensibly lost in this process of institutionalisation". Beech refers to Bourdieu's notion of art's "inverted economy", "whereby art is esteemed for the distance it takes from the established measures of value: wealth, power, popularity, etc." (Beech, 2006, p. 8), hence:

> Institutionalisation occurs when the social system gets a grip on art, threatening art's autonomy, independence and dissent. (Beech, 2006, p. 8)

How do artists perceive their own position within the institution? What are artists' expectations of art and the art institution? What alternative conditions do they envisage for art?

Institutionalisation

> These institutions, which determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation. (Buchloh, 1990, p. 143)

Art institutions present two major problems for artists, in the first case, although institutions are "supporting structures" for art, the opportunities they provide for the production of art by way of gallery exhibitions, commissions, residencies etc. are *defining* contexts. Secondly, art institutions retroactively recuperate works of art by *re-defining* them in art-historical contexts. In the process of institutionalisation, art is separated from its particular context (de-contextualised) and subsequently re-contextualised as art (neutralised). The condition of "art" with its associated ideologies and exclusions overrides any particular (and temporary) recuperation.

Art does not exist in an ideal abstract space but in real spaces, in museums, biennials, galleries, art fairs, on the street. Depending on where we encounter the work of art it appears to alternate between precious artefact or commodity, between aesthetic experience or social relation, between experiment or monument. Prestigious and imposing museum and gallery spaces immediately feel like churches or shopping malls, they reduce the audience to spectators or consumers of something that is always beyond reach. When we speak of spectator passivity and lack of engagement, this is because everything is mediated. Finding themselves thus on either side of a mediated

and inauthentic relationship, artist and audience feel cheated. The museum or gallery space is not just a physical space of display; it is an entire set of practices, conventions and aura around the work of art. Artists thematise and resist this defining context in their work, only to be subsumed once again within the institution. Within the space of the gallery, artists enter into relationships of dependency and rituals of participation that are inextricably linked to the sustainability of their practice: these spaces effectively define what artists produce. Once inside the institution, artist become complicit with it, see eye to eye with its ideology, accept its values and cannot sustain an independent critical position without endangering their own precarious position within the institution.

Disappointed with his exclusion from the exhibition *When attitudes become form* (1969), at Kunstahlle Bern, Daniel Buren pasted his posters in the public space outside the venue and "was arrested for executing a poster project illegally in the streets" (Birnbaum, 2005, p. 53). He subsequently launched a campaign of similar protest strategies in public spaces in conjunction with his participation in exhibitions.[46] His official exhibition participation earned him recognition while the postering served to promote his work as radical and cutting edge. With installations such as *Travail in situ* (1971, Wide White Space, Antwerp), Buren brought the two practices together by lining up striped posters (which were also invitations to the exhibition) along the wall to form a band which extended out of the gallery space. Arguably, Buren's early attempts to destabilize traditional notions of art were motivated by a desire to provoke the attention of the art world, because he abandoned this provocation once he was incontrovertibly established within the art world. Although Buren remained constant with regard to his stated aim to use stripes throughout his career, his use of coloured glass in recent works *in situ*, like Dan Flavin's[47] coloured neon installations, has evolved into a form of decorative ambience for museums.[48]

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[46] *Affichage sauvage* (1969), Summershow, Seth Siegelaub Gallery, Paris, *Affichage sauvage* (1970), International Biennial, Tokyo, *Within and Beyond the Frame* (1973), John Weber Gallery, New York.

[47] See Dan Flavin's Untitled (to Piet Mondrian who lacked green) and Untitled (to Piet Mondrian through his preferred colors, red, yellow and blue) (both 1986), at the exhibition Making Histories Changing Views of the Collection (2011), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

[48] See the exhibition *The Eye of the Storm: Works in situ by Daniel Buren* (2005), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and *Architecture, contre-architecture: transposition* (2010), *In situ* project, Mudam Luxembourg. According to the museum press release, Buren is "subverting, not without a certain irony, the invitation to exhibit" at the museum, but he is also "emphasizing certain architectural characteristics of the museum" <http://www.mudam.lu/en/expositions/details/exposition/daniel-buren/>.

The solution must necessarily lie in creating new contexts and to conceive of new ways to think of art in social space. Not to salvage existing institutions, which like all institutions ultimately seek to stabilise and augment their power. Anton Vidokle who champions the concept of artistic sovereignty (Vidokle, 2010), seems to run out of imagination beyond the familiar problems of artist-run spaces:

> Artists' initiatives these days from the start mimic existing institutional and commercial structures: incorporate, establish a board of directors, sell memberships, produce benefit auctions and market editions, sell artworks, etc. To think that this has no effect on their programming or the content they generate would be naïve. There is virtually no period of experimentation before this type of "normalized" behavior sets in. (Obrist, Vidokle and Aranda, 2007, p. 17)

David Beech concurs:

> It is clear that a number of artist-run spaces are set up entrepreneurially to catch the attention of the market and art's leading public institutions. Such spaces may be funded and managed as independent concerns, but they are in no way ideologically or culturally independent of art's institutions. (Beech, 2006, p. 10)

Alexander Alberro says that by the 1980s, many artist-run spaces in New York were firmly established "with professional administrators who developed expanded exhibition programmes and sought general audiences" (Alberro, 1998, p. 57). JJ Charlesworth places a similar shift in London in the 1990s:

> It was the concentration of power in the hands of certain institutions that provoked the formation of the ICA (and subsequently the Independent Group). A couple of generations later, it was a similar concentration of power that drove the explosion of artist-run initiatives that characterised the London art world of the 1990s. With the rising cost of property in the last decade, that dynamic has largely disappeared from the London art scene, shifting from non-commercial spaces to commercial spaces… (Charlesworth, 2008)

Charlesworth argues that the Independent Group, which was central to the formation of the ICA claimed "the legitimacy that came from championing an art that related to contemporary experience, rather than the institutionalised conventions of a culture rooted in the past" (Charlesworth, 2008). Artist-run spaces are currently regarded as springboards to the market or as risky subsidiaries of major galleries; they have thus steadily discredited their reputation as autonomous spaces.

JJ Charlesworth argues that art institutions are in large part responsible for producing an art scene, rather than merely representing an existing one. Crucially, he suggests that institutions have the option to support "different forms of artistic practice and

presentation" (Charlesworth, 2008). This of course is much easier said than done, institutions are not only motivated to stay ahead and current in the work they present. Institutions are themselves actors in a much broader national and international competitive field and they need to meet their targets as well as their budgets. Since the 1990s a more overtly political form of art made a reappearance on the major stages of the art world, from the singular work of artists blanket-branded "relational aesthetics" in the 1990s to exhibitions spearheaded by Documenta,[49] which drew much of the critical fire and were subsequently followed by other institutions in the 2000s.[50]

David Beech argues that institutionalisation threatens to identify art with the "conservative defence of art as a minority culture of permanent values" and suggests that the answer lies in an engagement with "the specifics of the social system that art is gripped by in the process of institutionalisation" (Beech, 2006, p. 8). The question "how do independent institutions become sedimented and trapped in conventions and power struggles" is urgent and warrants research. Beech describes recuperation as "an effect of the cultural capital that is conferred on the artwork by the authority of the institution that houses and frames it" (Beech, 2006, p. 9) and cites Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), as the typical example of how the institutionalisation of the avant-garde was effectively a recuperation of the readymade[51] as modernist object:

> The urinal may be worthy of aesthetic attention but to frame it in terms of an untroubled aesthetic or formal experience is to reassert the categories and values of art's institutions over the subversion of those institutions by anti-art and the values of the readymade. It is an act of recuperation which converts the avant-garde critique of art into an example of acquiescent art. (Beech, 2006, p. 8)

For Beech, the overemphasis of the avant-garde negation of dominant culture is at the expense of the avant-garde's "principled practices", such as the "death of the author,

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[49] *Documenta X* (1997), curated by Catherine David and *Documenta XI* (2002), curated by Okwui Enwezor.

[50] For example the exhibition *Uncertain States of America*, Serpentine Gallery (2006), curated by Daniel Birnbaum and Hans Ulrich Obrist, culminating in the exhibition *New Order* at the *White Cube* (2011), which accumulated a broad collection of work characterised by the predominantly grey and rough patina of "political art" aesthetics behind the black glass of the hermetic white cube in London's Mason's Yard.

[51] Despite his protests, Duchamp facilitated this recuperation by authorising a total of fifteen replicas of the urinal. Three replicas were authorised between 1950 and 1963: the 1950 New York Reproduction requested by the Sidney Janis Gallery (Philadelphia Museum of Art), the 1953 Paris Reproduction was lost and the 1963 Stockholm Reproduction (Moderna Museet). In 1964, Duchamp authorised a limited edition series of eight urinals and four proofs, fabricated in Milan by gallerist Arturo Schwarz (Durantaye and Hollander, 2007).

the attack on the primacy of the visual, the dematerialization of the art object" (Beech, 2006, p. 9). This is however a radical misunderstanding of the avant-garde because these "principled practices" are merely means, transitional and contingent strategies that have to be continuously reinvented in different contexts. It is precisely these practices that are recuperated and recalibrated as aesthetic forms in dominant art discourses; Duchamp's *readymade* is such an institutionalised practice.

The resistance to commodification by making art that cannot be sold surely only makes sense in the context of a practice that negates instrumentalisation. Although it may be a particularly potent aesthetic strategy, what is particular about dematerialisation is its origin as a resistant practice. And theoretically, it is a very cunning strategy; by removing the possibility of any material profit, the dematerialised work of art serves no interests and therefore becomes immune to instrumentalisation. Once dematerialised art becomes a consecrated form of art, then it is just a matter of time before a market springs up. In her disillusioned *Postface* to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object From 1966 to 1972* (1973), Lucy Lippard laments that:

> Hopes that "conceptual art" would be able to avoid the general commercialization, the destructively "progressive" approach of modernism were for the most part unfounded. It seemed in 1969 that no one, not even a public greedy for novelty, would actually pay money, or much of it, for a xerox sheet referring to an event past or never directly perceived, a group of photographs documenting an ephemeral situation or condition, a project for work never to be completed, words spoken but not recorded; it seemed that these artists would therefore be forcibly freed from the tyranny of a commodity status and market-orientation. Three years later, the major conceptualists are selling work for substantial sums here and in Europe; they are represented by (and still more unexpected—showing in) the world's most prestigious galleries. (Lippard, 1973, p. 263)

Very few people find this outcome surprising anymore, we have become accustomed to these paradoxes. This is why it matters little if, as Beech argues, the recuperation of the avant-garde was not "complete and final" and the institutionalisation of the avant-garde is not always achieved on the same terms:

> Rather than preserving the pre-established cultural settlement, however, the institutionalisation of anti-art has infected art's institutions with a critical discourse on art's institutions. In fact, over the last 10 to 15 years art's institutions have reconfigured themselves largely in terms of the categories and values of the Avant Garde, undoing much of the curatorial work that had converted the Avant Garde into an aesthetic style or spectacular cul-de-sac. (Beech, 2006, p. 8)

Beech argues that recuperation must be maintained and safeguarded by the institution from "radical reclamation" and argues that despite being "framed as authorised", avant-garde art is available to the public and to the possibility of reversal of recuperation by the "social forces that underpin subversive culture" (Beech, 2006, p. 8). At the same time however, as Bourdieu argues, conservative forces are also "ceaselessly renewed", whether these are institutions, state and business enterprises or the media (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 343). Thus construed, critique is essentially a game of rhetorical hide-and-seek, incapable of initiating tangible change. Beech however argues in favour of the transformative effect of critique:

> Critique, if it is to have a transformative effect, needs to build alternative institutions. If critical culture is not to be converted into mainstream culture without remainder then it needs to institutionalise its alternative values. (Beech, 2006, p. 10)

Beech is right in arguing that we need to reinforce values that are alternative to the current "mainstream", however, if we are not talking about the transformation of "mainstream culture" then what transformation are we talking about? It makes little sense to think of this transformation taking place within the fringes of the art world. The only way to really change anything is to start with pragmatic short-term goals and pursue them with self-sufficient means. For artists this means establishing sustainable practices and independent networks. Beech proposes that a "stronger brand of independence" than the entrepreneurial art-run space is necessary for a "substantial divergence from business-as-usual":

> The first condition of art's independence is not art's isolation but its contestation of the cultural field, either by setting up alternative spaces or by occupying existing spaces differently. (Beech, 2006, p. 10)

Beech's suggestion however is for more institutions, because "alternative spaces, artist-run galleries and artist-led art magazines are institutions":

> Art's existing institutions can be reused independently if they are treated as contested spaces. Independence, resistance and dissent have to be manufactured. (Beech, 2006, p. 10)

Although it is true that independence must be "manufactured", it is clear that the intention to create alternative spaces or to occupy spaces differently has failed. This notion of institutionalisation would have to depart from the model of the New York group *Collaborative Projects* (Colab), which was formed in 1977 and incorporated as a non-profit organisation in 1978 to access government funding available to arts organisations (Ault, 2002, p. 217). *Colab* obtained government grants and produced

and sponsored large thematic exhibitions, films and screenings, *X Magazine*, *Potato Wolf* a weekly live experimental TV series broadcast on Manhattan Cable. With its own sources of funding, *Colab* was in control of its own exhibitions and cable TV shows, and bypassed the bigger, more established alternative spaces. However, if the long-term aspiration behind these intentions is to claim a stake in the contested territory of the mainstream art world then they will always be vulnerable to recuperation and co-optation.

In his *Frieze* article *Under the Canary* written in 1992, David Batchelor observed the rising trend of DIY exhibitions in warehouse spaces. He argued that what began as a necessity to make up for the lack of visibility for artists without gallery representation turned quickly into a trend. Batchelor admits that it was tempting to describe this trend as the beginning of a movement away from the "establishment towards a situation where control rests with the practitioner rather than with the dealer or agent", or even a politically motivated "rejection of the dominant commercially-orientated art world" (Batchelor, 1992). He concludes however that the majority of artists were thus:

> …clearly colonising space in an attempt to capture the uninterested, the dismissive or the myopic inside the very structures that are rejecting their work. The found spaces are being used as a springboard from which to jump back into the gallery. (Batchelor, 1992)

As Batchelor points out, it makes a lot of sense that artists will seek "Critical acclaim, public appreciation and financial rewards" from their peers and their chosen field (Batchelor, 1992). But ultimately, he sees emerging artists as mischievous adolescents who desperately negotiate the rites of passage into the art world. These artists discover that the best way to gain entry is by invitation once they have demonstrated that they can promote themselves independently. Far from wishing to contact a different audience, artist-run spaces address an informed audience (Batchelor, 1992).

Dave Beech concludes his article with the argument that the "taboo on institutionalisation" is effectively a refusal to nurture alternative practices by denying them the institutionalisation that they "need and deserve in order to thrive" (Beech, 2006, p. 10):

> We do not need to avoid institutionalisation, we need fuller, wider, and more diverse forms of institutionalisation. Institutionalisation for the few needs to be replaced by institutionalisation for all. (Beech, 2006, p. 10)

Beech's example is the concept of "self-institutionalisation", introduced by Jakob Jakobsen and Henriette Heise in 1998, when they set up *Info Centre* in East London to serve as an "exhibition space, archive and bookshop". Jakobsen used the term "self-

institutionalisation" to designate a "series of practical experiments with the construction and use of institutions" (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 8). The first manifesto or "info sheet" stated that *Info Centre* was committed to art as an institutionalising practice over and above the production of objects with an extended social aim:

> We are committed to an understanding of art practice that is not exclusively related to the making of art works, but also includes the establishing of institutions for the experience and use of art and generally the making of institutions for human life. (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 8)

Funded by the Danish Contemporary Art Foundation, *Info Centre* was intended as a temporary institution, and "engaged and serviced a range of communities, discourses and networks in London" (Davies, 2001), and it closed down in 1999 (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 8).

> The construction of an institution was not intended as a critique but instead as a means to take control of both production and distribution. It represented an escape from oppositional institutional critique through the total refusal of the dominant institutions' monopoly of power. (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 8)

Anthony Davies describes this strategy as "starburst", which he defines as setting up "a programme for a specified period and then re-routing the networks and discourses to other locations" (Davies, 2001). This activity included Infopool meetings in London, publications, a website and the Copenhagen Free University (CFU) set up in Jakobsen and Heise's apartment in Copenhagen in 2001 (Jakobsen and Heise, 2007). In their statement, WE HAVE WON! (2007), Jakobsen and Heise recount their objectives in setting up CFU as a reaction against recent shifts in artists' self-definition as accomplices to power in the prevailing conditions of neo-liberalism. The CFU was additionally a reaction against a similar adaptation of education to corporate practice, with the associated reification and commodification of knowledge:

> The Copenhagen Free University made it clear that universities do not necessarily have to reflect the hegemonic structures of society; universities could be organised and based in and around the everyday knowledge and material struggles structuring people's lives. […] Knowledge for us is always situated and interwoved with desire. (Jakobsen and Heise, 2007)

More significantly, Jakobsen and Heise point out that the CPU "never wanted to become a fixed identity", the project was a temporary project from the start (Jakobsen and Heise, 2007):

> This is why the Copenhagen Free University closed down at the end of 2007. Looking back at the six years of existence of the CFU we end our activities with a clear conviction and declare: We Have Won! (Jakobsen and Heise, 2007)

Far from emphasising the need to "institutionalise alternatives in order to care for them […] to underwrite alternative practices with the institutions that they need and deserve in order to thrive" (Beech, 2006, p. 10) as Beech argues, Jakobsen and Heise's concept of "self-institutionalisation" does not propose the retreat to defensive enclosure that the choice of the term implies.[52] They argue instead that with their conceptualisation of the term is the intention "to take power and play with power but also to abolish power" (Jakobsen and Heise, 2007).

Beech's conclusion is misleading because institutions invariably end up courting power in order to survive. Gerald Raunig emphasises that amongst its various definitions, the term "institution" also carries the "sense of constituted power" (Raunig, 2009, p. 8). In his essay *What is an Institution?* (2006), John Searle demonstrates that the purpose of institutions is to create power relationships (Searle, 2006, p. 34). Searle defines institutions in terms of their specific properties, clearly distinguishing art-making practices from institutional practices.

Searle argues that the defining characteristic of any institution is language itself, the "fundamental social institution" (Searle, 2006, p. 36). Searle points out that although institutions are dependent on human beliefs, we take them for granted and treat them as though they have physical properties. To answer the question "What is an institution?", Searle suggests that we should examine what distinguishes institutional facts from other types of facts (Searle, 2006, p. 24). He foregrounds two concepts to account for the difference between social facts and institutional facts. In the first instance, the "collective assignment of function" describes our social capacity to assign a function to things that do not posses that function intrinsically. Secondly, "status functions" are a particular form of "assignment of function" (Searle, 2006, p. 30). We assign functions to people or objects when they cannot carry out those functions entirely by means of their physical properties. Those functions are thereby carried out by our collective belief that the objects or persons have "a certain *status* and with that status a function". To illustrate his argument, Searle uses the example of a wall that

[52] The term "self-institutionalisation" is confusing because artists' projects, as Maria Lind points out, do not qualify as institutions because they are "too small and volatile" (Lind, 2009. p. 27). Artist's collectives are volatile and more significantly, usually unhierarchical and defined by tacit rules and informal procedures.

physically blocks the movement of traffic. Even when the wall deteriorates, the remaining line of stones is still *recognised* as a *boundary* and continues to perform the same function, blocking passage to anyone who is not *authorised* to cross it. This occurs as long as everyone continues to accept the status of the line of stones as a boundary. This is a status function (Searle, 2006, p. 31).

Searle argues that this apparently "feeble apparatus" does not "come tumbling down" because of its scope: the status function "iterates upward indefinitely" and the entire system operates laterally and vertically in an interlocking system of rights and obligations. More specifically, when the status function becomes regularised it becomes a rule. These rules, expressed as "*X counts as Y in context C",* are what constitute institutional structures. Unlike ordinary rules, which exist independently of institutions, status functions are "constitutive rules" which do not merely regulate but "constitute the very behavior they regulate" (Searle, 2006, p. 32). Art thus seems to escape the regulating role of the status function because the rules of art do not constitute the behaviour they regulate. If this were so, we would not have any expectations of innovation in art.

Searle argues that ultimately the purpose of institutions is to create power relationships: "Human institutions are, above all, *enabling*, because they create power, but it is a special kind of power" (Searle, 2006, p. 34). This special kind of power governs all institutional structures including "rights, duties, obligations, authorizations, permissions, empowerments, requirements, and certifications", Searle calls these "deontic powers" (Searle, 2006, p. 34):

> Think of anything you would care to mention—private property, government, contractual relationships, as well as such informal relationships as friendship, family and social clubs. All of these are matters of rights, duties, obligations, etc. They are structures of power relationships. (Searle, 2006, p. 34)

These power relations, according to Searle, function in a way that is fundamental to the understanding of society, namely that "institutional structures create desire-independent reasons for action". Institutions thus essentially provide the recognition of duties, obligations and requirements, as well as the motivation to carry them out "independent of your inclinations at the moment". But institutional structures define activities that we would not normally associate with obligations, art is such an activity. Searle argues that this is a critical issue because the locus of institutional power in many cases defines "very powerful human desires", such as money and political power: "By creating institutional reality, we increase human power enormously". Searle

explains that by creating institutions "we increase the human capacity for action" (Searle, 2006, p. 35). Institutions thus propel action by motivating it.

For Searle, the possibility of satisfying our desires within institutional structures depends on the recognition of deontic relationships:

> Without the recognition, acknowledgment, and acceptance of the deontic relationships, your power is not worth a damn. It is only worthwhile to have money or a university degree or to be president of the United States if other people recognize your having this status. (Searle, 2006, p. 35)

If we accept Searle's definition of the structure and function of the institution, the practice of art-making does not constitute an institution. Searle argues that "money, property, government and marriage" are institutions, whereas "science, education and religion" do not fall under the same category. They are not institutions, although there are singular institutions as well as institutional facts within these fields (Searle, 2006, p. 46):

> 'The National Science Foundation' names an institution. 'Science' does not. The rules of scientific method, if there are such, are regulative and not constitutive. They are designed to maximize the probability of discovering the truth, not to create status functions with deontic powers (Searle, 2006, p. 47)

Art is not an institution because it is not "defined by a set of constitutive rules" (Searle, 2006, p. 46). A museum however, is defined by such rules, museums have board members or trustees, they have to meet qualitative targets and they have internal rules, which regulate the various departments and job descriptions. Museum rules are also constitutive of the behaviour of visitors and the type of art that they display. Between the work of the artist and the function of the museum is the discursive field of the "institution of art" which is "defined by a set of constitutive rules" (Searle, 2006, p. 46):

> Do those rules determine status functions which are in fact collectively recognized and accepted? (Searle, 2006, p. 46)

They are, the entrance criteria for art competitions, MA courses in curating and art-writing residencies specify these requirements.

> Are those status functions only performable in virtue of the collective recognition and acceptance, and not in virtue of the observer independent features of the situation alone? (Searle, 2006, p. 46)

Yes, there is no manifest distinction between the "immaterial labour" of artists, curators and art-writers from the labour of scholars, researchers and administrators.

The controversial practice of Anton Vidokle is much debated but not contested as such, he is considered an artist.

> Do the status functions carry recognized and accepted deontic powers? (Searle, 2006, p. 47)

They do, the art world is constituted by collectively recognised "rights, duties, obligations, authorizations, permissions, empowerments, requirements, and certifications" (Searle, 2006, p. 34). The deontic powers of the art institution provide the motivation to keep producing and networking incessantly without immediate reward, and thus function as "desire-independent reasons for action" (Searle, 2006, p. 35).

The art institution thus provides the engine that drives the productivity of the field of art. Searle argues that the creation of a field for "desire-based reasons for action" becomes contingent on the acknowledgment of "a system of desire-independent reasons for action", and this is true not only for those who compete for power within the institution, but for the audience as well (Searle, 2006, p. 35). Thus the increased activity of the art field depends on the institutional field, from which it also maintains a certain amount of independence in terms of its fundamental structure. The field of art practice can be described as the "desire-based reasons for action", which is not governed by constitutive rules. However, the art world is dependent on the art institution as a "system of desire-independent reasons for action" governed by constitutive rules. Artists straddle both the art field and the art institution and thus have to negotiate these differences on their own terms individually.

Peter Bürger regards the institution of art as virtually synonymous with artistic autonomy. He ascribes to "the institutional framework" the role of "releasing art from the demand that it fulfil a social function", (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 25). Searle's theory of the institution however identifies the institution of art unequivocally as a means for the functionalisation of art. The necessity for "desire-independent reasons for action" in the art field negates the critical and emancipatory potential of art practices as unique "desire-based reasons for action". Additionally, it makes little sense to mobilise external reasons to motivate artists to do what they enjoy doing anyway.

In his article *Occasional Documents: Towards Situation* (2001), Howard Slater draws on the Situationists' revolutionary hypotheses of "unitary urbanism" and the "construction of situations" (Debord, 1995/1957) to argue that the only way to substitute "a revolutionary creativity of the social field" in the place of reified individual creativity is to create "autonomous institutions through which new social relations

informed by desire and becoming can come into a mutually recognised existence as social entities" (Slater, 2001). For Slater the creation of autonomous institutions depends on what Cornelius Castoriadis describes as the individual's "internalisation" of social institutions. For Castoriadis, individuals are constituted by internalising social institutions; they thus become the "concrete embodiment" of these institutions:

> This internalization, we know, is anything but superficial: modes of thought and of action, norms and values, and, ultimately, the very identity of the individual as a social being all depend upon it. (Castoriadis, 1996, p. 133)

For Castoriadis, society is a configuration of institutions that conceal the fact that they are socially constructed. Slater argues that through their concealment, institutions do not only appear reified and apparently transcendent, they in fact *institute* heteronomous social relations. Heteronomy thus becomes internalised "as the conditioning factor of identity, as a mode of being inscribed in the social fabric" (Slater, 2001). For Castoriadis this concealment of the instituted social imaginary works together with the rigid structure of institutions to constitute the "rigidity of the socially fabricated individual and the repression of the psyche's radical imagination" (Castoriadis, 1996, p. 132). Thus, as Slater points out:

> …not only is a creative living labour alienated from the worker in the product, but the creative activity of self-institution, of seeing institutions as social organs that can be modified and transformed, is itself similarly subject to an alienation. (Slater, 2001)

Taking together the points that Searle, Castoriadis and Slater make, we can conclude that self-institutionalisation does not guarantee that we can escape the rigidity of institutions and their inevitable sedimentation into constricting and invisible conventions, which not only conceal their nature but also end up becoming defining ends in themselves. For Castoriadis a true "politics of autonomy" would have the task of enabling "the collectivity to create the institutions that, when internalized by the individuals, will not limit but rather enlarge their capacity for becoming autonomous" (Castoriadis, 1996, p. 134). The politics of autonomy and the politics of art are thus two entirely different things.

