Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique

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INSTITUTIONS OF EXODUS

INSTITUENT PRACTICES AND MONSTER INSTITUTIONS

I

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE?

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Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming*

Gerald Raunig

(Translated by Aileen Derieg)

When we propose in the announcement of our Transform project the provisional thesis that a new 'phase' of institutional critique will now emerge,[1] following the two previous 'phases' – the first beginning in the late 1960s, the second in the late 1980s – this thesis is based less on empirical evidence than on a political and theoretical necessity to be found in the logic of institutional critique itself. Both 'phases' of this now-canonized practice developed their own strategies and methods within their respective contexts. The resemblances between them are deep – and go beyond even what the categories of art history and criticism would suggest. At the same time, there are clear divergences grounded in the differing social and political conditions within which each emerged. Things have changed tremendously since Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers and others initiated what appears in retrospect as the first wave of institutional critique. In the late 1980s and 90s, in a changed context, these practices developed into diverse artistic projects that continued to circulate under the same name. Now, if institutional critique is not to be fixed and paralyzed as something established in the field of art and remaining constrained by its rules, then it must continue to change and develop in a changing society. It must link up with other forms of critique both within and outside the art field – whether these forms emerged in opposition to existing conditions or were the resistance that provoked those conditions in the first place.[2] Against the background of this kind of transversal exchange among forms of critique – but also without naively imagining spaces somehow free from domination and

institutions – institutional critique needs to be rethought as a critical attitude and as what I call an 'instituent practice'.

In his 1978 lecture 'What is Critique?' Michel Foucault describes the spread and replication of governmentality in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, claiming that along with this governmentalization of all possible areas of life and finally of the self, critique also developed as the art not to be governed *like that*. Even without going into more depth here on the continuities and breaks between the historical forms of developing liberal governmentality and the current forms of neo-liberal governmentality (see Isabell Lorey's essay in the third section of this volume), it may be said that the relationship between *government* and *not to be governed like that* is still a prerequisite today for reflecting on the contemporary relationship between institution and critique. In Foucault's words:

> [T]his governmentalization, which seems to me to be rather characteristic of these societies in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, cannot apparently be dissociated from the question 'how not be governed?' I do not mean by that that governmentalization would be opposed in a kind of face-off by the opposite affirmation, 'we do not want to be governed, and we do not want to be governed *at all*'. I mean that, in this great preoccupation about the way to govern and the search for the ways to govern, we identify a perpetual question which could be: 'how not be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them'. (Foucault, 1997a: 28)

Here Foucault insists on the shift from a fundamental negation of government toward a maneuver to avoid this kind of dualism: from *not to be governed at all* to *not to be governed like that*, from a phantom battle for a *big other* to a constant struggle in the plane of immanence, which – as I would like to add – is not (solely) actualized as a fundamental critique of institutions, but rather as a permanent process of instituting. Foucault continues:

> And if we accord this movement of governmentalization of both society and individuals the historic dimension and breadth which I believe it has had, it seems that one could approximately locate therein what we could call the critical attitude. Facing them head on and as compensation, or rather, as both partner and adversary to the arts of

> governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them. (Foucault, 1997a: 28)

These latter categories are the ones I want to focus on in terms of the transformation and further development of the question of contemporary forms of institutional critique: transformations as ways of escaping from the arts of governing, lines of flight, which are not at all to be taken as harmless or individualistic or escapist and esoteric, even if they no longer allow dreaming of an entirely different exteriority. "Nothing is more active than a flight!" as Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet write (2002: 36) and as Paolo Virno echoes almost literally: "Nothing is less passive than the act of fleeing, of exiting" (2004a: 70).

If the 'arts of governing' mean an intertwining of governing and being governed, government and self-government, then '*transforming* the arts of governing' does not consist simply of any arbitrary transformation processes in the most general sense, because transformations are an essential aspect of the context of governmentality itself. It is more a matter of specifically *emancipatory* transformations, and this also rescinds a central aspect of the old institutional critique. Through their emancipatory character these transformations also assume a transversal quality, i.e. their effects extend beyond the bounds of particular fields.

In contrast to these kinds of emancipatory transversal transformations of the 'arts of governing', there is a recurring problem in art discourse: that of reducing and enclosing more general questions in one's own field. Even though (self-)canonizations, valorizations and depreciations in the art field – as well as in debates on institutional critique practices – are often adorned with an eclectic, disparate and contradictory selection of theory imports, these imports frequently only have the function of disposing of specific art positions or the art field. A contemporary variation of this functionalization consists of combining poststructuralist immanence theories with a simplification of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The theories that argue, on the one hand, against an outside in the sense of Christian or socialist transcendence, for instance, and, on the other, for the relative autonomy of the art field, are blurred here into the defeatist statement, "We are trapped in our field" (Fraser, 2005). Even the critical actors of the 'second generation'

of institutional critique do not appear to be free from these kinds of closure phantasms. Fraser, for instance, conducts an offensive self-historicization in her essay 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', published in *Artforum* in 2005. In her account, all possible forms of institutional critique are ultimately limited to a critique of the 'institution of art' (Bürger, 1984) and its sub-institutions. Invoking Bourdieu, she writes:

> [J]ust as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a 'totally administered society', or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves. (Fraser, 2005: 282)

Although there seems to be an echo of Foucault's concept of self-government here, there is no indication of forms of escaping, shifting, transforming. Whereas for Foucault the critical attitude appears simultaneously as 'partner' and as 'adversary' of the arts of governing, the second part of this specific ambivalence vanishes in Fraser's account, yielding to a discursive self-limitation that barely permits reflection on one's own enclosure. Against all the evidence that art – and not only critical art – over the whole twentieth century produced effects that went beyond the restricted field of art, she plays a worn-out record: art is and remains autonomous, its function limited to its own field. "With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape it" (Fraser, 2005: 282).

Yet exactly this kind of constriction is refused in Foucault's concept of critique, the critical attitude: instead of inducing the closure of the field with theoretical arguments and promoting this practically, thus carrying out the art of governing, a different form of art should be pushed at the same time which leads to *escaping the arts of governing*. And Foucault is not the only one to introduce these new non-escapist terms of escape. Figures of flight, of dropping out, of betrayal, of desertion, of exodus: these are the figures that several authors advance as post-structuralist, non-dialectical forms of resistance in refusal of cynical or conservative invocations of inescapability and hopelessness. With these

kinds of concepts Gilles Deleuze, Paolo Virno and others attempt to propose new models of non-representationist politics that can be turned equally against Leninist concepts of revolution aimed at taking over the state and against radical anarchist positions imagining an absolute outside of institutions, as well as against concepts of transformation and transition in the sense of a successive homogenization in the direction of neo-liberal globalization. In terms of their new concept of resistance, the aim is to thwart a dialectical idea of power and resistance: a positive form of dropping out, a flight that is simultaneously an 'instituent practice'. Instead of presupposing conditions of domination as an immutable horizon and yet fighting against them, this flight changes the conditions under which the presupposition takes place. As Paolo Virno writes in *The Grammar of the Multitude*, exodus transforms "the context within which a problem has arisen, rather than facing this problem by opting for one or the other of the provided alternatives" (Virno, 2004a: 70).

When figures of flight are imported into the art field, this often leads to the misunderstanding that it involves the subject's personal retreat from the noise and babble of the world. Protagonists such as Herman Melville's Bartleby in Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben or the 'virtuoso' pianist Glenn Gould in Virno are seen as personifications of individual resistance and – in the case of Bartleby – of individual withdrawal. In a conservative process of pilferage and reinterpretation, in critical art discourse these figures are displaced so far from their starting point that flight no longer implies, as it does with Deleuze, fleeing to look for a weapon. On the contrary, here the old images of retreat into an artist hermitage are rehashed, which are not only deployed by the new circles of cultural pessimism against participative and relational spectacle art, but also against collective interventionist, activist or other experimental strategies. For example, when *Texte zur Kunst* editor Isabelle Graw turns to "the model of the preoccupied painter working away in his studio, refusing to give any explanation, ostentatiously not networking, never travelling, hardly showing himself in public", it is allegedly to prevent the principle of the spectacle from "directly accessing his mental and emotional competencies" (Graw, 2005: 46).

Although Graw refers to Paolo Virno directly before the passage quoted, neither Virno's problematization of the culture industry nor his concept of exodus tends toward these kinds of bourgeois expectations of salvation by the artist-individual. With the image of the solitary

painter, who eludes the "new tendency in capitalism to take over the whole person" (Graw, 2005: 47) by obstinately withdrawing his person, Graw links a contemporary analysis with an ultra-conservative result. Even after the countless spectacular utilizations of this stereotype, it appears that the same old artist image – contrary to Virno's ideas of virtuosity – can today still or once again be celebrated as anti-spectacular.

What the poststructuralist proposals for dropping out and withdrawal involve, however, is anything but this kind of relapse into the celebration of an individual turning away from society. The point is to thwart dichotomies such as that of the individual and the collective, to offensively theorize new forms of what is common and singular at the same time. Paolo Virno in particular has lucidly developed this idea in *A Grammar of the Multitude*. Alluding to Karl Marx's notion of the 'general intellect' from the *Grundrisse*, Virno posits the notion of a 'public intellect'. Following Marx, 'intellect' is not to be understood here as a competence of an individual, but rather as a shared link and constantly developing foundation for individuation. Thus Virno neither alludes to media intellectuals in the society of the spectacle, nor to the lofty ideas of the autonomous thinker or painter. That kind of individualized publicity corresponds more to Virno's negative concept of 'publicness without a public sphere': "The *general intellect*, or public intellect, if it does not become a *republic*, a public sphere, a political community, drastically increases forms of submission" (Virno, 2004a: 41).

Virno focuses, on the other hand, on the social quality of the intellect.[3] Whereas the alienated thinker (or even painter) is traditionally drawn as an individual withdrawing from idle talk, from the noise of the masses, for Virno the noise of the multitude is itself the site of a non-state, non-spectacular, non-representationist public sphere. This non-state public sphere is not to be understood as an anarchic place of absolute freedom, as an open field beyond the realm of the institution. Flight and exodus are nothing negative, not a reaction to something else, but are instead linked and intertwined with constituent power, re-organizing, re-inventing and instituting. The movement of flight also preserves these 'instituent practices' from structuralization and closure from the start, preventing them from becoming institutions in the sense of constituted power.

What does this mean in relation to the artistic practices of institutional critique? From a 'schematic perspective', the 'first generation' of institutional critique sought a *distance from* the institution; the 'second' addressed the inevitable *involvement in* the institution. I call this a schematic perspective, because these kinds of 'generation clusters' are naturally blurred in the relevant practices, and there were attempts – by Andrea Fraser, for instance – to describe the first wave as being constituted by the second (including herself) and also to attribute to the first phase a similar reflectedness on their own institutionality. Whether this is the case or not, an important and effective position can be attributed to both generations in the art field from the 1970s to the present, and in some cases relevance is evident that goes beyond the boundaries of the field. Yet the fundamental questions that Foucault already implicitly raised, which Deleuze certainly pursued in his book on Foucault, are not posed with the strategies of distanced and deconstructive intervention in the institution: do Foucault's considerations lead us to enclose ourselves more and more in power relations? And most of all, which lines of flight lead out of the dead end of this enclosure?

To make use of Foucault's treatments of this problem for the question of new 'instituent practices', I would like to conclude this article by returning to the later Foucault, specifically to his Berkeley lecture series 'Discourse and Truth', delivered in the autumn of 1983, and to the term *parrhesia* broadly explained there.[4]

In classical Greek, *parrhesia* means 'to say everything', freely speaking truth without rhetorical games and without ambiguity, even and especially when this is hazardous. Foucault describes the practice of *parrhesia* using numerous examples from ancient Greek literature as a movement from a political to a personal technique. The older form of *parrhesia* corresponds to publicly speaking truth as an institutional right. Depending on the form of the state, the subject addressed by the *parrhesiastes* is the assembly in the democratic agora, the tyrant in the monarchical court.[5] *Parrhesia* is generally understood as coming from below and directed upward, whether it is the philosopher's criticism of the tyrant or the citizen's criticism of the majority in the agora: the specific potentiality of *parrhesia* is found in the unequivocal gap between the one who takes a risk to express everything and the criticized sovereign who is impugned by this truth.

Over the course of time, a change takes place in the game of truth "which – in the classical Greek conception of *parrhesia* – was constituted by the fact that someone was courageous enough to tell the truth to *other people*… [T]here is a shift from that kind of *parrhesiastic* game to another truth game which now consists in being courageous enough to disclose the truth about *oneself*" (Foucault, 1997b: 150). This process from public criticism to personal (self-)criticism develops in parallel to the decrease in the significance of the democratic public sphere of the agora. At the same time, *parrhesia* comes up increasingly in conjunction with education. One of Foucault's relevant examples here is Plato's dialogue *Laches*, in which the question of the best teacher for the interlocutor's sons represents the starting point and foil. The teacher Socrates no longer assumes the function of the *parrhesiastes* in the sense of exercising dangerous contradiction in a political sense, but rather by moving his listeners to give account of themselves and leading them to a self-questioning that queries the relationship between their statements (*logos*) and their way of living (*bios*). However, this technique does not serve as an autobiographical confession or examination of conscience or as a prototype of Maoist self-criticism, but rather to establish a relationship between rational discourse and the lifestyle of the interlocutor or the self-questioning person. Contrary to any individualistic interpretation especially of later Foucault texts (imputing a 'return to subject philosophy', etc.), here *parrhesia* is not the competency of a subject, but rather a movement between the position that queries the concordance of *logos* and *bios*, and the position that exercises self-criticism in light of this query.

In keeping with a productive interpretation for contemporary institutional critique practices, my aim here is to link the two concepts of *parrhesia* described by Foucault as a genealogical development, to understand hazardous refutation in its relation to self-revelation. Critique, and especially institutional critique, is not exhausted in denouncing abuses nor in withdrawing into more or less radical self-questioning. In terms of the art field this means that neither the belligerent strategies of the institutional critique of the 1970s nor art as a service to the institution in the 1990s promise effective interventions in the governmentality of the present.

What is needed here and now is *parrhesia* as a double strategy: as an attempt of involvement and engagement in a process of hazardous refutation, and as self-questioning. What is needed, therefore, are

practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet which do not fancy themselves in an imagined distance to institutions; at the same time, practices that are self-critical and yet do not cling to their own involvement, their complicity, their imprisoned existence in the art field, their fixation on institutions and the institution, their own being-institution. 'Instituent practices' that conjoin the advantages of both 'generations' of institutional critique, thus exercising both forms of *parrhesia*, will impel a linking of social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism. This link will develop, most of all, from the direct and indirect concatenation with political practices and social movements, but without dispensing with artistic competences and strategies, without dispensing with resources of and effects in the art field. Here exodus would not mean relocating to a different country or a different field, but betraying the rules of the game through the act of flight: 'transforming the arts of governing' not only in relation to the institutions of the art field or the institution art as the art field, but rather as participation in processes of instituting and in political practices that traverse the fields, the structures, the institutions.

Notes

* The author thanks Isabell Lorey and Stefan Nowotny for critical remarks and advice.

1. The project announcement, first published online in 2005, is reprinted – in revised format – in the preface to this volume.
2. On the temporal and ontological priority of critique-resistance, see Deleuze: "The final word of power is that resistance comes first" (1988: 89, trans. modified). See also Raunig (2007: 48-54).
3. Klaus Neundlinger and I discuss the social character of 'intellect' more fully in our introduction to the German edition of *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Virno, 2005: 9-21).
4. My ideas on Foucault and *parrhesia* were first developed for the eipcp conference 'Progressive Art Institutions in the Age of the Dissolving Welfare State', held in Vienna in 2004, and first published online (Raunig, 2004).
5. The oldest example of political *parrhesia* is the figure of Diogenes, who, precarious in his barrel, commands Alexander to move out of his light. Like the citizen expressing a minority opinion in the democratic setting of the agora, the cynic philosopher also practices a form of *parrhesia* with regard to the monarch in public.

2

The Institution of Critique

Hito Steyerl

In speaking about the critique of institutions, the problem we ought to consider is the opposite one: the institution of critique. Is there anything like an institution of critique and what does it mean? Isn't it pretty absurd to argue that something like this exists at a moment when critical cultural institutions are undoubtedly being dismantled, underfunded, subjected to the demands of a neo-liberal event economy and so on? However, I would like to pose the question on a much more fundamental level. The question is: what is the internal relationship between critique and institution? What sort of relation exists between the institution and its critique or on the other hand – the institutionalization of critique? And what is the historical and political background for this relationship?

To get a clearer picture of this relationship we must first consider the function of criticism in general. On a very general level, certain political, social or individual subjects are formed through the critique of institutions. Bourgeois subjectivity as such was formed through such a process of critique, and encouraged to leave behind 'self-incurred immaturity', to quote Immanuel Kant's famous definition of enlightenment (Kant, 2000: 54). This critical subjectivity was of course ambivalent, since it entailed the use of reason only in those situations we would consider as apolitical today, namely in the deliberation of abstract problems, but not the criticism of authority. Critique produces a subject who should make use of reason in public circumstances, but not in private ones. While this sounds emancipatory, the opposite is the case. The criticism of authority is according to Kant futile and private.

Freedom consists in accepting that authority should not be questioned. Thus, this form of criticism produces a very ambivalent and governable subject; it is as much a tool of governance as of that resistance with which it is often assumed to be aligned. But the bourgeois subjectivity formed thereby was very efficient. And in a certain sense, institutional criticism is integrated into that subjectivity, something which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explicitly refer to in their *Communist Manifesto*, namely as the capacity of the bourgeoisie to abolish and to melt down outdated institutions and everything else that is useless and petrified, as long as the general form of authority itself isn't threatened. The bourgeois class had formed through a limited, so to speak, institutionalized critique and also maintained and reproduced itself through its continuous application. And in this way critique had become an institution in itself, a governmental tool that produces streamlined subjects.

But there is also another form of subjectivity that is produced by criticism and also institutional criticism. An obvious example is the French citizen, a political subject of French formed through an institutional critique of the French monarchy. The latter institution was eventually abolished and even beheaded. In this process, an appeal was already realized that Marx was to launch much later: the weapons of critique should be replaced by the critique of weapons. In this vein one could say that the proletariat as a political subject was produced through the criticism of the bourgeoisie as an institution. This second form produces forms of subjectivity that probably are just as ambivalent, but with a crucial difference: it abolishes the institution that it criticizes instead of reforming or improving it.

