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Revealing the Silent Message of the Museum:

The Legacies of Institutional Critique

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Abstract

Joining reflections examining the legacies of institutional critique, this thesis focuses on the transforming roles of its producers, consumers and targets. A theoretical thesis emerging from desk-based research, it uses Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory to examine agents in the cultural field. It argues that the public enactment of institutional critique contributed to the expansion of the roles of artist, visitor and the institutions themselves. Examples of the practice are provided, ranging from the contemporary artworks of Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser, acts by the Guerrilla Girls to internal, institutionally-produced critiques in the form of exhibitions and display methods. By examining the forms it takes, it maps the reception and transformation of the practice itself in the context of the changing museal landscape from the 1960's to today. Expanding from its original, largely *external* methods, contemporary institutional theory now *internalises* institutional critique. This thesis argues that by drawing the public's attention to the museum's framings (or 'silent messages'), they can critically - and more independently - consider the narratives they receive. In this sense, institutional critique is internalised once again with the potential for use by visitor-agents. In doing so – and by holding museums accountable to their ideologies - it offers a valuable tool for the benefit of agents within the museal field.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

> In its broadest sense, museology is concerned with the theoretical approach to any individual or collective human activity related to the preservation, interpretation and communication of our cultural and natural heritage, and with the social context in which a specific man/object relationship takes place. Although the field of museology is much broader than the study of the museum itself, its main focus remains the functions, the activities and the role in society of the museum as a repository of collective memory.
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The complexities of the museum give rise to critical issues which serve as the object of study in academia and the museum profession. Broadly speaking, those issues include the museum's "history and development; relation to society; the ethics of classification, exhibition, and exclusion; the representation of cultures; property and ownership; the poetics of display; material culture and historical documentation; tradition, innovation, and self-reflexivity in museum practice" (Carbonell, 2007, *backcover*). This thesis examines a practice concerned with these very issues: *institutional critique.*

Institutional critique is a term often used to refer to certain forms of art characterised by use of the institution as the subject of investigation. This thesis looks at the practice of institutional critique in its use as both an artistic and museum-professional methodology. Isabelle Graw asserts that "[t]he concept of Institutional Critique as applied to art is based on the assumption that art is able to *do* something." This thesis holds that the practice - in its various manifestations – produces effects on the field around it.

Firstly, the term 'institution' requires clarification in the context of this thesis. The art canon uses institutional critique as an umbrella term to describe artistic responses to anything from the art market (commercial galleries, private dealers, auction houses) to local or national governments, academia, sponsors, museums, galleries and artistic practice itself. Whilst recognising their inextricable symbiotic relationship to all of these entities, the institutional subjects referred to in this thesis are specifically museums and galleries, unless otherwise stated. This thesis also recognises the multifarious nature of such places, the predilection to pigeonhole them and the difficulties in discussing generalised institutional frameworks in relation to them. Not simply

repositories and/ or exhibition showcases for objects, museal institutions comprise a network of systems, agents, functions, events, histories, sites and values. It is these practices which are explored within both the field of museology and certain institutional critiques and which serve as the objects of this study.

The term *critique* is likewise broad. The artist Andrea Fraser proclaimed it 'vague', referring to its objectives as operating on a sliding scale, from more timid reflections and exposures on the one hand, to outright revolution on the other (Fraser, 2005a, p.411). Whilst earlier artists proposed overthrowing the institution in favour of utopian ideals, the works discussed here share an interest in the institutional site as home to social and cultural structures worthy of revision. Whilst canonical categorisations often refer to institutional critique as an art movement, this thesis – and I believe the works cited - approach it as a methodology[1], or in Michel Foucault's words, an 'instrument' (Foucault *in* Raunig, 2009b). In examining their use of this instrument, this thesis does not seek to reduce the many implications of these artistic works, but rather frame aspects of them in museological terms.