Undecidability, indeterminacy and plurality

> For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word "meaning" — though not for *all* — this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. (Wittgenstein, 1968, §43)

Where is meaning located? Is the meaning of a work of art located within the object itself? Does meaning depend on the artist's intention?[53] Or the context of the encounter with art? Is the meaning entirely up to the audience? I will argue that meaning is relational; the work of art is always open to contingent and supplemental interpretations. Claude Levi-Strauss sees the desire for meaning as a desperate attempt to make sense of reality by forging connections between disparate fragments:

> Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find them a meaning. (Levi-Strauss, 1962, p. 22)

Edward Said describes this urge to create meaning as a fear of meaninglessness:

> The writer is as much a respondent as he is a describer. Similarly the reader is a full participant in the production of meaning, being obliged as a mortal thing to act, to produce some sense that even though ugly is still better than meaninglessness. (Said, 1984, p. 41)

The fixing of meaning, ascribing a coherent sense to what has none is a fallacy of textual critique, which translates art into language. In art, the meaning is created in the interplay between various registers (Said, 1984, p. 40). These registers are physical and intellectual, explicit and implicit, in one word: aesthetic. This interplay cannot be translated into language without remainder, as much as a text cannot be translated from one language into another without losing something vital.

In *Seduction* (1990), Jean Baudrillard argues that "total liberty, or total indeterminacy are not opposed to meaning. One can produce meaning simply by playing with chance or disorder", (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 138). This is what the surrealists taught us. Sometimes, in order to understand something it helps to take it out of its familiar context, the meaning of a particular text will generate different meanings when it is read in conjunction with other texts. The experience of a work of art is similarly subject to the effect of other works of art. Works of art do not "contain" a reducible sense.

In my first encounter with Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense (2004),* I read and re-read the first chapters trying to locate the definitions of his terms. I gave up and continued to read and eventually I understood what his terms meant through the contexts in which he uses them. Deleuze puts his terms to use rather than treating them as stable

[53] Since the "death of the author", we know that we cannot refer to the artist, besides artists are notoriously resistant to explaining the "meaning" of their work. The work of art embodies the artists' intentions and one of the reasons we value art is for its capacity to generate potentially infinite interpretations.

signs; they thus become subverted or lose their original meanings through their function. Not only words and phrases, but entire works of art can be taken out of context and acquire new meanings. How could Nietzsche be used against his own ideas? Why is Kant still controversial? How does collage work if not by decontextualization and juxtaposition? Just as words acquire their meaning through their use, so texts and works of art can appear meaningful in one way or another within the contingency of circumstances in which we encounter them. Understanding depends on prior experience and knowledge, on particular registers and associations that are cultural and context-specific. Derrida only becomes comprehensible within the context of the texts he deconstructs. Texts, discourses and events are constrained by their contexts.

In *Signature Event Context* (1982), Jacques Derrida argues that the determination of a context is never absolute or certain. In fact, Derrida argues that the notion of context harbours "behind a certain confusion, very determined philosophical presuppositions" which exceed the conventional notion of context and unsettle its value and meaning (Derrida, 1982, p. 310). For Derrida the scope of the text is massively reduced by the limits of a context. However, the intention of Derrida's argument is to sever all ties between text and presence, which relegates the text to a textual universe, and thus attracts due criticism from Edward Said. In his essay, *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1984), Said argues that even in their most rarefied form, texts "are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly" (Said, 1984, p. 35). This is why circumstantial reality, or what Said calls "worldliness" is a feature of all discourse, whether it is spoken or written (Said, 1984, p. 34). The "worldliness" of the literary text refers to the ways in which literature is entrenched in narratives of history and geography and the means whereby readers bring their own worldviews to bear on literature.

Said argues that the thesis of the potentially limitless interpretations of a text—because "all reading is misreading"—is derived from the "conception of the text as existing within a hermetic, Alexandrian textual universe, which has no connection with actuality" (Said, 1984, pp. 39-40). He argues that, on the contrary, "texts impose constraints upon their interpretation [because] the closeness of the world's body to the text's body forces readers to take both into consideration" (Said, 1984, p. 39). Furthermore, a function of texts is to situate themselves by "soliciting the world's attention" and they do this by placing "restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively" (Said, 1984, p. 40). This is more or less Derrida's argument. Similarly, while Derrida takes issue with John Austin's emphasis on the spoken performative,

Said takes issue with Paul Ricoeur's distinction between spoken and written discourse, and the associated assumption that circumstantial reality is the property of the "speech situation":

> According to Ricoeur, speech and circumstantial reality exist in a state of presence, whereas writing and texts exist in a state of suspension—that is, outside circumstantial reality—until they are "actualized" and made present by the reader-critic. (Said, 1984, p. 34)

For Said, all texts are worldly because they are implicated in particular historical contexts. A text is something historically and materially more than a critical occasion, it is a social and political monument.

> Texts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components. For texts after all are not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal monuments. (Said, 1984, p. 53)

For Said, the text engages the world in ways that are "numerous and complicated" (Said, 1984, p. 35). Every text or aesthetic object has an "idiolect, voice, or more firmly, irreducible individuality" (Said, 1984, p. 33), it is an impersonal object which can nevertheless "deliver an imprint or a trace of something as lively, immediate and transitory as a 'voice' […] it bears a personality, for which a common analogy is a talking voice addressing someone" (Said, 1984, p. 33). The text therefore is not only a voice, which addresses a potential audience, it is also worldly, it is in the world.

Exhibitions also address an audience. Michael Warner argues in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), that the audience is constituted through the address; the mode of address imposes a set of assumptions on the public (Warner, 2002, p. 67, 87). The process of publication makes a set of assumptions public, they become common currency. Although Said and Derrida agree on this, for Said the text is not self-sufficient, while for Derrida, the text stands for itself and is therefore autonomous. Outside of its context, the text is open to interpretation and therefore also becomes vulnerable to misuse. This is not a problem of polysemy as Derrida shows, but a question of *dissemination* (Derrida, 1982, p. 310). Considered in terms of the work of art, the privileging of the notion of dissemination over polysemia reframes the plurality of the work of art and its multiple interpretations, as a dispersal of meaning. We have all regarded the same work of art anew in a different exhibition context: are Georg Baselitz's monumental wooden sculptures funny or only when we see them in a context such as John Bock's exhibition *Klutterkammer* (2004), at the ICA?

In *Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator* (2007), Simon Sheikh argues that historically, public exhibitions were amongst the disciplinary and pedagogical

techniques used in the creation of the bourgeois subject. Nineteenth-century exhibition making "marked not only a display and division of knowledge, power and spectatorship, it also marked a production of a public [with] constitutive effects on its subjects and objects alike" (Sheikh, 2007, p. 175). Employing a pedagogical approach, the museum constituted the viewing subject as a subject of knowledge but also represented the subject through the curatorial mode of address. Techniques of collection and display represented colonial and national histories of the emerging nation states, and thereby also circulated specific values, ideologies and power/knowledge relationships through rational argument and persuasion, rather than by decree (Sheikh, 2007, pp. 175-176). Involved thus in "an economy of desire as well as in relations of power and knowledge", public exhibitions both inscribed and empowered the bourgeois subject. Exhibition practice also set up divisions and exclusions because access was predicated on an understanding and acceptance of the represented histories and identities. Exhibitions thus also "indicated ways of seeing and behaving" (Sheikh, 2007, p. 177):

> And thus the importance of the art opening, the *vernissage*, as a bourgeois ritual of initiation and cultivation: one is not merely the first to watch (and, in some cases, buy) but also to be watched: to be visible *as* the cultivated bourgeois subject of reason, in the right place and *in* your place. (Sheikh, 2007, p. 177)

Giorgio Agamben maintains that culture in traditional societies exists as absolute identity between an act of transmission and the thing transmitted, this is what constitutes *tradition*. In modern societies, characterised by the *accumulation* of culture, transmission is recuperated by aesthetics (Agamben, 1999, p. 114). The function of transmission as a frame and context serves as the locus of meaning and overrides the content of the transmission.

Inevitably, every artwork is infinitely interpretable, and it can even be argued that it will always be misunderstood (Adorno, 2002/1970, pp. 346-347). This is demonstrated in the episode of Martin Heidegger's misunderstanding of Van Gogh's painting of "peasant shoes" (Heidegger, 2000/1937), his correspondence with Meyer Shapiro[54] and Derrida's *Restitutions* (1987/1971). We understand by misunderstanding. We cannot decipher the layers of code, so we put ourselves in Van Gogh's shoes and draw our own conclusions.

[54] Shapiro, Meyer (1968). The Still-Life as Personal Object—A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh. In *The reach of Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Goldstein 1878-1965*. New York: Springer.

> …a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself. (Said, 1984, p. 39)

We might thus argue that essentially, it does not matter how we interpret the work of art, its meaning is dependent on a particular encounter. When speaking about works of art, we also necessarily speak of things that are not art; even abstract art is about something other than art.[55] A recent style of criticism begins with an anecdote of events that precede the encounter with the work of art. These events provide the critic with a way to frame and make sense of the work. The work of art does not generate meanings of its own accord, but through a "constitutive interaction" (Said, 1984, p. 39). Meaning is relational and cannot be deduced from an isolated object. Without a binding context, reality is a potentially infinite meaningless network. To engage in a debate about the meaning of a particular work of art is not to come to any hard and fast conclusions, as the work will keep generating meanings on repeated viewings. The endeavour to pin down the meaning of the work of art is at best a literary or linguistic exercise.

Adorno argues that works of art are "objective" because they are produced through a dialectics of subjectivity and otherness (Adorno, 2002/1970, pp. 264, 273-275, 344-345). But Adorno understands the "objectivity" of the work of art in another sense as well, he argues that the relationship of art to society is to be found not in reception but in the anterior sphere of production, because art is:

> …the product of the division of labor […] human reactions to artworks have been mediated to their utmost and do not refer immediately to the object; indeed, they are now mediated by society as a whole. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 228)

This means that the significance of art in relation to society is given regardless of the work's content. Adorno thus disregards the particular content and the reception of the work of art, its particular context and the interpretations and associations the work has accrued over time in the constitution of meaning in art:

[55] Against the view that works of art are self-sufficient artefacts, Hal Foster argues that the abstract art of Peter Halley represents capitalism: "it is the abstractive processes of capital that erode representation and abstraction alike. And ultimately it may be these processes that are the real subject, and latent referent, of this new abstract painting" (Foster, 1986, p. 139). David Carrier argues that paintings are "irretrievably bound up with the social structure in which they are created […] today's contemporary abstract paintings refer to the capitalist system in which they are commodities" (Carrier, 1988, p. 52).

> Interest in the social decipherment of art must orient itself to production rather than being content with the study and classification of effects that for social reasons often totally diverge from the artworks and their objective social content. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 228)

This "objective social content" is the historically inscribed content of the work of art and what stands in for the meaning of the work of art; it stands for an "objective" reading not of singular works of art, but of art as such. Adorno is making a distinction between the reception or interpretation of art and its literal relationship to society. For Adorno, the work of art fulfils an objective role within society; this is the significance of the work, not its manifest content. The significance of a work of art is to be found in the fact that its reception might cause a controversy or none at all. Diedrich Diederichsen points out that very little is generated in terms of discourse on the part of works of art that no longer need to negotiate their legitimacy, and that the role of art is precisely to generate this discourse (Diederichsen, 2008, p. 30).

Adorno argues that the relationship of art to society, or the fact that art must be presented as *art* (in the institution of art), is the real purpose of art, and it thus overrides the artist's intentions. Susan Buck-Morss too argues that it does not matter what artists do:

> …so long as it is done within the authorised, artworld space. (Here the analogy with "theory world" would seem to be absolute, as the academic freedom of critical theorists coincides with our lack of influence in public and political debate). (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 68)

How do we recognise art?

> Products which are considered "works of art" have been singled out as culturally significant objects by those who, at any given time and social stratum, wield the power to confer the predicate "work of art" onto them; they cannot elevate themselves from the host of man-made objects simply on the basis of some inherent qualities. (Haacke, 2006, p. 53)

How do we recognise art? Can we define art? Can a work of art exist only within a protected and dedicated space or do we recognise a work of art in a casual environment? Does the work rely on its context to be understood as "art" or does it have that quality in and of itself? Can the work of art create its own context?

For Brian O'Doherty, Duchamp's two "gallery gestures", *1,200 Bags of Coal* (1938)[56] and *Mile of String* (1942)[57] are "not art, perhaps, but artlike". More than any work of

[56] International Exhibition of Surrealism, Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris.

art, the *gesture* "depends for its effect on the context of ideas it changes and joins". The curious status of the gesture, its "meta-life around and about art" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40), prompts O'Doherty to ask to whom does Duchamp address the *gestures*:

> Are they delivered to the spectator? To history? To art criticism? To other artists? To all, of course, but the address is blurred. If pressed to send the gestures somewhere, I'd send them to other artists. (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40)

O'Doherty seems to be on the right track, because as he points out:

> Both Duchamp's gestures fail to acknowledge the other art around, which becomes wallpaper. Yet the artists' protest (did any of them ever say how they felt?) is preempted. For the harassment of their work is disguised as harassment of the spectators (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40)

Duchamp's *gestures*—and his "hostility" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 41)—were not directed at the audience but at the artists because the ideological site of the gallery is the intensification of the artist's commitment to art. Helen Molesworth argues that:

> By challenging the necessity of traditional artistic labor and the value of unique objects and by establishing a potential continuum between the space and activities of everyday life and the rarified realm of art, Duchamp's readymades constituted the most serious attack on the category of Art since the Renaissance. (Molesworth, 2003, p. 28)

But if the *gestures* survive as a sustained attack on the institution of art, the readymade does not. Duchamp's gallery gestures continue to perform this critique on artists for whom Duchamp is an influential precursor, even while they aestheticise his protest. By repeating Duchamp's "harassment", by brining it repeatedly, parodically into the museum, artists have fetishised it. Andy Warhol plays off the *Brillo Boxes* (1964) against the hermeticism of the exhibition space. The outcome is not a challenge to the gallery space, but a fetishisation of the mass produced object. Molesworth argues that Duchamp liberated artists from artistic convention:

> Far from destroying art, Duchamp's profound challenge ultimately served to create an enormous field of aesthetic possibility. It helped liberate artists from conventional modes of working, contributing to a climate that permitted and rewarded an increasingly porous idea of art's possibilities. (Molesworth, 2003, p. 28)

Benjamin Buchloh views Duchamp's readymade as "the ultimate subject of a legal definition and the result of institutional validation (a discourse of power rather than

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[57] *First Papers of Surrealism*, 551 Madison Avenue, New York.

taste)". Buchloh points out that the freedom conceptual art gained through its emancipation from the material art object and its manual production is a deceptive freedom. The suspension of all traditional criteria for judging art in the end only strengthens the power of the art institutions (Buchloh, 1990, pp. 117).

> This erosion works, then, not just against the hegemony of the visual, but against the possibility of any other aspect of the aesthetic experience as being autonomous and self-sufficient. (Buchloh, 1989, p. 118)

According to Susan Buck-Morss, it was "Duchamp's famous gesture of placing a urinal on the museum wall that performed the dialectical reversal of subject and predicate: Because it is in the museum, it is art" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 66). Art practice, seemingly liberated from the criteria of taste and politics is now dependent on legitimisation from "the museum, the curatorial decision, and the biennials that legitimate the artists, and on which they (un-freely) depend" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 67). As Jan Verwoert points out "if an object, or the practice of producing it, no longer qualifies as art on the basis of recognisable material properties, then in the end it is the museums or the market that determine whether it is art or not" (Verwoert, 2005). At the same time, however, the institution of art ostensibly and structurally remains faithful to the subjective criteria of the judgement of taste. The gallery space, the museum, the exhibition, remain unchallenged in their monopoly on aesthetic practice.

Following Adorno's emphasis on the "immanent critique" of art (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 248), Bürger argues that art is defined by its self-criticism (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22). Brian O'Doherty regards Duchamp's *gestures* as a singular occasion to examine what happens to the work of art in the exhibition context (and how we make sense of art). Considering how the *gestures* "subsumed an entire gallery […] and managed to do so while it was full of other art", O'Doherty observes that:

> By exposing the effect of context on art, of the container on the contained, Duchamp recognized an area of art that hadn't yet been invented. This invention of context initiated a series of gestures which "develop" the idea of a gallery space as a single unit, suitable for manipulation as an esthetic counter. From this moment on there is a seepage of energy from art to its surroundings. With time, the ratio between the literalization of art and the mythification of the gallery is inverse and increasing. (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40)

O'Doherty points out that the gallery space assumes not only the role of "context", but also of "history" and "ideology", in a word, our *belief* about what art is and what it does. Duchamp's *gesture* is an "invention", its formal content lies in its "aptness, economy and grace":

> It dispatches the bull of history with a single thrust. Yet it needs that bull. For it shifts perspective suddenly on a body of assumptions and ideas. (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40)

O'Doherty points out that when we look at a work of art, the gallery space disappears and becomes something that we take for granted, but also that its invisibly provides the structure and support for the *way* that we look at and understand a work of art. Adorno makes a similar argument regarding the way we understand the "new" in art; we understand it in relation to the "old". Adorno privileges "the new" as a critique (but also a validation) of "older aesthetic norms" and regards it as part of the work of art: "through the new, critique—the refusal—becomes an objective element of art itself" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 22). However, the new is always in danger of becoming fetishised: "Fetishization expresses the paradox of all art that is no longer self-evident to itself"[58] (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 22). Adorno argues that art cannot take its conventions for granted and points to the paradox of an art that seeks out the new (and different), only to subsume it within the old (and the same):

> The new wants nonidentity, yet intention reduces it to identity; modern art constantly works at the Munchhausean trick of carrying out the identification of the nonidentical. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 22)

The conceptual artists Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn launch a similar critique of Judd's "specific object":

> You are saying that materials which don't "belong" to art are more objective. But you are *also* saying that, by appropriating these materials "for" art purposes, they *lose* their extra-art associations. They become materials "without histories." (Beveridge and Burn, 1975, p. 130)

Art defined as its self-consciousness is involved in relentless re-definition through the interrogation of anything that may be taken for granted about art. However the insights of this self-critique quickly fall back into convention and the self-critique of art falls back onto the distinction between art and non-art. The process can be described as a progressive expansion and contraction of the field of art with the persistent importation and exportation of its contents. This is evident in the practice of artists in the twentieth century who have stripped art of all its recognizable characteristics and

[58] Similarly, any critique of this fetishization must be carried out within the work itself, in other words we must not critique the mere fact that it has become a fetish (Adorno, 1970/2002, p. 22).

in the expansion of art into other fields. The relatively recent coupling of art and research is one such example.[59]

> …the only sense in which there is a difference between the appreciation of art and the appreciation of nonart is that the appreciations have different objects. The institutional structure in which the art object is embedded, not different kinds of appreciation, makes the difference between the appreciation of art and the appreciation of nonart. (Dickie, 1974, p. 41)

Theodor Adorno argues that we cannot understand art with the help of a theory of art because "the arts will not fit into any gapless concept of art" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 2), we can only understand art "by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 3). For Adorno art "is defined by its relation to what it is not", he argues that the "specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other" (Adorno, 2002, p. 3):

> Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form. It exists only in relation to its other; it is the process that transpires with its other (Adorno, 2002, p. 3)

Art is also defined by the distinction between art and non-art.[60] The vague and inconsistent distinction between contemporary art and popular culture is evident in the impossibility of articulating any well-defined description of art that radically excludes popular culture. In fact, the definition of art has stumped theorists for centuries. Obviously art cannot be defined. We cannot define art either in terms of its individual or collective agents because popular culture too is produced by individual or collective agents acting independently of agencies or companies. Artists of the twentieth century (Marcel Duchamp, Allan Kaprow, Sol LeWitt, Group Material, Gorilla Girls) have divested art of authorship and its significance as the public expression of subjectivity[61]

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[59] The *Journal for Artistic Research* (JAR) is an international, online, open access peer-reviewed journal organised by the *Society of Artistic Research* for the "identification, publication and dissemination of artistic research and its methodologies", *JAR* website <http://www.jar-online.net/>. Although *JAR* considers the status of art research to be "still hotly debated", this opinion is voiced from within an established organisation for the promotion of art research. The cross-over between art and other fields including politics, commerce and research was debated at *ART &...,* a symposium organised by Alun Rowlands and John Russell (November 2007, ICA, London). "The contemporary discourses of art cannot be conceived of as an autonomous specialism: Art, but as a space of transversality and connectivity", <http://www.john-russell.org/Web%20pages/Artworks/Exhibitions/Solo/A_art&.html>.

[60] See also Agamben, 1999, p. 42.

[61] In *Marx After Duchamp, or The Artist's Two Bodies* (2010), Groys argues that art is no longer an unaliented activity distinct from industrial labour because we no longer identify art as the

while, as Boris Groys points out, this polemic only serves to conceal the process of institutional authorisation which amounts to the "multiple authorship" of art (Groys, 2008, pp. 96-97).

Neither can the definition of art be determined by recourse to its historical origins because "artworks became artworks only by negating their origin […] art retroactively annihilated that from which it emerged" (Adorno, 2002/1970, pp. 2-3). Adorno conceives of a progressive development of art, which is defined by what it replaces and what it appropriates through successive iterations. He therefore also conceives the end of art:

> Art and artworks are perishable, not simply because by their heteronomy they are dependent, but because right into the smallest detail of their autonomy, which sanctions the socially determined splitting off of spirit by the division of labor, they are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it. Admixed with art's own concept is the ferment of its own abolition. (Adorno, 2002, p. 4)

"Art" for Ranciere is "the *dispositif* that renders [the different arts] visible" or more precisely, art is "the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such" (Ranciere, 2009, p. 23). Art serves to identify art. If art performs this function, it is immanent and incidental to what art is. Art is not defined, art is legitimised. The question is how art is legitimised as art, because this is no longer a function of art itself. For Diederichsen, "the type of art that generates speculative profits seems to rest on the shoulders of the type that was required to justify itself", whilst

> …the art in need of justification and its justifying discourses supply the grist for the art world's mill, its conversation and its ideas. But beneath this lies the plump flesh of the art economy – the very old as new (Diederichsen, 2008, p. 30).

Artworks, art practices, actions or events do not have an essential ontological status; they acquire their status only in the context of an encounter. This amounts to the "relational" nature of art. But if art cannot be defined, then how do we recognise it? Pierre Bourdieu argues that the "specific economy of the literary and artistic field [is] based on a particular form of belief", the work of art only exists because of the (collective) belief which recognises and acknowledges it as a work of art. This requires

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unique trace of the artist's body. Groys observes that the readymade opens up the possibilities for works of art not only to be produced in an "alienated, quasi-industrial manner, but also to allow these artworks to maintain an appearance of being industrially produced" (Groys, 2010).

us to understand the work of art as a fetish which is constituted by—amongst other things—discourses which produce the work of art as an "object of belief" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35). Every discourse contains not only the affirmation of the work, but also an affirmation of its own legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 36).

What is camouflaged here is the regulation of production and dissemination of cultural production. The mechanism of 'qualitative' judgement is the belief system that sustains this apparently natural system of the selection and promotion of artists. The importance ascribed to professionalism contains this naturalised, unspoken concept of quality, which is disseminated throughout the art world. The production of a work of art involves material production but also symbolic production: the production of the value of the work and production of belief in the value of the work (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 36). Thus the necessity of taking into account both the social conditions of artistic production (social origin, education, qualifications etc.) as well as the social conditions of the field of social agents which help to define and produce the value of works of art (institutions, museums, galleries):

> …it is a question of understanding works of art as a *manifestation* of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37)

If we cannot take for granted the existence of art, the multitude of forms it assumes also come under question. Art institutions however cannot function on this basis of uncertainty. Art institutions perform an affirmation of art over and above the affirmation of the individual works of art they display. This is the task for specialists; their influence is in direct proportion to their institutionally conferred status as curators, writers, critics and artists. If anything can be art, then it is important that we can rely on an authority to separate art from non-art. Andrea Fraser and Benjamin Buchloh argue that art is constituted not as such by the spaces or practices of art but by the discourse of art (Fraser, 2005, p. 103, Buchloh, 1990, p. 118). The institution of art provides the conditions for the production of art as well as the discourses by which we recognize art. It produces discourses on the "meaning" of art as well as discourses on the concept of "meaning".

In her essay, *One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity* (1997), Miwon Kwon argues that site-specific art extends previous attempts to take art out of the museum and gallery circuit by subordinating the "site" (both in terms of actual location and institutional frame), to "a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate" (Kwon, 1997, p. 92). Art thus

seems to find a space for itself outside of institutional space and in the "ungrounded, fluid, virtual" (Kwon, 1997, p. 95) and apparently uninstitutionalised field of discourse. Kwon argues that "unlike previous models", the "site" of discourse:

> …is not defined as a precondition. Rather, it is *generated* by the work (often as "content"), and then *verified* by its convergence with an existing discursive formation. (Kwon, 1997, p. 92)

This however only proves that art may overflow the institutional context, but it remains attached and dependent through discourse. Institutions represent themselves through discourse, extending their traditional pedagogical model with panel discussions, conferences and talks.[62] Nicolas Bourriaud's intention in writing *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) was to articulate a way of understanding art practice in the 1990s. Bourriaud tapped into a form of socially-engaged art practice that emerged in the 1970s[63] and took root in the 1990s. In due course, and in part thanks to Bourriaud's legitimising discourse, it flourished within museums in the 2000s. With the exception of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and possibly Liam Gillick and Pierre Huyghe, the work of the artists that Bourriaud collaborates with cannot be characterised as relational, but as object-based and spectacular. This also explains why, although the theory has been influential, it has also drawn much criticism in terms of Bourriaud's theoretical rigour and the implications of his arguments.[64] Rather than support artists' aims to disentangle the function of art as commodity, Bourriaud takes a step in the opposite direction by fetishising the concept of "relationship" itself:

> When a collector purchased a work by Jackson Pollock or Yves Klein, he was buying, over and above its aesthetic interest, a milestone in a history on the move. He became the purchaser of a historical situation. Yesterday, when you bought a Jeff Koons, what was being brought to the fore was the hyper-reality of artistic value. What has one bought when one owns a work by Tiravanija or Douglas Gordon, other than a relationship with the world rendered concrete by an object, which, *per se,* defines the relations one has towards this relationship: the relationship to a relationship? (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 48)

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[62] These public discussions often tend to be exercises in public relations rather than sincere investigations or sharing of information, the real issues are often glossed over in mutual legitimation and anecdote.

[63] Bourriaud refers to Josef Beuys (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 40), but equally this tendency was present in the work of the Artists' Placement Group (1968-1975), Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson (East London Health Project, 1978-1981 and Docklands Community Poster Project, 1981-1991), Stephen Willats (West London Resource Project Public Monitor, 1973) and others.

[64] See Ranciere, 2009; Bishop, 2004; Martin, 2007/2006 and Kenning, 2006.

Bourriaud addresses the collector and—playing the role of cultural entrepreneur—stresses the unique selling point of relational aesthetics. How does he stand in relation to the explicit intention of artists who resist the commodification of their work? While Bourriaud promotes the understanding of contemporary art, this is framed within an agenda to reinforce and extend the power of the institution. Considering Bourriaud's theory of "relational form" Dean Kenning argues that Bourriaud is inattentive to the specific ways in which form is produced relationally, "relational forms become formulaic in Bourriaud's theory", the result for Kenning is that as artistic forms thus become interchangeable and "the works which illustrate best the relational role that art is seen as playing in society will be the most insipid". Kenning regards this as an excuse to foreground the gallery as a site of social exchange, "reinforcing the performative authority of the art institution" (Kenning, 2006, p. 58).

> The paradox of relational aesthetics is that whilst making claims for a more socially relevant type of practice, the art space itself becomes the zero degree condition of its functioning. (Kenning, 2006, p. 58)

The museum is identified with the work; the identity of the work seeps into the museum and the identity of the museum seeps into the work, but they are two entirely different things. The institution draws our attention first and foremost to the work of art as a work of art.