So in this sense institutional critique serves as a tool of subjectivation of certain social groups or political subjects. And which sort of different subjects does it produce? Let's take a look at different modes of institutional critique within the artfield of the last decades.

To simplify a complex development: the first wave of institutional criticism in the art sphere in the 1970s questioned the authoritarian role of the cultural institution. It challenged the authority that had accumulated in cultural institutions within the framework of the nation state. Cultural institutions such as museums had taken on a complex governmental function. This role has been brilliantly described by Benedict Anderson in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, where he

analyzes the role of the museum in the formation of colonial nation states. In his view, the museum, in creating a national past, retroactively also created the origin and foundation of the nation, and that was its main function (Anderson, 1983). But this colonial situation, as in many other cases, points at the structure of the cultural institution within the nation state in general. And this situation, the authoritarian legitimation of the nation state by the cultural institution through the construction of a history, a patrimony, a heritage, a canon and so on, was the one that the first wave of institutional critique set out to criticize in the 1970s.

Their justification in doing so was ultimately a political one. Most nation states considered themselves to be democracies founded on the political mandate of the people or citizens. In that sense, it was easy to argue that any national cultural institution should reflect this self-definition and that any national cultural institution should thus be founded on similar mechanisms. If the political national sphere was – at least in theory – based on democratic participation, why should the cultural national sphere and its construction of histories and canons be any different? Why shouldn't the cultural institution be at least as representative as parliamentary democracy? Why shouldn't it include for example women in its canon, if women were at least in theory accepted in parliament? In that sense the claims that the first wave of institutional critique voiced were of course founded in contemporary theories of the public sphere, and based on an interpretation of the cultural institution as a potential public sphere. But implicitly they relied on two fundamental assumptions. First, this public sphere was implicitly a national one because it was modeled after the model of representative parliamentarism. Institutional critique justified itself precisely on this point. Since the political system of the nation state is at least in theory representative of its citizens, why shouldn't a national cultural institution be? And this analogy was more often than not grounded in material conditions, since most cultural institutions were funded by the state. Thus, this form of institutional critique relied on a model based on the structure of political participation within the nation state and a Fordist economy, in which taxes could be collected for such purposes.

Institutional critique of this period related to these phenomena in different ways. Either by radically negating institutions altogether, by trying to build alternative institutions or by trying to be included in mainstream ones. Just as in the political arena, the most effective strategy was a combination of the second and third model, which

demanded for example that cultural institutions include minorities and disadvantaged majorities such as women. In this sense institutional critique functioned like the related paradigms of multiculturalism, reformist feminism, ecological movements and so on. It was a new social movement within the arts scene.

But during the next wave of institutional criticism in the 1990s, the situation was somewhat different. It wasn't much different from the point of view of the artists or those who tried to challenge and criticize institutions that, in their view, were still authoritarian. Rather, the main problem was that they had been overtaken by a right-wing form of bourgeois institutional criticism, precisely the process by which "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels, 1998: 38). Thus, the claim that the cultural institution ought to be a public sphere was no longer unchallenged. The bourgeoisie had de facto decreed that 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, and it is not by chance that, in a sense, institutions which still adhere to the ideal of creating a public sphere have survived longer in places where Fordism is still hanging on. Thus, the second wave of institutional critique was in a sense unilateral since claims were made which at that time had at least partially lost their legitimative power.

The next factor was the relative transformation of the national cultural sphere that mirrored the transformation of the political cultural sphere. First of all, the nation state is no longer the only framework of cultural representation – there are also supranational bodies like the European Union. And secondly, their mode of political representation is very complicated and only partly representative. It represents its constituencies symbolically rather than materially. To play on the additional meanings in the German word for 'representation': *Sie stellen sie eher dar, als sie sie vertreten* ('They *portray* more than they *represent*'). Thus, why should a cultural institution materially represent its constituency? Isn't it somehow sufficient to symbolically represent it? And although the production of a national cultural identity and heritage is still important, it is not only important for the interior or social cohesion of the nation, but also very much to provide it with international selling points in an increasingly globalized cultural economy. 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 only into the surface of the institution without materially altering the institution or its organization in any deeper sense. This mirrors a similar process on the political level: the symbolic integration of minorities, for example, while maintaining political and social inequality, the symbolic representation of constituencies into supranational political bodies and so on. In this sense the bond of material representation was broken and replaced with a more symbolic one.

This shift in representational techniques by the cultural institution also mirrored a trend in criticism itself, namely the shift from a critique of institution towards a critique of representation. This trend, which was informed by cultural studies, feminist and postcolonial epistemologies, somehow continued in the vein of the previous institutional critique by comprehending the whole sphere of representation as a public sphere, where material representation ought to be implemented, for example in form of the unbiased and proportional display of images of women or black people. This claim somehow mirrors the confusion about representation on the political plane, since the realm of visual representation is even less representative in the material sense than a supranational political body. It doesn't represent constituencies or subjectivities but creates them; it articulates bodies, affects and desires. But this is not exactly how it was comprehended, since it was rather taken for a sphere where one has to achieve hegemony – a majority on the level of symbolic representation, so to speak – in order to achieve an improvement of a diffuse area hovering between politics and economy, state and market, subject as citizen and subject as consumer, as well as between representation and representation. Since criticism could no longer establish clear antagonisms in this sphere, it started to fragment and to atomize it, and to support a politics of identity which led to the fragmentation of public spheres and their replacement by markets, to the culturalization of identity and so on.

This representational critique pointed at another aspect, namely the unmooring of the seemingly stable relation between the cultural institution and the nation state. Unfortunately for institutional critics of that period, a model of purely symbolic representation gained legitimacy in this field as well. Institutions no longer claimed to materially represent the nation state and its constituency, but only claimed to represent it symbolically. And thus, while one could say that the former institutional critics were either integrated into the institution or not, the second wave of institutional critique was integrated not into the

institution but into representation as such. Thus, again, a Janus-faced subject was formed. This subject was interested in more diverse and less homogenous forms of representation than its predecessor. But in trying to create this diversity, it also created niche markets, specialized consumer profiles, and an overall spectacle of 'difference' – without effectuating much structural change.

But which conditions are prevailing today, during what might tentatively be called an extension of the second wave of institutional critique? Artistic strategies of institutional critique have become increasingly complex. They have fortunately developed far beyond the ethnographic urge to indiscriminately drag underprivileged or unusual constituencies into museums, even against their will – just for the sake of 'representation'. They include detailed investigations, such as for example Allan Sekula's *Fish Story*, which connects a phenomenology of new cultural industries, like the Bilbao Guggenheim, with documents of other institutional constraints, such as those imposed by the World Trade Organization or other global economic organizations. They have learned to walk the tightrope between the local and the global without becoming either indigenist and ethnographic, or else unspecific and snobbish. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of most cultural institutions that would have to react to the same challenge of having to perform both within a national cultural sphere and an increasingly globalizing market.

If you look at them from one side, then you will see that they are under pressure from indigenist, nationalist and nativist demands. If you look from the other side, then you will see that they are under pressure from neo-liberal institutional critique, that is to say, under the pressure of the market. Now the problem is – and this is indeed a very widespread attitude – that when a cultural institution comes under pressure from the market, it tries to retreat into a position which claims that it is the duty of the nation state to fund it and to keep it alive. The problem with that position is that it is an ultimately protectionist one, that it ultimately reinforces the construction of national public spheres and that under this perspective the cultural institution can only be defended in the framework of a New Left attitude seeking to retreat into the remnants of a demolished national welfare state and its cultural shells and to defend them against all intruders. In other words, it tends to defend itself ultimately from the perspective of its other enemies, namely the nativist and indigenist critics of institution, who want to

transform it into a sort of sacralized ethnopark. But there is no going back to the old Fordist nation-state protectionism, with its cultural nationalism, at least not in any emancipatory perspective.

On the other hand, when the cultural institution is attacked from this nativist, indigenist perspective, it also tries to defend itself by appealing to universal values like freedom of speech or the cosmopolitanism of the arts, which are so utterly commodified as either shock effects or the display of enjoyable cultural difference that they hardly exist beyond this form of commodification. Or it might even earnestly try to reconstruct a public sphere within market conditions, for example with the massive temporary spectacles of criticism funded by the German *Bundeskulturstiftung* (National Foundation for Culture). But under reigning economic conditions, the main effect achieved is to integrate the critics into precarity, into flexibilized working structures within temporary project structures and freelance work within cultural industries. And in the worst cases, those spectacles of criticism are the decoration of large enterprises of economic colonialism such as in the colonization of Eastern Europe by the same institutions that are producing the conceptual art in these regions.

If in the first wave of institutional critique criticism produced integration into the institution, in the second one only integration into representation was achieved. But now in the third phase there seems to be only integration into precarity. And in this light we can now answer the question concerning the function of the institution of critique as follows: while critical institutions are being dismantled by neo-liberal 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, the need seems never to have been greater for institutions that could cater to the new needs and desires that this constituency will create.

3

Anti-Canonization: The Differential Knowledge of Institutional Critique

Stefan Nowotny

(Translated by Aileen Derieg)

Wanting to canonize artistic practices of institutional critique is a rather paradoxical endeavor. The reason is quickly evident. Canonization itself belongs to the specifically institutional practices that institutional critique refers to – and indeed *critically* refers to. Tacitly ignoring one of these critical impulses is hence inscribed in every canonization attempt, even though a retrospective acknowledgement of the relevance of these impulses is intended. 'Relevance' itself is categorized in the framework of a historiography that is entangled in its own preconditions, clinging jealously to the notion that in the end it has to be the art whose history is to be written.

The results are well known, not only in terms of the art subsumed under the name 'institutional critique', but also in terms of what is called 'political art' in general. Bert Brecht is treated as a revolutionary of theater art who was eccentric enough to be a communist as well; the Situationists are seen as oddballs of fine art who no less eccentrically maintained that changing perceptions of the streets was more important than changing perceptions of painting. And the 'art' of 'institutional critique'? As a 'current' it has meanwhile also aged sufficiently to provide a welcome occasion for various historicizations, self-historicizations or even 'examinations of topicality', which – instead of examining it – regularly become entangled in the self-referentiality specific to the art field, and specifically examining it as *institutional practice*.

It is not particularly helpful when one established canon or another is itself declared – in a duplication of the retrospective gesture – the object of negotiation by contrasting it with a possible 'other' or expanded canon. This is naturally not intended to deny that a critical query and contestation of dominant canonizations, their complicity with social-political power relations, their legitimizing and stabilizing function in terms of these hegemonic relations were (and are) an important element of the insights of institutional critique. Nevertheless, guidelines for action are not to be seamlessly derived from theoretical insights in the sense that the *end* of changing criticized conditions is already to be reached with the *means* of an expanded or counter-canon. This circumvention suffers from the problem of all superficial theories of hegemony: an insufficient reflection on the level of the means themselves. Where the critical impulse is at least maintained as a social-political one, this is usually accompanied by a fetishization of the ends, which ultimately obscures a critical examination of the means altogether; where it withdraws into the self-contemplation of the contexts it started from (and this is of particular interest here), the result is the fetishization of a certain *form of ends*.

What is fetishized in the latter case is less the end itself, but rather the form in which it is sought, that is, more precisely, the form of aiming at something or the link binding means and ends together. And this link proves to be all the more deceptive, since an incautious consideration of the form of ends and means may depict one and the same thing. Pursuing an end according to a certain form and treating it solely within the confines of this form, however, does not at all signify a sufficient reflection on the means. Instead, it simply signifies fixing the means as such to a spectrum placed beyond the realm of critique, a spectrum that yet results from a specific, fundamentally contingent connection between means and ends in need of reflection. And it ultimately signifies constraining the possible ends themselves, to the extent that the only acceptable end is one that corresponds to a given spectrum of means.[1]

A flagrant example of fixing institutional critique art practices to art as the form of ends is found, for instance, in an issue of *Texte zur Kunst* devoted to institutional critique. There, Isabelle Graw proposes expanding the canon of 'the usual suspects' (Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Andrea Fraser, etc.) with artists such as Jörg Immendorff or Martin Kippenberger. The concern that the existing

canon could be 'at the expense' of certain artists, whose work "could be equally regarded as questioning the institution of art or as an attack on it" (Graw, 2005: 47) is just as characteristic as the 'expense' rhetoric that Graw utilizes, which appears at least ambiguous in the context of the magazine that conceptually addresses a match between art criticism and the art market (or more precisely: that is to be read against the background of the highly conflictual interweaving of symbolic and material valuation systems, which is characteristic of the art field throughout modernism).

No less characteristic is the specification of Graw's concern, which immediately follows: this relates to painting, the canonical neglect of which is deplored as a proven medium of institutional critique. Accordingly, the figure of the 'ostentatiously' solitary atelier painter, who withdraws his 'mental and emotional competences' from public access, is stylized into the carrier of an institutional critique revolt, into an anti-neo-liberal spectacle dissident. The genius in individual revolt need only withdraw and produce; all the others can devote themselves to the contemplative viewing of the fruits of his competences (Nowotny, 2005), specifically – why not? – in the form of 'institutional critical' painting. Meanwhile, the 'institution of art' carries on in its old familiar bourgeois variation undeterred – if it were not for the unfortunate battle against its neo-liberal adversaries, in which it is entangled.

The irony of all this is that Graw's concerns are not only due to the dissatisfaction that art fixed to "its presumed capability of critique" is "underestimated", but also that they claim to do justice to another concern, namely that an "inflationary assertion of critique" could ultimately lead to the "neutralization of every possibility of really achieving critique" (Graw, 2005: 41, 43). The latter concern indeed touches on a central problem that is inextricably linked with the *activity* of critique – as opposed to its mere assertion – and which has been widely discussed in the art field, not least of all since the publication of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. How does critical activity relate to its effects? To what extent is it capable of keeping alive its differential deployment aimed at change beyond the respective self-assurance of a 'critical distance', in other words, feeding it into a social context and counteracting its own neutralization or the ways it is even inverted for uncritical purposes?

However, Graw does not let this concern leap any borders, but encloses it within the boundaries of the very field that art criticism routinely – *institutionally* – plows. For this reason, the questions remain obscured that would arise from the inversion of Graw's suspicion about 'fixing' art to its capability for critique: namely, whether the critique that is manifested in institutional critique practices is not underestimated when it is fixed to its character as art. In fact, in terms of canonization, this question can be traced even in the 'first generation' of institutional critique art practices, for it is an essential element of the critical impulses of these practices. It may be sufficient here to recall Robert Smithson's essay 'Cultural Confinement' from 1972, which sees the conditions for neutralizing the explosiveness of critique specifically in its fixation to being art (and not in the reverse fixation), that is in the confinement of the critical to a predetermined framework of representation:

> Museums, like asylums and jails, have yards and cells – in other words, neutral rooms called *galleries*. A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral […] The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized, it is ready to be consumed by society. (Smithson, 2001: 16)

It would be too simple to reduce the scope of Smithson's criticism to the museum-bound forms of representation and curatorship that it directly refers to. The operative structure that it describes, namely the 'political lobotomization' of the potential charge of artistic works that follows from isolation and neutralizing reintegration, can also be observed often enough where art works in public space, intended as political interventions, only provoke meager debates about art or occasionally about cultural policies, instead of really triggering the intended political discussions. The 'warden-curator' as functionary of this operative structure is abetted, in turn, by a whole series of further functionaries, including, not least of all, the professional discourse producers of the art field. This also applies to the artists themselves, whom Smithson is already far from locating in a naively asserted outside of the institutional field of power per se, which is evident, for instance, in his polemic against post-minimalist art practices:

> Also, I am not interested in art works that suggest *process* within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioral game playing. The artist acting like a B. F. Skinner rat doing his *tough* little tricks is something to be avoided. Confined process is no process at all. It would be better to disclose the confinement rather than make illusions of freedom. (Smithson, 2001: 16)

The institutional critique impulse originating with artists like Smithson not only ties into the desire for a positively productive 're-socialization' of their own activities going beyond the boundaries of the art field, but also into the impulse to critically query one's own role as an artist and the forms of artistic self-confinement. Adrian Piper succinctly formulated the task of self-criticism that becomes apparent in this latter impulse (and which can be expanded to other functionaries within the art field) no less polemically than Smithson in a text written in 1983:

> [T]here is no biological necessity about a socially conditioned disinclination to perform the difficult and often thankless task of political self-analysis. It is not as though artists are congenitally incapacitated by having right cerebral hemispheres the size of a watermelon and left cerebral hemispheres the size of a peanut. (Piper, 2001: 50-1)

That not only the sharpness and decisiveness of these kinds of statements, but especially the multiple layers of the critical gesture inherent to them are marginalized in the discussion today, in favor of routine canonizations and counter-canonizations, may have something to do with the fact that the reason for current debates on art institutions and other public institutions is the impact of neo-liberal policies on these institutions. And as in other areas as well, the extent of political defensiveness and a lack of orientation in light of rampaging neo-liberal reforms is expressed, not least of all, in the defense of instruments and institutions that might well have been the subject of a critical examination yesterday. Instead of targeting what can generally be identified as 'art' and classified in 'currents', against this background it would seem advisable not to fall back behind the institutional critique of historical political analyses of modern art and exhibition institutions – or 'art' as an institutional field – like Carol Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals* (1995) for instance, or Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995). With Bennett's historically precise reconstruction of the modern museum and exhibition complex in mind, for example, carried out

against the background of Foucault's analyses of governmentality (Nowotny, 2003a; 2005), it would be better to begin by considering the overlapping of various governmentality arrangements in which institutional critique has to orient itself today, both within the art field and beyond it. Given the growing divergence between political economy and nation-state frameworks, this overlapping must be seen as inherently contradictory.

Yet if every form of historiography must ultimately be regarded as an institutional practice itself and an 'outside the institution' cannot simply be presumed, but rather questions must be raised about the possibilities of a transformation of institutional practices, how can an alternative to canonization be imagined that is not a counter-canonization? One possibility certainly consists in a *political* analysis of the respective constellation, in which institutional critique is articulated. This means assuming a perspective which takes into account the specific functionality of the art field within the concrete social-political context, ranging beyond the self-referential structures of this field, and which also includes a view to the changes, to which this functionality and thus the conditions of critique are subjected. Here I would like to propose a somewhat different approach, however, which does not contradict the first at all, but should rather be appended to it: an approach that envisions 'critique' less in keeping with the model of a *judgement structure* (roughly speaking, in other words, a subject that *positions* itself *vis-à-vis* the criticized conditions), but rather with the model of a practice (meaning a subject that *is involved* and *involves itself* in a specific way *in* the criticized conditions).