The thesis in context

It has been said that "… the discourse around institutional critique within art has remained strangely insular, not contextualising the critique within a larger cultural or even societal and political critique" (Lind, 2011, p.32). Discussions of artistic institutional critique are firmly situated within the art canon, which privileges the artist and artwork but fails to examine its institutional legacies. This thesis' examination of artistic institutional critique joins a growing interest in the subject within museological discourse. An emerging number of museal conferences and papers[2] address its implications where for some time, it was overlooked. It still stands to expand its limitations by investigating outside the small number of canonised artists, the agents it considers and by conducting more thorough and applied studies of the practice. The spheres of art and museology can benefit from an interdisciplinary approach in order to develop understanding via new perspectives. Much has been written about the use of institutions by

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[1] See also Fraser, 2005b and Sheikh, 2006.

[2] Those used in this thesis include: Enid Schildkrout's *Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists:* Into the Heart of Africa *and* The Other Museum (1991), Lisa Corrin's *Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves* (1994), Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson's *Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums* (1996), Maria Lind's *Learning from Art and Artists* (2000), S. Latimer's *Artistic Licence* (2001), Lyn Zelevansky's *From Inside the Museum: Some Thoughts on the Issue of Institutional Critique* (2006), Hillary Marie Cook's M.A thesis *Mining the Museum and after: Fred Wilson's institutional legacy* (2008), Fred Wilson's contribution to the *Margins for Change* conference at the V&A (2010), Stuart Burch's *A museum director and his go-betweens* (2011), Miranda Stearn's *Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators* (unpublished). Janet Marstine's *A Conversation with Fred Wilson on Museums and Social Justice* is due to be published in June 2012.

artists as sites and systems which influence their work. Perhaps the discussion can turn to the next stage of the artist-institution dialogue – institutional responses to those works and the effects on the individuals and bodies involved. Greater still is the gap between museological discourse and practice; its potential uses in practice could also be discussed and implemented.

Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory

This thesis will examine the role and effects of institutional critique by using an established theory as "a model for organizing knowledge from a delimitated field" (Berg, 2012, p.7). Pierre Bourdieu's early work concerned the critical and sociological study of museums before the prevalence of museum studies. He addresses "the relationship between cultural practices and broader social processes" (Johnson, 1993, p.1) and is thus useful for the study of museums. His Field theory helps to understand the institution, its networks and people as part of a *field of power*. As he wrote:

> "A field is a field of forces, within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field." (Bourdieu, 1995, p.30)

The cultural field is occupied by "individuals, groups or institutions" Bourdieu terms *agents* (Bourdieu, 1983, p.29). The agents are the stakeholders within the cultural field – museum professionals, visitors, artists, academics, politicians, museums and so on. He uses his theory to understand what happens in a given field through relationships between agents. Therefore it can be used as a framework to explain the relationship between institutional critique, the museum and its agents, in terms of *power*. He argues that systems of domination exist in nearly all areas of cultural practice and that power is often concealed and unquestioned (Johnson, 1993, p.2). Importantly, he notes that the field of forces is also a field of *struggle*, for "the power [of the agents] to impose the dominant vision of the field" (Bourdieu, 1995, p.36).

Bourdieu identifies *symbolic capital* and *cultural capital* as forms of power within the field. Symbolic capital can be understood a form of prestige and is attained through knowledge and recognition. Cultural capital is a form of knowledge giving the agents who possess it an appreciation of or the ability to understand cultural relations or objects. These forms of capital are, obviously, not natural or universal, but acquired. As agents possess them to greater or lesser degrees, it renders them unequal in the field (Johnson, 1993). The positions they take based on their capital place

them in a hierarchy – within the institution the hierarchies may be quite obvious – the Board and Director sit at the top with staff members underneath. Agents not in the employ of the museum, such as visitors, consultants, patrons, artists, critics, academics, bloggers, etc., are situated in their own positions depending on individual capital. It also goes without saying that agents occupy positions in a number of fields, for example: the museum professional is also the visitor, and (as will be discussed later) the artist performs as museum professional and so on. What is fundamental to these agents is their *self-servitude*. As Bourdieu noted: "they serve objectively only because, in all sincerity, they serve their own interests, specific, highly sublimated and euphemized interests." (Bourdieu, 1984 *cited in* Fraser, 1994, p.6). Crucially, this thesis echoes Bourdieu's argument that these positions are subject to change.