An institution of legitimisation

> In many ways I think we are using up the symbolic capital of the museum. The core audience still comes for what the museum represented in the past rather than what it does now, so at some point they will give up, I imagine, as will many modernist-trained critics. (Esche and Lind, 2011)

In the early twentieth century, the avant-garde sets its critical sights on the institution of art with the conviction that art's lack of social impact is to be blamed on its autonomy (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22). In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), Bourdieu reveals that the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy in art is in effect a compromise between the symbolic and the commercial character of the work of art. More significantly, Bourdieu argues that political power must justify itself through external legitimisation because "force cannot assert itself as such, as brute violence, an arbitrariness […] without justification". Power therefore appeals to social institutions for justification, recognition and legitimacy. In order to provide legitimate recognition institutions must not be subject to coercion and they must be recognised and legitimate themselves (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 104-105). Power thus appeals to artists

and intellectuals, granting relative autonomy to institutions that provide its legitimation:

> The prince can obtain a truly effective legitimation service from his poets, painters or jurists only in so far as he grants them the (relative) autonomy which is the condition for independent judgement but which may also be the basis for critical questioning. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 105)

Bourdieu explains that the arts can provide "powerful instruments of legitimation" directly or indirectly.[65] But equally, and because the "apparent autonomy or misrecognized dependence may have the same effects as real independence", the arts can also use their legitimating power to subvert power with "challenges to the self-evidences of common sense" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 105). The field of art is thus a potential site for symbolic revolution. This is why, in due course, the progressive expansion and differentiation of the field is accompanied by institutionalisation as a means of control (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 106).

The institution of art is constituted—and henceforth functions—as a buffer zone, and this is the point at which art assumes the status of autonomy:

> The historical avant-garde movements made clear the significance art as an institution has for the effect of individual works, and thereby brought about a shift in the problem. It became apparent that the social effect of a work of art cannot simply be gauged by considering the work itself but that its effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the work 'functions'. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 90)

For Peter Bürger the autonomy of art accomplishes the movement towards art's ineffectuality; if art belongs within a circumscribed field, it ceases to take place in the real world. The *institutionalisation* of art in a circumscribed field of its own conceals the *instrumentalisation* of art within the institution of art. The institution of art is a space of apparent freedom, but this freedom is latent. The historical avant-garde performed a negation of the institution of art, understood as:

> …the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 22)

[65] Jacques-Louis David, Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Rodchenko, Arno Breker and Shepard Fairey have legitimised power directly, but indirect legitimisation through corporate sponsorship and community art is just as effective.

In capitalist society, the market assumes an ideological function and "dominion-legitimating world pictures" lose theirs (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 23), this leaves the legitimating institutions with a loss of centre. The institution draws our attention first and foremost to the work of art as a work of art. The institutional context of art shifts our focus from the interpretation of the singular work of art to the problem of understanding *art* as such. If the authority of art institutions guarantees the status of art, then we are caught in a double bind. If the work of art is dependent on its context and if that context is invariably the gallery, the museum or the collection, then the work of art is tautological. Haacke argues that it is not merely a question of the physical properties of the museum or gallery that have an effect the work of art. More significantly, "the status and the meaning" of the institutional context "infects" the work of art (Haacke, 2007). Exhibition contexts are frames that seep into the object that they define.

Peter Bürger argues that the social role of art is not determined by artists' intentions. The social effect of works of art is "decisively determined by the institution within which the works function" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 31). Bürger argues that although the attitude of neo-avant-garde artists "may perfectly well be avant-gardiste", their art is nevertheless institutionalised as autonomous art. For Bürger, the neo-avant-garde institutionalises the avant-garde as art and "thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions". Despite artists' intentions, their work takes on the identity of "artistic manifestations" (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 58). The art institution thus endures even in works of art that ostensibly intend to overcome the divisions between art and non-art.

According to Daniel Buren, the art institution serves an idealist function by perpetuating the universality of art (Buren, 1973, p. 68). The idealism of autonomous art renders art apolitical and divests it of critical content by sequestering it to an extra-social realm. At the same time, paradoxically, this is precisely the process by which art is functionalised. Within the art institution, art becomes instrumental in numerous ways. Whatever the values each individual work conveys, these become redirected by the museum and this is what art ends up being about: the direct association with power and prestige, which overrides anything the work might be doing. The museum comes across as benefactor providing aesthetic experience, entertainment and diversion. Such recuperation is lamentable because the artist's subjective singularity is misrepresented and misapprehended as the voice of a powerful universality.

The context of art *determines* (in the sense of "limits, draws a line around") the production of art and the meaning and value of art. It is a circular system which

reinforces itself, if it were not for a constant influx of new artists (expendable and equivalent) it would stagnate. Art production is directly determined by museums, biennials, foundations, collections, art fairs, funding bodies, galleries and journals.

In the mid 1960s, Daniel Buren began to paint alternating white and coloured vertical stripes emulating the traditional fabric of French awnings. In 1967, he stopped painting but continued to use stripes on paper and other supports and in 1968, he began to affix them in public spaces (*auffichages sauvages*). For Buren the frame of reference of the work includes the surrounding architecture ("when we say architecture, we include the social, political and economic context") as "the inevitable background, support and frame of any work" (Buren, 1996/1975, p. 319). In *The Function of the Museum* (1973), Buren argues that the art institution has a "mystical" role, it "instantly promotes to "Art" status whatever it exhibits […] thus diverting in advance any attempt to question the foundations of art". Buren refers to the museum as "the frame and effective support upon which the work is inscribed/composed", the art institution frames and compromises the (critical intentions of the) work of art (Buren, 1973, p. 68):

> In fact every work of art inevitably possesses one or several extremely precise frames. The work is always limited in time as well as in space. By forgetting (purposefully) these essential facts one can pretend that there exists an immortal art, an eternal work…. And one can see how this concept and the mechanisms used to produce it […] place the work of art once and for all above all classes and ideologies. (Buren, 1973, p. 68)

One of the ways in which the museum as an institution sustains the "idealistic nature" of art is through the deliberate "non-visibility […] of the various supports of any work (the work's stretcher, the work's location, the work's frame, the work's stand, the work's price, the work's verso or back, etc…)". For Buren art (and by implication the artist) bears the responsibility of revealing the obscure process of the institutional framework: "This frame does not seem to worry artists who exhibit continually without ever considering the problem of the place in which they exhibit" (Buren, 1973, p. 68). Most artists seem to study, produce, exhibit and sell their work quite contentedly within the existing structure of the art institution. But, according to Buren:

> …any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism. This idealism (which could be compared to Art for Art's sake) shelters and prevents any kind of break. (Buren, 1973, p. 68)

For Hal Foster, artists practicing a critique of the institution in the 1970s responded to the necessity to "expose this false idealism of art […] for it became clear that its supposedly supplemental role of 'preservation, enclosure and refuge' actually preconditioned art production" (Foster, 1986, p. 101).

The museum as *parergon*

> "Artists" as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners in the art-syndrome and relate to each other dialectically. They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame and are being framed. (Haacke, 2006, p. 55)

The museum is a lacuna, it is a gap, nothing in itself, it acquires its meaning from the work that it hosts and exhibits to the public. This is why the space of the museum itself becomes invisible. Having shed the gilt frame, the work of art is now framed by the museum: "To paint something is to recess it in illusion, and dissolving the frame transferred that function to the gallery space" (O'Doherty, 1976, p. 40). In *The truth in painting* (1987), Jacques Derrida uses the frame as a philosophical metaphor; the frame is the symbol of the *parergon*, as that which is external to the artwork but also part of it. Whereas the picture frame belongs neither to the painting nor the gallery walls, it is part of both:

> *parergon:* neither work *(ergon)*nor outside the work *[horsd'oeuvre],* neither inside or outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 9)

For Derrida, the frame represents the distinctions we effectively institute in order to separate and recognise things. The *parergon* "comes up against, beside, and in addition to, the *ergon*" (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 54), it supplements the *ergon*. Whereas Kant discounts the frame as mere decoration, Derrida problematises Kant's failure to account for what is "outside" the work. Namely, the discourse around art that in fact constitutes its significance (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 53). For Derrida, the *parergon* is everything that is traditionally dismissed as exterior to a work of art, therefore not essential to its meaning: it is the preface, catalogue, press release, review or critique. Crucially, there are additional factors involved in the production of art that we cannot discount, such as funding, sponsorship, selection, academic and institutional validation. These factors, understood as external to the work, encroach on and influence the

production of art, the conditions of its display and consequently have a bearing on the meaning of the work.[66]

According to Derrida, the *parergon*—the discourse that frames the work—is what makes the work mean anything at all. The concept of the *parergon* thus challenges the convention that the work of art is a vessel of meaning and that signification lies within the work. Any attempt to suggest an essential, fixed meaning becomes destabilised with a shift in context (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 56). There is no meaning within the work itself, it is thus supplemented with "constructed" signification by what is exterior to it. Thus none of the plural and subjective interpretations of the work can be privileged over any other.

> A frame is essentially constructed and therefore fragile: such would be the essence or truth of the frame. If it had any. […] The fragility of the frame is its "essential constructedness" or systemic precariousness, need for incessant recreation / its "lack of being" (Derrida, 1987/1974, p. 73)

Duncan Reekie points out that in Renaissance theatre, carnival, pantomime and music hall the "framing techniques" used to indicate the border between the performance and reality were flexible conventions. Carnival and music hall allowed for irony, slippage and interplay between the modes of drama, including addressing and interacting with the audience: "Integrating elements of improvisation, myth and the anarchic subversion of the carnival, popular theatre invokes another order of reality – the marvellous". Naturalist drama of the nineteenth and twentieth century replaced conventional frames with "institutional, technological and mimetic strategies"; these different registers were suppressed in naturalist theatre (Reekie, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Pirate copies of feature films on the black market have often been filmed in cinema theatres. These are usually poor copies, the image is blurred, the colours are muted, the contrast is high, the sound echoes and one is familiarly transported into the cinema theatre, the black silhouette of the latecomer blocks the screen momentarily, someone is chewing popcorn within earshot, the man in the row in front turns to say something to his companion. This has the effect of creating a distance between the viewer and the film, foregrounding it as a spectacle and downplaying its immersive effect. The

[66] At Tate Britain we are welcomed by "BP British Art Displays" banners on every threshold. Although British Petroleum sponsorship covers only the museum's display expenses—which for activist collectives such as *Liberate Tate* <www.liberatetate.org> is adequate cause for protest—everything in the museum carries the designation "BP". See also the BP website <http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9026067&contentId=7048078>.

viewing of pirated feature films inadvertently reactivates Bertold Brecht's defamiliarisation technique.

Physical encounters with works of art occur primarily in museums or galleries. These are dedicated contexts for works of art and they contain other works of art, Andy Warhol exploited this fact with his *Brillo Boxes* (1964) which play off the other work. Boris Groys argues that everything in the private installation space of the artist becomes part of it, especially the audience (Groys, 2011). The work of Hans Haacke and Dan Graham highlights the containing effect of the art context, which infects everything. The capacity of the museum to bestow "art-ness" (Duncan, 1995, p. 110) on everything within its space by placing brackets around objects, bodies and events, de-contextualising and re-contextualising them. This environment creates endless opportunities for artists to exploit, only to be reappropriated as another art-exercise within the museum.

> But isn't this one of the more important functions of museums, to kill things, to finish them off, to give them the authority and thus distance from people by taking out of their real everyday context? Even over and above the will of the actors involved with any given museum, I think the structure of museums tend towards this kind of activity: historization. It is sort of a cemetery for art… (Obrist, 2008, pp. 120-121)

The institution as a productive apparatus

In his article *Institutionalisation for all* (2006), Dave Beech argues that artists today are thrown immediately into circulation as institutions take a more active role in the promotion of "emerging" artists:

> Art's institutions do not lag behind contemporary practice as they typically have since the emergence of modernism and the avant garde. Funding, retrospectives, sales, monographs, prizes, major public works, honours, professorships and trusteeships are not restricted to old-timers these days. Young art is welcomed without delay into art's established institutions at a time when contemporary art is growing as an industry, extending its pull on the tourist economy, increasing the popular recognition of its leading practitioners (now celebrities) and developing global brands. (Beech, 2006, p. 7)

The industrial scale of the art world accommodates more artists than ever before, there are more jobs and opportunities for artists, we have never had it better; however artists are more dispensable than ever as well. Before artists can become established on the market, they must first seek legitimisation through the tier-system of art institutions on which they depend: art schools, galleries, journals etc. The criteria are not commercial, art is judged exclusively according to artistic criteria, or so the story

goes. Art is absorbed into capitalist circulation through commodification and recuperation only once it is safely institutionalised. Corporations invest in artists who have a list of credentials.[67] Far from lagging behind the times, JJ Charlesworth suggests in *Not about institutions, but why we are so unsure of them* (2008), that institutions effectively *constitute* contemporary art practice because "Emerging art only emerges if powerful institutions allow it to" (Charlesworth, 2008).

> The active aspect of institutional choice becomes more visibly unstable, however, when it addresses that thing called the 'emerging artist'. What is an 'emerging artist'? Where do they emerge from and what do they emerge into? […] the paradoxical aspect of such formulations of art as 'emerging' is that responsibility for art emerging is assigned to itself, or to any other agency other than the institution which in fact enables its emergence. We could argue that nowadays the institutions of presentation of contemporary art are strangely uncomfortable with openly declaring the power that they do in fact wield. […] Emerging art only emerges if powerful institutions allow it to. (Charlesworth, 2008)

According to Peter Bürger, the notion of the autonomy of art played a crucial role in the failure of the avant-garde to realise its goals. The avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde pitted themselves against the art institution, which acquires its status precisely from the concept of the autonomy of the aesthetic. It is therefore capable of absorbing any criticism in the form of anti-art and re-presenting it as an aesthetic experience, as art:

> …it can be affirmed, with reasonable confidence, that as soon as a concept is announced, and especially when it is "exhibited as art," under the desire to do away with the object, *one merely replaces it* in fact. The exhibited concept becomes *idealobject*, which brings us once again to art (Buren, 1996, p. 142)

For Rosalind Krauss the liberation of art from the fetters of medium-specificity leads directly to a new form of dependency, its dependency on the market. Krauss claims that the art object has been "reduced to a system of pure equivalency by the homogenising principle of commodification, the operation of pure exchange value from which nothing can escape" (Krauss, 1999, p. 15). Isabelle Graw also points out that, in the absence of artistic criteria, the "new power of the art market manifests itself, then, in the *replacement* of artistic criteria by economic imperatives" (Graw, 2006, p. 147).

[67] "We wanted to invite artists to work here with the architecture and create artworks that relate specifically to the building, the Lufthansa identity and the construction process. We therefore selected artists who are on the brink of an important stage in their careers. Lufthansa will continue to follow their progress." Frankfurt Lufthansa Aviation Center website <http://lac.lufthansa.com/en/html/kunst/konzept/index.php>.

Paradoxically, art fairs appear to provide a more "neutral" exhibition space for the work of art to assert its own conditions of address. This is possibly because the evident commercial context has no pretensions to ostensible thematic and concealed ideological framings. Boris Groys argues in *The Politics of Installation* (2009) that the market is a more democratic space within which works of art can assert their own value:

> …the art market appears to be more favorable than the museum or Kunsthalle to Modern, autonomous art. In the art market, works of art circulate singularized, decontextualized, uncurated, which apparently offers them the opportunity to demonstrate their sovereign origin without mediation. (Groys, 2009)

Whereas, art institutions must justify the works of art they exhibit and where "every discourse legitimizing an artwork […] can be seen as an insult to that artwork", in the art market the work of art can assert its autonomy—irrespective of aesthetic taste and theoretical critique—and command its own price:

> The sovereign decision of the artist to make an artwork beyond any justification is trumped by the sovereign decision of a private buyer to pay for this artwork an amount of money beyond any comprehension. (Groys, 2009)

Presumably Groys has the auction house in mind, however, he does not take into account is the intricate gate-keeping system against which a work of art must assert its "value". According to Richard Bolton "the market can be manipulated deliberately. Important collectors can change the status of the work of artists merely by shuffling their collections" (Bolton, 1998, p. 27).

The notion of the autonomy of art perseveres today more than ever, veiling instrumental decisions in a cloak of ambiguous aesthetic judgements that merely serve to legitimise institutional decisions. This is evident in practices ranging from the unregulated commerce of the primary art-market, to the autonomy of the relatively new form of the independent curator—modelled on the figure of Harald Szeemann—who designs exhibitions of art based solely on his or her own subjective criteria.[68] The legitimising authority of the curator is in effect productive. JJ Charlesworth observes that recent discussions on the role of the "curator-as-author" acknowledge the "role of

[68] Marc Spiegler writes in the Art Newspaper that curators fashion their careers by "becoming the new stronghold for validation of taste. The curator is also closer to the artist, because where the critic is trying to be 'objective' the curator is clearly subjective" (Spiegler, 2005).

the contemporary art institution in *producing* an art scene, and not merely representing an already existing one" (Charlesworth, 2008).

Institutions have currently usurped the critical role of the artist via the mediating role of the curator. Often an artist him or herself, the curator mediates between artists, institutions and public thus representing an indeterminate hybrid figure, part institution, part artist. A distinctive brand of institutional critique is taken up by museums and art fairs themselves, which adhere rhetorically to the self-critical model of modern art. This is evident in contemporary institutional discourse and in the current proliferation of institutions inviting artists to practice institutional critique and hosting exhibitions, conferences and symposia on the critique of institutions.[69] This posture disguises these strategies of self-promotion and self-validation.

Neutralisation and the accretion of value and sense

> …in our museums, with modern painting hung beside that of the past, the latter enters into a comparable silence. It does so as soon as it is removed from its original context; out of that context its original message loses its meaning. So it is that, for us today, the beauty of the Old Masters' art is similar in kind to that of modern painting, since we no longer have eyes or ears for the message that was once attached to it. We see something else today, we see that magic interplay of light that lies above or beneath the literal significance of the forms. What we perceive today in these majestic images is not the expression of a well-defined majesty, bound up with political or mythological constructions, but the expression of a majesty quite devoid of political implications. (Bataille, 1983/1955, p. 53)

In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Pierre Bourdieu produces a theory on the structure of the field of cultural production and how it connects with the fields of power and class. He demystifies the symbolic struggle for the definition of art and the naturalisation of cultural practices. Bourdieu argues that the study of art history fails in its stated task because "the essential explanation of each work lies outside of each of them, in the objective relations which constitute this field" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30). Instead of studying the art object as a discrete artefact, Bourdieu argues that:

[69] The talk *Institutional critique: can the institution ever criticise?* was part of the series of events entitled *60 Years of Curating* at the ICA in association with the London Consortium and London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise, London in October 2008. The blurb for the event states: "In 2005 Martha Rosler restaged her piece from 1973, Garage Sale. The exhibition offered a piece of institutional critique on object festishism, the act of buying and selling, and the notion of an 'art exhibition'. However, Rosler is now a known entity, an institution in herself. Is all critique eventually undone, institutionalised, aestheticised?" (ICA, 2008).

> The task is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of the position-takings in which they are expressed. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30)

Bourdieu observes that every position in the field of art is defined by its relation to all the other positions which constitute the field. Even dominant positions depend on the overall space of positions. The structure of the relationships which constitute the field follows the structure of the distribution of capital which determines success in the field: "The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces". The relations between positions defines the strategies which the occupants of the different positions use in their struggle to maintain and strengthen their positions (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30). Bourdieu argues that because a "position-taking" within the field is relatively constituted, it is subject to changes in the field and "receives its distinctive *value* from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 31). This means that the work of art is subject to definitions and interpretations that are determined by the field as a whole:

> The meaning of a work (artistic, literary, philosophical, etc.) changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or reader. (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 30-31)[70]

The institutional context of art breaks down the relationships of the particular elements of a work of art, effectively disassociating works of art from their social context and political aspect. The apparent disconnection of the work from its context and its attachment to art history abstracts the work and presents it as an object free from ideology. Adorno argues that the history of art separates the "productive force" of art from the "real history" in which it is produced:

> The heteronomy, which reception theory's normative interpretation of phenomena foists on art, is an ideological fetter that exceeds everything ideological that may be inherent in art's fetishization. Art and society converge in the artwork's content [*Gehalt*], not in anything external to it. This applies also to the history of art. Collectivization of the individual takes place at the cost of the social force of production. In the history of art, real history returns by virtue of the life of the productive force that originates in real history and is then separated from it. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 228)

[70] Bourdieu considers parody and pastiche as the fate of a cultural artefact taken out of context (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 31).

The aesthetic and art-historical categorisation of art does not leave it unscathed. The category of the aesthetic object delimits a reified sphere. Once consecrated within this sphere, works of art are removed from their existence in the world. The traditional time-lag between the production of the work of art, its circulation to an increasingly broader audience (beginning in the studio, the art school), and its eventual inclusion in the museum, followed the temporal recession of events into historical facts. Although it is impossible to reconstitute this history, or the *doxa* that constitutes the field of art at any point in time:

> Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the 'mood of the age' produces a derealization of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time […] they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32)

The contemporary art institution institutionalises and historicises art simultaneously. The formative effect of this orgy of production and dissemination on current art students is very difficult to predict. Bourdieu points out that a vast amount of information circulates and produces effects within any cultural field. In his particular example, he refers to the field of philosophy:

> …what circulates between contemporary philosophers, or those of different epochs, are not only canonical texts, but a whole philosophical doxa carried along by intellectual rumour—labels of schools, truncated quotations, functioning as slogans in celebration or polemics—by academic routine and perhaps above all by school manuals (an unmentionable reference), which perhaps do more than anything else to constitute the 'common sense' of an intellectual generation. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32)

These influences provide obvious reference points for other producers and they often perform their work on the unconscious, burrowing their way into the text of a book or between the frames of a film. Sometimes they are surreptitiously placed between the frames where the attentive observer will find them. Especially in the art world, references to formative influences—even discarded ones—have a role in the production of the field. A significant influence in the context of production is the oedipal complex: the work is always an aspirational response to another work.

Finally, the structure of the entire field is also subject to change as the result of change in the power relations that constitute the space of positions. And this also has the effect of constraining the production of the field. Bourdieu considers the transformation of the field of production when a new group with new ideas makes an appearance in the field and displaces "the universe of possible options; the previously dominant

productions may, for example, be pushed into the status either of outmoded [*déclassé*] or of classic works" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32). In the current lateral expansion of the field there are no discernible movements, influences come from all directions and rather than a progressive movement, the production of art follows localised flourishes. In this context, personal and subjective agendas are privileged over social and collective concerns in art practice. The field is one of professional competition rather than common aspiration. Bourdieu argues that given this account of the structure of field—and although we cannot entirely discount the possibilities for self-determination in the field of art—it is impossible:

> …to make the cultural order [*episteme*] a sort of autonomous, transcendent sphere, capable of developing in accordance with its own laws. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 33)

For Adorno, normative interpretations impose heteronomy on art. We can see this in the display texts at the Tate Modern, which provide assertive interpretations of the art on display.[71] These authoritative statements are not supplemental or equal to other interpretations because they come directly from the mouth of the institution. They impose themselves on the audience, precluding active engagement. Cultural artefacts are effectively captured and ideologically re-directed by normative interpretations over democratic ones. Adorno argues that although works of art are "internally revolutionary", all art has nevertheless the "tendency toward social integration". Adorno is essentially referring to institutional integration, which:

> …does not bring the blessings of justice in the form of retrospective confirmation. More often, reception wears away what constitutes the work's determinate negation of society. (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 229)

The institution of art abstracts and aestheticises the work of art, allowing extraneous values to be attached to it: "Form works like a magnet that orders elements of the empirical world in such a fashion that they are estranged from their extra-aesthetic existence" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 226). It is not only art with purely formal objectives that is susceptible to accretion of value and ideology. Any work of art, as soon as it

[71] *Test Sites* (2006), Carsten Holler's Unilever commission was composed of three gigantic slides, the audience could use them to shuttle from the top floors to ground level in the Turbine Hall. According to Tate Modern, these slides "question human behaviour, perception and logic, offering the possibility for self-exploration in the process". We are also told that they "are impressive sculptures in their own right, and you don't have to hurtle down them to appreciate this artwork" (Tate, 2006).

becomes the object of aesthetic judgement is a clean slate and can tell us nothing apparently about the real world:

> Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy. However, once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities, they themselves—their truth content—are also damaged. In the administered world neutralization is universal. (Adorno, 2002/1970, pp. 228-229)

This problem has been addressed by artists throughout the twentieth century but the idealised value of art still persists, notably in the market. In his essay *Enlightened Self-Interest: The Avant-Garde in the 80s* (1998), Richard Bolton argues that in an information society—characterised by immaterial labour—capital is generated by the manipulation of signs in the form of investments, corporate takeovers, media spectacles, advertising and communication. At the same time, labour conflicts arising in the productive base are suppressed because the "success of the commodity depends upon its degree of detachment from reality, from labor […] the corporation replaces the individual as the author of the commodity" (Bolton, 1998, p. 42):

> The object, abstracted, infused with aura, becomes a free-floating sign, and value becomes flexible, determined by manipulation of market. (Bolton, 1998, p. 42)

Politics and the war of culture

> What is in our time the value of the aesthetic—of reception as well as production? Indeed, what is the point (political or otherwise) of culture itself in the first place? (Jameson, 1986, p. 44)

For Fredric Jameson, it is "culture's radical self-doubt, the profound guilt of culture works at their own 'elitist' and (appropriately Kantian) un-practicality", that spawns radical traditions eager to denounce art in its entirety (Jameson, 1986, p. 44). Jameson argues that although we can perform a critique of the "strategic cultural and ideological institutions" of art and literature, individual works will always escape these institutional approaches. In particular, we can analyse the historical terms of these institutions, scrutinise their institutional subsystems (the gallery, museum, art school, journals, etc.), and demystify their various ideologies (defences, theories etc.), however individual works of art escape this approach. This is because the ideology of the individual work of art is incommensurable with the ideology of the field of art in general.

Jameson reveals how the dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy at play within the institution of art enforce a distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, which excludes the later from artistic discourses and thereby masks the dynamics of the

institution altogether. For Jameson, Hans Haacke's work is a "solution" to this dilemma, because he includes within the work of art the excluded heteronomous (and *parergonal*) elements: the patrons, donors and museum trustees. According to Jameson, Haacke's work draws the heteronomous determinants of art into the work of art. The work's "content" can thus only be excluded as heteronomous "at the price of repudiating the installation itself and denying it any status as a 'work of art'", which is in fact what happened at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971 and at the Cologne Museum in 1974 (Jameson, 1986, p. 48). The letter written by Thomas M. Messer, director of the Guggenheim Museum, to Hans Haacke in 1971 justifies the cancellation on the grounds that the "political" intentions of the work exceed the "professional competence" of the institution (Messer, 1971, pp. 248-249).

It is impossible to situate oneself critically within the art world without acknowledging the institutional frame and one's own complicity with what it in fact stands for. On the other hand, the problem of the impact of the art institution on art practice is difficult for artists to negotiate without becoming self-conscious. Perhaps the only way to escape the context of the museum is to address it critically by practicing a type of institutional critique or site-specificity.

Although conceptual artists highlighted the politics of the museum, they also inadvertently helped to promote the institution, leading to the current practice whereby institutions formally invite artists to practice this critique. They limited the scope of art practice in hermetic and self-conscious investigations and introduced what Buchloh calls "the aesthetic of administration" (Buchloh, 1990). In this sense, institutional critique foregrounds the institution, which takes precedence as the disavowed centre of the structure of art as a language game. Finally, institutional critique becomes dependent on the museum and sets the precedent for the institutional privileging of art that is made inside the institution (site-specificity, performance, happening and event).