Perhaps too little attention has previously been given to the fact that Foucault – where he talks about 'suppressed knowledges', the 'local discursivities' that are denigrated by the dominant discourse – describes these forms of knowledge as, among others, 'differential knowledge' (Foucault, 1999: 16). What does the notion of differentiality refer to here? On the one hand, certainly to the resistance of this knowledge, to the fact that "it owes its force to the sharpness with which it enters into opposition with everything around it". On the other hand, however, it also refers to this knowledge being differential *in itself* (also self-pluralizing for this reason), to the fact that it cannot be "transposed into unanimity" – even though the Foucauldian genealogy itself, as a tactic of its description, exposes it to a certain danger of uniformed coding and re-colonization (Foucault, 1999: 21). Not least of all, this knowledge is

differential because it does not allow itself, being resistive, to be subjected to any authorized discursive field, to any authorization by a dominant discourse, but instead recognizes the power effects found in the separation of knowledge into fields and in furnishing these fields with discursive authorities, yet without composing itself into a new totality of knowledge. Hence as plural knowledge it also does not 'organize' itself under a unified form, but rather in an open, non-dialectical game of concurrence. For precisely this reason, the Foucauldian genealogy can be concerned with "preparing a historical knowledge of struggles and introducing this knowledge into current tactics" (Foucault, 1999: 17).

The struggles that Foucault was specifically thinking of in the mid-1970s – and through which "for ten, fifteen years now [...] it has become possible to criticize things, institutions, practices, discourses to a tremendous and overflowing extent" (Foucault, 1999: 13) – were particularly those of anti-psychiatry, attacks on gender hierarchies and sexual morals, and on the legal and penal apparatus. Why should we not append the battles of institutional critique practices to this list (it is not a coincidence that Robert Smithson compares the 'cells' of the museums with those of 'asylums and prisons' in the passage quoted above...)? What could come into view through this kind of perspective is not so much – or at least not solely – the question of the respective critical assessment of art institutions, and certainly not of a canon, but rather an open field of a knowledge of action, a practical knowledge that rejects reintegration into the form of ends specific to art and in which the difference of institutional critique is actualized. We find it in the most diverse tactics of context politicization, self-masking, alienation, parody, the situation-specific refraction of themes, research, discursive and material context production, in self-institutionalization, in production that starts with social interaction, or even simply in a more or less developed renegade position.

A historiography and investigation of institutional critique could be oriented to these practices, if the aim is to introduce this knowledge into current tactics.

Notes

1. An example from – at least at first glance – outside the art field that indicates the background of these reflections (namely Walter Benjamin's essay 'On the Critique of Violence'): Pursuing the end of justice under the

form of law, in other words as a legal end, means nothing more than considering it (egally) capable of generalization, whereby the form of law is placed beyond dispute both at the level of the means (legal claims, laws, etc.) and at the level of the ends (e.g. the non-contradictory regulation of human affairs).

4

Notes on Institutional Critique

Simon Sheikh

The very term 'institutional critique' seems to indicate a direct connection between a method and an object: the method being the critique and the object the institution. In the first wave of institutional critique from the late 1960s and early 1970s – long since celebrated and relegated by art history – these terms could apparently be even more concretely and narrowly defined: the critical method was an artistic practice, and the institution in question was the art institution, mainly the art museum, but also galleries and collections. Institutional critique thus took on many forms, such as artistic works and interventions, critical writings or (art-)political activism. However, in the so-called second wave, from the 1980s, the institutional framework became somewhat expanded to include the artist's role (the subject performing the critique) as institutionalized, as well as an investigation into other institutional spaces (and practices) besides the art space.[1] Both waves are today themselves part of the art institution, in the form of art history and education as much as in the general de-materialized and post-conceptual art practice of contemporary art. It shall not be my purpose here, however, to discuss or access the meaning of institutional critique as an art historical canon, or to engage in the writing of such a canon (I shall respectfully leave that endeavor for the *Texte zur Kunst* and *October* magazines of this world). Instead, though, I would like to point out a convergence between the two waves, that seems to have drastically changed in the current 'return' of institutional critique that may or may not constitute a third wave. In either of its historical emergences, institutional critique was a practice mainly, if not exclusively, conducted

by artists, and directed *against* the (art) institutions, as a critique of their ideological and representative social function(s). Art's institutions, which may or may not contain the artists' work, were seen, in the words of Robert Smithson, as spaces of 'cultural confinement' and circumscription, and thus as something to attack aesthetically, politically and theoretically. The institution was posed as a problem (for artists). In contrast, the current institutional-critical discussions seem predominantly propagated by curators and directors of the very same institutions, and they are usually opting *for* rather than against them. That is, they are not an effort to oppose or even destroy the institution, but rather to modify and solidify it. The institution is not only a problem, but also a solution!

There has been a shift, then, in the placement of institutional critique, not only in historical time, but also in terms of the subjects who direct and perform the critique – it has moved from an outside to an inside. Interestingly, Benjamin Buchloh (1990) has described the historical moment of conceptual art as a movement from institutional critique and 'the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions', in a controversial essay entitled, tellingly, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions'. While Buchloh focuses on the emergence of conceptualism, his suggestive distinction is perhaps even more pertinent now that institutional critique is literally being performed by administrative aestheticians, i.e. museum directors, curators etc. (Buchloh, 1990). Taking her cue from Buchloh, Andrea Fraser goes a step further in her recent essay 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', where she claims that a movement between an inside and an outside of the institution is no longer possible, since the structures of the institution have become totally internalized. "We are the institution", Fraser (2005: 282) writes, and thus concludes that it is rather a question of creating critical institutions – what she terms 'an institution *of* critique', established through self-questioning and self-reflection (Fraser, 2005). Fraser also writes that the institutions of art should not be seen as an autonomous field, separate from the rest of the world, the same way that 'we' are not separate from the institution. While I would certainly agree with any attempt to view art institutions as part of a larger ensemble of socio-economic and disciplinary spaces, I am nonetheless confused by the simultaneous attempt to integrate the art world into the current (politico-economic) world system *and* the

upholding of a 'we' of the art world itself. Who exactly is this 'we'? If the art world is seen as part of a generalized institutionalization of social subjects (that in turn internalizes the institutionalization), what and where are the demarcation lines for entry, for visibility and representation? If one of the criteria for institutions is given in the exclusions performed by them (as inherent in any collection), the question which subjects fall outside institutionalization, not due to a willful act or exodus as certain artistic movements thought and desired, but through the expulsions at the very center of institutions that allow them to institutionalize? Obviously, this would require a very expanded notion of institutional critique – one that lies somewhat outside the history of institutional critique as discussed here.

So, to return to the object at hand, institutional critique as an art practice: what does it mean when the practice of institutional critique and analysis has shifted from artists to curators and critics, and when the institution has become internalized in artists and curators alike (through education, through art historical canon, through daily praxis)? Analyzed in terms of negative dialectics, this would seem to indicate the total co-optation of institutional critique by the institutions (and by implication and extension, the co-optation of resistance by power), and thus make institutional critique as a *critical* method completely obsolete. Institutional critique, as co-opted, would be like bacteria that may have temporarily weakened the patient – the institution – but only in order to strengthen the immune system of that patient in the long run. However, such a conclusion would hinge around notions of subjectivities, agencies and spatialities that institutional critique, arguably, tried to deconstruct. It would imply that the historical institutional critique was somehow 'original' and 'pure', thus confirming the authenticity of the artist-subjects performing it (as opposed to the current 'institutional' subjects), and consequently reaffirming one of the ideas that institutional critique set out to circumvent, namely the notion of authentic subjects per se (as represented by the artist, reified by the institution). If institutional critique was indeed a discourse of disclosure and demystification of how the artistic subject as well as object was staged and reified by the institution, then any narrative that (again) posits certain voices and subjects as authentic, as possible incarnations of certain politics and criticalities, must be said to be not only counter to the very project of institutional critique, but perhaps also the ultimate co-optation, or more accurately, hostile take-over of it. Institutional

critique is, after all, not primarily about the intentionalities and identities of subjects, but rather about the politics and inscriptions of institutions (and, thus, about how subjects are always already threaded through specific and specifiable institutional spaces).

Rather, one must try to historicize the moments of institutional critique and look at how it has been successful, in terms of being integrated into the education of artists and curators, that is of what Julia Bryan-Wilson has termed 'the curriculum of institutional critique' (Bryan-Wilson, 2003). One can then see institutional critique not as a historical period and/or genre within art history, but rather as an analytical tool, a method of spatial and political criticism and articulation that can be applied not only to the art world, but to disciplinary spaces and institutions in general. An institutional critique of institutional critique, what can be termed 'institutionalized critique', has then to question the role of education, historicization and how institutional auto-critique not only leads to a questioning of the institution and what it institutes, but also becomes a mechanism of control within new modes of governmentality, precisely through its very act of internalization. And this is the expanded notion of institutional critique that I briefly mentioned above, and which could become the legacy of the historical movements as much as an orientation for what so-called 'critical art institutions' claim to be.

Notes

1. James Meyer (1993) has tried to establish a genealogy rather than a mere art history of institutional critique.

5

Criticism without Crisis: Crisis without Criticism

Boris Buden

Why do we talk today about institutional critique in the field of art? The answer is very simple: Because we (still) believe that art is intrinsically equipped with the power of criticism. Of course, we don't simply mean art criticism here but something more than that, the ability of art to criticize the world and life beyond its own realm, and even, by doing that, to change both. This includes, however, some sort of self-criticism, or more precisely, the practice of critical self-reflexivity, which means that we also expect of art – or at least used to expect – to be critically aware of the conditions of its possibility, which usually means, the conditions of its production.

These two notions – to be aware of the conditions of possibility and production – point at two major realms of modern criticism: the theoretical and the practical-political realm. It was Immanuel Kant who first posed the question about the conditions of possibility of our knowledge and who understood this question explicitly as an act of criticism. From that point on we may say that modern reflection is either critical – in this self-reflexive way – or it is not modern.

But we are not going to follow this theoretical line of modern criticism here. We will concentrate instead on its practical and political meaning, which can be simply described as a will for radical change, in short, the demand for revolution, which is the ultimate form of practical and political criticism. The French Revolution was not only prepared through the bourgeois criticism of the absolutist state. It was nothing but this criticism *in actu*, its last word turned into political action. The idea of revolution as an ultimate act of criticism has found its most

radical expression in Marxist theoretical and political concepts. Remember that the young Karl Marx explicitly characterized his own revolutionary philosophy as "the ruthless critique of everything existing". He meant this in the most radical sense as a criticism that 'operates' in the very basement of social life, that is, in the realm of its material production and reproduction, something we understand today, perhaps oversimplifying, as the realm of economy.

In this way criticism has become one of the essential qualities of modernity. For almost two centuries to be modern meant simply to be critical – in philosophy as much as in moral questions, in politics and social life as much as in art.

But there is also another concept, which – as a sort of its complement – has long accompanied the idea and practice of modern criticism, and that is the concept of crisis. A belief that the two – crisis and criticism – have something in common, that there is an authentic relation, or better, an interaction between them, equally belongs to the modern experience. Therefore, an act of criticism almost necessarily implies the awareness of a crisis and vice versa; a diagnosis of crisis implies the necessity of criticism.

Actually, criticism and crisis didn't enter the historical scene at the same time. Criticism is the child of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. It was born and developed out of the separation between politics and morality, a separation that criticism has deepened and kept alive throughout the modern age. It was only through the process of criticism – the criticism of all forms of traditional knowledge, religious beliefs and aesthetic values, the criticism of existing juridical and political reality and finally the criticism of the mind itself – that the growing bourgeois class could impose its own interests and values as the highest instance of judgement and in that way develop the self-confidence and self-conscience it needed for the decisive political struggles to come. In this context one shouldn't underestimate the role of art and literary criticism especially in the development of the modern philosophy of history. It was precisely art and literary criticism that produced at that time among the intelligentsia the awareness of a contradiction between the 'old' and the 'modern' and in that way shaped a new understanding of time capable of differentiating the future from the past. But at the end of this period arises also the awareness of the approaching crisis: "We are approaching the state of crisis and the

century of revolutions", writes Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1966: 252). Whereas for Enlightenment thinkers revolution was a synonym for an inevitable historical progress, which occurs necessarily as a kind of natural phenomenon, Rousseau by contrast understood it as the ultimate expression of crisis, which brings about the state of insecurity, dissolution, chaos, new contradictions, etc. In connection with the crisis – which it has prepared and initiated – criticism loses its original naïvety and its alleged innocence. From now on criticism and crisis go together shaping the modern age of civil wars and revolutions, which instead of bringing about the expected historical progress, cause chaotic dissolutions and obscure regressive processes, often completely beyond rational control. The interaction between criticism and crisis is one of the major qualities of what later was conceptualized as the 'dialectics of enlightenment'.

In the meantime the interplay of both notions became a sort of *terminus technicus* of modernist progress introducing a difference – and simultaneously a relation – between 'old' and 'new'. To say that something has gone into crisis meant above all to say that it has become old; that is, that it has lost its right to exist and therefore should be replaced by something new. Criticism is nothing but the act of this judgement, which helps the old to die quickly and the new to be born easily.

This also applies to the development of modern art, which also follows the dialectics of criticism and crisis of its forms. So we understand for instance realism as a critical reaction to the crisis of Romanticism, or the idea of abstract art as a critique of figurative art, which has exhausted its potential and therefore went into crisis. Also the tension between art and 'prosaic reality' was interpreted through the dialectics of crisis and criticism. So was modern art – especially in Romanticism – often understood as a criticism of ordinary life, of ordinariness as such, or in other words of a life that had lost its authenticity or its meaning – in short, a life that had also gone into some kind of crisis.

Let us now go back to the question, whether this dialectics of criticism and crisis still makes some sense to us today. A few months ago in Austria I had an opportunity to pose this question directly. I moderated a discussion on the legacy of the artistic avant-garde today in the post-communist Eastern Europe. I hoped everybody would agree

when I said that the avant-garde is still the most radical case of modernist art criticism – both in terms of a criticism of traditional art of its time and in terms of a criticism of existing reality, precisely in the moment of its – widely recognized and acknowledged – crisis. After five hours of debate, the conclusion was that the critical experience of avant-garde art is of no value at all today, at least not in Eastern Europe.

The participants in the discussion were mostly younger artists from central and southern regions of Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania and also Turkey. Actually, only the representative of Turkey was prepared to take the topic seriously and believed that the critical stance of the avant-garde still makes some sense to us today. The most open and most radical in his refusal of the avant-garde question was the representative of the Czech Republic. He argued that the avant-garde experience is actually a problem of generations. For him, it is an older generation of artists and art historians that still sees some challenge in the avant-garde and is bothered by this question. The younger generation, he believes, is already beyond the problem of the political meaning of art, or relations between politics and aesthetics. He gave this example: the old generation still discusses vehemently whether or not we need to consider the political meaning of Leni Riefenstahl's work. For the young generation, on the contrary, this simply doesn't matter any more. They have so to speak a direct insight into her art without any political connotations. They see it as what it really is – a pure art in its pure aesthetic value and meaning.

In fact I was not interested at all in this topic, since I know these people and their interests, so I didn't actually expect them to be really interested in the avant-garde. However, there was another issue I found much more interesting there. The participants were actually all members of the so-called Transit-Project. This is a project that was launched a few years ago by an Austrian bank with the aim of supporting art in Eastern Europe. The participants were representatives of the project in their countries. Since I know that this particular bank has earned an enormous amount of money in Eastern Europe, I was curious whether they would have any opinion on that fact – that is, on the way they are paid for their artistic work, or on the role of art and art funding under these circumstances.

I was also motivated by an article that appeared around then in the Viennese daily *Der Standard*. It reported on the profits of Austrian banks and insurance companies in Eastern Europe. In it, one could read that the result of the so-called business activity of the Generali Holding Vienna (an insurance company) had tripled the year before. The annual net profit had doubled in the same year. One can only wonder how this had been possible. The answer was to be found in the subtitle of the same article: 'The growth engine Eastern Europe'. It is due to the eastern expansion of the holding – and Austrian banks too – that they can make such profits. I hoped that the participants would somehow tackle this issue. To speak more openly, I wanted to provoke some sort of criticism. Unfortunately, it didn't work. Nobody found the economic, material conditions of their art making worth mentioning.

It seems that the critical legacy of the avant-garde in post-communist Europe is finally dead. Moreover, it also seems that there is no authentic interest among young artists in institutional criticism, in what we have called above self-criticism: critical awareness of the conditions of the possibility of their art and the conditions of its production.

The reason for this is obvious: our perception of avant-garde criticism is essentially framed by the historical experience of communism. This means that the experience of the avant-garde, as much as the experience of radical criticism, appears to us today only from our post-communist (post-totalitarian, or post-ideological) perspective. It appears as a phenomenon of our past, as a phenomenon, to use Francis Fukuyama's (1992: xi) notion, of a lower level of humanity's ideological evolution. In short it appears that, as a problem, it belongs to the concerns of an older generation, to use words of the Czech colleague, and thus by implication is sooner or later going to die out.

But let me, at this point, pose an 'impossible' question: is communism really dead? As far as I know, it is not only still alive, but also proves, in some fields, its superiority over capitalism. Yes, I really mean today's China. (Please don't tell me that this is not the real communism. There has never been a real communism. I can remember very well that from the perspective of Yugoslavian communism – also often dismissed, due to the market economy, as not being an authentic, real one – the Soviet and whole East-block communism was defined as

a form of state-capitalism). Why don't we then learn about radical criticism and self-criticism from Chinese communists who obviously seem to have been more successful than their Western comrades? But before we ask the highest theoretical authority of the Chinese communism about the true meaning of criticism and self-criticism, let me remind you of a historical fact: In the historical reality of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea of communist revolution itself became an institution – in the form of the communist movement and the Communist Party in its various national forms. As an institution, the communist movement also developed its own institution of criticism, the institution of so-called self-criticism, which played the extremely important function of informing the self-conscious subject of revolutionary action and later of a socialist community.

For Chairman Mao, conscientious practice of self-criticism was one of the most important hallmarks distinguishing a Communist Party from all other political parties. Let me quote him: "As we say, dust will accumulate if a room is not cleaned regularly, our faces will get dirty if they are not washed regularly. Our comrades' minds and our Party's work may also collect dust, and also need sweeping and washing". Therefore, self-criticism is for Mao "the only effective way to prevent all kinds of political dust and germs from contaminating the minds of our comrades and the body of our Party".