Bourdieu's notion of often unquestioned power, and the words *conserving* and *transforming* in the quote above are central to this thesis' examination and understanding of institutional critique and its agents. What happens within the field is determined by the agents' struggle to maintain or improve their positions of power, and "if one position alters, the position of all the others changes too" (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p.31). Bourdieu's theory has been described as narrow, as it doesn't acknowledge social and artistic permeations (Kastner, 2006, p.45). Whilst Bourdieu maintains each field's *laws* operate independently of economics and politics, for example (Bourdieu, 1986b, p.162), he acknowledges that they do translate external influences (he uses the metaphor of a prism's refractions) (*ibid.*, p.164). In its museal context, institutions encompass many disciplines, by the nature of the world they re-present via the objects they display, the audiences they represent and attract, and their partnerships or mechanisms of control or influence under, for example, political, social or corporate fields. Therefore, I argue that external influences certainly play their part. Ultimately, this thesis considers institutional critique's legacy framed in Bourdieu's theory.

Aim and Research Questions

The cultural field forms the background of this thesis, as a 'site of actions and reactions' (Bourdieu, 1995). With this in mind, this thesis aims to illustrate - using examples - *the ways in which institutional critique has changed the positions of selected agents within the cultural field and institutional practices themselves.* Chapters are divided to focus on artists and visitor-agents, critiqued institutions, and institutional practice, moving from art-specific critiques and beyond. The scope of the thesis demands necessary delimitations, and for that reason it does not consider other agents, or the effect of the practice on objects, for example. It asks how the practice and

practitioners of institutional critique *itself* evolved, what forms it takes and how it might change the position of the producers and consumers within the field. In doing so, it considers what the *purpose* of institutional critique might be – does it seek to reform, to change, or simply pass judgment? Do these kinds of deconstructions debunk museum myth, or simply offer another, equally subjective reframing? What is its *potential*: can it be used to offer *solutions* to the issues it identifies? Whom does it *serve*? How is the *institutional reception* to such critiques characterised? Using examples across the museal field, this thesis maintains that art has a place outside of its own dedicated institutions. In addressing these questions this thesis aspires to fill gaps in knowledge where the spheres of art and museology overlap and add to current discourse.

Method and Methodology

This thesis develops a qualitative analysis based on the critical evaluation of collected resource material, underpinned by theory. Method - "the instruments you use when you collect, organize and… analyse a material" (Berg, 2012, p.8) – emerges from this thesis' desk-based study. Principally comprised of secondary research, it included the sourcing[3] of published and unpublished writings, academic and newspaper articles, presentations, websites and theses. Authors include academics and practitioners in the museal field, journalists, masters students and artists. In an attempt to draw multiple aspects to the discussion and avoid too abstract an argument, exhibitions, artworks, and institutional strategies are used as examples, with data gathered from catalogues, interviews and newspaper articles. Obtaining data from the original sources (protagonists or receivers) of these practices was vital to better understand institutional critique in the institution and direct research to the needs of the thesis. Primary research was conducted via nine informal interviews with artists and museum professionals[4] to contribute to the understanding of specific and localised practices. Critiquers were asked open-ended questions about the nature, reasoning, intentions and effects of the critiques. The disadvantages of using this method were evident in the sometimes unsatisfactory answers and response rate, which was lacking from the institutional side. This was expected, and as such the primary research was considered supplementary to the secondary.

A hermeneutical methodology framed by Field theory formed the analysis of the material. Hermeneutics – the methodology of interpretation – focuses on written texts but can also be

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[3] Books and journal articles were obtained from local, national and online libraries (public, university and museum) and the internet. Theses and unpublished texts were obtained directly from authors.