According to John Osborne, speaking at the panel discussion entitled *Institutional critique: can the institution ever criticise?* at the ICA (2008), institutional critique has become a "subconscious practice within the institution". The significance of this outcome is that institutional critique is co-opted by museums as a strategy for their own self-promotion:

> Institutional critique was the main art-institutional means for the political modernisation of its own institutions […] it is the medium of political modernisation and in that sense it is essentially a politically conservative but modernising function. (Osborne, 2008)

Institutional critique has provided the means whereby the institution reinvents itself. This reinvention is not the type that artists have in mind; it does not contain the radical promise of transformation with unlimited possibilities because it is informed by a neo-liberal agenda. As Patricia Bickers has pointed out, Haacke's visitor surveys are currently used by museums as a "marketing device" (Haacke, 2007).[72] According to Osborne this modernisation:

> …marks recognition by the institution and artists alike of the new *kind* of *professionalism* in art. It is not the professionalisation of artists which some people talk about. It is a new kind of professionalisation, and it is a new kind of recognition of a kind of managerial or self-managerial role as an essential institutional practice (Osborne, 2008)

Artists like Carey Young extend their critique to neo-liberalism, but can this critique overcome the prevalence of neo-liberalism in the very exhibition contexts that we encounter her work? Does this predicament amount to the irony of institutional critique or its cynical realism? Artists affirm and sanction the museum merely by exhibiting within it. This positive affirmation of the institution speaks louder than their negative critique, which becomes subverted and comes across as rhetorical posturing, hypocrisy or nonsense.

In his *Installation Munster (Caravan)*, first exhibited in 1977 at Skulptur Projekte Münster, Asher presented a caravan parked on the streets of Munster that depended entirely on the museum for its artistic designation without even being in the institution. As Fraser points out, "nothing indicated that the caravan was art or had any connection to the exhibition. To casual passersby, it was nothing but a caravan" (Fraser, 2005, p. 281). How then are we to perceive the work as art? Speaking to students at the Cooper Union School of Art in 2007, Fraser explains that:

> ...it's only the people who are going to the exhibition and go to the museum and pick up, or get the brochure, the catalogue of the exhibition, and go out and look for the trailer, who see it as art. To everybody else on the street, who might be standing next to those people, it's just a trailer (Fraser, 2007)

Fraser argues that with *Installation Munster*, "Asher demonstrated that the institutionalization of art as art depends not on its location in the physical frame of an

[72] Hans Haacke's first *Visitors' Profile* was intended for his 1971 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, which was cancelled. In 1970, he exhibitied *MOMA Poll* at the exhibition *Information*, Museum of Modern art, New York, followed by *Visitor's Profile 2* (1973), at the John Weber Gallery, New York.

institution, but in conceptual or perceptual frames" (Fraser, 2005, p. 281). Fraser's argument is that with *Installation Munster* Asher demonstrates that:

> …the institution of art is not only "institutionalized" in organizations like museums and objectified in art objects. It is also internalized and embodied in people. It is internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as art (Fraser, 2005, p. 281)

Far from demonstrating these things, Asher's Munster installation only becomes a work of art if we read the museum catalogue or brochure. Asher is demonstrating that a work of art does not exist until it is institutionally validated. In his installation at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art in 1979, Michael Asher literally limited the work to materials specific to the architectural space of the institutional space itself. Asher removed aluminium panels from the museum facade and mounted them inside the museum.

> Rigorously denying spatial and temporal transcendence, Asher's works are constituted first of all within their own spatial, institutional context, the museum; and they become the performative articulation of their actually given historical time, the allocated exhibition period itself. (Buchloh, 2000/1987, p. 22)

Asher's installations fail both as works of art and as a forms of critique; they are obscure, unrewarding, pointless and worst of all, they privilege the institution as the primary site of artistic production. John Welchman is visibly frustrated by artists' apparent ignorance regarding how their work comes across and its long-term the consequences:

> Could it be that there is something delusional in practices that are so attached to deconstructing the apparatuses of the museum—mostly from within the institution—yet still believe themselves to be "critical" according to some measure or judgment from the outside? Has critique been evaporated into absorption; and the era of installation and site-specificity ushered in during the 1990s digested the assumptions of Institutional Critique so thoroughly that the predicates of place have now become the first conditions of the artwork? (Welchman, 2006, p. 13-14)

In *The Museum and the Monument: Daniel Buren's Les Couleurs/Les Formes* (2000), Buchloh suggests that Buren's *Les Couleurs: Sculptures* (1977), striped flags mounted on buildings and visible from the Centre Pompidou, represents an attempt "at solving one of the most crucial problems in twentieth century art: the dialectic between aesthetic reification and the counter-concept of aesthetic use value" (Buchloh, 2000, p.

126). These installations by Buren and Asher articulate a subtle relationship between formalism and Dadaist intervention and can be construed either way.

The institution of art determines what is produced and exhibited through forms of direct censorship and indirect methods of positive and negative reinforcement, which enforce artists' self-censorship.[73] Herbert Schiller argues in his book *Culture, Inc. The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (1989), that the "apparent absence" of control in the sphere of culture is achieved by the internalisation of values:

> It is not necessary to construct a theory of intentional cultural control. In truth, the strength of the control process rests in its apparent absence. The desired systemic result is achieved ordinarily by a loose though effective institutional process. It utilizes the education of journalists and other media professionals, built-in penalties for doing what is not expected, and rewards for doing what is expected, norms presented as objective rules, and the occasional but telling direct intrusion from above. The main lever is the internalization of values. (Schiller, 1989, p. 8)

The institution selects through exclusion, but on what criteria? Justification in art can never be definitive because all aesthetic values are subjective. The institution of art dictates but it also suggests, coaxes and propositions artists into making work with calls, project rooms, residencies, commissions, etc. The institution also educates artists, and so on.

Culture is both an industry and a battleground. The institution of art has entirely ceded to material objectives and political agendas and can no longer claim a critical position in relation to capitalism. Whereas the autonomy of art is founded on the promise of "aesthetic revolution", it is currently subject to corporate instrumentalisation and control. Throughout modernity, we have examples of artists who established their own alliances with power (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 51-60). Since the late twentieth century, curators and administrators mediate between artists and power. Exhibition sponsorship is arranged by museums on behalf of artists, who have no control of the alliances they enter into as a result of exhibiting in institutions. The political partnerships of museums or galleries are not considered problematic, apparently they have no bearing on art. Art exists in an abstract, reified sphere, it is not real.

If art continues to claim the avant-garde project—which includes the ambition to reject all forms of domination and exploitation—then artists need to resist the colonisation of

[73] See Bourdieu and Haacke, 2005, pp. 2-10 on the relationship between censorship and self-censorship.

art by the powers that it has repeatedly rejected. Artists need to reassert art as a free and potentially revolutionary space within society. Art is not just a harmless and self-indulgent game for artists and patrons alike, because in every game there is in the end a winner. Art is as much a struggle in terms of exclusively aesthetic goals, as it is a struggle for control over its own territory. The power that individuals wield in the art world is upheld by the entire population that makes up the art world. The intricate alliances in the art world are politically charged because they constitute the struggle for power. Power within the art world is constituted through its structure, which is relational as well as hierarchical. The field's hierarchical structure is composed at the top by powerful collectors, dealers and museum directors and politicians. Next is a group of supporting collaborating curators, dealers, collectors, artists, museum directors, gallery directors, critics, theorists, writers and politicians. Following them a less powerful but crucial group of gallery directors, curators, academics, museum staff, journalists, teachers, entrepreneurs, celebrities, students and—most significantly—lots of artists. This last group function like proselytisers who consciously or unconsciously transmit the discourse of their superiors to their own spheres of influence: artists, journalists, the public and crucially, the students. The spaces where this dissemination of dominant ideas intensifies includes art schools, universities, conferences, museum and gallery panel discussions, journals and the media, exhibitions and web-sites.

The three fields: society, power and art

> It is clear that curatorial practice today goes well beyond mounting art exhibitions and caring for works of art. Curators do a lot more: they administer the experience of art by selecting what is made visible, contextualize and frame the production of artists, and oversee the distribution of production funds, fees, and prizes that artists compete for. Curators also court collectors, sponsors, and museum trustees, entertain corporate executives, and collaborate with the press, politicians, and government bureaucrats; in other words, they act as intermediaries between producers of art and the power structure of our society… (Vidokle, 2010)

Karl Marx links the control of material production in society to control over the production and distribution of ideas. He argues that insofar as the ruling class determines "the extent and compass of an epoch", it also controls the intellectual production of that epoch, its members rule "as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch" (Marx, 1998, p. 67).

In *The Painting of Modern Life* (1985), TJ Clark describes "ideologies" as distinct and singular "orders" of knowledge, which are imposed on representations and behaviours,

ways of "providing certain perceptions and rendering others unthinkable, aberrant or extreme". Ideologies, for Clark are singular constructs tied to class-specific attitudes and experiences and are "therefore at odds, at least to some extent, with the attitudes and experience of those who do not belong to it". Although, Clark holds that class "is regularly made out of the many and the various" he also affirms the existence of antagonism between ideological frameworks belonging to different classes. The function of ideology therefore is "as far as possible to dispose of the very ground for such conflicts" (Clark, 1985, p. 8). Herbert Marcuse maintains that art provides ways for power to assert itself (Marcuse, 2009/1968, pp. 71, 97), Benjamin Buchloh sees art as "a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation" (Buchloh, 1990, p. 143), Adrian Piper uses the term "weaponry".[74] In *The Rules of Art* (1996), Pierre Bourdieu affirms the existence of power struggles "for the monopoly of the definition of the mode of legitimate cultural production" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 227). These power struggles do not just take place amongst artists; they take place amongst the legitimising institutions of art:

> The producer of the *value of the work of art* is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a *fetish* by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 229)

In *The Field of Production* (1993), Bourdieu sketches an image of the relationship of art to society with a diagram of three interlocking social spheres and their power dynamics: the social totality, the field of power and the field of art. Each sphere has its own hierarchy, indicated by a dominant pole on the one end and a dominated pole on the other. The field of power is situated within the dominant pole of the social totality. The field of art in turn, is governed by a "double hierarchy", it occupies the dominant pole of society and it simultaneously occupies a dominated position within the field of power. But how is this balance of power allocated and articulated? Bourdieu argues that this double hierarchy is a "struggle" between two opposing principles of assigning value or "principles of hierarchization" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40).

The field of art controls the production of symbolic capital and its "principle of hierarchization" is autonomy. Bourdieu defines of "autonomy" in this instance as "fulfils its own logic as a field" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39). The field of art thus retains a degree

[74] Piper argues that "Galleries and museums are political arenas in which strategies of confrontation and avoidance are calculated, diplomacy is practiced, and weaponry is tested, all in the service of divergent, and often conflicting, interests" (Piper, 1996/1980, p. 43).

of autonomy regarding the economic and political forces in society. Pulling in the opposite direction is the "heteronomous principle of hierarchization", which is "favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40) and is indicated by official success. For Bourdieu success is "measured by indices such as book sales, number of theatrical performances, etc. or honours, appointments, etc." (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38). Thus the heteronomous principle would dominate the art-field unchallenged if the field lost its autonomy and became subject to ordinary laws prevailing in the economic and political field.

Equally, in the field of art the *autonomous* principle of hierarchisation "would reign unchallenged if the field of production were to achieve total autonomy with respect to the laws of the market" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38). Paradoxically, the more autonomous the field of art becomes, the more independent it becomes from the field of power and the more autonomous artists become from institutional and ideological constraints. Although as Bourdieu argues: "whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39) and this is why the autonomy of art is always "relative".

For Bourdieu the "most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production" is one where production addresses an audience of other producers, epitomised by the Symbolist movement. In the most autonomous sectors of cultural production there is an inversion of principles of common economies, Bourdieu describes this as a game of "loser wins". For example, in economic terms the autonomous field "excludes the pursuit of profit and does not guarantee any sort of correspondence between investments and monetary gains", in terms of power "it condemns honours and temporal greatness" and in terms of institutional authority, "the absence of any academic training or consecration may be considered a virtue" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39).

> The more autonomous the field becomes, the more favourable the symbolic power balance is to the most autonomous producers and the more clear-cut is the division between the field of restricted production, in which the producers produce for other producers, and the field of large-scale production… (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39)

The paradox is that the contemporary art world—as the most lucrative sector of the culture industry—has essentially become a field of "large-scale production". This is not only evident in large-scale exhibitions and sprawling museums but also "factories" for the mass production of the work of artists such as Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami. In Bourdieu's scheme, the *heteronomous* principle of hierarchisation functions to screen the field of art from social forces. The field of power

asserts the heteronomous principle as a value in the field of art, which is a field of institutional authorisation and "multiple authorship" (Groys, 2008, p. 96). So interestingly, the buffer zone that in bourgeois society traditionally encircles and protects art, now converts it into a field of mass-production, with the associated division of labour between art-making, curating, research, education, marketing, promotion, fund-raising, etc. in the various museum departments each with its experts and trained staff.

> The program of the visual industry implies that visuality and its meanings are no longer produced by singular protagonists (artists, galleries, curators). Instead responsibility for the production and distribution of images and their content lies in the hands of larger entities, including international franchises and multi-national conglomerates. (Graw, 2006, pp. 146-147)

Analysing the relations between artists and mediators such as agents, dealers, gallery directors or publishers, Bourdieu describes the later as "equivocal figures": through them, the logic of the economic field enters the autonomous field. These figures must posses "economic dispositions" but also qualities that are similar to those of the artists "whose work they valorize and exploit" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 39):

> …this favours the relationship of trust and belief which is the basis of an exploitation presupposing a high degree of misrecognition on each side. These 'merchants in the temple' make their living by tricking the artist or writer into taking the consequences of his or her statutory professions of disinterestedness. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40)

Bourdieu argues that "authenticity" in the art field is demonstrated by the absence of guarantee of strictly economic or political rewards: the art world is structured in such a way, that those who enter it must demonstrate that they "have an interest in disinterestedness" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40). There is however an economic logic in the field, but it is a reverse logic involving the investment of belief and commitment:

> There are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40)

This group also includes curators and other institutional figures who mediate between artist and public and who barter the symbolic capital of the work in exchange for economic, political and social rewards within the sphere of art and beyond. Bourdieu alludes enigmatically to something that is crucial for our discussion:

> This explains the inability of all forms of economism, which seek to grasp this anti-economy in economic terms, to understand this upsidedown economic world. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40)

Bourdieu is implying that the principle of instant gratification which governs in the field of power has limited bearing in the field of art, which is structured according to an inverse economic logic. The insistence on applying the "heteronomous principle of hierarchization" in the art world—as has been the case in the music industry—creates a large-scale cultural industry, a powerful mainstream. Being thus at odds with the disinterested values of the field, this mainstream promotes a climate of estrangement amongst the producers. In the music industry, this process led to productive resistance, which librated the producers from their dependence on legitimisation from the mainstream as they printed their own CDs and organised their own gigs. This process resulted in the diminishing value of the mainstream and the once bloated record companies found themselves struggling to survive. The overall result was the disintegration of the entire centralised music industry into self-governing networks.

The Politics of art

> "An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. (Chesterton, 2005/1908, p. 8)

Bourdieu describes the field of art as a struggle between two principles, the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle. The struggle between the competing forces of heteronomy and autonomy takes place within the institution of art even before it takes place within the work of art.

For Peter Bürger, art "lives off the tension" between autonomy and its social content (Bürger, 2007/1974, p. 25). He does not suggest that they are incompatible, on the contrary, "the autonomy status certainly does not preclude the artist's adoption of a political position; what it does limit is the chance of effectiveness" (Bürger, 2007/1974, pp. 25-26). Adorno considers the dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy in relation to the work of art itself, not in the context of the political and economic relations that constitute the field of art, thus obscuring the inherent congruence between artists who make art-for-art's-sake and those who believe in the social role of art. There is no clear separation between autonomy and heteronomy, their relationship is dialectical. Given

that artists occupy a dominated position in the institution of art, there is always the pressure of external economic or political interests.

Ranciere dispels the distinction between political and non-political art as a fallacy, yet he too considers heteronomy and autonomy in terms of the art object, not the structure of the field. But as we have seen, the work of art is a fetish, although it embodies the collaborative efforts of everyone in the field, it does not reveal the power relationships at play in the field, nor the political choices of the individual agents in the field.

Inevitably, the commitment of socially engaged artists like Beveridge and Burns or autonomous artists like Judd and Flavin is to art. Bourdieu argues that socially engaged art shares with autonomous art "a radical rejection of the dominant principle of hierarchy" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40, note 12). In political terms, to consider the principles at play within the work of art without considering the principles at play at the level of power is speculative at best. Because the power structure of the field determines the production and representation of the field. It renders its own role invisible by disavowing this power:

> The state of the power relations in this struggle depends on the overall degree of autonomy possessed by the field, that is, the extent to which it manages to impose its own norms and sanctions on the whole set of producers, including those who are closest to the dominant pole of the field of power and therefore most responsive to external demands (i.e. the most heteronomous); this degree of autonomy varies considerably from one period and one national tradition to another, and affects the whole structure of the field. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40)

So we can safely say that currently, the field is characterised by a very low degree of autonomy. Which makes Bourdieu's claim even more urgent: he argues that the power configuration in the field of at ultimately rests on the value of art for the dominant field in its struggle for power, more specifically:

> …in the struggle to conserve the established order and, perhaps especially, in the struggle between the fractions aspiring to domination within the field of power (bourgeoisie and aristocracy, old bourgeoisie and new bourgeoisie, etc.), and on the other hand in the production and reproduction of economic capital (with the aid of experts and cadres). (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 41)

If we follow Bourdieu's reasoning, then art is one more weapon in the political struggle of the dominant classes. This shines some light on the relationship between art and politics in the institution of art, and the resulting impact on the role of the artist within this configuration. This is not a novel idea, but the definition of the artistic field as "a

field of positions and a field of position-takings" avoids reductive interpretations of the type that endeavour to gauge the critical impact of the singular work of art, and equally, the automatic condemnation of profit-making or commercial activity. It also avoids the reductive polarisation between "the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by an isolated artist" and ethical or instrumental agendas (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34). In other words, we need not resort to conspiracy theories. The position that individual agents or institutions occupy within a system certainly determines their behaviour within it. Additionally, it follows that these individuals or institutions aim to achieve independence and stability, in other words, they will try to maintain control over their status by consolidating their power and influence with others in the field. The position that individual agents or institutions occupy within the field is determined by and determines how much influence they have. Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production is the site of struggles; at stake is the power to impose not only the dominant definitions of the artist but also those who are entitled to define the artist (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42).

Bourdieu's positive argument is that there is "no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42).[75] It follows then, that even attempts to restrict the redefinitions of the field by imposing conditions of entry can be subverted: "polemics imply a form of recognition; adversaries whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring them cannot be combated without consecrating them" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42). The institution's most effective weapon against undesirable competition is feigned indifference.

When Bourdieu refers to the "*boundary* of the field is a stake of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 42), he is not merely referring to the boundary of inclusion within the field of art. He is referring to the three boundaries between the three social fields: between the field of power and the social totality which it dominates, between the cultural field and the social totality and between the field of power and the cultural field. The most disputed boundary of all, according to Bourdieu, is the one between the field of cultural production and the field of power (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 43)

Bourdieu argues that the homology between oppositions that structure the field of art and oppositions that structure the field of class relations may produce "ideological effects which are produced automatically whenever oppositions at different levels are

[75] Blogging is a good example, art journalism and blogs have achieved broader popularity than art journals, leading those journals to imitate arts blogs in their own websites.

superimposed or merged". But there are also struggles within the field of power itself, which produce "partial alliances", the struggles within the field of art are therefore "always overdetermined and always tend to aim at two birds with one stone" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44). The complexity that is the result of the superimposition of these various conflicts and allegiances goes a long way in explaining the ambiguity of the relationship between art and politics as it is regarded within the field of art. It has less to do with the intentions of artists concerning the work of art itself, and more to do with the *parergonal* elements of art practice, which have a direct bearing on the work of art. For example, the relationship (of trust) between artists and dealers or curators who represent the artwork to the public. Or the choices that artists must make between participating in an exhibition or not, accepting a commission or not and a multitude of singular choices, the consequences of which may serve to reinforce the heteronomous principles of the field, with the artists' endorsement. Bourdieu explains that the individual artists or groups within the productive field of art are not immune to the attractions of the heteronomous field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 41); artists constantly negotiate the tension between the impulse toward heteronomy and the impulse toward autonomy (and their respective rewards). This is what constitutes the dynamic space of artists' dilemmas and choices. Bourdieu argues that by responding to the logic of competition within the field, artists adjust to the expectations of the various positions in the field of power, without making conscious decisions (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 45). For example, the most common scenario is the artist who considers the benefits of gallery representation;[76] these include the possibility of increased income and visibility (heteronomous values), which will enable the artist to produce new work, thus satisfying the artists' autonomous values. However, the artist soon discovers that this is not actually how things turn out; quite often it is the artist who brings visibility to the gallery and the sale of a work of art may cover the artist's associated expenses, but a very small proportion of artists make enough of a profit from sales to maintain a studio.

Although the solidarity of artists ("who occupy the economically dominated and symbolically dominant position within the field of cultural production") with the "economically and culturally dominated positions within the field of class relations" is based on "homologies of position", they are also divided by "profound differences in

[76] Generally understood as a partnership—if we go by the standard 50/50 share in sales—however, artists' relationship with their gallery is rarely a relationship negotiated on equal terms.

condition" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44), which is the source of many ironies in the field of art. However, Bourdieu points out that artists can use their power to articulate critical proposals about the world:

> The fact remains that the cultural producers are able to use the power conferred on them, especially in periods of crisis, by their capacity to put forward a critical definition of the social world, to mobilize the potential strength of the dominated classes and subvert the order prevailing in the field of power. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44)

What are the politics of art? What informs artists' ideological choices, what are they based on? Are they political ideologies? If we follow Bourdieu, the traditional values that artists apply to each other are autonomous values, for example, the condemnation of material gains and the approval of earned recognition. Artists are not socialists, democrats or liberals when it comes to choices about art, whether these choices are intrinsic to the work or *parergonal* choices, such as whether to participate in a specific exhibition or go for gallery representation.

When we say "autonomy", we mean "art is its own politics". But artists do not institutionalise their politics. Adorno's concept of autonomy characterises the designation "artist" as a political ontology. The etymology of "autonomy" emphasises self-legislation.[77] Art is an autonomous sphere because artists create their own rules and they defend their right to create their own rules. Their "precarious" condition insists on this right; artists are not answerable because artists do not get a paycheck. Unlike curators, artists do not ask for permission.

The work of an artist is considered inauthentic if it is at odds with the artist's life-style. This self-consciousness can be traced back to Théophile Gautier, Oscar Wilde, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Chris Burden, Andy Warhol. After Warhol, artists increasingly identify as professionals. Artists are well-educated, with a string of credentials they promote their unique brand of autonomy. They self-consciously negotiate their autonomy, hand it over as a commodity in exchange for recognition. On the other hand, if artists do not compete on the professional level they will not be able to produce and exhibit their work.

Exploding Cinema was initially defined by a set of strategies aimed against limitations to artists' freedom. It is astonishing that after 20 years these strategies are still crucial.

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[77] "Autonomy": 1. the quality or state of being self-governing; especially the right of self-government 2. self-directing freedom and especially moral independence. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2011).

What does it reveal? It helps to identify some of the major limitations of the art institution and it shows that very little has changed since 1991.

How do we make a connection with a historical text or context? We make a subjective connection. This is why we probably do not realise that certain epiphanies have already resurfaced numerous times; it is just that our attention was elsewhere. Epiphanies resurface when they are necessary, because without the connecting link we fail to recognise any similarity with our own experience. Paradigm shifts and revolutions follow similar patterns: any set of premises will eventually become redundant but in the meantime it has become sedimented and institutionalised, a way of life is built on it and interests coagulate around it. This is why any set of premises and the structures around it must be forcibly removed and replaced when it no longer serves a purpose. The notion of the autonomy of *art* must be replaced with the concept of the autonomy of the *artist*.

CHAPTER FOUR: NO STARS NO FUNDING NO TASTE[78]

> There's a strange kind of […] obsolescence written into the film club thing which is that it takes a lot of energy to do it and you can't make any money out of it. So you can do it for a while, but eventually you are going to be thinking you have got to find a way to sell this thing to make money out of it. But the thing is the Exploding is always going to be around, because we don't care. We never wanted to make money and we never wanted to go into the commercial industry. (Reekie in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

Art is political, not because of the contingencies within which it is embedded and the histories it necessarily incorporates. Art is political because we encounter it in the imposing museum, the hidden gallery, the exclusive auction house. The privileged and circumscribed context of the encounter with art is politically charged. Artists who imagine a different way of doing things and do not share the ideologies and discourses of established art venues are effectively excluded. Artists have responded to these exclusions by creating their own spaces, events and networks, thus practicing a negative critique of the predominant and naturalised bourgeois ideology that reigns in the art world. These include artist-run spaces, one-off exhibitions and screenings in warehouse spaces, organisations and networked practices. The problem, however, with many of these distributed practices, is that they often fail to grow to produce an enduring alternative culture for the production and distribution of art. There are various reasons for this: these spaces are often unsustainable and become co-opted in their struggle to survive. They are isolated within the broader sphere of the cultural industries and feel the pressure to conform and compete. They often serve as springboards to the mainstream and either disappear or become transformed when they have served their purpose. In many ways, these failures can be traced to a single factor, the artist's desire for recognition:

> Fame and success are important tools of affirmative culture; by casting achievement as an individual accomplishment, the artist is separated from the collective—the subculture—from which the work originally drew its power. This former power is replaced by the power of value and fame. "Genius" fills the void left by the elimination of work's social base. (Bolton, 1998, p. 41)

Georges Bataille discerns this most "pathetic desire" in Manet: "What he yearned for was encouragement, official success" (Bataille, 1983/1955, p. 27). Manet assisted a

[78] Exploding Cinema slogan.

revolution not only in art but also in the status of the artist in society, yet "his aplomb concealed a rankling bitterness. Few more charming men than he, yet few have suffered more not simply from their failure to gain recognition, but from being a target of public ridicule" (Bataille, 1983/1955, p. 23).[79] This public was a new public for art, a bourgeois public. And the artists of the modern world "were their own masters, their own sovereign. The ambiguous name of "artist" covered both a newfound dignity and a pretension difficult to justify" (Bataille, 1983/1955, p. 26):

> In the confusion brought on by an almost overnight emancipation Manet appears as the symbol of all the conflicting inclinations a free man is torn between. (Bataille, 1983/1955, p. 26)

After 1848, the political climate in Europe began to change in favour of the bourgeoisie who were now the ruling class. How did this affect the artists? How did they react?