This sounds very funny to us today, like an infantile ideological fairy tale. But let me point to a crucial contradiction in Mao's concept of self-criticism: it has nothing to do whatsoever with the crisis of capitalism or with any sort of crisis. Although Mao describes communist self-criticism as the most effective weapon of Marxism-Leninism, he doesn't justify it with the ideological principals of Marxism-Leninism. On the contrary, his definition of self-criticism seems to be completely non-ideological, simply a matter of trivial common sense: a clean face is better than a dirty one, a clean room better than one full of dust, germs are bad for health.

Why this trivialization? And, what is even more important, what happened to the crisis, where has it gone, why has it suddenly disappeared? Why this particular form of communist criticism – a self-criticism that is not related to any sort of crisis? In the guise of the communist political movement both the crisis of capitalism and its criticism have merged into one single institution in which there is no

possibility to differentiate between them. In other words, precisely in merging together they have become each other's outside. For the communist movement the crisis of capitalism was suddenly out there, in the outside of its own institution. But for capitalism, too, the criticism of its crisis can now be perceived only as coming from its own outside. The result is that communists couldn't see themselves as being part of the capitalist crisis and therefore, instead of resolving it, through their criticism, they have finally succeeded in making it stronger, more efficient, finally more sustainable or simply permanent. The problem was that communism and capitalism – or if you want, capitalism as crisis and its communist criticism – have never reached the point of a radical mutual exclusion, but on the contrary, were helping each other in moments of crises.

Why should we forget that it was precisely American capital which helped Bolshevik Russia to recover from the destructions of the civil war? And why forget the role of art in this story? The Soviets, as it is well known, were exchanging some of the most precious and also most expensive art works, mostly French paintings from the nineteen century, for new industrial technology from the United States. In our liberal jargon we today would call it a perfect win-win situation. The one side could get rid of what it considered at that time meaningless and historically obsolete (i.e., bourgeois art). And the other side could expand its markets, push forward employment and consequently stabilize the social situation and pacify its working class (i.e., escape its crisis). It didn't work, but not, as many believe today, because the Bolsheviks were primitives who couldn't recognize the real value of the artworks they possessed. Far from it: they knew all about the market value of those artworks, and this according to the pure capitalist logic. They treated them exclusively as commodities. But this became possible only after these artworks were artistically devaluated, after they had lost their artistic value as a consequence of an authentic art-criticism. It was actually the avant-garde art that stated the crisis of traditional art and – within what we today understand as pure history of art – radically criticized all these French paintings and destroyed their artistic value.

Moreover, it was now the artistic avant-garde itself that needed factories and working masses in order to articulate its artistic principles and produce its own artistic values. The avant-garde did not need museums and depots to collect its works and present them to an audience they didn't care about and were actually disgusted with. And

who could provide the needed factories and working class? American industrial technology. Capitalism, in short. This is a wonderful example of how crisis and criticism of both capitalism and art can successfully work together, of course within an overall capitalist context, in order to produce – normality!

Another example of how capitalism and communism can function in harmony is of course today's China. To translate the reality into the dialectics of crisis and its criticism, it is precisely the rule of an institutionalized criticism of capitalism (i.e., the rule of the Chinese Communist Party) that today helps capitalism to survive its crises and persist. Not only by opening the world's largest market to global corporate capital, but also by providing it with cheap and highly disciplined labour. This doesn't happen, as so many believe, because today's Chinese communists have betrayed the very principles of the communist idea, and because, ceasing to criticize capitalism, they have started to improve it. They have not betrayed Mao. On the contrary, they stick faithfully to his true legacy.

Let me quote the Chairman once more. Discussing the necessity for self-criticism, he calls for personal sacrifice:

> As we Chinese Communists, who… never balk at any personal sacrifice and are ready at all times to give our lives for the cause, can we be reluctant to discard any idea, viewpoint, opinion or method which is not suited to the needs of the people? Can we be willing to allow political dust and germs to dirty our clean faces or eat into our healthy organisms? [C]an there be any personal interest… that we would not sacrifice or any error that we would not discard?

And let's remember that the famous Stalinist show trials would have never been possible without the institution of self-criticism and personal sacrifice. As is well known today, they were introduced at the beginning of the 1930s, precisely at the moment when collectivization started to produce catastrophic results, plunging Soviet society into deep crisis. It was self-criticism that then helped to project this crisis into an outside, to present it as an effect of the subversion from the outside, a work of imperialist spies and agents. It was therefore completely understandable that the institution had to be cleaned up from all those 'germs and parasites' which had eaten into the healthy organism of Soviet society. Criticism – in the guise of communist self-criticism – was used (or if you like misused), not to disclose the real crisis and its antagonisms and

intervene in it (which would have been a classical Marxist approach), but on the contrary to hide it and in this way to make it permanent, that is, to transform or translate crisis in some sort of normality.

This is typical for today's situation: neither are we able to experience our time as crisis nor do we try to become subjects through an act of criticism. In the period of classical modernism, crisis was always experienced as an actual possibility of a break and criticism as this break itself. Obviously, such an experience is no longer possible for us today. There is no experience whatsoever of an interaction between crisis and critique. One cannot simply ignore Giorgio Agamben's warning, that one of the most important experiences of our times is the fact that we are unable to have any experience of it. The result is a permanent criticism that is blind to the crisis, and a permanent crisis that is deaf to criticism. In short, a perfect harmony!

6

Artistic Internationalism and Institutional Critique

Jens Kastner
(Translated by Aileen Derieg)

In 1970 a group called the Guerilla Art Collective Project placed military uniforms filled with meat and labeled 'SHIP TO…' in the main square in front of the university in San Diego. The action – at the same time a protest against the war in Vietnam and an art production (Breitwieser, 2003: 16) – was carried out on the borderline between installation and sculpture, as well as between art and politics. The group member who initiated the project was Allan Sekula, a student of the social philosopher Herbert Marcuse.

Marcuse was one of the most important advocates of social movements in the 1960s. His *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), influential for many students in Western Europe and North America during that period, saw in the protest movements new possibilities for the realization of alternative, non-alienated ways of living, an approach that later became conventional in research dealing with social movements. However, it was not only these possibilities that united the various upheavals since the mid-1960s and partly enabled the conjoining of very different concerns – feminist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist and anti-militarist. Similar in some ways to Dada fifty years earlier, in terms of what the actors had in common, 1968 as an international or transnational upheaval, as 'a world revolution' (*il manifesto*), in which widespread artistic mobilization was also involved, was based primarily on negative internationalist motivations: the war against Vietnam conducted by the USA was the outstanding negatively uniting element. "The military intervention of the USA in the Vietnam conflict gave the protests of the various national

student avant-garde groups an international dimension, an idea that united them, and a common strategy" (Gilcher-Holtey, 2003: 49). Just as social criticism was linked at the political level in the urban centers through this negative bracket with liberation movements in developing countries, at the cultural level agitation by politicized students joined forces with artists expanding their methods. Countless artistic actions took place in the most diverse countries in the course of the protest movements, linking anti-war ideas with local social, cultural and political concerns, and especially joined them with the actions of the social movements. In his history of conceptual art Tony Godfrey (2005: 190) wonders about "how little the political situation was directly addressed by art" in light of the vehement student unrest, but he considers the importance of the Vietnam war in the development of art in the late 1960s and early 1970s so great that he begins every chapter of his book by elaborating on it.

My thesis is that the internationalist orientation functions both as the potential link between artistic and social movements and as a possible means for overcoming the structural obstacles between both. This conjunction is by no means to be taken for granted, nor is it generally the case. It is blocked, according to Pierre Bourdieu, by the complete difference and incompatibility of the respective fields. Although there exists a "structural affinity between literary avant-garde and the political avant-garde" (Bourdieu, 1996: 251), the reconciliation of the two "in a sort of summation of all revolutions – social, sexual, artistic" (Bourdieu, 1996: 387) repeatedly runs into the rifts or hurdles that exist between the two areas. It was not unusual for these hurdles to appear even in the context of 1968. They were evident, for example, in the repeatedly occurring, mutual vituperation between political activists and activist artists. In 1971 Henryk M. Broder, for instance, contended that the Vienna Actionist Otto Muehl was "no leftist, but an anal-fascist", whereas Muehl criticized the bourgeois mentality of all revolutionaries, who "put on their comfy slippers" again when they are finished revolting (Raunig, 2007: 290). The controversies surrounding Muehl and the other actors from Vienna Actionism were ultimately so heated because the art scene in Austria had a certain dominance within the situation in 1968, which was generally marked, according to Robert Foltin (2004: 74) by "a lack of theory and by a low degree of militancy."[1]

The thesis that social and artistic movements come together and/or mutually permeate one another in artistic internationalism also contradicts two narrow readings of Bourdieu, which have been formulated in discussions about institutional critique. Andrea Fraser's reading (2005), for example, which picks up from Bourdieu, regards the art field as being so closed that everything done outside it can have no effects at all towards the inside – and vice versa. In the essay that opens this volume, Gerald Raunig rightly criticizes Fraser's position, and Stefan Nowotny in his text on 'anti-canonization' criticizes a similar position on the part of Isabelle Graw. Nowotny maintains that in Graw's essay 'Beyond Institutional Critique' is a "flagrant example of fixing institutional critique art practices to art" (this volume). However, Graw's position also stands for a second curtailment of Bourdieu's art field theory. In light of the sales-oriented clientele of a New York art fair, completely uninterested in content, she wrote in a *Tageszeitung* article in 2004 that "under these circumstances... the notion of art as an autonomous special sphere... can no longer be maintained" (Graw, 2005: 15). However, since the autonomization of the art field, the economy of symbolic goods, which Bourdieu speaks of, does not take place between the poles of total commercialization and 'pure production'.[2] Hence the existence and expansion of influential art fairs does not at all contradict the autonomy of the field.[3] Objections must therefore be raised against both of these constrictions: talking about the autonomy of the art field means neither asserting a social area incapable of achieving effects towards the outside, nor that a terrain exists here, which is untouched by economic, social and other influences. Instead, it is a matter of pointing out specific functionalities that differ from those in other social fields.[4]

The artist, photographer and art theoretician Allan Sekula also formulated the protest against the Vietnam War in another action, one that was photographically documented. In this six-part photo series an activist, barefooted and equipped with a Vietnamese peasant's straw hat and plastic machine gun, crawls through the wealthy suburbs of a large US city. The title of the 1972 action, *Two, three, many ... (terrorism),* directly refers to Ernesto Che Guevara's anti-imperialist *foco* theory. In this context Guevara called for the creation of 'two, three, many' Vietnams to expand the so-called people's war against imperialism by creating multiple revolutionary hot spots. Sekula thus puts Che Guevara's internationalist appeal into an artistic form, indicating the justification

for the appeal on the one hand, but on the other also representing a symbolic alternative to the non-artistic implementation of guerrilla concepts in the major urban centers. The *foco* theory was not only one of the foundations for the development of the 'urban guerrilla concept' by the Red Army Fraction (RAF) in 1971. Following a first wave of guerrilla movements limited to Latin America, a 'second wave' (Kaller-Dietrich and Mayer, undated) arose in Western cities based on the practices of the Tupamaros, the leftist urban guerrillas in Uruguay. The Weather Underground in the USA and other radical leftist groups in various western countries also referred directly or indirectly to this dictum from Che Guevara as they went underground (Jacobs, 1997).

The collage series *Bringing the War Home* (1967 – 1972) by the US artist and art theoretician Martha Rosler[5] is also to be seen in the context of *foco* theory. The collages show various motifs from the Vietnam War mounted in pictures from contemporary US American brochures for furnishings. By calling everyday furnishings into question as the furnishings of everyday life, Rosler builds here on an effect similar to that of the Berlin group Kommune 1 with their flyer about a fire in a Brussels department store in 1967. In this flyer, Kommune 1 satirically calls the fire an advertising gag for the USA, invoking the 'crackling Viet Nam feeling (of being there and burning too)', that everyone should be able to share (Enzensberger, 2004). This satire strategy also serves the idea of making injustice in developing countries directly comprehensible to people in major cities, making it palpable, in fact 'bringing the war home'.

If institutional critique is taken not merely as a label for works by the four or five protagonists that are always named (Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, John Knight), but rather, as Hito Steyerl sees it in her essay in this volume, as 'a new social movement within the art field', then this would certainly include Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula. Questioning one's own role within the art system, linking this with concrete socio-political themes such as the criticism of US foreign policy and the criticism of the ideology of the idyllic private sphere of the family, suggests a version of institutional critique that goes beyond the constraints of art institutions like galleries and museums. It also covers more than Isabelle Graw (2005: 50) includes with the differentiated, expanded concept of institution, of corporate culture and celebrity culture. It is more to be understood as a criticism of the institutions of capitalist society altogether, in the sense

of Marcuse's utopian idea that the aim is to work towards a society in which people are no longer enslaved by institutions. To this extent, Steyerl's analysis also needs to be expanded: institutional critique should not only be understood as a movement within the art field, but also as one that would hardly be imaginable without the social movements outside the art field.

Artistic internationalism – in other words a certain orientation of the subject matter of artistic work that nevertheless first develops in the confrontation with the viewers – proves to be the link between art movement and social movement. With regard to this functional link, works like those described above are to be defended against both their proponents and their opponents.

One of these opponents, for example, is Jacques Rancière (2006), who lists Rosler's aforementioned work as an example of art that too strongly disambiguates the relation between illusion and reality. In works like *Bringing the War Home*, according to Rancière, "the sense of fiction is lost" (Rancière, 2006: 91), which should, however, be central to the real politics of art. Rancière (2006: 87) argues for a "politics of art that is proper to the aesthetic regime of art" and which precedes the political action of the artist.[6] He maintains that the confrontation between two heterogeneous elements, as demonstrated in Rosler's collages, is characteristic of critical art. However, it tends to turn itself into a mere inventory of things. In turn, this taking inventory leads to the exact opposite of what was intended: the politics of art is reduced to "welfare and ethical imprecision" (Rancière, 2006: 96), or it dissolves into "the indeterminacy[...] that is called ethics today" (Rancière, 2006: 99). According to Rancière, art is political neither because of its message nor in the way that it represents social structures, ethnic and sexual identity or political struggles. "Art is primarily political in creating a space-time sensorium, in certain modes of being together or apart, of defining being inside or outside, opposite to or in the middle of" (Rancière, 2006: 77).

Yet Rosler and Sekula's works are by no means situated exclusively in the tradition of explicitly political agitation art like that of John Heartfield or Diego Rivera. However, even their works – denigrated by Rancière as 'directly' political art – could prove to be suitable for creating a sensorium, if, for example, the indeterminate specification of being together and apart, etc. is interpreted as a relationship, as it exists

and is thematized in the relationship between work and viewer. For only very few 'political' works are limited solely to conveying messages and representing social/political conflicts. Michelangelo Pistoletto, for instance, in his mirror painting (*Vietnam*, 1962/1965) linked the art historical issue of the work-viewer relationship with political explicitness. Two persons, painted on tissue paper and cut out along their contours, are glued to a reflecting metal panel, a woman in a red trench coat and a man in a black suit with a tie, each of them holding a stick with a demo banner attached to the upper ends, on which the letters '...NAM' can be read. Looking at this life-sized picture, viewers are immediately drawn into the depiction of the scene, obviously an anti-Vietnam War demonstration. Here Pistoletto positions the viewers both opposite the picture as such and also in front of a political statement, directly involving them in both. According to Tony Godfrey (2005: 114), this artistic stance, which places the viewer in a direct relationship to the image, is "a crucial characteristic of Conceptual Art."

In the case of Sekula's *Two, three, many ... (terrorism)* and Rosler's *Bringing the War Home*, this kind of context is established through the internationalism of 1968. This internationalism involves more of a political stance than a (for example, Trotskyist) program, an awareness of the ways in which social battles in different regions of the world are mutually conditioned. Due not least of all to the anti-colonial liberation movements, with the student movements of the 1960s an anti-authoritarian internationalism – in contrast to the proletarian internationalism of the early twentieth century – gained "more significance theoretically as well[...] In fact, this was one of its central components. Internationalism and '68' formed a unit and must therefore also be treated as such" (Hierlmeier, 2002: 23). This internationalist perspective was realized in the social movements in this way perhaps even more than in the art field, within which it was criticized as obscuring western hegemony.[7]

The artistic internationalism is all the more to be emphasized also in response to proponents of Rosler's *Bringing the War Home*, such as Beatrice von Bismarck (2006). Martha Rosler continued her series in 2004 under the same title, but instead of motifs from the Vietnam War she used motifs from the US invasion of Iraq. Although there is no dismissing that Rosler's Iraq series is a 'self-quotation', as Bismarck (2006: 239) puts it, a comparable point of reference in terms of subject matter is certainly the rhetoric of freedom used by the US government

both then and now. Nor is the observation false that the more garish choice of colors in comparison with the original series enhances the impression of uncanniness, understood in Freud's sense as a return of the repressed. "Especially in Rosler's photographic collages, in which the images of war break into the familiar homeyness, the home sweet home, as what is only seemingly alien, this return of the repressed finds a striking visual form" (Bismarck, 2006: 240).

Yet one crucial criterion still remains unmentioned in this account, specifically the integration of artistic work in the strategies and practices of the social movements. Although the US invasion of Iraq was accompanied by worldwide protests, this movement has for the most part long since ceased to operate in the context of a Guevara-like anti-imperialism. The tactic of 'bringing the war home' in any way was completely absent. And there is a reason for this: filling this slogan with emancipatory significance seems to be entirely unthinkable for social movements at a time when al-Qaida-style Islamic terror has struck Western capitals on many levels, on the one hand, and on the other is installed as a scenario of general threat. The war, or a war, has long since 'come home', has arrived in the Western urban centers, into which it first had to be brought in the 1960s and 1970s, although its effects are not those intended by movement actors in the 1960s. On the contrary, instead of enlightenment, awareness, empathy, emancipatory radicalization, an institutional and psychological insulation is taking place. The boom in security technologies and policies had already signaled the end of the urban guerrillas in the 1970s. Failing to reflect on this end and merely attempting to pick up from where it stopped thirty years earlier must give rise to perplexity in the case of an artist like Rosler. For she herself had emphasized how relatively "the measures of aesthetic coherence are applied to photographic practice" (Rosler, 1999: 122), and lamented a contemporary tendency to detach art works from their context. Although a link is made in the continuation of the series to an ethical issue, and the standpoint of the viewer in relation to the depicted situation is questioned, the political context of the emancipatory social movement and its strategies remains omitted – both in the work and in the criticism formulated by Bismarck.