[4] In terms of ethics, all individuals and institutions contacted were notified of the nature of the research and that use of the information was with their consent (a consent form was offered), with the option to keep their names anonymous if desired.

applied to works of art (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p.143) and within sociology, making it suitable in this context. So, too, does this thesis operate on the basis that art can be (but not restricted to) 'texts' that may be 'read.' Here, texts are distilled to "… identify meaningful pieces of information, which in turn are used to generate themes or categories from a group of texts. These themes or categories communicate findings that reflect knowledge of the phenomenon under study." (Byrne, 2001, p.968). Analysis should be understood to be directed at (due to sheer weight of material) the oeuvre of institutional critique: reading key texts (in art, New Institutionalism, exhibitions, museology, etc.) in order to gain a general understanding of the whole. In this way I was able to pinpoint patterns of responses and attitudes to and about institutional critique, and key concepts within the field. The methodology also advocates a historical, contextual comprehension (Prasad, 2002), which has been included in the thesis (particularly in Chapter One) as a logical basis for understanding. Hermeneutics also recognises the author and reader's subjectivities (or 'prejudices') in shaping the understanding of the text, and the lack of universality. Therefore (with a nod to Bourdieu and the practice of self-critique) I must acknowledge my own background's - or habitus'[5] - influence on this thesis.

Outline of Thesis and Overview of Literature

This thesis amalgamates findings with analysis to reveal and review the qualitative information in support of the argument. In Chapter One I outline a small number of artists who have contributed substantially to the understanding of artistic productions of institutional critique. This brief overview seeks to introduce the reader to what form institutional critique takes in art practice. Chapter One reflects my interpretation of what has been established within the canon. A fairly homogeneous history, its discussions are limited to the artworld itself and cover the period of institutional critique's inception to works within the last decade. A small core of artists are routinely listed in the canonised writings, the majority of whom are European and from the USA. Literature central to this version of events includes Benjamin H.D Buchloch's essay *Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions* (1990) and Andrea Fraser's writings. These works identified institutional critique and began the discourse. James Puttnam's *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (1991), Kynaston McShine's *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (1999) Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson's *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist's Writings* (2009) retrospectively describe the history of institutional critique, the latter via a collection of artworld figures' writings. These texts and anthologies form the backbone of research for the entire thesis.

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[5] A Bourdieusian term explained on p.23.

Chapter Two explores artist-agent position changes into more collaborative, institutionalised roles as practitioners of institutional critique. It provides examples of their attempts to retain their autonomy, gain capital and participate in museal and art discourse. Thinking about the nature of critique itself led me to Foucault, who provides a notion concerned with the critiquing agent (*What is Critique?* (1978)). Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992) is drawn upon repeatedly throughout this thesis as a successful example of artistic institutional critique. It has already been extensively discussed in the art canon, so there is a great deal of literature available. Particularly useful texts included Judith E. Stein's *Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's* Mining the Museum (2003), which follows up the author's 1993 review of the exhibition, making it particularly valuable in terms of a retrospective view. *Mining the Museum's* curator/ facilitator, Lisa Corrin, edited an insightful catalogue entitled *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (1994). The book's installation and object photography serves as a visual aid. And in addition to essays, Corrin chaired a discussion with the Historical Society's docents, directing the book's focus away from purely art-based discourse to education, staff experiences and public reactions. Unusually for literature concerning Wilson, Enid Schildkrout discussed his work in relation to an institutionally-produced exhibition in *Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists:* Into the Heart of Africa *and* The Other Museum (1991). Schildkrout's work also addresses Wilson's work in a museological – as opposed to an art - context. The *effects* of Wilson's work were quite under-discussed, prompting Hillary Marie Cook to write her MA thesis Mining the Museum *and after: Fred Wilson's institutional legacy* (2008) which was helpful throughout this thesis, particularly in her examination of critical reviews in the press. The artist's intentions can be understood directly through his own words in a number of speeches and interviews, such as at the *Margins for Change* conference in 2010.

Andrea Fraser is another artist discussed whose work is concerned with the effects of institutional critique on artists. She has produced a number of performances and texts; in doing so she integrates herself into the realm of discourse and extends her position of a visual artist. Her texts (used in this chapter and throughout) include *How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction* (1994), *What is Institutional Critique?* (2005) and *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005). She cites Bourdieu – who writes about the role of artists in the field of cultural production – as influential. Of particular interest is that Bourdieu's field is one of struggle, a question around which her own self-examination revolves, and of the agent's self-service (Fraser, 1994). Indeed, her desire to make the abstract forces at work in the museum visible (Fraser, 2005a) - including those advantageous to her - bears hallmarks of Bourdieu's thinking. And in an attempt to discuss artists outside the canonised minority, and outside the

traditional exhibition format, I interviewed Harwood of the Mongrel collective about his work *Uncomfortable Proximity* (2003) to find out more details about the work, his intentions, and the process of working with Tate as two agents whose interests were similar, but not unified. Researching Bourdieu's Field theory as a framework utilised Randal Johnson's edited book of Bourdieu's essays *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) which were used throughout the thesis.