> From its beginnings, the artistic avant-garde has discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, 'non-artistic' forms of expressivity and display – forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture. Manet's "Olympia" offered a bewildered middle-class public the flattened pictorial economy of the cheap sign or carnival backdrop, the pose and allegories of contemporary pornography superimposed over those of Titian's "Venus of Urbino". (Crow, 1983, p. 215)

The Impressionist movement effected a distinct rejection of society in the artists' refusal to represent any value other than fleeting impressions. Impressionism coincided with the Second Empire, during this period "the bourgeois acquiescence to political authoritarianism was followed by the first spectacular flowering of consumer society" (Crow, 1983, p. 228). In his essay *Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts* (1983), Thomas Crow argues that emerging modes of commodity production determined the character of the modernist avant-garde. Crow discerns in the host of competing practices within modernism an attempt to construct a critical mediation of commodities (Crow, 1983, p. 233). He emphasises the central role in Impressionist painting of the "new spaces of commercial pleasure the painters seem rarely to have left". For Crow, early modernist artists consistently identified with the "social practices of mass diversion—whether uncritically reproduced, caricatured, or transformed into abstract Arcadias". He comes across the "debris" of mass culture in cubist and dada

[79] A letter by Berthe Morisot describes him as "embittered to the very end by the blind incomprehension of the art public". He even challenged his friend Louis Edmond Duranty to a dual on account of an unfavourable review in *Paris-Journal*. Their friendship was restored when Duranty wrote another, favourable review (Bataille, 1983, p. 23).

collage and discovers the "delighted discovery of American traffic, neon, and commercialized black music" in Mondrian's *Boogie-Woogie* series (Crow, 1983, p. 215). This trend reached its climax in Pop Art, and continues to be a fundamental strategy for artists. Crow argues that innovation in modern art is due largely to a consistent sourcing of "non-artistic" forms, primarily from popular culture:

> From its beginnings, the artistic avant-garde has discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, 'non-artistic' forms of expressivity and display—forms improvised by other social groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture. (Crow, 1983, p. 215)

As consumption in the post-Fordist capitalist economy became self-justifying and began to play a larger role in social relations, there was a need to create expanded desires and sensibilities, and artists provided "the skills required for an even more intense marketing of sensual gratification" (Crow, 1983, p. 252). Crow argues that the artistic avant-garde provided the service of mediating between the differentiated strata of commodity culture, which he describes as a "necessary brokerage between high and low" (Crow, 1983, p. 253):

> In its selective appropriation from fringe mass culture, the avant-garde searches out areas of social practice which retain some vivid life in an increasingly administered and rationalised society. These it refines and packages, directing them to an elite, self-conscious audience (Crow, 1983, p. 253)

High art is thus "an irreplaceable status indicator", which guarantees its value and permanence (Crow, 1983, p. 253).

> Functionally then, the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the cultural industry: it searches out areas of social practice not yet completely available to efficient manipulation and makes them discrete and visible. (Crow, 1983, p. 253)

A close look at the histories of art and the histories of popular culture reveals intimate interactions between the two. Far from being discretely outlined, these two fields kept separate by respective discourses and markets, can be clearly seen to co-evolve in complex processes of appropriation, quotation, imitation and parody. Art and popular culture have endlessly recycled common strategies, techniques and ideas against a backdrop of social and political shifts. Beyond this cycle of exchange however, Crow sees a filtering system at work which moves in one direction: "appropriation of oppositional practices upward, the return of evacuated cultural goods downward". Achieved largely by the legitimising function of art institutions, this process entrenches

class bias and thus "modernist negation becomes, paradoxically, an instrument of cultural domination" (Crow, 1983, p. 255).

The Exploding Cinema Collective is a resistant subculture, its roots are not in art but in the underground. Thomas Crow defines resistant subcultures as "groups which articulate for themselves a counter-consensual identity", they thereby convey "an implicit message of rupture and discontinuity" (Crow, 1983, p. 233). Exploding Cinema represents a progressive counterpoint to art institutions. Its original constitution was motivated by the activities of predecessors and informed by the potential disasters of official recognition and support. Exploding Cinema is not motivated by the desire for recognition from the established sector; it relies on the audience and the community of producers who send in their films to be screened. Exploding Cinema is unique in that this vision was never abandoned or compromised. The question rather, is how did it manage to survive?

I have been a member of Exploding Cinema since 2004 and this chapter differs slightly in tone from the rest of the thesis. My intention is not to valorise Exploding Cinema but to convey it as one more element in a vast sphere of creativity, productivity and community that does not aspire to distinctions and recognition within the art world.

ARTISTS MARCH ON THE MUSEUM

> Record attendances at the Tate Gallery are not a cause for joy. The Sermon on the Mount was a CON-TRICK. The performer-audience situation whereby, hopefully, some of the magic will rub off onto the multitudes is a substitute for DOING. THEM and US is wrong. The hierarchy of PROVEN WORTH is wrong; this worth is proved by pieces of paper (whether certificates or diplomas), by cash (whether salaries, wages, or grants) by END-PRODUCTS (whether coal, tins of beans, records, books or art objects); and the cash and the pieces of paper are directly dependent on the PRODUCTION of end-products, and if you don't think that stinks then your future is bright, my boy, because I.C.I., I.C.A., C.I.A., Unilever, British Petroleum, The Ministry of Employment and Productivity (otherwise known as The Arts Council) and countless others are looking for people just like YOU. "You want unlimited money for research; then what's the return? Nothing? Yes, well, show him out Miss White." […] It is time to move the emphasis from end-products to PROCESS; to ACTIVITY with NO GUARANTEED RETURNS; this implies TRUST; the insistence on guaranteed returns implies MISTRUST. NO MORE LABELS. NO INSTRUCTIONS. NO PACKAGE DEAL. (Breakwell, 1969, p. 12)

This is not a contemporary manifesto, it is a hand-scrawled text by Ian Breakwell published in 1969, its polemical tone still echoes the reverberations of 1968. The fact that artists have denounced these powers ever since, seems to have made no

difference whatsoever. Breakwell argues astutely that artists and their products are instrumentalised as the tools of the art industry, a blatant contradiction of the autonomy claim of art.

But there is another assumption in Breakwell's text which is more significant. The assumption that the state should fund artistic production and the associated assumption that funding should be provided with no strings attached. These assumptions may be embedded in the liberal tradition, but they defy the laws of economics and politics, they are simply naïve. Breakwell's text was published in the July-August 1969 issue of *Circuit*, which was a report on the *Friends of Arts Council Operative* (FACOP) Artists' Conference held at St. Katherine's Docks, London, 8th June 1969. FACOP was an artists' group, formed to assess the Arts Council's activities (Thomas, 2006, p. 463). The conference brought together 350 artists and activists to discuss the role of the artist in society and the problems of patronage, amongst other concerns. The conference was critical of the Arts Council's priorities and argued for reforms:

> FACOP's central demand in 1969 was for the Arts Council to be replaced by an 'Artists' Council', which would be democratically elected at meetings – such as those organized by FACOP. (Thomas, 2006, p. 463)

During the 1970s, Breakwell worked with the Artist Placement Group (APG), which was founded in 1966 and placed artists into government departments and industry (1968-75) with the expectation that they could bring a different perspective to these institutions and affect a positive shift in decision-making processes. Breakwell's placements included the Department of Health and Social Security and British Rail (Steveni, 1983). For the founders John Latham and Barbara Steveni, the APG was one project amongst many within a concerted effort "to give art a purpose 'outside' its immediate and overly obvious remit in the art institutions of gallery and museum" (Slater, 2000).

Throughout Europe and the US in the 1960s and 1970s, against the backdrop of feminist, civil-rights and anti-war movements and the critiques of artistic autonomy that were emerging in conceptual art, artists' groups coordinated their efforts against the ossified traditions of art institutions and art schools, and tried to bridge the gap between art and life. From the early 1960s, Fluxus challenged the reigning art world hierarchy, the separation of art from life and the status of the artist. Fluxus artists endeavoured to fuse art and life by taking art outside the established circuits to an expanded audience. They experimented with materials and practices, musical

performances and happenings and challenged the professional and elite status of the artist (DeRoo, 2006, p. 45). Deploying Dadaist rhetorics, George Maciunas declared:

> Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, "intellectual", professional & commercialized culture […] Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals (Maciunas in Smith, 1998, p. 3)[80]

The *Art Workers' Coalition* (AWC) was a New York based movement conceived in January 1969 to address the responsibility of museums towards artists.[81] The coalition of artists and critics delivered *13 Demands* to Bates Lowry, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. What were these demands, and how might they be evaluated today? The demands draw particular attention to the rights of artists when dealing with institutions. The first demand required that the museum hold a public hearing on "The Museum's Relationship to Artists and to Society" (Art Workers' Coalition, 1969). This was not granted but the Open Hearing did in fact occur at the School of Visual Arts later that year and was a well-attended event, leading to further actions of the AWC (Lippard, 1970, p. 171).

The second and third demands protested the exclusive selection and exhibition practice of the Museum, especially with regard to minority artists and communities. The fourth demanded an artists' committee with a curatorial role in the Museum. The fifth demanded free entry into the Museum and extended opening hours. Subsequent demands included a rental fee for the exhibition of artists' work, the acknowledgment of artists' rights to refuse the exhibition of their work, a clarification of copyright legislation and artists' legal rights (targeting copyright royalties), an open system for the documentation of artists' work in the museum archive, the exhibition of experimental work "requiring unique environmental conditions at locations outside the Museum", a section devoted to the exhibition of the work of artists without gallery representation, specialist technical staff for the installation of work, a museum appointed "responsible person to handle any grievances arising from its dealings with artists" (Art Workers' Coalition, 1969). Almost all the demands were related to professional grievances, and they were all refused, with the exception of the fifth

[80] George Maciunas' Fluxus manifesto was delivered to the audience as part of Ben Patterson's *Paper Piece*, at the *Festum Fluxorum Fluxus*, Düsseldorf Art Academy in September 1962 (Smith, 1998, p. 3).

[81] The AWC was originally formed by Hans Haacke, Tom Lloyd, Willoughby Sharp, Takis, Tsai, John Perrault, and Gregory Battcock (Volpato, 2010).

demand with which the coalition had some measure of success: one free admission day per week was subsequently instituted by museums in the US (Kirwin, 2010, p. 50).

Why did all these efforts fail to meet their objectives? What are the conditions that have relegated the activism of the 1960s and 1970s to obscurity? What are the factors that have contributed—since the expansion and experimentation in the art of the 1960s—to the current state of affairs, where art is ubiquitous but institutionalised, exclusive, safe and expensive?

A number of factors came into play, amongst them were the lack of solidarity amongst artists and their incapacity to self-organise;[82] the recuperation of anti-art as an aesthetic object by the art institution; and a naivety concerning the artists' ambitions and their articulation.[83] In the case of institutional critique, critique was transformed into stylised activism within the museum, a kind of institutional self-vaccination. Although Hans Haacke's work fulfils a critical role within the museum, it also has the aura of a work of art. Haacke's work is first of all a work of art. The reason for the failure of artists' ambitions throughout the twentieth century is due to the confusion amongst artists about what is actually at stake in the affirmation of artistic autonomy.

THE EXPLODING CINEMA

> …Exploding Cinema is an anarchic long-running screening night where they show everything people want to show. […] I've shown there, and it's fun if totally intimidating. The audience are supportive, but they're also a little intense […] Exploding Cinema showed super8, expanded cinema and experimental things in hilarious locations before it became ten-a-penny to have 'edgy' screening places. I loved it then and I love it now. Possibly because as I spend a lot of time trying to help people with their financing and their deals, it's quite lovely to get immersed in filmmakers who don't care about any of that and get on with it in a beautifully wild way (Phillips, 2011)

In the autumn of 2004, after a long trek from Deptford in a storm that left us drenched, we walked through the side door of the Hatcham Social Club in New Cross

[82] See Lippard, 1970 and Forkert, 2006.

[83] Howard Slater argues that the industrial placement of the APG redefined the artist's role in the context of social research. Although, in contrast to the object-based aestheticism of the art institution, the placement comes across as a radical practice, it also reveals a naivety concerning the role of the artist in the professional sphere: Latham redefined the artist as an "incidental person", who was subsequently legitimised and redefined as a responsible employee, a professional (Slater, 2000). The APG model was later adopted by the Arts Council in the form of the "artist in residence" which was "far less radical, because it reverted to a more passive model of the artist (sometimes engaged to beautify the surface environment of an organisation, rather than to question its mode of operation)" (Mason and Davidson, 2007).

Gate, across the courtyard and into the function hall. On the counter was a gutted television set with glowing letters that spelled EXPLODING CINEMA. We were greeted by the cheerful banter of founding member Jennett Thomas, she stamped our wrists and handed us our booklets and raffle tickets. The first impression of Exploding Cinema is that of a room animated by countless projected images on the walls, the ceiling and the audience. The cigarette smoke catches the flickering beams of light from Super 8 and 16mm projectors, video projectors, slide projectors, overhead projectors and solars. Just above the whirl of the Super 8 projectors and the babble and movement of the audience, your attention falls on the main screen. If you want to screen your film at Exploding Cinema, your work must compete with this activity to grab the audience. At Exploding Cinema, there is no polite reverence; attention is not granted in advance, it must be wrested from the audience.

> You don't go to Exploding Cinema to bow down in front of the screen. Film is there as part of other things. It's part of drinking, it's part of meeting people, part of music and atmosphere. It's more something that comes in through the skin. (Audience member in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

Unlike the self-consciously mute and ceremonial screenings of contemporary art venues, whether one-off screenings in galleries or video loops in little dark rooms in museums and biennials where viewing is a private experience, Exploding Cinema is irreverent and democratic, a fusion of life and art.

The films screened at Exploding Cinema are an unpredictable motley collection of experimental, documentary, animation, home videos, found footage as well as horror, comedy and video art. Exploding Cinema is an ideal context: a plural and inclusive space to view films, performances, installations, live music and comedy. It is a space of social interaction without divisions, a space of proximity between artists and audience, a community that is engaged and egalitarian. Exploding Cinema instantly made sense to me.

Exploding Cinema, "a hybrid fusion of projection, performance and social space" emerged in 1991 from the London underground scene (Szczelkun, 2002). Although it has generated critical literature,[84] Exploding Cinema itself is not well-documented. In his PhD titled *Exploding Cinema 1992-1999, culture and democracy* (2002), former

[84] At least three current and former members of Exploding Cinema, including Peter Thomas, Duncan Reekie and Stefan Szczelkun, have written PhDs, books and articles on Exploding Cinema and the British underground and independent film and video sector.

member Stefan Szczelkun, who was involved in several other collective projects and inclusive groups, describes the collective as "complex and multi-layered, with multiple and dynamic authorship", its discourse "largely informal, oral and unrecorded" (Szczelkun, 2002).

In fact, Exploding Cinema has passively resisted archival documentation of its events and the films screened at them. Although one could theoretically compile a definitive list of the estimated 2000 films shown at Exploding Cinema screenings in the last 20 years (Exploding Cinema, 2009/1998), this would require a complete collection of the Exploding Cinema programme booklets/fanzines handed to the audience at the door, and even then, films sometimes do not make it into the booklet. When Jennet Thomas and Paul Tarrago left the collective in 2005, we arranged alternative storage for the collective's equipment but the archive of VHS tapes which they had amassed from previous shows filled 3 large bin bags and did not fit into the van. For Szczelkun, there are "strong grounds to argue for the need to collect, archive and analyse this body of work" (Szczelkun, 2002) and he made efforts to introduce archiving systems into Exploding.[85] When Paul Tarrago and Stefan Szczelkun submitted Exploding Cinema materials (a curated exhibition of flyers, booklets, posters) to the *British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection* (2000), this set a dreaded precedent for the institutionalisation of Exploding Cinema.

Archival documentation delegates events to history. As a practice, it is associated with the anxiety of collecting the legitimising credentials of a professional practice. The plurality of Exploding Cinema is not reducible to any summation, theorisation or archival practice.

The resistance that is built into Exploding Cinema against all forms of institutionalisation can be found in the collective's constitution. When unprecedented conditions arise, these are evaluated through collective consideration and debate.[86] The *Exploding Cinema Collective Agreement* (Exploding Cinema, 2005/1991) lays out a limited number of restrictions: (a) the collective is committed to open access non-curated screenings for a diverse popular audience with the ambition "to break down the limiting divisions between maker and audience, theory and practise, amateur and

[85] Szczelkun has compiled a catalogue of films shown at Exploding Cinema 1991-1998, see Szczelkun, 2002.

[86] These occasions have included debates on whether or not to accept invitations from Tate Modern and the V&A to participate in their programmed events on underground cinema and art collectives, in both cases the decision was no.

professional". (b) The collective has an open membership, anyone can join the collective by coming to a meeting. Membership is voluntary. (c) The collective is non-profit-making and does not accept funding under any circumstances. (d) Decisions are made collectively, the roles and duties within the collective are allocated on a rotational basis to promote skill-sharing and exclude specialisation and hierarchy (Exploding Cinema, 2005/1991).

The collective constitution of Exploding Cinema is by no means ideal. Unlike a team of film-makers—where every member has an allocated job-description—a collective is often subject to internal strife and antagonism. The informal hierarchies usually established in collectives are more difficult to address and challenge than formal ones. A tightly-knit group of collaborators often becomes a clique that is impenetrable to outsiders. Exploding Cinema has been through many transitions and incarnations. In 1994, Exploding narrowly escaped dissolution in a schism that warned the members about the likelihood of internal threats to its survival.

Exploding Cinema has two inbuilt mechanisms which prevent the collective form settling into a sedimented hierarchy. The first is the open membership principle; the influx of new members periodically changes the dynamic of the collective and unsettles the balance of power. The second mechanism is its job-rotation and skill-sharing ethos; the various jobs (programming, publicity, door-duty, AV desk, transport of equipment etc.) are shared and rotated. No job is privileged, there are no leadership roles and decisions are made by collective consensus following debates on specific issues. These two principles allow participation on the basis for freedom and at the same time they prevent individual members from claiming ownership. Individual members of Exploding Cinema are therefore also disinterested; they are tolerant of the different opinions, aspirations and practices of members within the collective and they do not have exclusive professional or material stakes in the activities of the collective. This amounts to a recognition that the collective is a plurality that cannot be owned, controlled or contained, which also means that we do not need to agree on everything. Exploding Cinema does not require absolute loyalty, the members assert their identity in other fields and spaces because Exploding Cinema is only one aspect of their identity.

Returning to Bourdieu's concept of *illusio*, the collective belief and investment in the values of Exploding Cinema does not flow in one direction. Belief in Exploding Cinema is not a matter of "loyalty to the institution" (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 158-159) because the members ascribe meaning and value to the stakes of the collective as they effectively contribute to their redefinition. At Exploding Cinema there is no hierarchy, apart from

the constitutional rules there are no defining structures, yet the collective is held together as an institution. It does not limit the freedom of the members, it compounds their freedom. Members of the collective pursue their individual agendas collectively, these become the agenda of Exploding Cinema. The decision to organise a show or participate in a festival is made collectively but it is usually initiated by a single member. Exploding does not define or limit the activities of members or the film-makers. The flexible and open structure of Exploding responds and changes to accommodate different venues, new members, shifting priorities and audience feedback. Although Exploding Cinema remains committed to the core constitutional rules that were established at its inception, the collective agreement is open to additions or amendments.

Can the model of Exploding Cinema be transferred to art institutions? This is not the question, artists' collectives spring about all the time. The problem is rather in their ambitions, which also provide the reasons why these collectives and artist-run space start up and why they subsequently become absorbed into the mainstream or disappear.

THE LONDON FILM-MAKERS' CO-OPERATIVE

Exploding Cinema emerged in the early 1990s when the cultural scene was set for a number of artists' collectives and independent activities. In 1991 a collective called *Pullit* were squatting the CoolTan building on Effra Road in Brixton, where they organised large inclusive exhibitions: "it soon became an Underground cultural centre housing a gallery, theatre, performance space, rave venue, café and office for the Brixton Green Party" and Ken McDonald held his *Reel Love* Super 8 screenings. Within this activity, a group of artists and film-makers came up with the idea to form a collective and organise open-access screenings (Reekie, 2007, p. 194):

> From the very beginning we decided to be totally open and democratic: anyone could show their work, anyone could join the group, all you had to do was come to a meeting and get involved. We drew up a loose constitution: the group was to be non-profit-making, all work would be voluntary, no wages would be paid, all the money we made would be used to run our screenings and to buy equipment to be collectively owned. (Reekie, 2007, p. 195)

Within a year, Exploding Cinema was showing more than twenty films per show to an average audience of two hundred. Contacted by a "hidden Underground subculture", the collective expanded. Some filmmakers began to make films specifically for Exploding and some began to experiment with film for the first time (Reekie, 2007, p.

196). Exploding Cinema members drew from a number of precedents and brought diverse influences to the collective. In his book *Subversion: the Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (2007), Duncan Reekie, a founding member of Exploding Cinema, traces the history of the underground film and video scene of the 1960s and 1970s. Amongst these were the *London Film-Makers' Co-op* and the New York *Cinema of Transgression*. Stefan Szczelkun and Duncan Reekie cite David Leister's *Kino Club* as the most significant contemporary influence, amongst "a cluster of sporadic and fragmented Underground activities around South London", including the filmmakers at Ken McDonald's *Reel Love* screenings, the Strand Super 8 Workshop in Brixton and Lepke B's old-school visuals (Reekie, 2007, p. 194).

Though there were precedents and lessons to be learned from them, Exploding Cinema came together and continues to evolve through extemporization and collective interaction: "from material necessity, process, experiment and audience interaction" (Reekie, 2007, p. 195). Reekie describes the early days of Exploding Cinema as a series of improvisations as elements such as slide shows, performance and live music were included as part of the screenings.

> Bored by the sedate and puritan format of established independent film and video screenings we began to develop techniques of combination and mutation, and to create a hybrid fusion of projection, performance and convivial interaction. (Reekie, 2007, p. 195)

Significantly, most of the work screened at the time was by the members of the collective. This had an effect on their production process, they had to speed it up and an element of this survives today. The work screened at Exploding is not always polished and the screening becomes part of the working process. The work itself is not a precious self-contained object but a means as well as an end that changes as it interacts with the audience.

Exploding Cinema creates unpredictable spatial, visual and conceptual contrasts and juxtapositions of all kinds. It radically transforms venues and unconventional venues offer themselves readily to appropriation and subversion, as did the office space of the squatted Reuters Data Centre in Shoreditch (May 2007, Temporary Autonomous Art), the Peckham Car Park (August, 2006), the Area 10 warehouse in Peckham (2004, 2006, 2008), the Blockbuster store in Catford (April 2012, Tapescape). With an audience of 2000 people, the legendary *Dive-In Show* at Brockwell Park Lido in August 1993 established Exploding Cinema as an underground institution (Szczelkun, 2002). There are the visual combinations and juxtapositions of 1980s sci-fi projected onto VHS Disney animation superimposed with black and white Super 8 loops and roving solar

projections. Then there is the programme of films. Exploding Cinema receives films from all over the world, they are either posted, uploaded to a server or handed to the collective. We screen all the films that we receive, but we do programme the shows. It is well-known that the effect and meaning of any film depends on its position in the programme and how it follows from and builds up a narrative together with the other films. Everyone brings something to the show, so the outcome is always unpredictable.

Undoubtedly the singular most influential precedent for Exploding Cinema was the *London Film-Makers' Co-operative* (LFMC). The early days of the LFMC served as an inspiration and set the precedent for Exploding Cinema's open access constitution, its emphasis on distribution, its activism and democratic organisation. The subsequent dissolution of the LFMC served as an example of how an independent organisation can be captured and destroyed by its growing dependence on financial support. This knowledge informed the constitution of Exploding Cinema.

The LFMC was formed in 1966 with an emphasis on film distribution. The first shows were organised in conjunction with the underground newspaper *The International Times* (1966). Within the year, the LFMC organised several open-access screenings and a festival, and provided visuals for the UFO Club "alongside lightshows, bands, jugglers, performance artists, food stalls and so forth" (Thomas, 2006, pp. 461-462). The LFMC was initially a screening and distribution organisation for underground cinema, not an artists' organisation (Reekie, 2005). Between 1969 and 1975, it evolved into a voluntary, non-profit, open-access democratic collective committed to the alternative production, distribution and exhibition of experimental film (Reekie, 2007, p. 5). Indicatively, when the BFI offered to take over the distribution arm of the LFMC, they declined on the grounds that it would threaten the LFMC's independence (Mazière, 2003):

> Most of the Institute's suggestions threaten or impair the independence of the Co-op as an organisation run by film makers for film makers, and for this reason alone, they must be declined. (LFMC letter to the BFI, 1970 in Mazière, 2003)

In the same letter, the LFMC however emphasised that they continued to demand funding and recognition for experimental film. Between 1969-1970 the LFMC—with its emphasis on distribution—merged with the *UK Arts Lab* (1967), which was spearheaded by David Curtis who ran the cinema and Malcolm Le Grice who focused on production and equipment (Mazière, 2003). The merger brought about a transition as the film-makers "not only made films, but also built and maintained equipment, and organized and promoted shows" (Thomas, 2006, p. 462). In their book *Reaching*

Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image (2011), Julia Knight and Peter Thomas describe this as a shift, which "finally brought together production, distribution and exhibition in the same organization":

> …a new activist philosophy was propounded whereby, in an attempt to break down the alienating effects of the film industry's division of labour, the filmmaker would operate in and be responsible for all areas of film work (Knight and Thomas, 2011, p. 42)

By the early 1970s, "independent film" defined a broad range of movements and interest groups of film-makers and media workshops producing an equally broad range of films from documentary to animation and avant-garde film (Reekie, 2007, p. 2). In 1975, the LFMC received its first major BFI Grant (Mazière, 2003), and from then onwards it became increasingly dependent on direct and indirect state patronage (Reekie, 2007, p. 5). In his article *The Struggle for Funding: Sponsorship, Competition and Pacification* (2006), Peter Thomas argues that shortly after the LFMC received its first subsidies from the BFI and the Arts Council "the urge to omnivorous volunteerism which had created and sustained the LFMC visibly subsided", and eventually this meant "the evisceration of that milieu and ethos which had been the source of the films, the ideas, and the energy" (Thomas, 2006, p. 466).

Peter Thomas locates the source of the problem in the conflict between the LFMC and the funding agencies concerning "who would control cultural production and provision, and what means would best deliver it" (Thomas, 2006, p. 465). Duncan Reekie locates the problem in a schism between two different attitudes towards experimental film-making within the LFMC. The underground film-makers were interested in exhibition and distribution. The artists, associated with the Arts Lab, were interested in the provision of workshops to make films so they wanted the LFMC to go into production. The two factions were also therefore interested in radically different audiences. These disagreements, according to Reekie, culminated in the triumph of the artist faction, which marked a shift away from counter-cultural activism towards the art institution in search for recognition with its ensuing normalisation, academisation, professionalisation and bureaucratisation (Reekie, 2005).

Reekie's analysis of the conflicting attitudes within the LFMC indicates that for the activists, the problem was not a question of production; the open-access ethos affirmed that anyone could make films. Production was significant for the artists because they approached film-making as a profession which had to be sustainable. While for the activists, everything was staked on the imminent revolution (Reekie, 2005), the artist's stake was a personal and professional risk. For the artist, art is an

investment because there is an expectation of return, regardless of how long it will take to arrive (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 66-69, Graw, 2006, p. 139).