With respect to the first phase of institutional critique, Sabeth Buchmann (2006) states that, in terms of the call for cultural and social relevance, it diverged from the historical avant-garde in that a different way of dealing with these issues was cultivated: the "radius of action was

and is no longer society", according to Buchmann (2006: 22), "but rather specific public, institutional and/or media fields."

Neither the depreciation of the aesthetic value of artistic works like *Two, three, many ... (terrorism)* or *Bringing the War Home* nor their political de-contextualization does justice to their specific criticism. The works discussed here do indeed thematize central issues that are immanent to the art field, which are linked to the questions and concerns of social movements – with the normative turn, so to speak, of being embroiled in the production of the social world: if I am part of the historical process, then – according to one of the central ideas of *foco* theory, which has been criticized as being voluntaristic – it ultimately only depends on my determination (and that of a few others) to reverse the conditions. Both Rancière and Bismarck are building on a false focus: Rancière with his criticism of the unambiguousness that he claims exists in the confrontation with social conditions and destroys or does not enable the alleged 'politics of aesthetics'; and Bismarck (and even Rosler herself with her continuation) by overlooking this tie with the social context. It would be better to build instead on the hinge function between artistic issues and political forms of social movements. Tying into the art historical question of the relationship between artist, work and viewer would make it possible to draw from what Bourdieu called the 'space of possibilities', which "defines and delimits the universe of both what is thinkable and what is unthinkable" (Bourdieu, 2001: 373). In this sense, the development of artistic internationalism that is based on and rooted in the battles of the social movements and their practices of solidarity represents a potential expansion of this space.

Notes

1. On the connection between Vienna Actionism and the student movement, see Foltin (2004: 58) and Raunig (2007: 187-202).
2. Nina Tessa Zahner (2005) has analyzed the emergence of a third field, a 'sub-field of expanded production' in the context of the Pop Art of the 1960s. This conjoins elements from both poles in the figure of the artist as entrepreneur. The lasting transformations of the field that go back to these developments would have to be discussed separately.
3. The 'autonomy of the art field' that Bourdieu speaks of is thus not to be confused with the 'autonomy of the art work' that is asserted by modernist art theory. Bourdieu's whole theory ultimately aims to unmask the

'autonomy of the art work' as an ideology. Both Graw's slightly disgusted statement about the dominance of money on the one hand and Zahner's (2005: 290) recognition of Pop Art on the other, which credits Warhol for, among other things, "having pointed out the ideological content of the art that claims to be autonomous", are based on this misunderstanding.

4. Bourdieu (2003: 141) speaks of a "space with two dimensions and two forms of struggle and history": between the 'pure' and the 'commercial' pole there is the question of the legitimacy and the status of art; at another level the recognition of the works and the conflicts between young/new and old/established artists is at stake.
5. The first pictures of the series were published about 1970 as contributions to a magazine called *Goodbuy to all that* (No. 10), placed next to an article by the 'Angela Davis Committee in Defense of Women Prisoners'.
6. Rancière also decisively rejects the social conditions of judgments of taste and their integration in the symbolic struggles of a society that Bourdieu developed in *Distinction* (1982). He describes Bourdieu's demystification of the pure aesthetic gaze as a "cheap alliance between scientific and political progressive thinking", yet he has nothing to counter this with but the assertion of a singular "form of freedom and indifference[...], which joined aesthetics with the identification of what art is at all" (Rancière, 2006: 79). It would be interesting to discuss whether this is the reason why Rancière, as Christian Höller (2006: 180) stresses, is to be regarded "currently in the context of left-wing cultural circles as 'most wanted'."
7. For example, Rasheed Araeen's (1997: 100) criticism in 1978: "The myth of the internationalism of western art must be destroyed now[...] Western art expresses exclusively the characteristics of the west[...] Western art is not international. It is only a transatlantic art. It only reflects the culture of Europe and North America. The current 'internationalism' of western art is no more than a function of the political and economic power of the west, which imposes its values on other people. In an international context it would therefore be more appropriate to speak of an imperialistic art."

7

Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions

Brian Holmes

What is the logic, the need or the desire that pushes more and more artists to work outside the limits of their own discipline, defined by the notions of free reflexivity and pure aesthetics, incarnated by the gallery-magazine-museum-collection circuit, and haunted by the memory of the normative genres, painting and sculpture?

Pop art, conceptual art, body art, performance and video each marked a rupture of the disciplinary frame, already in the 1960s and 70s. But one could argue that these dramatized outbursts merely *imported* themes, media or expressive techniques back into what Yves Klein had termed the 'specialized' ambiance of the gallery or the museum, qualified by the primacy of the aesthetic and managed by the functionaries of art. Exactly such arguments were launched by Robert Smithson in 1972 in his text on cultural confinement (Smithson, 1996), then restated by Brian O'Doherty in his theses on the ideology of the white cube (O'Doherty, 1986). They still have a lot of validity. Yet now we are confronted with a new series of outbursts, under such names as net.art, bio art, visual geography, space art and database art – to which one could add an archi-art, or art of architecture, which curiously enough has never been baptized as such, as well as a machine art that reaches all the way back to 1920s constructivism, or even a 'finance art' whose birth was announced in the Casa Encendida of Madrid just last summer.

The heterogeneous character of the list immediately suggests its application to all the domains where theory and practice meet. In the artistic forms that result, one will always find remains of the old

modernist tropism whereby art designates itself first of all, drawing the attention back to its own operations of expression, representation, metaphorization or deconstruction. Independently of whatever 'subject' it treats, art tends to make this self-reflexivity its distinctive or identifying trait, even its *raison d'être*, in a gesture whose philosophical legitimacy was established by Immanuel Kant. But in the kind of work I want to discuss, there is something more at stake.

We can approach it through the word that the Nettime project used to define its collective ambitions. For the artists, theorists, media activists and programmers who inhabited that mailing list – one of the important vectors of net.art in the late 1990s – it was a matter of proposing an 'immanent critique' of the Internet, that is, of the techno-scientific infrastructure then in the course of construction. This critique was to be carried out inside the network itself, using its languages and its technical tools and focusing on its characteristic objects, with the goal of influencing or even of directly shaping its development – but without refusing the possibilities of distribution outside this circuit.[1] What's sketched out is a two-way movement, which consists in occupying a field with a potential for shaking up society (telematics) and then radiating outward from that specialized domain, with the explicitly formulated aim of effecting change in the discipline of art (considered too formalist and narcissistic to escape its own charmed circle), in the discipline of cultural critique (considered too academic and historicist to confront the current transformations) and even in the 'discipline' – if you can call it that – of leftist activism (considered too doctrinaire, too ideological to seize the occasions of the present).

At work here is a new tropism and a new sort of reflexivity, involving artists as well as theorists and activists in a passage beyond the limits traditionally assigned to their practice. The word tropism conveys the desire or need to turn towards something else, towards an exterior field or discipline; while the notion of reflexivity now indicates a critical return to the departure point, an attempt to transform the initial discipline, to end its isolation, to open up new possibilities of expression, analysis, cooperation and commitment. This back-and-forth movement, or rather, this transformative spiral, is the operative principle of what I will be calling extradisciplinary investigations.

The concept was forged in an attempt to go beyond a kind of double aimlessness that affects contemporary signifying practices, even

a double drift, but without the revolutionary qualities that the Situationists were looking for. I'm thinking first of the inflation of interdisciplinary discourses on the academic and cultural circuits: a virtuoso combinatory system that feeds the symbolic mill of cognitive capital, acting as a kind of supplement to the endless pinwheels of finance itself (the curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist is a specialist of these combinatories). Second is the state of indiscipline that is an unsought effect of the anti-authoritarian revolts of the 1960s, where the subject simply gives into the aesthetic solicitations of the market (in the neo-Pop vein, indiscipline means endlessly repeating and remixing the flux of prefabricated commercial images). Though they aren't the same, interdisciplinarity and indiscipline have become the two most common excuses for the neutralization of significant inquiry (Holmes, 2001). But there is no reason to accept them.

The extradisciplinary ambition is to carry out rigorous investigations on terrains as far away from art as finance, biotech, geography, urbanism, psychiatry, the electromagnetic spectrum, etc., to bring forth on those terrains the 'free play of the faculties' and the intersubjective experimentation that are characteristic of modern art, but also to try to identify, inside those same domains, the spectacular or instrumental uses so often made of the subversive liberty of aesthetic play – as the architect Eyal Weizman does in exemplary fashion, when he investigates the appropriation by the Israeli and US military of what were initially conceived as subversive architectural strategies. Weizman challenges the military on its own terrain, with his maps of security infrastructures in Israel; but what he brings back are elements for a critical examination of what used to be his exclusive discipline (Weizman, 2007). This complex movement, which never neglects the existence of the different disciplines, but never lets itself be trapped by them either, can provide a new departure point for what used to be called *institutional critique*.

Histories in the Present

What has been established, retrospectively, as the 'first generation' of institutional critique includes figures like Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers. They examined the conditioning of their own activity by the ideological and economic frames of the museum, with the goal of breaking out. As Stefan Nowotny and Jens Kastner show in their essays in this section of this volume, these artists had a strong relation to the anti-institutional

revolts of the 1960s and 70s, and to the accompanying philosophical critiques. The best way to take their specific focus on the museum is not as a self-assigned limit or a fetishization of the institution, but instead as part of a materialist praxis, lucidly aware of its context, but with wider transformatory intentions. To find out where their story leads, however, we have to look at the writing of Benjamin Buchloh and see how he framed the emergence of institutional critique.

In a text entitled 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', Buchloh (1990) quotes two key propositions by Lawrence Weiner. The first is *A Square Removed from a Rug in Use*, and the second, *A 36"x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (both 1968). In each it is a matter of taking the most self-referential and tautological form possible – the square, whose sides each repeat and reiterate the others – and inserting it in an environment marked by the determinisms of the social world. As Buchloh writes:

> Both interventions – while maintaining their structural and morphological links with formal traditions by respecting classical geometry… – inscribe themselves in the support surfaces of the institutions and/or the home which that tradition had always disavowed… On the one hand, it dissipates the expectation of encountering the work of art only in a 'specialized' or 'qualified' location… On the other, neither one of these surfaces could ever be considered to be independent from their institutional location, since the physical inscription into each particular surface inevitably generates contextual readings. (Buchloh, 1990)

Weiner's propositions are clearly a version of immanent critique, operating flush with the discursive and material structures of the art institutions; but they are cast as a purely logical deduction from minimal and conceptual premises. They just as clearly prefigure the symbolic activism of Gordon Matta-Clark's 'anarchitecture' works, like *Splitting* (1973) or *Window Blow-Out* (1976), which confronted the gallery space with urban inequality and racial discrimination. From that departure point, a history of artistic critique could have led to contemporary forms of activism and technopolitical research, via the mobilization of artists around the AIDS epidemic in late 1980s. But the most widespread versions of 1960s and 70s cultural history never took that turn. According to the subtitle of Buchloh's famous text, the teleological movement of late-modernist art in the 1970s was heading 'from the

aesthetics of administration to the critique of institutions'. This would mean a strictly Frankfurtian vision of the museum as an idealizing Enlightenment institution, damaged by both the bureaucratic state and the market spectacle.

Other histories could be written. At stake is the tense double-bind between the desire to transform the specialized 'cell' (as Brian O'Doherty described the modernist gallery) into a mobile potential of living knowledge that can reach out into the world, and the counter-realization that everything about this specialized aesthetic space is a trap, that it has been instituted as a form of enclosure. That tension produced the incisive interventions of Michal Asher, the sledgehammer denunciations of Hans Haacke, the paradoxical displacements of Robert Smithson, or the melancholic humor and poetic fantasy of Marcel Broodthaers, whose hidden mainspring was a youthful engagement with revolutionary surrealism. The first thing is never to reduce the diversity and complexity of artists who never voluntarily joined into a movement. Another reduction comes from the obsessive focus on a specific site of presentation, the museum, whether it is mourned as a fading relic of the 'bourgeois public sphere', or exalted with a fetishizing discourse of 'site specificity'. These two pitfalls lay in wait for the discourse of institutional critique, when it took explicit form in the United States in the late 1980s and early 90s.

It was the period of the so-called 'second generation'. Among the names most often cited are Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. They pursued the systematic exploration of museological representation, examining its links to economic power and its epistemological roots in a colonial science that treats the Other like an object to be shown in a vitrine. But they added a subjectivizing turn, unimaginable without the influence of feminism and postcolonial historiography, which allowed them to recast external power hierarchies as ambivalences within the self, opening up a conflicted sensibility to the coexistence of multiple modes and vectors of representation. There is a compelling negotiation here, particularly in the work of Renee Green, between specialized discourse analysis and embodied experimentation with the human sensorium. Yet most of this work was also carried out in the form of meta-reflections on the limits of the artistic practices themselves (mock museum displays or scripted video performances), staged within institutions that were ever-more blatantly corporate – to the point where it became increasingly hard to shield the

critical investigations from their own accusations, and their own often devastating conclusions.

This situation of a critical process taking itself for its object recently led Andrea Fraser to consider the artistic institution as an unsurpassable, all-defining frame, sustained through its own inwardly directed critique (Fraser, 2005). Bourdieu's deterministic analysis of the closure of the socio-professional fields, mingled with a deep confusion between Weber's iron cage and Foucault's desire 'to get free of oneself', is internalized here in a governmentality of failure, where the subject can do no more than contemplate his or her own psychic prison, with a few aesthetic luxuries in compensation. Unfortunately, it all adds very little to Broodthaers' lucid testament (1987), formulated on a single page in 1975. For Broodthaers, the only alternative to a guilty conscience was self-imposed blindness – not exactly a solution! Yet Fraser accepts it, by posing her argument as an attempt to "defend the very institution for which the institution of the avant-garde's 'self-criticism' had created the potential: the institution of critique" (Fraser, 2005: 282).

Without any antagonistic or even agonistic relation to the status quo, and above all, without any aim to change it, what's defended becomes little more than a masochistic variation on the self-serving 'institutional theory of art' promoted by Arthur Danto, George Dickie and their followers (a theory of mutual and circular recognition among members of an object-oriented milieu, misleadingly called a 'world'). The loop is looped, and what had been a large-scale, complex, searching and transformational project of 1960s and 70s art seems to reach a dead end, with institutional consequences of complacency, immobility, loss of autonomy, capitulation before various forms of instrumentalization.

Phase Change

The end may be logical, but some desire to go much further. The first thing is to redefine the means, the media and the aims of a possible third phase of institutional critique. The notion of transversality, developed by the practitioners of institutional analysis, helps to theorize the assemblages that link actors and resources from the art circuit to projects and experiments that don't exhaust themselves inside it, but rather, extend elsewhere (Guattari, 2003). These projects can no longer be unambiguously defined as art. They are based instead on a circulation between disciplines, often involving the real critical reserve of marginal or counter-cultural positions – social movements, political associations,

squats, autonomous universities – which can't be reduced to an all-embracing institution.

The projects tend to be collective, even if they also tend to flee the difficulties that collectivity involves, by operating as networks. Their inventors, who came of age in the universe of cognitive capitalism, are drawn toward complex social functions which they seize upon in all their technical detail, and in full awareness that the second nature of the world is now shaped by technology and organizational form. In almost every case it is a political engagement that gives them the desire to pursue their exacting investigations beyond the limits of an artistic or academic discipline. But their analytic processes are at the same time expressive, and for them, every complex machine is awash in affect and subjectivity. It is when these subjective and analytic sides mesh closely together, in the new productive and political contexts of communicational labor (and not just in meta-reflections staged uniquely for the museum), that one can speak of a 'third phase' of institutional critique – or better, of a 'phase change' in what was formerly known as the public sphere, a change which has extensively transformed the contexts and modes of cultural and intellectual production in the twenty-first century.

An issue of *Multitudes*, co-edited with the *Transform* web-journal, gives examples of this approach.[2] The aim is to sketch the problematic field of an exploratory practice that is not new, but is definitely rising in urgency. Rather than offering a curatorial recipe, we wanted to cast new light on the old problems of the closure of specialized disciplines, the intellectual and affective paralysis to which it gives rise, and the alienation of any capacity for democratic decision-making that inevitably follows, particularly in a highly complex technological society. The forms of expression, public intervention and critical reflexivity that have been developed in response to such conditions can be characterized as extradisciplinary – but without fetishizing the word at the expense of the horizon it seeks to indicate.

On considering the work, and particularly the articles dealing with technopolitical issues, some will probably wonder if it might not have been interesting to evoke the name of Bruno Latour. His ambition is that of 'making things public', or more precisely, elucidating the specific encounters between complex technical objects and specific processes of decision-making (whether these are *de jure* or *de facto* political). For that,

he says, one must proceed in the form of 'proofs', established as rigorously as possible, but at the same time necessarily 'messy', like the things of the world themselves (Latour and Weibel, 2005).

There is something interesting in Latour's proving machine (even if it does tend, unmistakably, toward the academic productivism of 'interdisciplinarity'). A concern for how things are shaped in the present, and a desire for constructive interference in the processes and decisions that shape them, is characteristic of those who no longer dream of an absolute outside and a total, year-zero revolution. However, it's enough to consider the artists whom we invited to the *Multitudes* issue, in order to see the differences. Hard as one may try, the 1750 km Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan pipeline cannot be reduced to the 'proof' of anything, even if Ursula Biemann did compress it into the ten distinct sections of the *Black Sea Files*.[3] Traversing Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey before it debouches in the Mediterranean, the pipeline forms the object of political decisions even while it sprawls beyond reason and imagination, engaging the whole planet in the geopolitical and ecological uncertainty of the present.