Turning the focus of discussion to visitor-agents, Chapter Three considers the role of institutional critique in developing visitor's critical thinking. The cultural institution's position of authority and truth-telling is a commonly-held perception (American Association of Museums, 2012) and central to the 'traditional' museum in upholding its reputation. In aiding their critical thinking skills and drawing attention to the institution's own framings and bias, it is argued that visitors can approach museums with an independent mind. Public critique of the institution via – for example – artworks, can expedite this. Examples include, again, *Mining the Museum*. The Director of the Contemporary, George Ciscle, confirmed the project's *intent* to bring these framings to the public's attention. It should be noted that the Maryland Historical Society did not respond to requests for information and a more conclusive idea of intent and effects had to be surmised from Ciscle's interview and related material. For this reason, combined with time limitations and the nature of the thesis overall, this chapter offers an overview and theory-based argument. It is hoped that this will provide a starting-point for a more sustained study into the formation and effects of visitor critical thinking.

From considering institutional critique and the visitor, Chapter Four questions whether it has effected change on institutions who have received critiques. This chapter considers the effects of artist activism and invited and uninvited critiques. One of the most notable critics of the art and wider museum world, The Guerrilla Girls' focus on representation and diversity in this area is well-known. In researching their work, I turned to their website, visual history and published texts, and an interview with a member to discuss their intent, methods and the wider effects of their work. The chapter explores examples of other artistic critiques and their reception, including Kendell Geers' *Title Withheld (Score)* (1995-7) and Michael Asher's *Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art: Catalog of Deaccessions 1929 through 1998* (1999). Even when invited, these critiques were met with resistance from the institutions. I requested information about the reception of Geers' work and received a reply from the artist, but not the curator. The denied requests for information from institutions has led to a shortfall in information, which then had to be concluded from that which was available.

Chapter Five brings together ideas introduced in previous chapters, considering art, artists, audiences, institutions and institutional agents in contemporary critical museum practice. It argues that Institutional critique is highly valuable when accepted, integrated and practiced by the museum itself. Examples illustrate *self*-critical practices that emerged from New Institutionalism and New Museology. Prominent thinkers and doers in New Institutionalism include Alex Farquharson, Simon Sheikh, Charles Esche, Nina Möntmann, Jan Verwoert, Jonas Ekeberg and Maria Lind. Their writings were researched as a basis for understanding key concepts and as examples of institutional practices. Examples of curator-led exhibitions that embodied this include *A Museum Looks at Itself* (1992) at the Parrish Art Museum, USA. Here, the accompanying catalogue and essays was particularly useful, as well as a critical review. Through discussions with museum professionals I became aware of self-critiquing practices facilitated by institutional agents within the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, USA. Since no information was publically available, interviews were necessary here. The thesis ends with a concluding chapter.

Limitations

The limitations of this thesis are chiefly due to time restrictions, the scope of the thesis itself and the difficulty in obtaining unpublished, primary source information – particularly from institutions. The examples provided are often found within the canon, and include exhibitions where more detailed information was available in catalogues and the press. But attempts have been made to examine previously under-discussed events. Where it reflects the canon, it endeavours to bring new aspects to the discussion. The inability to gain a first-hand experience of many of the exhibitions, institutions and critiques (due to their historical nature or geographical location) is unavoidable but a disadvantage, although the availability of associated texts and images has been valuable. The examples provide the basis for the argument presented, which is necessarily theory-oriented. As previously suggested, the next step would be to undertake a more conclusive, practice-based study into the development and effects of public institutional critique. It is for this reason that this thesis should be viewed as a hypothesis with the potential for application in an empirically-based, phenomenological case study.

Chapter One

The Museum as Palette

The third kind of art exhibit is what I call the site-specific form of art that challenges the nature of the frame itself.