> If a state agency funded your work then they would distribute it to state funded art centres, cinemas, festivals, art schools and Universities. Or maybe your work would be co-funded by T.V. and screened at 2 a.m., on a Wednesday in a lack lustre short film compilation. Once your funded work had been distributed you could use it to apply for more funding or to get yourself a teaching post in an Art school or university where you could screen other funded work to your students who inspired by the work could apply for funding to make their own work. If you were really successful you could be appointed to a funding panel in one of the agencies or even become a career administrator in the funded sector. And the absence in this autonomous circuit was a popular audience. (Exploding Cinema, 2009/1998)

In the industrial, technological and administrative transformations of the 1980s, the broad independent film movement lost its sense of identity (Reekie, 2007, p. 2). With the guarantee of state funding and distribution through the production arm of the BFI and Channel 4—and increasingly private production companies, which were commissioned to produce content for the BBC, cable and satellite television—"the concept of independence from a commercial mainstream became ever more difficult to rationalise" (Reekie, 2007, p. 3):

> To be an independent film/video maker was no longer an act of conscious political autonomy or radical opposition; it was to be a free-lancer in the deregulated media industry. (Reekie, 2007, p. 3)

In 1991 "the L.F.M.C. was locked into an endless series of feuds, schisms and scandals, mostly concerning money, power and the possibility of a move to new premises (The Lux); its screenings were sparse and often deserted" (Exploding Cinema, 2009/1998). The gradual shift of the LFMC from "underground" to "avant-garde" culminated in the 1990s when the term "artists' film and video" was adopted by state agencies (Reekie, 2007, p. 3). In his research paper *Institutional Support for Artists' Film and Video in England 1966–2003* (2003), Michael Mazière maintains that by the mid 1990s the Arts Council and the BFI did not only fund a broad range of organisations such as LFMC, *London Electronic Arts* (LEA, established as London Video Arts in 1976) and *Umbrella*, but they played a leading role in production, distribution and exhibition within the mixed-market economy (Mazière, 2003).

The LUX Centre on Hoxton Square was purpose built in 1997 to house the LFMC and the LEA (Reekie, 2007, p. 4). As a condition of the move to the new building, the LFMC had to abolish its open access constitution in 1995 and adopt a standard bureaucratic structure. It however continued to accept new members as well as membership fees

(Reekie, 2007, p. 6). In 1999, the LFMC was forced into a merger with the LEA to form the *LUX Centre for Film, Video and Digital Arts*, (Reekie, 2007, p. 6, note 7). The LUX suddenly closed down in 2002, the LUX distribution collection survives and continues to be funded by the Arts Council.

> What remained of the avant-garde and the independent film and video sector had become a closed circuit of state agencies, desperately underfunded workshops and an elite circle of established artists and production companies locked into mutual self legitimisation. (Reekie, 2007, p. 194)

The fall of the LUX proved damaging for British experimental film and video and the LFMC. According to Reekie, it signals the failure of "the most ambitious project in the history of British experimental film and video" (Reekie, 2007, p. 7). From a truly independent field of experimental film and video in the 1960s and 1970s, the LFMC became the "audio/visual element of a broader state project engaged in the integrated production distribution and exhibition of a legitimate film/video culture" (Reekie, 2007, p. 3):

> What remained of the avant-garde and the independent film and video sector had become a closed circuit of state agencies, desperately underfunded workshops and an elite circle of established artists and production companies locked into mutual self legitimisation. (Reekie, 2007, p. 194)

The significance of this in relation to the field of contemporary art is that it reveals how in a short time the forces that play a supporting role, eventually control the productive field. This process is now so naturalised within the field of art that it is indisputable and unchallenged. For Reekie, the question is "how did a radical voluntary collective organisation get fatally involved in a commercially incompetent public/private partnership" (Reekie, 2007, p. 7) and why, despite the proliferation of academic theory and analysis, debates and peer reviewed journals "British radical filmmaking and the independent film and video sector had become politically, culturally and industrially wretched" (Reekie, 2007, p. 4). Reekie locates the problem in the fact that the LFMC did not make any money. On the one hand, this was because they relied on funding.[87]

[87] Adorno picks up on the problem of funding: "Currently official culture grants special funds to what it mistrustfully, half hoping for failure, calls artistic experimentation, thus neutralizing it. Actually, art is now scarcely possible unless it does experiment. The disproportion between established culture and the level of productive forces has become blatant: What is internally consistent appears to society at large as a bogus promissory note on the future, and art, socially dispossessed, is in no way sure that it has any binding force of its own" (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 37).

On the other, it was because their films were not appropriate for mass consumption; the main audiences for the films were art schools and regional film theatres. The Arts Council proceeded with the logic of a bureaucratic cultural organisation informed by state policy, whereas the system of cultural distribution is capitalist (Reekie, 2005).

In due course, a similar fate befell the ICA as it became increasingly dependent on private funding and even abolished its entrance fees.[88] Anthony Davies argues that in the 1990s corporations began to interact with the public through their association with cultural institutions. The alliance between art and business was sold to artists as an alternative to the elitist gallery system (Davies, 2001). This has now become conventional with the proliferation of agencies and consultancies that mediate and distribute the work of artists and film-makers.

> Inasmuch as any work of art becomes increasingly superfluous under the conditions of total reification because it has lost its function of a critical reflection of social reality, it approaches a state of either mere objecthood or mere aesthetic voluntarism, i.e. decoration (Buchloh, 2000/1981, p. 132)

The instrumentalisation of art by museums, corporations and government institutions is a well-documented problem within the art world and beyond; art is recast in public relations and marketing jargon and government policy. The question rather is why do artists continue to participate in and supply these promotional mechanisms? The simple answer is that artists will use any opportunity to produce new work, and they are not always aware of what they hand over in return. In *Free Transit* (2005), Pierre Bourdieu claims that cultural production exists by virtue of the public funds that are channelled via cultural institutions and argues in favour of state funding:

> We cannot leave cultural production to the risks of the marketplace or the whims of the wealthy patron. (Bourdieu and Haacke, 2005, p. 69)

Public funding however comes with no fewer strings attached than private sponsorship or the market. Funding bodies have agendas too. Publicly funded art often amounts to the functionalisation of art in the name of institutional policies, whatever the particular terms of the agenda. If artists accept financial support, they are in effect legitimising both the values affirmed in the terms of funding bodies and the functionalisation of their work. According to video activist Sue Hall (TVX, Fantasy Factory) arts funding in

[88] On the funding crisis in the ICA see Charlesworth, 2010.

the 1960s was ubiquitous and independent artists accepted public and private funding as a matter of fact. In an interview with Peter Thomas, she relates

> …the situation really changed from independent or independents to dependent or dependents. The more the arts funders talked about the independent sector, the less independent it was […] we allowed ourselves to be sucked in by the lure of the money and we didn't realise that our freedom was disappearing, until it was too late. You could say that it was naïve, and yes it was naïve, but our attention was elsewhere. (Thomas, 2010)

Reekie argues that by the mid-1990s the movement was already being historicised, while the relevance of the concept of independence was under question:

> Nevertheless, although the movement has lost its ideological integrity there remains a complex national network of independent film/video agencies and institutions which is now so dependent on state funding that it can be identified as a sector of the state. It is the 'independent sector' but it is not independent. (Reekie, 2007, p. 3)

The logic behind the founding of Exploding Cinema was along the lines "what can we do to make sure this does not happen again". The LFMC were forced to change their constitution twice, why did they accept these conditions? It is much easier to judge from a distance, but when you are involved in a day-to-day process, the decisions you make lead to consequences that are impossible to evaluate. In the case of the LFMC, this process was documented. Artists complain about their grievances in private but not in public. This fosters the mystification and normalisation of the art world, prolonging its function to individualise artists and re-direct their efforts to externally determined purposes.

PARTICIPATION (PROXIMITY/COMMUNITY/CONTEXT)

> The art audience is the worst audience in the world. It's overly educated, it's conservative, it's out to criticize, not to understand—and, it never has any fun. […] So I refuse to deal with that audience, and I'll play with the street audience. That audience is much more human, and their opinion is from the heart. They don't have any reason to play games; there's nothing gained or lost. (Hammons, 1991, p. 28)

Guy Debord's situationist critique of the *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) is a precursor and backdrop for the staging of current debates on participation. The *spectacle* according to Debord mediates the extreme *separation* that characterises social relationships, which are no longer directly experienced but mediated in spectacular representation. The spectacle is "pacifying and divisive" (Bishop, 2006, p. 12), it reunites the separated "only *in their separateness*" (Debord, 1967, p. 16). Film-makers

from Eisenstein to Debord were concerned about the passivity of the audience. If the *spectacle* delegates social subjects to subjugation and prevents their self-determination, then the injunction to activity through the construction of situations would eventually dissolve the audience function (Bishop, 2006, pp. 12-13). This notion of 'constructed situations' is adopted by contemporary artists[89] in the effort "to produce new social relationships and thus new social realities" (Bishop, 2006, p. 13).

Participatory art usually involves audience participation as a component of the work. The artist is the director or manager and the audience is used a vehicle or test subject for the artist's ideas. This type of art is usually exhibited in the form of installation, inviting the viewer to enter and participate, thus becoming part of the work. This notion of participation is crucial to the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija (Bourriaud, 2002) and Thomas Hirshhorn (Bishop, 2004). Frequently, the participatory work of art takes place in a remote location and it is the documentation of the event that is exhibited (*House Project, The Land* (1998) by Rirkrit Tiravanija; *Supergas* (1996) by Superflex). These projects are usually hosted within or supported by institutions that additionally promote the notion of participation in the form of workshops, family days and school visits. Alternatively such projects are commissioned in the form of community art by local authorities and government sponsored initiatives to compensate for the lack of social cohesion in urban centres.

Amongst the concerns and motivations that have informed participatory art since the 1960s, Claire Bishop discerns three categories: activation, collectivity and community. The first is the desire to activate the audience, to empower individual subjects with experiences of "physical or symbolic participation" that will hopefully enable them to exert more control over their own lives. The assumption is that there is a causal relationship between engagement with a work of art and individual or collective agency (Bishop, 2006, p. 12):

> Sometimes politics are ascribed to such art on the basis of a shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society, as if a desultory form might evoke a democratic community, or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world. (Foster, 2006/2004, p. 193)

The second value prioritised in participatory art is collaboration because it emerges from and produces non-hierarchical social models. Bishop suggests that the

[89] It is also consequently recuperated by institutions, see Bourriaud, 2002, p. 19.

relinquishment of authorial control in collaborative production is considered more democratic than individual authorship and has the additional "aesthetic benefits of greater risk and unpredictability". But she also points out that these qualities are neither particular to participatory art nor are the values associated with them particularly justified, concluding that: "As an artistic medium, then, participation is arguably no more intrinsically political or oppositional than any other" (Bishop, 2006, p. 12).

The third argument follows the Marxist critique of capitalism, it perceives a "crisis in community and collective responsibility" and takes issue with the alienating effects of capitalism. For Bourriaud the motivation for participatory art is to "fill in the cracks in the social bond" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 36). Bishop articulates this motivation as "a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning" (Bishop, 2006, p. 12). Originating from a position of privilege however, these projects often assume a patronising attitude, with the intention to educate and transform. Artists "working with live events and people as privileged materials" (Bishop, 2006, p. 13) entertain the conceit that they can manipulate "sociopolitical relationships" in the way that traditional artists manipulated materials. Wochenklausur aim to bring about "recognizable and sensible change" in social relations "just as the Baroque master made an effort to realize his plan for a ceiling fresco in a cathedral, regardless of whether he personally put his hand to the task or not" (Wochenklausur, 2008). Bourriaud expresses a similar view in his ambiguous concept of "relational form" as the articulation of political ambitions in relational art (Bourriaud, 2002, pp. 13-14)

Bishop discerns two different approaches in participatory work, both of which address the issue of political commitment in art. On one end of the spectrum is the category of "disruptive and interventionist" events prefigured by provocative Dada actions in the street. On the other, is the category of "constructive and ameliorative" projects, which according to Bishop, harks back to the propagandist Soviet mass spectacles of collectivity (Bishop, 2006, p. 11). Francois Matarasso's 1997 study, *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*, contributed significantly to the current consensus among policy-makers in Britain regarding the value of publicly funded participatory arts programmes (Merli, 2004, p. 17). Matarasso claims that the true purpose of the arts is "to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society" (Matarasso, 1997, p. v), his study advocates the funding of participatory arts programmes on the basis that they can produce positive social effects at a low cost:

> In economic terms the case for supporting participatory arts projects arises principally from their contribution to social policy objectives. […]

> participatory arts projects are different, effective and cost very little in the context of spending on social goals. They represent an insignificant financial risk to public services, but can produce impacts (social and economic) out of proportion to their cost. (Matarasso, 1997, p. 76/81)

Matarasso evaluated the social impact of participation in the arts according to a research model that measured the potential changes to individuals and communities (Matarasso, 1997, p. vii). In a critical review, Paola Merli sheds doubt on Matarasso's research methodology and the ideology that frames his assumptions. She questions Matarasso's main claim, which advocates the use of participatory arts as a "form of governance to promote social cohesion" (Merli, 2004, p. 17). Merli argues that the reasoning behind this evaluation is flawed and the research data fails to support the conclusions of the study because Matarasso's method of assessing the social impact of the arts has little bearing on "social development and cohesion" (Merli, 2004, p. 18; Matarasso, 1997, p. vii). She points out that the questions in the survey do not reflect criteria that have the potential to change people's lives, but "only 'help' people to accept them" (Merli, 2004, p. 18):

> However, making deprivation more acceptable is a tool to endlessly reproduce it. Social deprivation and exclusion arguably can be removed only by fighting the structural conditions which cause them. (Merli, 2004, p. 18)

Merli argues that amongst the fallacies in Matarasso's study are the perception that promoting inclusion is the way to combat exclusion and that the researchers' own culture and values are suitable standards by which to judge the personal development of individuals in the studied communities:

> Such a commitment to changing people's ideas and behaviour does not solve problems because it leaves the structural conditions of deprivation untouched. (Merli, 2004, p. 19)

Merli concludes that Matarasso's study is informed by a desire to restore social stability and control by means of enculturation. His revival of 1960s socially-engaged art as a cheap and innovative social policy objective is therefore "simply a new way of achieving the old "civilising" objective of cultural policy" (Merli, 2004, pp. 19-20).

> Unable to allow participation on terms other than its own, the spectacle propagates the image of participation and invites everyone to 'join in' with the happy whole whilst at the same time ensuring that this totality is illusory and unattainable: a strong, appealing, but empty image. In principle, one can have anything, do anything, be anything, and go anywhere, but one cannot choose or define the whole in which these abundant choices are made. (Plant, 1992, p. 25)

In his 2004 essay *The Emancipated Spectator*, Ranciere challenges the viewpoint that spectatorship is inherently passive, and questions the conventional binary equivalences and oppositions on which it is premised (Ranciere, 2007, p. 279, 274). Oppositions between "looking/knowing, looking/acting, appearance/reality, activity/ passivity" are effectively "a partition of the sensible", which divides individuals into those with capacity and those with incapacity and thus promotes inequality. These "allegories of inequality" persist in the relationship between master and student, or performer and spectator by delegating the learning process to an "endless verification of inequality". For Ranciere, "Emancipation starts from the opposite principle, the principle of equality" (Ranciere, 2007, pp. 275, 277). In other words, equality is based on the assumption that we can all respond to a work of art and generate our own interpretations and meanings. Ranciere argues that there is no need to suppress the work of art in order to suppress the distance between the artist and the audience in the misguided search for communitarian immediacy because distance "is the normal condition of communication". He refers to the chorus of Greek tragedy, where the chorus represents the incorporation of the community/audience into the play or ritual. The chorus is not physically active, but neither is it a passive audience, it can discuss, critique and foretell the consequences of the action onstage. The chorus also has privileged information that the players onstage do not have (Ranciere, 2007, pp. 276, 274). Ranciere argues that the spectator is equally able to "contemplate ideas, foresee the future, or take a global view of our world". He argues that the gap that separates the audience and the performers is what in fact connects them via the work of art and makes communication possible. However, it also "prevents any kind of 'equal' or 'undistorted' transmission". In other words, the work of art is open to interpretation and hence "crucial in the process of intellectual emancipation" (Ranciere, 2007, pp. 277-278).

OPEN ACCESS

> …the challenge of exploding cinema is "you think its rubbish, show us yours" (Matt Lloyd in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

For Stefan Szczelkun, the key aspects of Exploding Cinema are its open-access principle, its independence and financial basis and its group identity (Szczelkun, 2002). Like the context of the art institution, the context of Exploding Cinema—the screening process, the presentation, the association with other films on the programme or projected onto the walls, the audience interaction—sets the work up and frames it. The open access programme of films and performances, their juxtaposition and variation,

the MC and the Q&A between the audience and the film-makers, the punters chatting at the bar or heckling in front of the stage. Exploding cinema is a space of creative exchange, where casual encounters take place and collaborations are struck up. Szczelkun and Reekie emphasise the importance of the conviviality at Exploding Cinema as an extension of the original intentions of the collective to be open and inclusive and to challenge the gravitas of the institutional screening.

Factors that have contributed to Exploding Cinema's continued existence over the last twenty years is the open-access principle and the tolerance of its open membership structure. If absolutely anyone can join the collective, then it does not matter what views they hold, this is what amounts to Exploding Cinema's resilience and pluralism. Exploding Cinema encourages the audience to make films by eliminating the selection process. Through its open membership, it encourages new members to join the collective and share the equipment and skills:

> If the audience found the work 'boring' or 'bad' we encouraged them to make better work themselves; if our equipment broke down we asked the audience to help us fix it and we discovered that if you created a space where anything could happen, and if you included the audience into the action, then it didn't really matter what went wrong. (Reekie, 2007, pp. 195-196)

Participation as an unspoken priority is a crucial principle governing the structure of Exploding Cinema. Experimentation and participation inform the purpose of the entire venture, without preconceived ideas about the outcome. Exploding Cinema is an unhierarchical and inclusive context where artists, film-makers and performers can contact an audience directly. Film-makers are invited onto the stage after their film is screened for questions from the audience. This opens up discussion and debate as audience members provide their feedback and film-makers have a chance to talk about their work. According to the artist and film-maker Philip Sanderson, Exploding Cinema continues to be relevant for a number of reasons, but mainly because it provides film-makers with access to an audience. He explains that in the 1980s and early 1990s there were limited opportunities for film-makers to screen their films. Although in theory the LFMC was open access, in practice the screenings were thematic and in effect curated. This also limited the film-makers' chances of access to funding which further limited their potential to make new work. Sanderson points out that several museums and galleries in London currently organise regular screenings, which are inaccessible to most film-makers: "programming in these galleries is tightly controlled by a small group of curators answerable to nobody but themselves" (Sanderson, 2010).

> So perhaps it was more this frustration at the seeming impossibility of getting one's work shown/seen rather than a lack of audience that was the impetus behind the Exploding Cinema. That such a pert up demand was there was evident at the early Exploding screenings when both unknown film and video makers rubbed shoulders with more experienced hands who though able to get their work on at the more established venues picked up on the immediacy, atmosphere and the excitement of the Exploding Cinema. (Sanderson, 2010)

Rose-Marie Kivijarvi, who joined the collective in 2010, described Exploding Cinema as a "free film school, without the exams and without the tutors. It is sort of a peer-led film school" (Kivijarvi in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011). Film-maker Asif Kapadia shares this view:

> For many people who submit their work to be screened at Exploding, including me back in the day the shows work almost like filmmaking workshops. People screen their work there to learn from the audiences' reaction and from other filmmakers, who at Exploding are of course, more often than not, one and the same. (Kapadia in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

The open-access principle of Exploding Cinema is an unconditional refusal of selection. Exploding Cinema screens all the films that are submitted, there is no censorship. If the audience objects to a violent or sexually explicit film, Exploding Cinema appeals to free speech and equally the right of the audience to make up their own minds. In January 2010, Exploding Cinema was the subject of a BBC Radio 4 programme, the presenter, film director Asif Kapadia posed the question:

> The value to filmmakers in showing their work at Exploding Cinema is clear, but what about the assertion the group makes that anyone can make a film and should have the opportunity to screen it? As noble as Exploding Cinema's no selection policy sounds, what does it mean for an audience? Do they really want to sit through a random sample of film with no quality control whatsoever? (Kapadia in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

Ben Slotover, Exploding Cinema member and low-budget film-maker who ran his own screening events, the Blunt Club (2002, with Paul Elliot) and Shaolin (1996), replied:

> Well it's funny because sometimes we show a film and I don't like it […] and I'm complaining of course to someone about it and then they'll say "My god that was the best film of the evening". So what do I know? We let the audience decide. At Exploding it's a bit like a stock-ticker for what's coming off the end of the production line. These are all new films and people are trying things out and saying "look, what if I attach a camera to a dog" or something. And they make something and maybe it's rubbish but the main thing is it has been made and it is like a snap-shot of films that people are making right now and right here and

> everyone is watching all of them, unless they walk out during one of the rubbish ones. (Slotover in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

The concept of "quality control" or curatorial selection is at best a subjective judgment and at worst it is censorship, cultural exclusion and political enculturation. Essentially it stands for and carries out the function of institutional legitimation. Curatorial selection prioritises the expert's taste over the audience's reception of the work, patronising and disempowering both the audience and the artist. In the most obvious sense, art is "served up" to the audience as *fait accompli*. Selection is carried out as a service by institutions on the presumption that a small proportion of cultural products need to be differentiated from the mediocre totality of what is produced at any time. But most low-budget amateur films screened at Exploding Cinema are better than funded productions and this is something the audience responds to. Selection is both subjective and largely unsubstantiated, based as it is on subjective criteria and expressed in institutional terminology. In fact, we see that the same artists are shuffled and re-shuffled in exhibitions worldwide. No sooner does an artist appear on the scene in New York before we encounter the same artist in London, Berlin, Hong Kong and so forth. This outcome betrays much about the laziness and the lack of imagination that characterises the function of curating. Legitimisation provides artists with exhibition venues, funding and crucially, an audience, which encourages artists to produce more work. It also opens up more opportunities, either officially through internal routes, or unofficially via curators and other institutional figures who haunt the exhibition circuit. Within this circular process, artists continuously improve and expand their practice. Without the initial legitimisation, artists are likely to spend their entire lifetime in obscurity. The audience is left out of the process altogether, they don't presume to understand or have the capacity to evaluate art because they have already been told that this is the province of experts.

Exploding Cinema provides a platform for the circulation of films, performances, installations etc without distinctions between media and genres, professionals and amateurs or political versus aesthetic intentions. This empowers the artists who are provided with access to an audience unconditionally, it also empowers the audience members who bring their own subjective judgement to bear and provide feedback directly to the artist. Exploding Cinema hosts regular shows in pubs (the Hatcham Social Club in New Cross 2000-06, the Half Moon in Herne Hill 2006-09, the Cross Kings in Kings Cross 2009-10) where many people in the audience are local punters out for a drink on Friday night. The diverse and egalitarian environment of Exploding

Cinema is probably very close to what the avant-garde artists had in mind when they conceived of the ambition to fuse art and life.

Anyone who has been to art school or film school was involved in a collaborative creative learning environment. In art school, we learn to look at art and to talk about art when it is half-formed, participating in its emergence. The work of art is constantly emerging through its reception, revision and re-contextualisation. Bourdieu does not hide his frustration when he speaks of the enduring myth of the individual creator or *genius*. This myth serves to conceal the levels of collaboration functioning to create the work of art. Art is the product of a collective effort between artists, actors, technicians, educators, agents, critics, theorists and audience (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 34-35). Works of art emerge through a process which includes the exchange of feedback; a collaborative aspect of art practice that is never acknowledged. At Exploding Cinema, this process is public and part of the reception of the work, it includes and empowers the audience. The contemporary art world elevates the work of a fraction of practicing artist to universal importance. Of course, most of this work merits our attention. However, it also disempowers us and removes us from first-hand experience of the work and its context. Art institutions, curators and galleries mediate jealously between the artist and the audience by selecting, framing and contextualising the work. These decisions are essentially made beforehand by legitimizing and instituting the work at its inception, in project rooms and commissions, residencies and fellowships.

In his essay *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art* (2005), Grant Kester articulates a concept of art as a *dialogical* encounter that promotes conversation. Considering the practice of artists and art collectives such as Suzanne Lacy, Wochenklausur and Temporary Services, Kester regards artist and audience as equals. The collaborative activity between artists extends to the audience's encounter with the work. Addressing the problem of evaluation in such work, Kester points out that enlightenment philosophy "rejected the idea of an aesthetic consensus achieved through actual dialogue with other subjects because it would fail to provide a sufficiently 'objective' standard of judgment or communicability" (Kester, 2005, p. 81). It follows that if we cannot judge art according to objective and universal criteria, then we need experts to make decisions on what counts as "good" art and is therefore appropriate for public display. But the claim for the universality of aesthetic criteria collapses if we consider that the apprehension of a work of art is dependent on the audience and their perceptions or beliefs. Kester argues that a dialogical aesthetic is consensual, local, provisional and collective, more specifically it is:

> …based on the generation of a local consensual knowledge that is only provisionally binding and that is grounded precisely at the level of collective interaction (Kester, 2005, p. 82)[90]

The idea of consensus is potentially volatile because it transfers power to the individual. Consensus plays a crucial role and in the public reception of art, without this consensual judgement, art becomes subject to the criteria of authority and the monopoly of the definition of art. We establish aesthetic sensibilities and values collectively in socially and historically determined contexts, our perceptions and values are contingent and therefore relative.

YOUTUBE AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

> Now that it is possible for anyone to show pretty much any film online via video sharing websites like YouTube and Vimeo what does that mean for a group like Exploding Cinema, does it still have a place? (Kapadia in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

New digital technologies have made the means of production more accessible, breaking down the distinctions between professionals and amateurs. The internet provides a publishing platform for everyone. It has been suggested that the advent of YouTube has eclipsed the need for collectives like the Exploding Cinema. Audience figures at Exploding Cinema were at a low when I joined in 2005. The following two to three years saw them drop even further and the three shows we had at Hoxton Hall, east London in 2006 drew a very small and timid audience. Things picked up when we returned to South London in 2007 for a series of regular and one-off shows. Since 2009, when we moved to regular venues in King's Cross and east London the audience numbers have increased remarkably.

> We did at one point think that the whole YouTube phenomenon was going to render redundant the likes of Exploding Cinema but it absolutely hasn't. In some ways it has made it all the more necessary because people are getting all of their culture sitting in front of their screens in their bedrooms and people really do want something else. (Jennett Thomas in Exploding Cinema, BBC Radio 4, 2011)

The availability of film-making technologies to a wider public has increased the need for spaces like Exploding Cinema, with its inherently popular structure. This is also evident in the proliferation of profit-oriented enterprises such as Secret Cinema and

[90] This also implies the apparently radical concept—which is never affirmed—that every work of art can and does establish the criteria for its judgment or communicability on it own terms. In other words, because of their singularity, works of art cannot be judged by universal criteria.

consulting agencies such as Artprojx, which organise film screenings. YouTube is not an alternative for Exploding Cinema, it is an immense random database with the potential to replace traditional promotional media, but not traditional screening venues, which are social spaces. Rather than a space of exchange, YouTube is a space where videos can be showcased, notably as a springboard to the media industry.[91] The popularity of "user-generated" content available on sites like YouTube and Facebook attracts advertising.[92] These companies generate revenue without having to produce any content. Corporations take advantage of "consumer-generated content" and create links to their products and services, taking advantage of the viral transmission of data on the internet.[93]

The media and cultural industries control of the terms of cultural production, taking advantage of the social and aesthetic value of cultural products. Works of art, films, theatrical performances and graphic novels provide entertainment, they have a pedagogical function, they help us to create meaning for ourselves, they enable understanding and communication, they teach us about other people's experience, they present us with different ways of seeing and thinking and their representations inscribe themselves in our sense of identity.