Similarly, the Paneuropean transport and communication corridors running through the former Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, filmed by the participants of the Timescapes group initiated by Angela Melitopoulos, result from the one of the most complex infrastructure-planning processes of our epoch, carried out at the transnational and transcontinental levels. Yet these precisely designed economic projects are at once inextricable from the conflicted memories of their historical precedents, and immediately delivered over to the multiplicity of their uses, which include the staging of massive, self-organized protests in conscious resistance to the manipulation of daily life by the corridor-planning process. Human beings do not necessarily want to be the living 'proof' of an economic thesis, carried out from above with powerful and sophisticated instruments – including media devices that distort their images and their most intimate affects. An anonymous protester's insistent sign, brandished in the face of the TV cameras at the demonstrations surrounding the 2003 EU summit in Thessalonica, says it all: ANY SIMILARITY TO ACTUAL PERSONS OR EVENTS IS UNINTENTIONAL.[4]

Art history has emerged into the present, and the critique of the conditions of representation has spilled out onto the streets. But in the

same movement, the streets have taken up their place in our critiques. In the philosophical essays that we included in the *Multitudes* project, *institution* and *constitution* always rhyme with *destitution.*[5] The specific focus on extradisciplinary artistic practices does not mean radical politics has been forgotten, far from it. Today more than ever, any constructive investigation has to raise the standards of resistance.

Notes

1. See the introduction to the anthology *ReadMe!* (Bosma, 1999). One of the best examples of immanent critique is the project 'Name Space' by Paul Garrin, which aimed to rework the domain name system (DNS), which constitutes the web as a navigable space (Bosma, 1999: 224-9).
2. See 'Extradisciplinaire', online at http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0507.
3. The video installation *Black Sea Files* by Ursula Biemann, done in the context of the Transcultural Geographies project, has been exhibited with the other works of that project at Kunst-Werke in Berlin, December 2005 – February 2006, then at Tapies Foundation in Barcelona, March – May 2007; published in Franke (2005).
4. The video installation *Corridor X* by Angela Melitopoulos, with the work of the other members of Timescapes, has been exhibited and published in Franke (2005).
5. See Stefan Nowotny's essay on destitution in the last section of this volume, as well as Pechriggl (2007).

8

Louise Lawler's Rude Museum*

Rosalyn Deutsche

On the brink of World War II, Virginia Woolf advised women to remember, learn from and use derision, of which they had long been objects (Woolf, 1938: 6). *Three Guineas*, Woolf's classic essay of ethico-political thought, counts derision among the great 'un-paid teachers' of women, educating them about the behavior and motives of human beings, that is, about psychology, a field that Woolf, unlike many leftist critics today, did not separate from that of the political.[1] Before writing the essay, Woolf had received requests for contributions from three organizations, each promoting a different cause: women's education, the advancement of women in the professions, and the prevention of war. At least that is the book's conceit. She responded by linking the three movements, making clear that for her the goal of feminism was not just equality for women but a better, less war-like, society. Since, she argued, the professions as currently practiced encourage qualities that lead to war – grandiosity, vanity, egoism, patriotism, possessiveness, combativeness – women must not simply become educated professionals but do so differently: "How can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war" (Woolf, 1938: 75)? Women can help, she suggested, by refusing to be deferential to the esteemed professions and instead considering it their duty to express the opinion that professional customs and rituals are contemptible. And what better way to accomplish this task than through humor, which, as Mignon Nixon notes, following Freud, discharges psychic energy, has pleasurable effects, and "promotes the defiance of deference"? (Nixon, 2005: 67).

Woolf's humor was of the type that Freud called 'tendentious'. It served the purpose of criticizing authority and, like hostile jokes, exploited "something ridiculous in our enemy" (Freud, 1960: 123-5). Here is a sample from her observations on professional dress:

> How many, how splendid, how extremely ornate they are – the clothes worn by the educated man in his public capacity! Now you dress in violet; a jeweled crucifix swings on your breast; now your shoulders are covered with lace; now furred with ermine; now slung with many linked chains set with precious stones. Now you wear wigs on your heads; rows of graduated curls descend to your necks. Now your hats are boat-shaped, or cocked; now they mount in cones of black fur. (Woolf, 1938: 19)

Woolf derided men's professional trappings because of the hierarchical distinctions of rank and the will to power they signified: "Every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning. Some have the right to wear plain buttons only; others rosettes; some may wear a single stripe; others three, four or five. And each curl or stripe is sewn on at precisely the right distance apart – it may be one inch for one man, one inch and a quarter for another" (Woolf, 1938: 19). Distinctions of dress, like adding titles before or letters after names, were designed to show superiority and to arouse competition and jealousy. Therefore the professional fashion system encouraged "a disposition towards war" (Woolf, 1938: 19).

Today, some critics find Woolf's hope that women, by virtue of their earlier exclusion, might change the professions outdated, irrelevant to a historical period in which women have to a considerable extent entered public life. Yet latent in Woolf's plea – what necessitates it – is, I think, the thoroughly timely recognition that the opposite is just as likely to occur: women can identify with the masculinist position. "It would be perfectly possible for a woman to occupy the role of a representative man", as Homi Bhabha puts it, explaining why he uses the term *masculinism* not to designate the power of actual male persons but to denote a position of power authorized by the claim that one comprehends and represents the social totality (Bhabha, 1992: 242). Masculinism understood in this sense is a relationship that can be sustained only by declaring war on otherness, by subjugating that which cannot be fully known. Woolf believed that cultural institutions cultivate the triumphalist relationship. Alert, like her anti-fascist contemporary

Walter Benjamin, to the barbarism underlying every 'document of civilization' (Benjamin, 1969: 256), she approached such documents warily. No venerated institution was safe from her derision. She even listed the British Royal Academy of Art, the institution that safeguarded standards of professional competence in art, among the great 'battlegrounds', whose members, she said, "seem to be as bloodthirsty as the profession of arms itself" (Woolf, 1938: 63).

Woolf was referring to combative behavior between the male academicians, but the Academy inflicted another kind of violence, one that can be discerned in Johann Zoffany's portrait of the academicians, *Life Class at the Royal Academy* (1772), a painting that has been an icon of feminist art history since Linda Nochlin used it to illustrate her landmark essay, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (Nochlin, 1971).[2] Nochlin treats Zoffany's conversation piece as a document of sexism, a work that shows an aspect of historical discrimination against women in the arts. Zoffany presented the academicians gathered around a nude male model at a time when women were excluded from access to the male nude and therefore from history painting, the most prestigious genre in the Academy's hierarchy. He solved the problem of including the Academy's two female founding members, Angelica Kauffmann and Mary Moser, by portraying them as painted portraits hanging on the wall. Directly facing the nude model, lit by a chandelier, stands Sir Joshua Reynolds, president of the Academy and author of the *Discourses on Art*, which he addressed as lectures to the 'Gentlemen' of the Royal Academy between 1769 and 1790. But, according to the critic Naomi Schor, 'Reynolds' does not just name a historical person; it is also "the proper name for the idealist aesthetics he promotes" (Schor, 1987: 17). The classical busts and figures strewn around Zoffany's life class allude to this aesthetic. Schor concludes that Reynolds' classical discourse, in which genius consists of the ability to comprehend a unity – what Reynolds enthusiastically called 'A WHOLE' – and in which the feminine is associated with the detail, which endangers masculine wholeness, cannot be separated from the discourse of misogyny (Schor, 1987: 5).

Idealist approaches to art are hardly limited to eighteenth-century classicism; they have remained alive for centuries in the widespread notion that the work of art is a complete, autonomous entity that elevates viewers above the contingencies of material life. Zoffany's *Academicians*, then, is not just a period piece that documents women's

historical exclusion from art education. It also records the transformation of the female figure from artist to image, from viewing subject to visual object, to what feminists two hundred years later theorized as a signifier of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1989: 14-26). That is, it documents the representational economy that Freud called fetishism, a perversion originating in the phallocentric attempt to triumph over the female body and its supposed threat to wholeness. Zoffany unwittingly shows us that the aesthetic institution is a masculinist battleground – an authoritarian rather than democratically agonistic realm – in a somewhat different sense than Woolf had in mind.

So far I have argued that Woolf's feminist challenge to cultural institutions is not gender-exclusive. Just as women can identify with masculine positions, men, who historically have occupied actual positions of power, can dis-identify with them. That is, there can be a non-phallic masculinity. Still, it is interesting to note that when, in the 1970s and 80s, a group of mostly female artists, including Louise Lawler, entered art institutions in order to explore them as, precisely, battlegrounds, they did so differently than the first wave of institution-critical artists.[3] For whereas Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher had drawn attention to the presence of economic and political power in the seemingly pure and neutral space of the museum and to the way the museum embodies dominant ideology and so exercises discursive power, and whereas works like Broodthaer's *Décor: A Conquest* (1975) and Haacke's *MoMA Poll* (1970) had, in different ways, specifically connected museums to war, the second wave – such diverse artists as Lawler, Victor Burgin, Andrea Fraser, Judith Barry, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Fred Wilson, and Mary Kelly, among others – at once extended and questioned the critique. Art historians have proposed a number of ways to distinguish between the work of the so-called first 'generation' of institutional critics and the second, postmodern generation, Lawler in particular: the second questions the authority of its own voice rather than simply challenging the authoritarian voice of museums, corporations, and governments (Foster, et al., 2004: 624); Lawler locates institutional power in a "systematized set of presentational procedures, whereas Asher, Buren, Haacke, and Broodthears situated power in a centralized building or elite" (Fraser, 1985: 123); Lawler explores not only the contextual production of meaning but, in deconstructive fashion, the

boundlessness of context (Linker, 1986: 99). Still another difference is that, unlike the first generation, feminist postmodernists were influenced by psychoanalysis and recognized to varying degrees the political importance of articulating relationships between psychical and social realms. Following in Woolf's footsteps, they approached institutions of aesthetic display not only as producers of bourgeois ideology but as spaces where dangerous, masculinist fantasies are solidified.

Lawler may not have been an exponent of psychoanalytic feminism, but many of her photographs lead us into the heart of such 'solid wishes'. And they do so with what Birgit Pelzer aptly calls a 'dose of derision' (Pelzer, 2004: 32). Literary theorist Kenneth Gross uses the term 'solid wishes' in *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, a book about relationships between figural statues and fantasy, about statues *as* fantasies. "Works of sculpture", writes Gross, are "solid wishes, or vehicles of a wish for things that *are* solid" (Gross, 1992: 198). It seems fitting, then, that some of the works in which Lawler most astutely exposes the art institution's fantasy life are a group of photographs, taken in the late 1970s and early 80s, that depict figural sculpture, and, in particular, classical and neoclassical statues, in museum settings. *Statue before Painting, 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa' by Canova* (1982) is exemplary. It served as the introductory image in Lawler's first published portfolio of the photographs she calls 'arrangements of pictures'. The black-and-white portfolio, itself an arrangement of pictures, appeared in the Fall 1983 issue of the journal *October*. Lawler's 'arrangements' depict art objects in their contexts of display, calling attention to the presentational apparatus of specific arts institutions and, at the same time, to 'art as institution', a phrase coined by Peter Bürger to refer to a more dispersed aesthetic apparatus: "The concept 'art as an institution'… refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works" (Bürger, 1984: 22). In such works as *Statue before Painting*, Lawler puts existing museological arrangements of artworks on display and makes visible the elements of the presentational apparatus, which, though authoritative, generally lie on the margins of the museum-goer's visual and cognitive field – architecture, labels, vitrines, pedestals, guards, installation shots, catalogues, security systems, and so on. Lawler appropriates the museum's arrangements and re-arranges them in a manner that recalls Freud's approach to dream interpretation,

an approach that re-arranges the space of the dream, bringing its peripheral elements, its details, into focus (and *vice versa*) in order to analyze the dream-work that distorts the wish at the dream's core. While it is tempting to see Lawler's arrangements, with their fragmented objects, exaggerated details, and enigmatic juxtapositions, as dream scenarios, they might more accurately be regarded as analyses of the museum's 'dreams', of the desire embodied in its arrangements.

Lawler shot *Statue before Painting, 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa', by Canova* in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, from the vantage point of the museum's Great Hall Balcony, where Antonio Canova's marble statue was then located. The statue occupied a position on the neoclassical museum building's processional axis, which begins at the steps leading to the main entrance, continues through the Great Hall and central staircase – both are overlooked by the balcony – and culminates at the arched entrance to the galleries of European paintings. *Perseus* stood across from the entrance, beneath an echoing arch on the balcony. The museum's official guidebook describes it as a second, more refined version of a sculpture that, when first executed and exhibited in Canova's studio between 1770 and 1800, "was acclaimed as the last word in the continuing purification of the Neoclassical style" (Howard, 1994: 265). Like 'Reynolds', 'Canova', too, is a proper name for idealist aesthetics, whose patriarchal relations of sexual difference, observed in Zoffany's *Life Class*, are concretized in the roughly contemporaneous *Perseus*. Seen in Lawler's photograph from a low, oblique angle and radically cropped so that it is cut by the upper edge of the photograph, Canova's statue, its phallus, and its pedestal – architectural equivalent of the phallus – occupy the forefront of the viewer's vision. At the same time, pushed to the right edge of the image, the statue is dislodged from its central position, disrupting the Museum's symmetrical arrangement. Behind Perseus, beyond the balcony's balustrade, the staircase, flanked by colonnades of Corinthian columns, rises from the Great Hall below and leads to the double arches through which visitors, after ascending the stairs, enter the collection of paintings. Framed by the arches hangs Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's *The Triumph of Marius* (1729), the opening exhibit in the anteroom to the Museum's history of Western painting. Its upper portion is sliced by the lower edge of the sign inscribed with the word 'paintings', a mutilation that corresponds to that of the Perseus statue, which Lawler brings into visual alignment with the Tiepolo. In a second correspondence, the

colossal painting dwarfs its spectators, who look up at it in an attitude that rhymes with our own angle of vision of statue and phallus in Lawler's photograph. Lawler accentuates this point of view, placing her viewers in a position that mimics not only that of the depicted viewers of Tiepolo but that of a small child catching sight of its parents' genitals. She thus suggests, perhaps unwittingly, that the psychic life of the museum bears a relation to infantile fantasies. The juxtaposition of the spectators' stance in front of the Tiepolo and Lawler's upward glance at Perseus literalizes both the deference with which art as institution treats works of art and the veneration with which classical antiquity regarded the phallus, defined as the figurative representation of the male organ. Drawing attention to the way the museum's arrangement includes a prescribed position for viewers, one that enforces a certain mode of spectatorship, Lawler simultaneously, as we shall see, makes Perseus the butt of derision and consequently re-positions her audience, inviting them to defy deference.

First, however, note one more similarity between the Tiepolo and the Canova, this one on the level of thematic content: each depicts a violent conquest in which a male protagonist establishes his authority by mastering difference – racial and sexual, respectively. Each glorifies war. In the Museum's words, *The Triumph of Marius* "shows the Roman general Gaius Marius in the victor's chariot while the conquered African king Jugurtha walks before him, bound in chains… The Latin inscription on the cartouche at the top translates, 'The Roman people behold Jugurtha laden with chains'" (Howard, 1994: 186). For his part, Canova portrays the classical hero Perseus holding aloft the head of Medusa, which he has just severed. Medusa, of course, is the female monster of classical mythology, who had snakes instead of hair and whose look turned men to stone.

At the time, Medusa's head had considerable currency among psychoanalytic feminists working in the visual arts, largely because in 1922 Freud had written a short essay about it and because in 1973, in an equally short text, 'You Don't Know What Is Happening, Do You Mr. Jones?', precursor to her famous 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey had used Freud's interpretation as the basis of a theory of phallocentric investments in looking at images (Freud, 1968; and Mulvey, 1989: 6-13 and 14-26). Additionally, Medusa had become a symbol of feminist subversion of phallocentric mastery in such writing as Hélène Cixous's 'The Laugh of the Medusa' of 1975 (Cixous, 1981:

245-64). Freud, as is well known, analyzed Medusa's head as a fetish: an object – visual, in this case – of masculine fixation that originates in fear of the female body, which is (mis)perceived as castrated, as missing the penis and, more importantly, the phallus, signifier of the presence that makes the subject whole. For Freud, Medusa's horrifying, decapitated head, surrounded by hair, symbolizes the female genitals and therefore the horror of castration. At the same time, it serves as a 'token of triumph' over castration anxiety, an object that disavows and conquers the threat of sexual difference. Visually, it contains multiple penis replacements in the form of Medusa's snake-hair, and on the narrative level, it turns men to stone, thus stiffening them and reassuring them of the presence of the penis. Mulvey argued that just as Medusa's head is an image not of a woman but, rather, of the threatened masculine subject restored to wholeness, so in a culture ordered by phallocentric categorizations of human beings, in which the feminine is equated with absence and loss, images of women have served, in various ways, as self-images of men, or, more importantly, of the narcissistic masculine ego. The feminist discourse about fetishism was concerned with the nature of masculine subjectivity, especially as it is reinforced by vision.

When *October* published Lawler's 'Arrangement of Pictures', it mis-captioned *Statue before Painting*, calling it *Statue before a Painting*. The editorial 'correction' – the insertion of the indefinite article *a* – stemmed from a failure to get the title's joke, to understand that it is a joke. For the real title mimics the phrase *ladies before gentlemen*, which is part of and here stands for an idealizing patriarchal discourse that supposedly places women on pedestals. In conjunction with the photograph, the title links patriarchal ideals and idealist aesthetics, which the neoclassical statue represents, suggesting that there is an alignment of sexual and aesthetic hierarchies in the museum. The image reverses the order of genders in the original phrase, for here it is a male statue – a phallic figure – that stands before a painting and occupies a pedestal. But the reversal only reveals the true gender relations behind idealizing arrangements, showing that in the patriarchal visual field "the true exhibit is always the phallus", as Mulvey puts it (Mulvey, 1989: 13).

To an extent, Lawler retrieves the artistic practice, prevalent among certain sculptors in the mid-1950s to late 60s, of what Mignon Nixon, in her superb study of Louise Bourgeois, calls 'posing the phallus'. This practice, Nixon (2005: 66, 236) argues, targeted the phallus with humor, which has the political effect of undermining it as a patriarchal symbol,

and inverts the seriousness of fetishism.[4] Yet Lawler's work differs from that of the earlier artists since, instead of sculpting a phallus, she uses her customary techniques of appropriation and montage – of "making meaning by juxtaposition and alignment" (Lawler, 2000) – to pose a found phallus, one of the many 'readymade' phalluses that proliferate in art museums, like snakes on Medusa's head. Posing the phallus in the context of an institution-critical work, in which Perseus takes up a position as guardian of the Museum's painting collection, *Statue before Painting* exhibits the role played by art as institution in reproducing sexual norms and maintaining the patriarchal overvaluation of the phallus.[5] For one thing, the photograph comments on the historical exclusion of female artists from the museum and, for another, it alludes to the male-dominated revival of traditional painting that was legitimated by art institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. But Lawler's photograph plays a bigger joke on the Metropolitan. It hints that what underlies, what precedes or comes before the museum's aesthetic arrangements is the desire solidified in both the form and subject matter of Canova's statue of Perseus. The idealized, neoclassical sculpture, substitute for an ideal body, materializes the phallocentric fantasy of the self, a self that in its dream of autonomy disavows its constitutive exclusion of and relation to others. In fact, Jacques Lacan, writing about the mirror stage as the matrix of narcissistic ego-formation, described the mirror image – external reflection of an idealized self – as "the *statue* in which man projects himself" (Lacan, 1977: 1-7). And the iconography of Perseus and Medusa foregrounds, as does the story told in Tiepolo's painting, the subordination and conquest of otherness – the warlike disposition – necessary to maintain the narcissistic fiction. The phallic statue metonymically alludes to the triumphalist subject positioned by the museum's idealist aesthetic.

Statue before Painting deprives Perseus of his token of triumph; Medusa's head is pushed outside the frame, Perseus is decapitated, and it would seem that Medusa, herself a kind of sculptor, has turned him to stone. Of course, this also fulfills his wish, soothing as well as testifying to his castration anxiety. Still, the most striking feature of the photograph is its attack on the integrity of the male body. The photographic cut challenges the sculpture's closure, exposing it to its outside. According to Christian Metz, the cut, which produces "the off-frame effect in photography", is a figure of castration because "it marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has

been diverted forever" (Metz, 1999: 217). Lawler's cut directs the diverted look to three objects that remain in the frame and that, as fetishes, represent attempts to establish integrity and disavow vulnerability – pedestal, phallus, and museum label, an element that visually echoes the phallus and no doubt bears the artist's proper name, the 'Name-of-the-Father', Lacan's name for the patriarchal order of sexual difference.[6] Precisely by giving prominence to these elements, Lawler takes away their authority,[7] as she does that of the grand staircase, itself an elevating structure that symbolically lifts visitors, just as the pedestal lifts the work of art, above the contingencies of everyday social life, encouraging them to take up the self-regarding position that Georges Bataille described in his definition of the museum as, precisely, a mirror:

> It is not just that the museums of the world as a whole today represent a colossal accumulation of riches but, more important, that all those who visit these museums represent without a doubt the most grandiose spectacle of a humanity liberated from material concerns and devoted to contemplation. We need to recognize that the galleries and the objects of art form only the container, the content of which is constituted by the visitors….The museum is the colossal mirror in which man finally contemplates himself in every respect, finds himself literally admirable, and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all the art magazines. (Bataille, 1971: 239)

Statue before Painting reveals and refuses the museum's positioning of the spectator, and it does so with supreme economy. Like a really good tendentious joke that, according to Freud, allows the teller and the recipient or, in our case, artist and viewer, to enjoy the pleasure of being impolite to "the great, the dignified and the mighty" (Freud, 1960: 125). Indeed, Lawler calls one of her later arrangements of pictures, really an arrangement of statues, *The Rude Museum* (1987). 'Rude' refers to the photograph's subject matter – a museum devoted to the work of nineteenth-century French sculptor François Rude – but it can also be read as a pun that alludes to the barbaric fantasies fostered in art institutions and, more, to the acts of impropriety with which Lawler herself, in this and other photographs, re-arranges museums and, as I have argued, exposes their fantasies. That is, it alludes to Lawler's own rude museums.

The actual Rude Museum, located in the transept of St. Etienne church in Dijon, consists of casts of works by Rude, a great patriot and admirer of the antique, though given in his sculpture to romantic gestures. Dominating the upper portion of Lawler's photograph is a plaster cast of Rude's most famous work, the high stone relief on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, *Departure of the Volunteers in 1792*, popularly known as *La Marseillaise* (1833-36). Near the center of the relief, which is severed by the frame of Lawler's picture so that the enormous figure of an especially militaristic Liberty hovering above cannot be seen, is a classically inspired male nude marching off to war. Like Canova's *Perseus,* Rude's soldier is beheaded by Lawler's cropping of the photograph, a cut that foreshadows the fate of later victims of the French Revolution. In the foreground, its foreshortened backside turned to the viewer, crouches a large hippopotamus sculpted by François Pompon (1855-1933). Stretching up its head and opening its mouth, it gawks at the hero's exposed phallus. The hippo could be regarded as yet another target of Lawler's humor, but I prefer to think of it as her ally, a *repoussoir* element that not only pushes back the principle scene but functions, by virtue of its comical deference (and open jaws), as a formidable threat to the phallic figure – as a rude viewer in the Rude Museum, like Lawler and those willing to listen to her tendentious joke.

For derisive impropriety, also made possible with the help of wild animals, nothing surpasses *Birdcalls* (1972/1981), an audiotape on which Lawler squeals, squawks, chirps, twitters, croaks, squeaks, and occasionally warbles the names – primarily the surnames – of twenty-eight contemporary male artists, from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner.[8] Recorded by Terry Wilson, the tape sounds as though different species of birds are calling out to one another in some natural setting, say, a forest or garden. In 1984, Andrea Miller-Keller, a curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum, one venue where the work has been played, nicknamed it *Patriarchal Roll Call*.[9]

When Lawler made the tape she was unaware of the precise difference between the two types of sound signals made by birds: calls and songs. For the title, she selected 'calls' because she thought that 'song' connoted pleasure for the bird whereas 'call' seemed more strident.[10] Her choice turned out to be highly accurate, in keeping with the intention and execution of the work, since it is typically male birds that burst into songs, which are complex patterns of notes used to

attract mates or establish territory. Calls, by contrast, consist of one or more short, repeated notes that convey messages about specific situations. If, for instance, a predator enters the immediate environment, birds give distress, alarm, and rally calls to signal the presence of a threat and to coordinate group activity against it (Kress, 1991: 80). Similarly, Lawler's *Birdcalls* originated in an act of self-defense. "In the early 1970s", she tells Douglas Crimp,

> my friend Martha Kite and I were helping some artists on one of the Hudson River pier projects. The women involved were doing tons of work, but the work being shown was only by male artists. Walking home at night in New York, one way to feel safe is to pretend you're crazy or at least be really loud. Martha and I called ourselves the 'due chanteusies', and we'd sing off-key and make other noises. Willoughby Sharp was the impresario of the project, so we'd make a 'Willoughby Willoughby' sound, trying to sound like birds. This developed into a series of bird calls based on artists' names. So, in fact, it was antagonistic. (Lawler, 2000)

The birdcalls started out as a humorous anti-predator response to the presence of two dangers in Kite and Lawler's habitat: physical attack in the streets of the city and discrimination in the alternative art world. Drawing a perhaps inadvertent parallel with real birds, Lawler describes the first birdcalls as 'instinctual' (Lawler, 2000). Interestingly, however, bird calls, including alarm calls, are not just involuntary, impulsive emotional displays but systems of communication that can be controlled (Marler and Evans, 1995: 138). Their frequency is affected by the presence or absence of companions, a phenomenon that ornithologists call the 'audience effect'. Some bird sounds are learned (Nottebohn, 2005: 146); some sentinel birds even give 'false alarms'. The birds' capacity for control and subversion accords with Lawler's tactics in *Birdcalls*, for while she situates herself in nature, which patriarchal systems of representation and sexual difference have traditionally opposed to culture and associated with the feminine, she treats it not as a place of confinement but, rather, of retreat and concealment, a refuge where she can escape Mulvey's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and what Michel Foucault called the 'trap' or 'cage' of visibility (Foucault, 1979: 200). Occupying the place prescribed for women (and in this regard it should be noted that *bird* is slang for a young woman), but only in jest – literally *playing* nature – she appropriates it as a base from which to make forays, using sound as ammunition, into the territory of culture and to

introduce tension into its hierarchical, gendered dichotomies, destroying their seeming naturalness. Heard but not seen, she challenges the proper name, the narcissistic ego, the Name-of-the-Father, and therefore the art world's relations of sexual difference, commenting on the fact that at the time she made *Birdcalls* "artists with name recognition were predominantly male" (Lawler, 2000).

Lawler produced the first publicly presented tape of *Birdcalls* in 1981, when, as Crimp has pointed out, the upcoming *Documenta 7* (1982) was an object of much art-world discussion (Crimp, 1993: 238). Rudi Fuchs, the international exhibition's director, planned to reaffirm the phallocentric, aestheticist notion of the work of art as a complete totality transcending its conditions of existence, and he therefore gave pride of place to neo-expressionism, a male-dominated trend of the 1970s and 1980s, which to a considerable extent represented a regression to aestheticism.[11] In preparatory versions of *Birdcalls*, Lawler had included only minimalist, post-minimalist, conceptual, and pop artists. Now, she added neo-expressionist painters Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Anselm Kiefer, and Julian Schnabel, targeting the new upsurge in masculine name-recognition with feminist name-calling.

Birdcalls is an anomaly in Lawler's production, her only sound piece, unless one counts the two versions of *A Movie Will Be Shown Without the Picture* (1979 and 1983). Yet its derisive tactics are quintessential Lawler. When she plays *Birdcalls* during presentations of her work, Lawler simultaneously projects an arrangement of slides. Some bear the names of the artists who are being called. These are interspersed with slides of both her own and the male artists' works. Following the title slide, the first, introductory image is always *Statue before Painting, 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa', by Canova*, and this arrangement indicates that there is a commonality between tape and photograph. Both, for example, use mimicry. In 1982, Lawler wanted to produce a record of *Birdcalls* and planned to decorate the jacket with a photograph of a parrot – that excellent mimic – looking suspiciously over its shoulder and set against a brilliant red background.[12] The record was never made, but, subsequently, Lawler used the parrot photograph in other contexts, titling it *Portrait* (1982). Given its initial connection to *Birdcalls*, it might be regarded as a self-portrait, in camouflage. Except that Lawler's mimicry is far from mechanical. It is, rather, one of the skills she has honed to warn audiences away from the danger of 'a position of passive

agreement'[13] with the art institution's grandiose fantasies, whose war-like effects, as Virginia Woolf knew, are no laughing matter.[14]

Notes

* First published in Louise Lawler, *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (looking back)*, Wexner Center for the Arts and MIT Press, 2006.

1. As Silvia Kolbowski asks about the rejection of psychoanalysis in current criticism: "Is psychoanalysis too feminine? i.e. too 'weak' to serve political analysis?" (2005: 18).
2. Zoffany's painting is alternatively titled *Academicians of the Royal Academy*.
3. It could also be argued that Lawler entered the artistic profession differently insofar as she has been reticent "about taking on the conventional role of the artist". See Lawler (2000).
4. Nixon's thesis differs from mine insofar as, using Melanie Klein, she argues that Bourgeois, Jasper Johns, Yayoi Kusama and Eva Hesse posed the phallus as, specifically, a part-object – a literal body part.
5. Nixon (2005: 71) suggests that Bourgeois did something similar when, in 1982, she posed with her sculpture *Fillette* (1968) for a portrait produced by Robert Mapplethorpe for her retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.
6. To the list of fetishes that Lawler highlights, we could add Perseus's feet in the winged sandals that Athena and Hermes lent him to aid in the conquest of Medusa. Recall that Freud speculated that the foot fetish originates in the fact that the woman's feet are the last thing the child sees before he catches sight of her genitals. The foot fetish represents the male subject's denial of the traumatic sight.
7. Lawler (2000) has used the phrase 'Prominence given, authority taken', which is the title of an important interview she did with Douglas Crimp. The phrase can be read as a description of the way the museum positions the artists, or, conversely, of Lawler's resistance to that positioning.
8. The twenty-artists are Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Richard Artschwager, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren, Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Gilbert & George, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke, Neil Jenney, Donald Judd, Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Richard Long, Gordon Matta-Clark, Mario Merz, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, Julian Schnabel, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, and Lawrence Weiner.
9. This information comes from an email from the artist, 22 April 2005.
10. From a conversation with Lawler, 26 February 2005.

11. Lawler was not invited to participate in *Documenta 7*, but Jenny Holzer and the alternative gallery Fashion Moda asked her to contribute to their collaborative work: a trailer stationed at the entrance to the show, which would sell objects and souvenirs. For an account of the stationary that Lawler ended up selling at Fashion Moda's installation, see Crimp (1993).
12. Lawler wanted to sell the record at Jenny Holzer and Fashion Moda's trailer, which was installed at the entrance to Documenta 7.
13. From an artist's brochure distributed at 'Projects: Louise Lawler', *Enough*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, September 19-November 10, 1987.
14. A recent photographic work by Lawler repeats the warning, which has become especially urgent at a time when the Bush administration has banned media images of coffins returning from the Iraq War and has treated certain, particularly Arab, deaths as un-grievable. Lawler's image, depicting the detached wings of a classical statue of Nike, goddess of victory, is titled *Grieving Mothers*.

9

Toward a Critical Art Theory

Gene Ray

Critical theory rejects the given world and looks beyond it. In reflection on art, too, we need to distinguish between uncritical, or affirmative, theory and a *critical* theory that rejects the *given art* and looks beyond it. Critical *art* theory cannot limit itself to the reception and interpretation of art, as that now exists under capitalism. Because it will recognize that art as it is currently institutionalized and practiced – business as usual in the current 'art world' – is in the deepest and most unavoidable sense 'art under capitalism', art under the domination of capitalism, critical art theory will rather be oriented toward a clear break or rupture with the art that capitalism has brought to dominance.

Critical art theory's first task is to understand how the given art supports the given order. It must expose and analyze art's actual social functions under capitalism. What is it *doing*, this whole sphere of activity called art? Any critical theory of art must begin by grasping that the activity of art in its current forms is contradictory. The 'art world' is the site of an enormous mobilization of creativity and inventiveness, channelled into the production, reception, and circulation of artworks. The art institutions practice various kinds of direction over this production as a whole, but this direction is not usually *directly* coercive. Certainly the art market exerts pressures of selection that no artist can ignore, if she or he hopes to make a career. But individual artists are *relatively* free to make the art they choose, according to their own conceptions. It may not sell or make them famous, but they are free to do their thing. Art, then, has not relinquished its historical claim to

autonomy within capitalist society, and today the operations of this relative autonomy remain empirically observable.

On the other hand, a critical theorist is bound to see that art as whole is a stabilizing factor in social life. The existence of an art seemingly produced freely and in great abundance is a credit to the given order. As a luxurious surplus, art remains a jewel in power's crown, and the richer, more splendid and exuberant art is, the more it affirms the social status quo. The material reality of capitalist society may be a war of all against all, but in art the utopian impulses that are blocked from actualization in everyday life find an orderly social outlet. The art institutions organize a great variety of activities and agents into a complex systemic unity; the capitalist art system functions as a sub-system of the capitalist world system. Without doubt, some of these activities and artistic products are openly critical and politically committed. But taken *as a whole*, the art system is affirmative (Marcuse, 1968), in the sense that it converts the totality of art works and artistic practices – the sum of what flows through these circuits of production and reception – into 'symbolic legitimation' (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's apt expression for it) of class society (Bourdieu, 1993: 128). It does so by *simultaneously* encouraging art's autonomous impulses and politically neutralizing what those impulses produce. Art *simulates* experiences of freedom, reconciliation, joy, solidarity and uninhibited communication and expression that are blocked in class society. Art is a form of compensation for the injustices, repressions and self-repressions, and impoverishments of experience that characterize everyday life under capitalist modernity. *As compensation*, art captures and renders harmless rebellious energies and dissipates pressures for change. In this way art is an *ideological support* for the social status quo and contributes to the reproduction of class society.

Frankfurt Modernism

The Frankfurt theorists pioneered and elaborated this dialectical understanding of art. Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno – working in close relation to others, including Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and Siegfried Kracauer, and certainly stimulated by the different Marxist approaches of Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács – have shown us how art under capitalism can, at the very same time, be both relatively autonomous and instrumentalized into a support for existing society. Every work of art, in Adorno's famous formulation, is

both autonomous and *fait social* (Adorno, 1997: 5). Every artwork is autonomous insofar as it asserts itself as an end-in-itself and pursues the logic of its own development without regard to the dominant logic of society; but every work is also a 'social fact' in that it is a cipher that manifests and confirms the reality of society, understood as the total nexus of social relations and processes. In the autonomous aspect of art's 'double character', the Frankfurt theorists saw an equivalent to the intransigence of critical theory. Free autonomous creation is a form of that reach for an un-alienated humanity described luminously by the young Karl Marx. As such, it always contains a force of resistance to the powers that be, albeit a very fragile one.

Their attempts to rescue and protect this autonomous aspect led the Frankfurt theorists to an absolute investment in the forms of artistic modernism. For them, and above all for Adorno, the modernist artwork or opus was a sensuous manifestation of truth as a social process straining toward human emancipation. The modernist work – and to be sure, what is meant here are the masterworks, the zenith of advanced formal experimentation – is an "enactment of antagonisms", an unreconciled synthesis of "un-unifiable, non-identical elements that grind away at each other" (Adorno, 1997: 176). A force-field of elements that are both artistic and social, the artwork indirectly or even unconsciously reproduces the conflicts, blockages and revolutionary aspirations of alienated everyday life. They saw this practice of autonomy threatened from two directions. First, from the increasing encroachments of capitalist rationality into the sphere of culture – processes to which Horkheimer and Adorno famously gave the name 'culture industry' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002). Second, from political instrumentalization by the Communist Parties and other established powers claiming to be anti-capitalist.

It was in response to his perceptions of this second threat that Adorno issued his notorious condemnation of politicized art (Adorno, 1992). Ostensibly responding to Jean-Paul Sartre's 1948 call for a *littérature engagée*, Adorno's position in fact had already been formed by the interwar context: the liquidation of the artistic avant-gardes in the USSR under Stalin and the Comintern's adoption of socialist realism as the official and only acceptable form of anti-capitalist art. Art that subordinates itself to the direction of a Party was for Adorno a betrayal of art's force of resistance. He took the position that art cannot instrumentalize itself on the basis of political commitments without

undermining the autonomy on which it depends and thereby undoing itself as art. Autonomous (modernist) art is political, but only indirectly and only by restricting itself to the practice of its proper autonomy. In short, art must bear its contradiction and not attempt to overcome it. As the culture industry expanded and consolidated its hold over everyday consciousness and, indeed, as struggles of national liberation and urban uprisings politicized campuses over the course of the 1960s, Adorno responded by hardening his position.