INDEPENDENCE OR AUTONOMY

> With the money we began to make on the door we were able to buy our own projection and sound equipment and become self-sufficient without state intervention or funding of any kind. (Reekie, 2007, p. 196)

Artists are engaged in a relentless struggle for recognition; they compete with each other for this recognition, indicated by exhibitions, reviews, awards, grants,

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[91] Examples include *Ataque de Pánico!* (2009) by Uruguayan filmmaker Fede Alvarez: "I uploaded [*Ataque de Pánico!*] on a Thursday and on Monday my inbox was totally full of e-mails from Hollywood studios" (Anonymous, 2011). Video of *Ataque de Pánico!* available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKQUZPqDZb0>.

Nick Haley's television commercial for the iPod Touch (2007), demonstrates that the "idea that you do not have to be a professional to create a good commercial is becoming widespread, in a trend known as consumer-generated content" (Elliott, Stuart (2007). Student's Ad Gets a Remake, and Makes the Big Time. New York Times, Oct 26, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/26/business/media/26appleweb.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1296241383-CD0nFR/Rg8NCBZAdyNhXWQ>). The advert is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dadPWhEhVk>.

[92] On the potential traffic generated by viral video clips and its optimisation see the *MarketingExperiments* website <http://www.marketingexperiments.com/improving-website-conversion/viral-video-clips-targeted-traffic.html>.

[93] On the re-direction of YouTube's focus from amateur videos to corporate broadcasts, see Hudson, 2011.

commissions and other forms of institutional legitimisation. A common anxiety amongst artists is the difficulty of showing work, many artists profess that they collaborate or curate exhibitions just for the chance to exhibit their work. It is precisely this difficulty that constitutes the structure of the art world: an artist must have some form of consecration in order to exhibit and to produce new work. In fact, the production of new work has become almost entirely dependent on an artist's consistent exposure and recognition within the art world:

> Unfunded experimental filmmakers were effectively excluded from all the established routes to distribution and exhibition, and those who did not desist were forced to spend their time and energy competing against each other for funding from agencies who had become so disengaged from economic and public accountability that they were both the critics and the audience of their own product. By creating a vertical state monopoly the independent sector had at last become truly autonomous. What got funded was good, what was good got funded and what did not get funded remained invisible. (Reekie, 2007, p. 194)

Artists are resigned to this state of affairs as though it were a form of natural selection. If artists refused to enter into unequal and compromising relationships, the art world would become transformed. Lucy Lippard's article *The Art Workers' Coalition: not a history* (1970) is an impassioned account of the early days of the AWC. Lippard describes a moment of turmoil in the art world, when artists were called to stand up to museums and their trustees, and museums were called to answer to the artists' grievances. A battlefront emerged in the New York art scene; Lippard confronted the artists and critics who remained silent, those who wavered and proffered excuses and those who condemned the AWC. The recurring theme in Lippard's text is the artist's status: "if he measures his success against his compromises, he is asking for a downer" (Lippard, 1970, p. 174). Significantly, the AWC was accused of the "politicisation" of art, although it was essentially a political organisation—a union—and offered no opinions on aesthetic matters (Lippard, 1970, p. 174). However, the barriers that the artists failed to break down were aesthetic:

> …if aesthetic differences are a barrier even to a successful artist's understanding or working with equally successful colleagues, as artists for artists' rights, maybe there's no ballgame. Maybe artists will have the unique distinction of being the only vocation in the world that can't get together long enough to assure their colleagues of not suffering from their mistakes. (Lippard, 1970, p. 174)

The airing of complaints from the assembled artists, film-makers, architects and critics at the AWC Open Hearing (1969) at the School of Visual Arts was a "picture of frustrated violence". This surprised no one but the parties it was aimed at because "art

world complaints are made loudly but in the relative privacy of studios and barely in public" (Lippard, 1970, p. 171). Amongst the many speakers at the Open Hearing, Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Gregory Battock and Seth Siegelaub expressed radical positions. Carl Andre expressed the most comprehensive polemic of all.[94]

> The solution to the artist's problems is not getting rid of the turnstiles at the Museum of Modern Art, but in getting rid of the art world. This the artists can do by trusting one-another and forming a true community of artists. (Andre, 1969, p. 30)

He argued that artists must reject the institution of art entirely and withdraw from public exhibitions, cooperation with museums[95] and commercial representation to create an alternative and democratic sphere where artists would have more control over their work (Andre, 1969, p. 30).

> No more "scene." No Vogue, Time, Life, Newsweek, interviews. Artists who permit themselves to be used this way are not in the true community of artists, who are universally hostile to such public humiliation. (Andre, 1969, p. 30)

Robert Barry urged the artists to abandon the museum. He questioned the movement's protest against the Museum of Modern Art. Acknowledging the museum's influence, he argued that the museum does not reflect the values of art although it appears under arts' guise.

> Why bother with the Museum of Modern Art? Why not work outside it and leave it to those who want it. If it doesn't serve us, why not let it be. […] The spirit of the museum and the spirit of art are two totally different conceptions. The Museum is a huge artistically impotent superstructure of something other than art, but with great influence. Under the guise of art, and without art's spirit it is even opposed to the true art spirit. And most of all it is unfortunately mistaken for the actual reality of art. (Barry, 1969, p. 69)

Carl Andre and Robert Barry urged the movement to completely abandon the institution in favour of a community of artists that would establish direct contact with the public. Although, as Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen points out, "the identity of the artist as artist was never really in question", the artists were not in favour of abandoning the art

[94] According to Philip Leider, editor of Artforum at that time, it was in fact he who wrote Andre's speech to the Open Hearing (Newman, 2000, pp. 267-268).

[95] "They make 'shows', get everything wrong. 'Will you lend a painting?' 'No.' So they will borrow a painting from a person to whom an artist has sold a painting. Fine. At least the proper relations between artist and museum have been established, the proper distance between what museums do and what artists do is maintained" (Andre, 1969, p. 30).

institution and the "relative autonomy of art" (Bolt Rasmussen, 2009, pp. 37, 45). The institution however is not the custodian of the autonomy of art; the autonomy of art is up to each individual artist. The institution accumulates artists' commitment to autonomy as a form of capital. If artists abandoned the institution they would not be compromising their autonomy, on the contrary, they would be asserting it. It was not the autonomy of art that they did not want abandon, it was the prestige of the institution:

> …the majority of the art world is afraid to take its bullshit out of the bars and into the streets, afraid of losing the toehold it got last year on the next ring of the ladder, but at the same time afraid that the ladder will have been burned, toppled, or blown sky high just as they get near the top (and there's no fury like that of a man who hates himself for compromising… (Lippard, 1970, p. 174)

What prevents artists from working collaboratively and in their own interests? There is a set of restrictions associated with the special aura of the artist, and these increase with the artist's success. The more an artist becomes dependent on the institution, the dealer, the collector, the more the artist has stakes in those relationships. The ideas promoted by Andre and Barry threatened to break down the invisible network of power-relationships that keeps the machinery of the art world in motion. Artists are trapped within their guarded autonomy and their dependence on the institution. Individualist and mistrustful of other artists they invest all their trust in the institution and back themselves into situations where they have no leverage and essentially no freedom or independence. The failure of the AWC to achieve its objectives proved that if artists do have any power in the art field they are afraid to show it.

Anton Vidokle's E-flux projects remind us of John Searle's argument that the purpose of institutions is to create new forms of power relationships. E-flux is establishing itself as a powerful institution in the art world. Responding to the need for a distribution system for information in the "international art scene" (Lind, 2009, p. 22), e-flux disseminates information in the form of press releases from museums, galleries and organisations all over the world. Maria Lind regards e-flux as "one of the simplest, yet most influential contributions to the art infrastructure in recent decades", although she acknowledges that e-flux "news digest" announcements are not inclusive of the activity in the field because they are essentially paid advertisements (Lind, 2009, p. 23). E-flux has a popular base of 50,000 subscribers, which it contacts daily via its announcements, it also publishes a journal and it organises artists' projects such as *E-flux Video Rental* (2004), *Martha Rosler Library* (2005), *United Nations plaza* (2006-07), *Time/Bank* (2009), and recently applied to manage the .art domain (E-flux, 2012).

In his article, *Art without Artists?* (2010), Anton Vidokle promotes the idea that artists need to aspire to sovereignty in their practice. For Vidokle, this implies that in addition to producing art, an artist must produce the conditions that enable this production, i.e. "its channels of circulation". Vidokle argues that these conditions are sometimes so critical to the work that they become the work (Vidokle, 2010). In fact, Vidokle does not think of e-flux as an artist-run space, but as "a long-term artists' project" (Obrist, Vidokle and Aranda, 2007, p. 18).

Vidokle's *New York Conversations* (2010)[96] was filmed in black and white on 16mm in a Chinatown storefront, documenting three days of conversations between artists, critics, curators and the public while Rirkrit Tiravanija cooked and served food. The film is a record of these conversations, displayed as text over black and white high contrast film with a soundtrack. The conversations drift through a range of topics albeit with a focus on working conditions in the art world and so-called "precarious" labour, with a meditation on the difference between material and immaterial labour. They compare themselves to immigrant workers who become displaced in order to find work, but neglect to mention the important differences between cultural and economic immigrants.[97] They discuss the possibilities for non-alienated life, the feasibility of artistic freedom, and whether the particular event itself was in fact an artwork.

An advocate of autonomy, Vidokle prefers Boris Groys' term "sovereignty" and believes that artists can negotiate their dependence on the institution on a case-by-case basis (Vidokle, 2010). This is as much as artists can normally do. Although our dependence and complicity is precisely in every decision we make, we still need a set of criteria by which to judge each case, because concession and compromise lies in the unanticipated consequences of every decision.

Maria Lind describes E-flux as "institution building" which she thinks of as a "less direct" phase of institutional critique (Lind, 2009, p. 28). In particular, it is the "self-appointed responsibility for setting up an organisation that involves a considerable number of people and [that] give it some sense of stability and continuity". Lind adds

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[96] *New York Conversations* (2010). 16mm film transfer to DV, 66min, e-flux films. Commissioned by the Brussels-based art journal *A Prior*, this film documents a three-day event organised by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Nico Dockx, and Anton Vidokle, with the participation of Liam Gillick, Jorg Heiser, Miwon Kwon, Monika Szewczyk, Jan Verwoert, Lawrence Weiner and others.

[97] Nomadic artists and curators make conscious choices and calculated risks when they re-locate in order to take up a temporary post. The plight of immigrant workers involves uncertainty and exploitation; many immigrants are indentured labourers, while illegal immigrants are entirely at the mercy of slave-traders and corrupt officials.

that institution building involves some sort of relation to "a local context and a specific community, be it geographical, social, cultural, or other" (Lind, 2009, p. 25). But how is the international art scene a "local community"? And who does E-flux as an institution serve? As Monika Szewczyk observes, E-flux is essentially a network that provides a distribution service for other institutions ("to publish their plans and propaganda") (Szewczyk, 2009. p. 58). This tends "to make the existing institutions matter *more*, since e-flux's increasingly broad channels allow them to reach a broad audience, one that is encouraged to correspond and converse" (Szewczyk, 2009. pp. 57-58). All the better because E-flux also publishes a *critical* journal. Rather than being a controversial "institution of its own legitimation" (Szewczyk, 2009. p. 61), E-flux is an institution for the legitimation of other institutions, and it receives legitimation in exchange, in the same currency.

Maria Lind and Monika Szewczyk point out that the many activities of e-flux have been possible because E-flux is a business, they also observe that "critical" sectors of the art world have discounted E-flux as "too complicit with capitalism" (Lind, 2009, p. 24) and that "to call it art, e-flux cannot be profitable, cannot be the institution of its own legitimation, cannot produce value in the given culture" (Szewczyk, 2009. p. 61). But the financial independence of E-flux is the secret of its success and the source of its autonomy from these other institutions, it is not where its complicity lies. Theodor Adorno argues that works of art have been commodities all along:

> Pure works of art, which negated the commodity character of society by simply following their own inherent laws, were at the same time always commodities. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002/1947, p. 127)

What is the persistent (if hypocritical) disavowal of commercial gains for artists based on? Artists need to make a living too. Why is this commonplace fact—together with the fact that artists make a lot of money when they make any at all—disavowed and obscured? The stubborn pursuit to detach art from its commercial aspect can be traced back to conceptual artists' misguided attempt to resist the fetishization of the art object, but it has only succeeded in making the process of ascribing value to art more mysterious. The more obscure the value of an object is, the more priceless it becomes. Every innovative reflex of resistance to capitalist reification has the potential to become its opposite and generate fantastic amounts of capital.

Adorno argues that autonomous art was a commodity from the moment of its inception (Adorno, 2002/1970, p. 239). Even as a negation of the social utility of the market, the freedom of art remains essentially bound up with the premise of a commodity economy (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002/1947, p. 127). Commodification is

not resisted by removing the possibility of selling or buying art. The culture of commodity logic is fuelled by other types of capital, not just financial capital. Museums trade in cultural and symbolic capital. Everyone needs some form of capital in order to participate. They can trade prestige, connections, ideas, skills, techniques, knowledge, networks, time etc. They can exchange these for other forms of value in the exchange network of capitalism. Stewart Martin argues that the commodity form does not limit the critical potential of art. On the contrary, "Art functions ideologically here precisely by presenting itself as a space that is free from capitalist exchange". Capitalist exchange value is not constituted at the level of objects because it is a measure of abstract labour: "It is the commodification of labour that constitutes the value of 'objective' commodities", not the other way around. For Karl Marx, the commodity form *reflects* capitalist exchange, it does not *constitute* it. To locate the source of value in the commodity would be to make "precisely the error that Marx calls fetishism" (Martin, 2007/2006, p. 378):

> If we avoid this fetishism, we are stripped of any delusions that the simple affirmation of the social within capitalist societies is critical of capitalist exchange; it simply draws attention to the social constitution of capitalist exchange, exposing it directly. There is no freedom from capitalist exchange here, merely the confrontation with it, face to face. (Martin, 2007/2006, pp. 378-379)

The commodity character of the work of art does not limit its critical potential, and the eradication of the materiality of the commodity does not eradicate capitalist exchange, as conceptual artists discovered and Siegelaub knew all along. Which brings up the question, if commodification does not divest art of its critical potential, then why is it a problem? After all, artistic autonomy is so-called because it marked the liberation of artists from the oppression and control of patronage. The commodification of art is one consequence of this liberation. Why are artists, who otherwise consider the sale of their work as a mark of prestige, reluctant to admit that art is a commodity? Commodification is the prerequisite for autonomy, just as heteronomy is the consequence of patronage. Bourdieu's analysis of the power struggle between autonomy and heteronomy in the field of art leaves no doubt that the art field is currently characterised by a very low degree of autonomy. Art institutions are being redefined as cultural businesses, their economic structure overhauled to generate profits, while sources of funding come increasingly from private corporations. Thus in Bourdieu's terms, the heteronomous principle currently reigns unchallenged and losing all autonomy, the artistic field disappears, becoming "subject to the ordinary laws

prevailing in the field of power, and more generally in the economic field" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 38).

In her 2009 essay, *The Institution of Critique*, Hito Steyerl makes timely reappraisal of the function of institutions and the "institutions of critique" within them (Steyerl, 2009, p. 14). Steyerl points out that cultural institutions were originally established with the specific task of legitimising and representing the identities of newly formed nation states. Their function was political and they reflected the democratic constitution of the nation states founded on the political mandate of the citizens. Museums were therefore instituted on similar principles of political participation and representation; they were required to represent the idealised public sphere of the state, which was "implicitly a national one". It follows that these institutions were also funded by state taxes: "museums had taken on a complex governmental function" (Steyerl, 2009, pp. 15, 14). In the nineties, artists practicing institutional critique tried to reassert the public identity of the museum, but their protests according to Steyerl fell on deaf ears, because in the mean time:

> The bourgoisie had sort of decided that in their view a cultural institution was primarily an economic one and as such had to be subjected to the laws of the market. The belief that cultural institutions ought to provide a representative public sphere broke down with Fordism… (Steyerl, 2009, p. 16)

Steyerl points out that artists' claims to the public status of the museum (and to public funds) are no longer legitimate because it is now sufficient for the state and its institutions to represent the public symbolically rather than materially[98] (Steyerl, 2009, p. 17). The reproduction of national identity and cultural heritage is no longer crucial for social cohesion, but it does serve to provide "international selling points in an increasingly globalised cultural economy" (Steyerl, 2009, p. 16).

> Thus, in a sense, a process was initiated which is still going on today. That is the process of the cultural or symbolic integration of critique into the institution or rather on the surface of the institution without any material consequences within the institution itself or its organisation. (Steyerl, 2009, pp. 16-17)

Steyerl describes the predicament of cultural institutions within the current political and economic circumstances as a challenge to perform "both within a national cultural

[98] Steyerl cites for example the symbolic integration of minorities in a sphere of social and political inequality (Steyerl, 2009, p. 17).

sphere and an increasingly globalising market" (Steyerl, 2009, p. 18). She maintains a faith that "critical institutions" are crucial and a sense that they are under threat:

> …while critical institutions are being dismantled by neoliberal institutional criticism, this produces an ambivalent subject which develops multiple strategies for dealing with its dislocation. It is on the one side being adapted to the needs of ever more precarious living conditions. On the other, there seems to have hardly ever been more need for institutions which could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create. (Steyerl, 2009, p. 19)

Exploding Cinema, which celebrated its 20th Birthday in 2011, seems uniquely equipped to deal with these circumstances. Self-funded, flexible, nomadic it seeks out and adapts to different contexts, as long as we consistently break even there will always be another show. Exploding Cinema does not rely on funding or institutional validation, it relies on an audience of producers.

THE USE-VALUE OF ART

> …nothing can have value, without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value. (Marx, 1976, p. 131)

In the first chapter, I argued that Theodor Adorno's faith in the critical value of autonomy is based on its potential to shield art from functional imperatives in a society where everything is subjected to functional demands. However, the political, ideological and financial instrumentalisation of art by institutions, corporations and governing bodies has evacuated this argument because art plays a functional role in society.

Karl Marx argues that in the process of exchange, products of human labour acquire a "socially uniform objectivity" or exchange-value, which is distinct from their use-value, their "sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility", or the particular ways that different things are used (Marx, 1976, p. 166). The use-value of a commodity thus accounts for its material qualities as distinct from its economic (or social) value. The circulation of commodities is a means of carrying out the "appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants" (Marx, 1976, p. 253):

> A thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity. Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour, creates, indeed, use-values, but not commodities (Marx, 1976, p. 131)

Art's so-called *functionlessness* is a normative demand, a prescription not a descriptive statement because art is useful. Art is valuable because of its use value, not its

exchange value. If we cannot use art in our lives then it is superfluous. Adorno states that in the subjugation of human desire to capitalist circulation and industrial production, freedom is expressed in the satisfaction of needs through use-value (Adorno, 1997/1965, p. 16). He argues that the social (purposeful) character and the aesthetic (purposeless) value of the work of art are in a dialectical relationship (Adorno, 1997/1965, p. 8) because art represents "a contact with things beyond the antithesis between use and uselessness" (Adorno, 1997/1965, p. 17). By subjecting everything to the law of profit, bourgeois society has debased the concept of usefulness, thus for Adorno, autonomous art fulfils a social role by demonstrating that only useless objects can conjure the existence of useful ones. Use-value thus contains the promise of liberation from the alienation of capitalist production. Even in the midst of that alienation, art can potentially assert itself as a negation of exchange-value.

In *Art Incorporated* (2004), Julian Stallabrass argues that the autonomy of art was a particular reaction against the orthodoxies of its time and avant-garde artists did not count on recognition in their lifetime. Autonomy came at a price and this is ultimately why Adorno stores so much faith in its critical and emancipatory potential. The autonomy of aesthetic judgment inheres in its freedom—its non-prescriptive character. Stallabrass argues that artists no longer enjoy this freedom while "sufficient autonomy is maintained to identify art as art" (Stallabrass, 2004, p. 200). Although art can conjure a utopian and "less instrumental world", it also serves as an ally to oppression:

> In these circumstances, it is works of evident use that press on the contradictions inherent in the system of art, that seek to liberate themselves from capital's servitude. To break with the supplemental autonomy of free art is to remove one of the masks of free trade. (Stallabrass, 2004, p. 201)

To privilege the use-value of art is to affirm that art is what we use it for, the use-value of art is its meaning. Although this leaves the door open to the political and commercial instrumentalisation of art, the claim of autonomy has not prevented these possibilities either. At the very least, as Stallabrass argues, it would "unmask" the conditions of this instrumentalisation. While art with overtly political objectives is subject to the criticism of externally determined purposes, the posture of neutrality that institutions maintain raises them above any such suspicion. It also raises them above any social responsibility. Peter Bürger has already indicated that the condition of autonomy can no longer describe the conditions for art. He maintains that the avant-garde confronts artists with the question of ambition:

> …with the question of what it is that one does when one produces works of art. The necessity of always seeking anew an answer to this question […] and of pursuing this search not alongside artistic production, but as an integral part of the latter, deeply alters the problem of autonomy. (Bürger, 1998, p. 178)

What are the ambitions for artists today? Can artists only aspire to professional ambitions—awards and participation in biennials—as the art establishment would have us believe? Walter Benjamin's essay *The Author as Producer* was addressed to the Paris *Institute for the Study of Fascism* in 1934. Benjamin states that artists are autonomous (whether they realise this or not) only as far as they are free to choose which class of interests to serve (Benjamin, 1969, p. 220). He argues that debates premised on a generalised concept of art are pointless: if social relations are determined by relations of production, art must be considered within its "living social context" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 222). To gauge the critical vigour of a work of art it is not enough to ask: "What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?" but rather "What is its *position* in them" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 222). Benjamin promotes the politically radical idea that artists must not supply the existing productive apparatus without attempting to change it:

> What matters […] is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 233)

Benjamin essentially proposes two related ambitions for artists: he argues that the work of art should incite the consumer to become a producer, while at the same time making accessible the means and techniques.[99] The avant-garde ambition to transform society is more urgent than ever, but not by using the same means. We need to overcome the identification of ends with means and develop strategies that are appropriate in the current context. By flicking through a lifestyle magazine, John Berger demonstrates in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), that *collage* does not perform anything on images that the media do not perform themselves. The clash between sophisticated advertising imagery and documentary photographs of war and conflict that Martha Rosler documents in her series of photomontages *Bringing the War Home/House Beautiful* (1967-72), already circulates in millions of magazines. For Victor Burgin,

[99] See for example the zero budget and DIY instructional video *DIY Dolly Zooms* (Blunt Productions, 2009) from the series *Zero Budget Filmmaking Tips* (2009) by Paul Elliott and Exploding Cinema member Ben Slotover.

political art is the new orthodoxy but artists do not depart in "content or analysis" from what is already familiar to us from the media, he argues that in fact that, what is "documented" in these works are the media themselves: "Artists making 'documentaries' usually encounter their subject matter not at first hand but from the media". According to Burgin the media play a crucial role in the "production of subjects", the task for art therefore is to provide a critical alternative (Burgin and Gelder, 2010):

> …what is now fundamentally critical to the western societies in which I live and work is the progressive colonization of the terrain of languages, beliefs and values by mainstream media contents and forms – imposing an industrial uniformity upon what may be imagined and said, and engendering compliant synchronized subjects of a "democratic" political process in which the vote changes nothing. (Burgin and Gelder, 2010)

In *Empire* (2001), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that the place for resistance is within the structure of capitalism and emancipation can occur only through the reconfiguration of that structure "with no possibility of any even utopian outside" (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 65). This is because the dominance of language, communication and immaterial labour blurs the traditional distinctions between productive forces and relations of production, thus:

> Social subjects are at the same time producers and products of this unitary machine. In this new historical formation it is thus no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is 'outside'. (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 385)

The consumers are also the producers, and artists are also caught within this cycle. Artists can play a crucial political role by disseminating encounters of alterity through their work, but also by materialising that alterity and showing that a different way of life is possible, even within the oppressive systems of capitalism. They can do this by sustaining a practice that is not cynically complacent and unproblematically complicit. Because the instrumentalisation of art would not be possible without the complicity of artists.

A DIVERSE NETWORK OF INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

What is compelling in Adorno's conception of the illusory autonomy of art in the concealment of its social character and terms of production, is that it does not presume a space outside of society. Adorno's autonomous art thesis constructs the possibility of creating within society the space of the "outside". Adorno claims that whether the work of art is political and socially engaged or not this has no impact on the autonomy of the work of art because the concept of autonomy is always relative and does not

preclude heteronomy. Today however, the notion of autonomy has been usurped by the institutions which define the field of "international contemporary art", and predetermine its activity. Equally then, the concept of autonomy is the product of a culture which defines within itself a territory where its rules do not count.[100]

Although art may be a positive model against the dehumanisation of labour and the instrumentalisation of everything in society, it also masks the instrumentalisation of this resistance. Critical art plays a strategic role in the legitimisation of the critical profile of the art institution. If art is the critical alternative to society as Bürger, Marcuse, Adorno and Ranciere believe, then it cannot function within its own internal politics like the rest of society. Adorno and Habermas argue that art is part of society and cannot be immune to its failings and the means by which it functions. This may sound like an ethical problem, but it is a political problem. It is the confrontation of one type of politics with another, a politics of collectivism, collaboration, inclusion and equality against a politics of competition, adversity, territorialism and distinction.

The emergence of the aesthetic as a theoretical category is closely bound to the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalist production, and at the same time, to the material process through which cultural production became separated from the political sphere and the social functions that it traditionally served (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9). Eagleton suggests that, from a radical political viewpoint, the notion of autonomy within aesthetic discourse is disabling. Art is thereby "conveniently sequestered from all other social practices, to become an isolated enclave within which the dominant social order can find an idealized refuge from its own actual values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possessiveness". He adds, that the "entirely self-regulating and self-determining" notion of autonomy "provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operations" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9). However, Eagleton points out that the

> …concept of autonomy is radically double-edged: if on the one hand it provides a central constituent of bourgeois ideology, it also marks an emphasis on the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes, in the work of Karl Marx and others, the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 9)

[100] The idea of "context as content" (O'Doherty, 1976) challenges the notion of the autonomy of art, because if one must account for the context of the work, this puts a condition on the work that subtracts from its conception as an ideal unity. The demand that artists contextualize their practice also negates their autonomy.

Liam Gillick shares Eagleton's view; together with a belief in modernism's incomplete legacy of autonomy: "an almost Adorno-like belief that you should continue to produce a form of heightened art, a kind of melancholic art of refusal and abstraction" (Slyce, 2009, p. 6). In a recent interview with John Slyce, Gillick expressed an affiliation with the notion of autonomy as the precondition of the "potential of art as an exception within the culture" (Slyce, 2009, p. 4). The notion of autonomy in art might offer a measure of freedom, empowering artists to create subjective and insular systems of signification, nevertheless, this is where "affirmative culture" is at its most successful, it objectifies and commodifies the artist's subjectivity, so the intended critique fails.