There can be little doubt that the given artistic autonomy is threatened by the two tendencies Adorno pointed to. But there is little doubt either that his conception of the problem forecloses its possible solution. Culture industry and official socialist realism were not the only alternatives to the production of autonomist artworks. But Adorno in effect couldn't see these other alternatives because he had no category for them. The most convincing of these alternatives constituted itself by terminating its ties of dependency on the art institutions, abandoning the production of traditional art objects, and relocating its practices to the streets and public spaces. The formation of the Situationist International (SI) in 1957 was an announcement that this alternative had reached a basic theoretical and practical coherence. Adorno remained blind to it as he continued to polish the *Aesthetic Theory* until his death in 1969. So did his heir, Peter Bürger, who would publish *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1974.

An English translation of Bürger's book appeared in 1984. Since then, it has functioned mainly as a theoretical support for modernist positions within Anglophone (i.e., globalized) art and cultural discourse. It still tends to be cited by those happy to counter-sign any possible death certificate of the avant-gardes, and by those dismissive of attempts to develop practices in opposition to dominant institutions. In the present context, as the essays in the first section of this volume make clear, we would only need to read Andrea Fraser (2005) to see how Bürger is still brought in as an authority purportedly demonstrating the futility, infantilism and bad faith of all practices aimed directly against or seeking radically to break with established institutional power. For Fraser, Bürger, together with Pierre Bourdieu, becomes a resource for the justification of an ostensibly more mature and effective position within the institutions. However, even when it is called 'criticality', resignation remains resignation. It is not my purpose here to engage with specific readings of Bürger or even to represent fairly the

development of Bürger's own positions since 1974. What follows is a critique of the arguments advanced in *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* since it is this text, in its English edition, that is operative today in support of a resigned and melancholic modernism. And in this regard, it is crucial to see Adorno standing behind Bürger. While in other respects, Adorno remains a key critical thinker for me, his rigid investments in artistic modernism are a political problem and, as such, are to be critically resisted.

Toward a Different Autonomy

With both Adorno and Bürger, the problem can be traced to a theoretically unjustified overinvestment in the work-form of modernist art. Bürger basically rewrites the history of the artistic avant-gardes as the development of the work-as-force-field so dear to Adorno. For Adorno, the avant-garde *is* modernist art, identity pure and simple. Bürger makes an important advance beyond this identification by grasping that the 'historical' avant-gardes had repudiated artistic autonomy in their efforts to re-link art and life – and that their specificity is to be located in this repudiation. But although Bürger works hard to differentiate his analysis from Adorno's, he returns to the fold, so to speak, by judging this avant-garde attack on the institution of autonomous art to be failure, a 'false supersession' (*falsche Aufhebung*) of art into life.

> The avant-garde intended the supersession (*Aufhebung*) of autonomous art by leading art over into a practice of life (*Lebenspraxis*). This has not taken place and presumably cannot take place within bourgeois society unless it be in the form of a false supersession (*falschen Aufhebung*) of autonomous art. (Bürger, 1984: 53-4, trans. modified)

The only successful result was an unintended one: after the historical avant-gardes, according to Bürger, a transformation takes place in the work-form of art. The organic, harmonized work of traditional art gives way to the (non-organic, allegorical) work-form in which disarticulated elements are held together in a fragmentary unity that refuses the semblance of reconciliation:

> Paradoxically, the avant-gardiste intention to destroy art as an institution is thus realized in the work of art itself. The intention to revolutionize

> life by returning art to its praxis turns into a revolutionizing of art. (Bürger, 1984: 72)

In other words, art cannot repudiate its autonomy, but it can go on endlessly repudiating its own traditions, so long as it does so in the form of modernist works. This pronouncement of failure and 'false supersession' is far too hasty. I will return to this point later. Here I want to question this investment in the institutionalized autonomy of art by contrasting it to the autonomy constituted through a conscious break with institutionalized art.

The Situationist alternative to art under capitalism was a more advanced and theoretically conscious breakout than the often partial and hesitant revolts of the early avant-gardes. Founded in 1957 but continuing in many respects the project of the Lettrist International (LI) from which many of its founding members came, the SI was a Paris-based network of mostly-European national 'sections' active until its self-dissolution in 1972. Formally combining the LI group around core members Guy Debord, Michèle Bernstein and Gil Wolman and the Imaginist Bauhaus around Asger Jorn, Constant and Giuseppe Pino-Gallizio, and soon assimilating the Munich-based Spur group around Hans-Peter Zimmer, Heimrad Prem and Dieter Kunzelmann, the SI undertook a radical collective critique of post-war commodity capitalism and the art system flourishing around a restored modernism. Drawing the practical conclusions, they transformed the SI within four years from a grouping of artists into a revolutionary organization of cultural guerrillas. The SI's critical process of progressive detachment from the art institutions culminated in an internal prohibition on the pursuit of an art career by any of its members. Situationist practice was radically politicized, but is not reducible to a simple or total instrumentalization. We can agree with Adorno that artists who paint what the Party says to paint have given up their autonomy; as apologists for the Central Committee's monopoly on autonomy, they are no more than instruments for producing compromised works. But the SI was a group founded on the principle of autonomy – an autonomy not restricted as privilege or specialization, but one that is radicalized through a revolutionary process openly aiming to extend autonomy to all. The SI did not recognize any Party or other absolute authority on questions pertaining to the aims and forms of revolutionary social struggle. Their autonomy was critically to study reality and the theories that would

explain it, draw their own conclusions and act accordingly. In its own group process, the SI accepted nothing less than a continuous demonstration of autonomy by its members, who were expected to contribute as full participants in a collective practice. This process didn't always unfold smoothly (what process does?). But the much-criticized exclusions carried out by the group by and large reflect the painful attainment of theoretical coherence and are hardly proof of a lack of autonomy. 'Instrumentalization' is the wrong category for a conscious and freely self-generating (i.e., autonomous) practice.

Moreover, the Situationists were even more hostile than Adorno to official Communist parties and would-be vanguards. Their experiments in collective autonomy were far removed – and openly critical of – the servility of party militants. Alienation can't be overcome, as they put it, "by means of alienated forms of struggle" (Debord, 1994: 89). Their critical processing of revolutionary theory and practice was plainly much deeper than Adorno's – and was lived, as it must be, as a real urgency. They carried out an autonomous appropriation of critical theory, developed in a close dialectic with their own radical cultural practices and innovations. As a result, true enough, they ceased to produce modernist artworks. But they never claimed to have gone on with modernism; they claimed rather to have surpassed this dominant conception of art (Debord, 1994: 129-47). My point is that Situationist practice – however you categorize or evaluate it – was certainly no less autonomous than the institutionalized production of modernist artworks favored by Adorno. If anything, it was far more autonomous and intransigently critical. In comparison to Situationist practice, which continues to function as a real factor of resistance and emancipation, Adorno's claims for Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett seem laughably inflated.

On the Supersession of Art

Situationist art theory, then, does not suffer from the categorical and conceptual impasses that led Frankfurt art theory to draw the wagons around the modernist artwork. For the Situationists, art oriented toward radical social change could no longer be about the production of objects for exhibition and passive spectatorship. Given the decomposition of contemporary culture – and in passing let's at least note that there is much overlap in the analyses of culture industry and the theory of spectacular society – attempts to maintain or rejuvenate modernism are

a losing and illusory enterprise. With regard to the content and meaning of early avant-garde practice, the critical art theory developed by the SI in the late 1950s and early 60s and concisely summarized by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967 is basically consistent with Bürger's later theorization. But the two theories diverge irreconcilably in their interpretation of the consequences.

The rise of capitalism – the tendency to reduce everything and everyone to commodity status and exchange value – was the material condition for the relative autonomy of culture; the bourgeois revolution was the political last act of a material process that had pulverized traditional bases of authority and released art from its old function of ritual unification. For the Situationists, as art became conscious of itself as a distinct sphere of activity in the new order, it logically began to press for the autonomy of its sphere. But self-consciousness also brought awareness of the impotence of this autonomy as a form of social *separation* and insights into its new functions in support of bourgeois power. The avant-gardes of the early twentieth century responded with a practical demand that separation be abolished and autonomy be generalized through revolution. This far Bürger is in agreement. But for him, the defeat of the revolutionary attempt to abolish capitalism makes the avant-garde breakout a failure that must be re-inscribed in the work-form of art, while for the Situationists this defeat is only one moment in a struggle that continues. For the SI, the logic of art – necessarily first *for* and then *against* autonomous separation – remains unchanged, and art can make its peace with separation only by deceiving itself. Resigned returns to institutionalized art and to the empty, repetitive formalist experiments of work-based modernism can only represent a process of decomposition: the "end of the history of culture" (Debord, 1994: 131).

In political terms, there are at this point just two irreconcilable options: either to be enlisted in culture's affirmative function – "to justify a society with no justification" (Debord, 1994: 138) – or to press forward with the revolutionary process. The institutions will organize the prolongation of art "as a dead thing for spectacular contemplation" (Debord, 1994: 131-2, trans. modified). The radical alternative is the supersession (*dépassement*; that is, *Aufhebung*) of art. The first aligns itself with the defense of class power; the second, with the radical critique of society. Surpassing art means removing it from institutional management and transforming it into a practice for expanding life here

and now, for overcoming passivity and separation, in short for 'revolutionizing everyday life'. There are of course possibilities for modest critical practices within the art institutions, but these can always be managed and kept within tolerable limits. Maximum pressure on the given develops from a refusal of the art system *as a whole*, openly linked to a refusal of the social totality. The history of the real avant-gardes, then, is not the history of artistic modernism, but the attainment of consciousness about the stakes and the need for this overcoming

The main defect of Bürger's theorization can be located in his historical judgment on the early avant-gardes, because this judgment becomes a categorical foreclosure or blindness. For Bürger, the conclusion that the early avant-gardes failed in their attempts to supersede art follows necessarily from the obvious fact that the institution of art continues. There can be no dialectical overcoming without the negating moment of an abolition:

> [I]t is a historical fact that the avant-garde movements did not put an end to the production of works of art, and that the social institution that is art proved resistant to the avant-gardiste attack. (Bürger, 1984: 56-7)

Art is not abolished; therefore, no supersession. This leads Bürger to declare that the early avant-gardes are now to be seen as 'historical'. Henceforth, attempts to repeat the project of overcoming art can only be *repetitions of failure*; such attempts by the 'neo-avant-garde', as Bürger now names it, only serve to consolidate the institutionalization of the historical avant-gardes *as art*:

> In a changed context, the resumption of avant-gardiste intentions with the means of avant-gardism can no longer even have the limited effectiveness the historical avant-gardes achieved.... To formulate more pointedly: the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-garde intentions. (Bürger, 1984: 58).

Marcel Duchamp's gesture of signing a urinal or bottle drier was a failed attack on the category of individual production, but repetitions of this gesture merely institutionalized the ready-made as a legitimate art object (Bürger, 1984: 52-7).

The problem here is that Bürger restricts his analysis to *artworks* and to gestures that conform to this category. That he comes close to perceiving that this may be a problem is hinted in those places where he

uses the term 'manifestation' (*Manifestation*) to refer to avant-garde practice:

> Instead of speaking of the avant-gardiste work (*Werk*), we will speak of avant-gardiste manifestation (*Manifestation*). A Dadaist manifestation does not have work character but is nonetheless an authentic manifestation of the artistic avant-garde. (Bürger, 1984: 50)

But soon it is clear that *all forms of practice* will in the end either be reduced to that category or else not recognized at all: "The efforts to supersede art become artistic manifestations (*Veranstaltungen*) that, independently of their producers' intentions, take on the character of works" (Bürger, 1984: 58). Bürger's limited examples show that what he has in mind by 'manifestation' are gestures that already fit the work-form, such as Duchamp's ready-mades or Surrealist automatic poems – or at most provocations performed before an audience at organized artistic events (*Veranstaltungen*).

Happenings and Situations

Bürger is aware of the 'happening' form developed by Allan Kaprow and his collaborators beginning in 1958. But he classes happenings as no more than a neo-avant-garde repetition of Dadaist manifestations, evidence that repeating historical provocations no longer has protest value. He concludes that art today

> can either resign itself to its autonomy status or organize events (*Veranstaltungen*) to break through that status; however, it cannot simply deny its autonomy status or suppose it has the possibility of direct effectiveness without at the same time betraying art's claim to truth (*Wahrheitsanspruch*). (Bürger, 1984: 57, translation modified)

Art's 'claim to truth', however, turns out to be a normative description of autonomy status itself. Following Adorno, Bürger accepts that it is only art's limited exemption from the instrumental reason dominating everyday life that enables it to recognize and articulate the truth – 'truth' here being understood not as a correspondence between reality and its representation but as an implicit critico-utopian evaluation *of reality*. Truth is not conformity to the given, but is rather the negative force of resistance generated by the mere existence of artworks that, obeying no logic but their own, refuse integration. Bürger's argument here merely

endorses Adorno's. What it really says is: art can't give up its autonomy status without ceasing to be art. And the implication is that if art does manage to directly produce political and social effects, it thereby ceases to be art and is no longer his – Bürger's – concern.

But Bürger cannot escape the problem in this way. He has already argued that the aim to produce direct effects (i.e., the transformation of art into a practice of life, a *Lebenspraxis*) is precisely what constitutes the avant-garde. So he cannot now give his theorization of the avant-garde permission to ignore the avant-gardes when they do attain their aim. He also attempts to elude the same problem with a variation on the argument. Pulp fiction – in other words, the non-autonomous products of the culture industry – are what you get when you aim at a supersession of art into life (Bürger, 1984: 54). By 1974, there were serious counterexamples for Bürger's argument; the SI even went so far as to spell everything out for him in its own books and theorizations. In this case the blindness is devastating, for the gap between contemporary avant-garde practice and the theory that purports to explain why it is no longer possible invalidates Bürger's work.

This would be the case only if the SI accomplished successful supersessions of art without collapsing into culture industry. The collapse hypothesis is easily dispensed with, since the SI did not indulge in commodity production. But putting Bürger's theory to the test at least helps us to see that any evaluation of Situationist supersessions must take into account the fact that the SI cut its ties to the art institutions and repudiated the work-form of modernist art. For the same cannot be said of Bürger's 'neo-avant-garde'. Bürger's examples – he briefly discusses Andy Warhol and reproduces images of works by Warhol and Daniel Spoerri (Bürger, 1984: 62, 58) – are artists who submit *artworks to the institutions for reception*. Even the case of Kaprow, who is not named but can be inferred from Bürger's use of the term 'happening', doesn't disturb this commitment to the institutions. Kaprow wanted to investigate or blur the borders between art and life, but he did so under the gaze, as it were, of the institutions, to which he remained dependent. It is in this sense that every happening does indeed, as Bürger claims, take on the character of a work. At most, the happening-form achieved an expansion of the dominant concept of art, but not its negation. Ditto, in this respect, for the case of Fluxus. The subsequent appearance of the new medium or genre of 'performance art' confirms the institutional acceptance (and neutralizing assimilation)

of this direction. (In my terms, the result of a successful capture or assimilation of a rebellious form of practice is another *expansion of the category* of institutionalized modernist art.)

The differences between the happening and the situation are decisive here. As an experimental event that never seriously put its autonomy status in question, the happening staged interactions or exchanges of roles between artist and audience – but in safe, more or less controlled conditions, and ultimately for institutional reception. Only when, as in the Living Theater in exile and also perhaps in Jean-Jacques Lebel's notorious 'Festivals of Free Expression' in the mid-1960s, happening-like events sacrificed the element of institutional reception (and its implicit appeal for institutional approval) did they become something more threatening to the institution of art. On the other hand, the staging of personal risk or even physical danger through the elimination of the conventions that put limits on audience participation, as in Yoko Ono's *Cut Pieces* of 1964-5 or Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974), are extremes of performance art that are indeed subject to the dialectic of repetition and the recuperation of protest pointed to by Bürger.

In contrast, a situation – a constructed moment of de-alienated life that activates the social question – does not depend on the dominant conception of art or its institutions to generate its meaning and effects. The Situationists themselves, who continued to criticize contemporary art in the pages of their journal, in 1963 published an incisive discussion of the happening-form and differentiated it from the practice of the SI:

> The happening is an isolated attempt to construct a situation *on the basis of poverty* (material poverty, poverty of human contact, poverty inherited from the artistic spectacle, poverty of the specific philosophy driven to 'ideologize' the reality of these moments). The situations that the SI has defined, on the other hand, can only be constructed on the basis of material and spiritual richness. Which is another way of saying that an outline for the construction of situations must be the game, the serious game, of the revolutionary avant-garde, and cannot exist for those who resign themselves on certain points to political passivity, metaphysical despair, or even the pure and experienced absence of artistic creativity. (Situationist International, 2002: 147)

Situations activate a revolutionary process, then, but do so by developing social and political efficacy within the found context of

material everyday life, rather than through a displacement of everyday elements and encounters into the context of institutionalized art. In this sense, situations are indeed 'direct' by Bürger's criteria. The so-called 'Strasbourg Scandal' of 1966 is an example of a successful situation that contributed directly to a process of radicalization culminating, in May and June of 1968, in a wildcat general strike of nine million workers throughout France. There moreover is little danger of mistaking or perversely misrecognizing this kind of event with an artwork or happening. The conclusion seems inescapable that the SI renewed – and not merely repeated to no effect – the avant-garde project of overcoming art by turning it into a revolutionary practice of life.

It follows that what Bürger has named the 'neo-avant-garde' in order to dismiss it is not avant-garde at all. Those who, like the SI, renewed the avant-garde project were categorically excluded from the analysis. When the repudiation of institutionalized art and the work-form are given their due weight as criteria, then it becomes clear that the avant-garde project of radicalizing artistic autonomy by generalizing it into a social principle is a logic inherent or latent in the capitalist art system. It will be valid to activate this logic – and to actualize it by developing it in the form of practices – just as long as the capitalist art system continues to be organized around an operative principle of relative autonomy. It will be valid, that is, for artistic agents to reconstitute the avant-garde project through a politicized break with the dominant institutionalized art. True, actualizations of the avant-garde logic cannot be mere repetitions. Each time, they must invent practical forms grounded in and appropriate to the contemporary social reality that is their context. But because this logic amounts to a radical and irreparable break with institutionalized art, there is little risk that such a protest will be reabsorbed through yet another expansion of the dominant concept of art. The SI showed that art could be surpassed in this way in the very period in which, according to Bürger, only impotent repetitions are possible.