For Castoriadis a "politics of autonomy" would have the task of enabling "the collectivity to create the institutions that, when internalized by the individuals, will not limit but rather enlarge their capacity for becoming autonomous" (Castoriadis, 1996, p. 134). The object of autonomy is thus an autonomous society:

> I call autonomous a society that not only knows explicitly that it has created its own laws but has instituted itself so as to free its radical imaginary and enable itself to alter its institutions through collective, self-reflective, and deliberate activity. (Castoriadis, 1996, p. 132)

It is not institutions we need, just like we do not need ideologies, slogans or leaders. We need self-sufficient communities, actual as well as virtual. As long as artists and their institutions continue to aspire to the recognition of the museum by subscribing to its values they will always be caught within heteronomously defined or alienated conditions. Rather than pursue inclusion with the art historical canon, artists can write and disseminate their own histories and compile their own archives. Referring to the example of the circulation of pirated Xerox editions of Horkheimer, Benjamin and Feuerbach which were out of print in the 1960s and early 1970s, Susan Buck-Morss argues that "spontaneous cultural dissemination is proof that there can be readers of theory and receptions of art without marketing departments". Buck-Morss sees within the current potential for circulation via the media "nothing less than a grass-roots, globally extended, multiply articulated, radically cosmopolitan and critical counter-culture" (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 72):

> In it, artists would relinquish their impotent power as residents of the gated community of the artworld in return for social relevance, relating to publics not as their spokespersons, not as ethnographers or advocates who represent to a global artworld the underprivileged and excluded, but as part of a critically creative global context, where aesthetic experience manages to escape not only the artworld, but all "worlds" as disciplinary regimes. (Buck-Morss, 2003, pp. 72-73)

But to do this artists must detach themselves from reliance on the legitimising structure of the art world. This means that they must also readdress the discourse of art and the values that it implicitly promotes and reclaim the complex and contradictory histories of art and of artists from their recuperation. It means that they have to devise means of independent production, to contact their own audiences and to collaborate with other artists in these goals. Bourdieu called for an "*Internationale of intellectuals*" to defend the autonomy of the means of cultural production:

> …it is especially urgent today that intellectuals mobilize and create a veritable *Internationale of intellectuals* committed to defending the autonomy of the universes of cultural production or, to parody a language now out of fashion, *the ownership by cultural producers of their instruments of production and circulation* (and hence of evaluation and consecration). (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 344)

Bourdieu says that we shouldn't be surprised to hear that "this autonomy is very severely threatened or, more precisely, that a threat of a totally new sort today hangs over its functioning" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 344). The various facets of this threat have been analysed in this thesis, but it is far from inclusive. Bourdieu, Siegelaub, Osborne, Steyerl and others identify this threat in the transition of art institutions from the control of the public sphere to corporate and neoliberal agendas:

> The *threats to autonomy* result from the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money. I am thinking of new forms of sponsorship, of new alliances being established between certain economic enterprises (often the most modernizing, as in Germany, with Daimler-Benz and the banks) and cultural producers; I am thinking, too, of the more and more frequent recourse of university research to sponsorship… (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 344)

However, the function of art institutions as public bodies is no less instrumental and ideological. Autonomy is contingent on financial independence and self-determination. Artists cannot assume positions of political neutrality beyond any form of power struggle. Exploding Cinema is a space for consensus and disagreement, it is both a critique and a way of life. It is a model of the kind of society we want. Society is a web of relationships, networks of power and conflicting interests that do not change from one moment to the next without great upheaval and instability. Sedimented structures, conventional practices and power relationships change over time. We can contribute to the type of society we want by making changes on the local level in which we operate. By building models of the type of society we want, in artist-run spaces, collective projects and local communities we can make improvements in the present and these will function more effectively to undermine the *status quo* than any negative critique.

> There is necessarily a plurality of arts, and however we may imagine the ways in which the arts might intersect there is no imaginable way of totalizing this plurality. (Badiou, 2003)

It is possible at any time to have plural, multiple definitions of art and to regard them as simultaneously valid. One form of art does not invalidate another and the pluralism of art does not presuppose a distinct audience for each form of art.

Dave Beech proposes that to contest the cultural field, independent or artist-run spaces need a "stronger brand of independence" (Beech, 2006, p. 10). This can be accomplished by pursuing pragmatic short-term goals with self-sufficient means. For artists this means establishing sustainable practices and independent networks. This should not be confused with a desire to supplant the mainstream, but to bypass it entirely with a terrain of diverse approaches, small organisations and institutions.

Exploding Cinema inspired the spontaneous emergence of an underground film scene in the mid-1990s, in London and throughout the UK and Europe. Although they were not all collectives or open-access, they all screened short low-budget films and incorporated live music, cabaret installation or performance into their shows. London-based clubs included The Halloween Society, Films That Make You Go Hmmmmm, Kinokulture, Omsk, My Eyes My Eyes, Cinergy, KingKey Movies (Vito Roco), Shaolin, Renegade Arts, Peeping Toms, Kinodisobey, Uncut, Scooter and many others. Beginning in 1996, they collaborated to organise the Volcano Film Festival (1997-1999) which turned out to be a major event with groups from Europe and New York (Szczelkun, 1998; Szczelkun, 2002; Ilson, 2005).

Since the late 2000s, a number of film clubs host regular screenings in pubs throughout London. However, it is lamentable that with the exception of groups like Kino London and Another Roadside Attraction, most of these clubs screen feature films: Cinema Colorama, Deptford Film Club, The Duke Mitchell Film Club, Midnight Movies, Full Unemployment Cinema, Aorta Burst Film Club and others.

As discussed in the first chapter, Sadie Plant raises a pertinent question about the difference and the connection between forms of critique and ways of life (Plant, 1992, p. 89-90). A way of life can also be a form of critique. We can perform critique by practicing alternatives. But any alternative is an alternative relationship and difficult to establish. Artists establish these relationships across different fields. Artists can create an independent network of organisations to ensure their mutual freedom and survival; they can diversify the field and its discourses and create new possibilities by practicing different models. The monopoly of mainstream art destroys this freedom, as do

extraneous agendas, which govern from within the entire field of art, and the way it functions.

CONCLUSION

The economic crisis of 2008 initiated a shift in the political climate on a global scale: government policies have drifted towards the right and we have grown accustomed to a permanent state of war and the tightening of surveillance and bureaucracy. Professional and social competitiveness, materialism and "connectedness" are the appropriate manners, while a massive accumulation of wealth accompanies an increase in corporate power and a corresponding weakening of democratic processes. Together, these conditions result in an exponential rise of individualisation and the breakdown of social cohesion. Since 2009, an oppositional tide of grassroots resistance movements—coordinated via social media—express global dissatisfaction with conditions that amount to erosions of the control that individuals can assert over their own lives. Has the growing economic austerity and the blatant privileging of material values over social ones politicised a whole generation of young people? Or are these demonstrations largely performative re-enactments of cultural stereotypes, inadvertently functioning to legitimise neo-liberal values, as long as their opposition appears to be illegitimate and coming from a demonised minority?

The neo-liberal promise of freedom through the free market is deceptive because it relies on firm-lipped complicity. We experience unprecedented levels of personal freedom at the expense of unprecedented levels of social constraint. This constraint is invisible, it comes from the disembodied voice of authority in public announcements, from myriad CCTV cameras, from spaces of exclusion and spaces of conformity where every available surface screams slogans and brands at us, from the multiple choice between unsatisfactory answers, from the incapacity to speak to power and to receive any answers.

In summary, in CHAPTER ONE: "INSTITUTIONALISED CRITIQUE" I describe the emergence of institutional critique in the aftermath of May 1968 when social and political upheavals reactivated the modernist controversy between political engagement and artistic autonomy. In the intervening period, art practices that attempted to critique and subvert the art institution from within failed and were absorbed, effectively reinforcing and expanding the institution's scope. The "institution of art" refers to the art world as a social configuration of institutions but we also speak of the art institution in terms of the legitimating discourses that enable us to recognise and discuss art. Within this broader definition of the art institution as an ideological system, works of art are regarded not as singular entities but as elements of an institutional

determination. It is nevertheless problematic to equate art practice with institutional practice. A more precise definition of the institution is necessary in order to analyse the conditions of art practice, mediation and reception. The institution functions to legitimise art by conferring credit in the form of "recognition". The art institution can thus be defined narrowly to include only those institutions or individuals that have the authority to legitimise art as such. The institution of art is socially determined, it is thus also internalised and entwined with our ambitions, identities, values and investments. Discourse determines the production of art, where practice is translated into discourse and discourse leads to more practice. The problem is that this serves to preserve the status quo. If institutional critique is a critique of the internalisation of ideology, then instead of problematising institutional sites while subscribing to their value-systems, it would be more appropriate to problematise institutions that are formative in our shared discourses on art and to redefine these discourses affirmatively. Institutional critique raises critical questions about the concept of the institution of art and the role of the artist within it. For Andrea Fraser, unlike movements of the historical and neo avant-garde which challenged art institutions and the autonomy of art, institutional critique on the contrary is a defence of art and art institutions against exploitation. Although artists practicing institutional critique seek to challenge the legitimating structures of the institution, they also seek recognition and rewards from the institution. These practices raise a pertinent question regarding the ultimate aspirations of institutional critique and the ambitions of critical art in general. Artists are profoundly invested in the values and meaning of art. Avant-garde artists did not take issue with museums or particular practices of interpretation, circulation, selection or exclusion within the art world; they took issue with the entire concept of art and its role in bourgeois society. Their aim to sublate art was a contradictory endeavour. Critical or political art is not a functionalisation of art, but it reveals and resists the institutionalisation of art as an exclusive field, which severs art's connections to the world and conceals the instrumentalisation of art in the service of political and economic interests. The argument that artists can infiltrate the institution and subvert it from within is naïve and misleading. Institutionalisation does not happen from one moment to the next, it is a process of internalisation. Institutional critique takes place within the value system it claims to challenge, working with and upholding the very same values and means that it means to abolish.

This chapter draws from the work of writers and theorists associated with institutional critique, including Benjamin Buchloh, Daniel Buren, Andrea Fraser, Rosalind Krauss, Isabelle Graw, Philipp Kaiser, Gerald Raunig and Simon Sheikh. I refer to Peter

Bürger's analysis of the art institution and to Pierre Bourdieu, Thierry De Duve and Jacques Derrida regarding the legitimating discourses of the art institution.

In CHAPTER TWO: I discuss the VICISSITUDES OF AUTONOMY. This chapter traces the concept of autonomy to Immanuel Kant with reference to Peter Bürger and Casey Haskins. It reviews Theodor Adorno's thesis on autonomy with reference to Stewart Martin, Andy Hamilton, Jacques Ranciere, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton. It discusses the role of the concept of autonomy within the art institution with reference to Arthur Danto and to Walter Grasskamp, Travis English, Stefan Germer on the work of Hans Haacke.

In the modern era, art by definition questions its existence. Since the early twentieth century, artists have articulated a self-conscious ambivalence regarding the autonomy of art. Aesthetic autonomy is an empowering concept but it is also constitutive of the false idealism of art and serves to conceal the connection between culture and hegemony. The moment of self-consciousness of art also marks the inception of the art institution. It is thus possible to differentiate between the work of art and its institutional function and designation. A distinction emerges between the singular practices of artists and art as a social institution with a legitimising cultural discourse that enables us to recognise and talk about works of art. For Adorno the social function of autonomous art in the era of modernism is social critique. Art resists heteronomy by insisting obstinately on its own values or rules. Through its functionlessness, art resists the logic of capitalism as the apparent negation and critique of functionalism. The defence of the autonomy of art however, obscures the social and political dimensions of the production of art and the relationship of art to social institutions. Commodification in and of itself does not necessarily compromise the critical function of the work of art. Autonomy is a fetish and a position of complicity but the pay off is substantial: works of art are critical because they protest against the instrumentalisation of everything in capitalist society. By the end of the twentieth century, institutional critique revealed the pervasiveness of the art institution and the illusory character of autonomy. Autonomy remains a crucial though problematic concept because it confronts artists who set out to produce a "political" critique of capitalist ideology from a position of plausible neutrality, one that is circumscribed by the institution of art. The art institution clings to the status of autonomy, because it guarantees art's symbolic value. But the institution also trades this symbolic value for economic and political forms of value. The posture of neutrality that institutions maintain raises them above the suspicion of externally determined purposes. Adorno's faith in the critical value of autonomy lies in its potential to shield art from functional

imperatives. The institutionalisation of art conceals the ideological and financial instrumentalisation of art. Institutionalised art is instrumentalised and functionalised in one way or another and therefore heteronomously defined, not autonomous. Art appears to be apolitical in a way that allows it to be political in its own terms. The institutions of art—which legitimise art—have taken over this autonomous function, both by promoting autonomy as a legitimating concept and by undertaking the role of legislator in place of the artist. A truly critical approach would have the task of *investigating* whether art is in fact subordinate to practical ends.

In CHAPTER THREE: GREAT EXPECTATIONS I address the political status of the artist. What are the politics of art? What informs artists' ideological choices and ambitions? In order to address these questions I consider the work of Dave Beech, JJ Charlesworth, Anton Vidokle, Jakob Jakobsen and Henriette Heise on self-institutionalisation. This chapter considers John Searle's analysis of institutions and refers to Pierre Bourdieu, Peter Bürger, Benjamin Buchloh, Boris Groys, Daniel Buren and Gerald Raunig on the institution of art in particular. I also consider the work of Edward Said and Jacques Derrida on the relationship between meaning and context.

Art institutions present two major problems for artists, in the first case, although art institutions are "supporting structures", the opportunities they provide for the production of art are *defining* contexts. Secondly, art institutions recuperate works of art by *re-defining* them in art-historical contexts. In the process of institutionalisation, art is separated from its particular context and subsequently re-contextualised as art and neutralised. Artists thematise and resist this defining context in their work, only to be subsumed once again within the institution. Once inside the institution, artists internalise its values and cannot sustain an independent critical position without endangering their own precarious position within the institution. The solution must necessarily lie in creating new contexts and to conceive of new ways to think of art in social space. For artists this means establishing sustainable practices and independent networks. John Searle demonstrates that the purpose of institutions is to create power relationships. Searle defines institutions in terms of their specific properties, distinguishing art-making practices from institutional practices. Art is not an institution because it is not defined by a set of constitutive rules. If the long-term aspiration behind artists' self-institutionalisation is to claim a stake in the contested territory of the art world then this will always be vulnerable to cooptation. The politics of autonomy and the politics of art are thus two entirely different things. Inevitably, every artwork is infinitely interpretable, and it can even be argued that it will always be misunderstood. The work of art is always open to contingent and supplemental

interpretations, its meaning is dependent on a particular encounter. Meaning is relational and is deduced within a binding context. The work of art fulfils an objective role within society; this is the significance of the work, not its manifest content. The vague and inconsistent distinction between contemporary art and popular culture is evident in the impossibility of articulating any well-defined description of art that radically excludes popular culture. Art is not defined, art is legitimised. The question is how art is legitimised as art, because this is no longer a function of art itself. Artworks, art practices, actions or events do not have an essential ontological status; they acquire their status only in the context of an encounter. But if art cannot be defined, then how do we recognise it? The work of art is a fetish which is constituted by—amongst other things—discourses which contain not only the affirmation of the work, but also an affirmation of their own legitimacy. What is camouflaged here is the regulation of production and dissemination of cultural production. The mechanism of 'qualitative' judgement sustains this apparently natural system of the selection and promotion of artists. The production of a work of art involves material and symbolic production: the production of the value of the work and production of belief in the value of the work. This is the task for experts with institutionally conferred legitimacy. If anything can be art, then it is important that we can rely on an authority to separate art from non-art. The institution of art provides the conditions for the production of art as well as the discourses by which we recognize art. It produces discourses on the "meaning" of art as well as discourses on the concept of "meaning". Power appeals to artists and intellectuals for legitimation, in exchange granting relative autonomy to institutions that provide this service. But equally, the arts can also use their legitimating power to subvert power. The field of art is thus a potential site for symbolic revolution. This is why the progressive expansion and differentiation of the field is accompanied by institutionalisation as a means of control. The institution of art is constituted and functions as a buffer zone between art, power and society. The *institutionalisation* of art in a circumscribed field of its own conceals the *instrumentalisation* of art within the institution of art. If the work of art is dependent on its context and if that context is invariably the gallery, the museum or the collection, then the work of art is tautological. The idealism of autonomous art renders art apolitical and divests it of critical content by sequestering it to an extra-social realm. At the same time, this is precisely the process by which art is functionalised. The context of art *determines* the production of art and the meaning and value of art, a circular system which reinforces itself. The museum is a lacuna, it is a gap, nothing in itself, it acquires its meaning from the work that it hosts and exhibits. Having shed

the gilt frame, the work of art is now framed by the museum. Funding, sponsorship, selection, academic and institutional validation are understood as external factors to the work of art, however they encroach on and influence the production and display of art, they consequently have a bearing on the meaning of the work. The concept of the *parergon* thus challenges the convention that the work of art is a vessel of meaning. There is no meaning within the work itself, meaning is supplemented by what is exterior to it. There are thus no privileged interpretations of the work of art. Institutions effectively *constitute* contemporary art practice. The art institution acquires its status from the concept of the autonomy of the aesthetic. It is therefore capable of absorbing any criticism in the form of anti-art and re-presenting it as art. The notion of the autonomy of art perseveres, veiling instrumental decisions in a cloak of ambiguous aesthetic judgements that serve to legitimise institutional decisions. The institutional context of art breaks down the relationships of the particular elements of a work of art, effectively disassociating it from its social and political context. The apparent disconnection of the work from its context and its attachment to art history abstracts the work and presents it as an object free from ideology. In the lateral expansion of the art field there are no discernible movements, influences come from all directions and the production of art follows localised flourishes. Personal and subjective agendas are privileged over social and collective concerns. The field is one of professional competition rather than common aspiration. The institution of art aestheticises the work of art, allowing extraneous values to be attached to it. Although conceptual artists highlighted the politics of the museum, they also limited the scope of art practice in hermetic and self-conscious investigations. Institutional critique became dependent on the museum and foregrounded the institution as the disavowed centre of art. Institutional critique provided the means whereby the institution reinvents itself, but this reinvention is informed by a neo-liberal agenda. Artists affirm and sanction the museum merely by exhibiting within it. Their positive affirmation of the institution speaks louder than their negative critique. The institution of art determines what is produced and exhibited through forms of direct censorship and indirect methods of positive and negative reinforcement, which enforce artists' self-censorship. The institution of art dictates but it also suggests, coaxes and propositions artists. Culture is both an industry and a battleground. The institution of art has entirely ceded to material objectives and political agendas and can no longer claim a critical position in relation to capitalism. The autonomy of art is founded on the promise of "aesthetic revolution", but it is currently subject to corporate instrumentalisation and control. Artists need to reassert art as a free and potentially revolutionary space within society.

Bourdieu describes the field of art as a struggle between two principles, the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle. This power struggle takes place within the institution of art even before it takes place within the work of art. The field of power asserts the heteronomous principle as a value in the field of art. The buffer zone that in bourgeois society traditionally encircles and protects art, now converts it into a field of mass-production. The insistence on applying the heteronomous principle of value in the art world creates a large-scale cultural industry, a powerful mainstream. Being thus at odds with the disinterested values of the field, this institution promotes a climate of estrangement amongst the producers. The relationship between autonomy and heteronomy is dialectical. Given that artists occupy a dominated position in the institution of art, there is always the pressure of external economic or political interests. To consider the principles at play within the work of art we must also consider the principles at play at the level of power, because the power structure of the field determines the production and representation of the field, rendering its own role invisible. Currently, the field of art is characterised by a very low degree of autonomy. Art is one more weapon in political struggles. The field of cultural production is the site of struggles: at stake is the power to impose the definitions of the artist as well as the definition of those who are entitled to define the artist. Artists are not socialists, democrats or liberals. When we say "autonomy", we mean "art is its own politics". But artists do not institutionalise their politics. Art is an autonomous sphere because artists create their own rules and they defend their right to create their own rules. Artists self-consciously negotiate their autonomy, hand it over as a commodity in exchange for recognition.

In CHAPTER FOUR: NO STARS NO FUNDING NO TASTE I discuss The Exploding Cinema Collective as a productive counterpoint to art institutions. Its constitution was motivated by its predecessors and informed by the potential disasters of official recognition and support. Exploding Cinema is unique in that this vision was never abandoned or compromised, the question is how did it manage to survive? This chapter addresses this question with reference to the research of Duncan Reekie, Peter Thomas, Stefan Szczelkun and Michael Mazière on the underground film scene in London.

Artists have responded to exclusion by creating their own spaces, events and networks, thus practicing a negative critique of the predominant and naturalised bourgeois ideology of the art world. These distributed practices often fail to grow to produce an enduring alternative culture for the production and distribution of art. These failures can be traced to the artist's desire for recognition. Art and popular

culture recycle common strategies, techniques and ideas against a backdrop of social and political shifts. The Exploding Cinema Collective is a resistant subculture, its roots are not in art but in the underground. Exploding Cinema does not aspire to distinctions and recognition within the art world. The assumption that the state should fund artistic production and the associated assumption that funding should be provided with no strings attached may be embedded in the liberal tradition, but it is naïve. Throughout Europe and the US in the 1960s and 1970s, against the backdrop of feminist, civil-rights and anti-war movements, artists' groups coordinated their efforts against the ossified traditions of art institutions and art schools, and tried to bridge the gap between art and life. Why did these efforts fail to meet their objectives? What are the factors that have contributed to the current state of affairs, where art is ubiquitous but institutionalised, exclusive, safe and expensive? A number of factors came into play, amongst them were the lack of solidarity amongst artists and their incapacity to self-organise; the recuperation of anti-art as an aesthetic object by the art institution; and a naivety concerning the artists' ambitions and their articulation. Critique was transformed into stylised activism within the museum, and functioned as an institutional self-vaccination. The reason for the failure of artists' ambitions throughout the twentieth century is the confusion amongst artists about what is actually at stake in the affirmation of artistic autonomy. Exploding Cinema is an ideal context: a plural and inclusive space of social interaction without divisions, a space of proximity between artists and audience, a community that is engaged and egalitarian. The resistance that is built into Exploding Cinema against all forms of institutionalisation can be found in the collective's constitution which emphasises: open access screenings for a diverse popular audience; open, inclusive and voluntary membership; non-profit-making and non-funded financial base; collective governance, rotation of roles and duties and skill-sharing rather than specialisation and hierarchy. The most influential precedent for Exploding Cinema was the *London Film-Makers' Co-operative (1966-1995-2002)*. The early days of the LFMC served as an inspiration and set the precedent for Exploding Cinema's emphasis on distribution, activism and democratic governance. The subsequent dependence of the LFMC on funding, its capture by the funding agencies and its dissolution functioned as a warning that was incorporated into the Exploding Cinema collective agreement. From its beginnings as an independent field of experimental film and video, the LFMC became the productive subsidiary of public cultural institutions. This process revealed how the supporting role of cultural institutions eventually exercise ideological and bureaucratic control over the productive field. This process is so naturalised within the institution of art that it is indisputable

and unchallenged. The instrumentalisation of art by museums, corporations and government institutions is a well-documented fact within the art world; art is recast in public relations and marketing jargon and government policy. The question is why do artists continue to participate in and supply these promotional mechanisms? Artists will use any opportunity to produce new work, and they are not always aware of what they hand over in return. Public funding comes with no fewer strings attached than private sponsorship or the market. Publicly funded art often amounts to the functionalisation of art in the name of institutional policies, whatever the particular terms of the agenda. If artists accept financial support, they are in effect legitimising the values affirmed in the terms of funding bodies and the functionalisation of their work. The logic behind the founding of Exploding Cinema was along the lines "what can we do to make sure this does not happen again". Artists complain about their grievances in private but not in public. This fosters the mystification and normalisation of the art world, prolonging its function to individualise artists and re-direct their efforts to externally determined purposes. Participatory art projects strive to collapse distinctions between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception. They emphasise collaboration and collectivity. However, participation is not intrinsically political or oppositional and the public is not inherently passive. Factors that have contributed to Exploding Cinema's continued existence over the last twenty years is the open-access principle and the tolerance of its open membership structure. Participation as an unspoken priority is a crucial principle governing the structure of Exploding Cinema. It provides film-makers with access to audience without censorship and a space for exchange. Curatorial selection is at best a subjective judgment and at worst it is censorship, cultural exclusion and political enculturation. It stands for and carries out the function of institutional legitimation, patronising and disempowering both the audience and the artist. Art is the product of a collective effort. Works of art emerge through a process which includes the exchange of feedback; a collaborative aspect of art practice that is never acknowledged. At Exploding Cinema, this process is public and part of the reception of the work, it includes and empowers the audience. Consensus plays a crucial role and in the public reception of art, without this consensual judgement, art becomes subject to the criteria of authority and the monopoly of the definition of art. The availability of film-making technologies to a wider public has increased the need for spaces like Exploding Cinema, with its inherently popular structure. Artists are engaged in a relentless struggle for recognition. Artists are resigned to this state of affairs as though it were a form of natural selection. If artists refused to enter into unequal relationships that they felt

compromising, the art world would become transformed. Artists are trapped within their guarded autonomy and their dependence on the institution. The commodity form does not limit the critical potential of art. The stubborn pursuit to detach art from its commercial aspect has only succeeded in making the process of ascribing value to art more mysterious. The commodity character of the work of art does not limit its critical potential, and the eradication of the materiality of the commodity does not eradicate capitalist exchange because symbolic capital is also a form of currency. Commodification is the prerequisite for autonomy, just as heteronomy is the consequence of patronage. Art is valuable because of its use value, not its exchange value. To privilege the use-value of art is to affirm that art is what we use it for, the use-value of art is its meaning. Consensus plays a crucial role in the public reception of art because without consensual judgement, art becomes subject to the criteria of authority. The concept of autonomy is the product of a culture which defines within itself a territory where its rules do not count. Critical art plays a strategic role in the legitimisation of the critical profile of the art institution. If art is the critical alternative to society then it cannot function within its own internal politics like the rest of society. The notion of autonomy in art might offer a measure of freedom, empowering artists to create subjective and insular systems of signification, nevertheless, this is where "affirmative culture" is at its most successful, it objectifies and commodifies the artist's subjectivity, so the intended critique fails. As long as artists and their institutions continue to aspire to the recognition of the museum by subscribing to its values they will always be caught within heteronomously defined or alienated conditions. Artists must detach themselves from reliance on the legitimising structure of the art world. They must also readdress the discourse of art and the values that it implicitly promotes and reclaim the complex and contradictory histories of art and of artists from their recuperation, they must devise means of independent production, to contact their own audiences and to collaborate with other artists in these goals. Exploding Cinema is a space for consensus and disagreement, it is both a critique and a way of life. It is a model of the kind of society we want. By building models of the type of society we want, in artist-run spaces, collective projects and local communities we can make improvements in the present and these will function more effectively to undermine the *status quo* than any negative critique. It is possible at any time to have plural, multiple definitions of art and to regard them as simultaneously valid. One form of art does not invalidate another and the pluralism of art does not presuppose a distinct audience for each form of art. Real autonomy can be accomplished by pursuing pragmatic short-term goals with self-sufficient means. For artists this means establishing sustainable

practices and independent networks. This should not be confused with a desire to supplant the mainstream, but to bypass it entirely with a terrain of diverse approaches, small organisations and institutions.

This thesis addresses artistic ambition in the context of contemporary art. The ambition for institutionally-bestowed recognition is the single factor behind the failure and recuperation of collectives and artist-run spaces. We participate in and simultaneously produce and reproduce the ideologies of the institution, it is thus important to demystify the function of the art institution. The significance of the failure if LFMC in relation to the field of contemporary art is that it reveals how in a short time the forces that play a supporting role, eventually control the productive field. This process is now so naturalised within the field of art that it is indisputable and unchallenged. The reason for the failure of artists' ambitions throughout the twentieth century is the confusion amongst artists about what is actually at stake in the affirmation of artistic autonomy. The autonomy of art is not aesthetic, it is political because it defines a sphere for the critique of power and it defines artists as free agents.

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