Ivan Karp *in* Karp & Wilson, 1996, p.190

During the 1960's and '70's, a surge of artistic focus on the institutions of art occurred. The paradigmatic shift of Conceptualism freed art from its materiality; releasing its possibilities and questioning its frames. Characterised as distinctly critical in nature, this focus prompted later generations of artists and thinkers to use the institution as subjects of their own investigations. They named it *institutional critique*.

This early period of institutional critique (often referred to as the 'first wave'), distinguished itself by being practiced by a number of influential artists. But it was by no means the first instance in which institutions found themselves the subjects of scrutiny. Proto-practitioners can be located throughout Modernism's history, and even prior to that. When it came to the museum, the Futurists wanted to destroy it; Duchamp wanted to undermine it; Rodchenko, Malevich and Kandinsky wanted to reinvent it. Le Corbusier was troubled by its singular narrative and Picasso declared it a lie.

General discussions of the role of museums turned to more targeted attacks on specific institutions. The institutional figurehead of modern and contemporary art - the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York - has long been the subject of artist's critiques. The group American Abstract Artists (AAA) picketed MoMA on April 15th, 1940, distributing an Ad Reinhardt-designed flyer which asked: "How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?" In it, the museum's mandate came under fire for failing its mandate by exhibiting non-contemporary artists (some of whom were actually deceased), and favouring European art. Neither did the Metropolitan Museum of Art escape the ire of the artist-critics. Via a letter, twenty-eight prominent American artists protested a juried exhibition on contemporary art. The jury, they

argued, was imbalanced, with an over-representation of members known to be hostile to avant-garde art.

Artists working with ideas borne of Conceptual art in the 1960's rebelled against the staid traditionalism that went hand-in-hand with the institution. In the footsteps of Duchamp, elitist cultural values created and perpetuated by museums were rejected. Fine art traditions, categorisation, ways of viewing, materials and singular forms gave way to a reconsideration of the relationship between the work, viewer and space. Reproductions, found objects and photography probed notions of authenticity, value and evidence of the artist's craft.

Institutional spaces became the subject of investigation. Artistic autonomy wrestled with the recognition that works of art were in some ways institutionally determined before they were even produced: the designation of paintings on walls and sculptures on floor pedestals was contested. The museum pedestal was discarded in favour of an egalitarian consideration of overlooked gallery spaces such as the floor. Works like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's proposal to block MoMA's entrances and wrap its façade reconsidered the gallery as a container of art. The idea that art required permanence was also questioned. The ephemeral or performative works that were created resisted the institutional obsession to collect them.

The museum as site was denied: works were produced in remote spots of land or alternative spaces. In an effort to activate his art and make it do "something other than sit on its ass in a museum" (*in* Puttnam, 1991), Claes Oldenburg created *The Store* (1961) in which he produced, exhibited and sold consumer product-style sculptures from a shop. In 1968, Lawrence Weiner removed a portion of wallboard and part of a rug from several institutions. In confiscating items and creating negative spaces, Weiner was responding to established art practices and the role of artist to *place* or *create* works *in* or *for* the gallery. In addition to reconsidering the artist's role, Weiner's works drew attention to the act of *looking* which was privileged above all in the gallery. In short, the artworks that were being produced during this period were critical of the very nature of the institutions themselves. [6]

The extent to which institutions were – and still are – critiqued in art, ranges from more benign investigations to concerted attacks. The strategies used are equally as diverse. The use of humour and mimicry was employed by several artists during the 1960's and '70's to examine museums as

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[6] In addition to the artists mentioned during this period, I refer also to Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Fred Sandback, Andy Warhol, the Fluxus group and Robert Smithson. This is not an exhaustive list.

subjects of satire. Preceded, again, by Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* works (1930's-1940's)[7], *the* museological works of the Fluxus group (*Fluxkits* (1960's) and *Flux Cabinet* (1975-77)) and Herbert Distel's (*Museum of Drawers* (1970-77)) played with the notion of the artist's own museum. Responsible for creation, selection, collection and display, these miniature worlds subverted the institution and empowered the artist.

During this period, Marcel Broodthaers' work emerged in what would later be acknowledged as a central component of first wave institutional critique. *Musée d'Art Moderne, Department des Aigles* (1968- 1972) was created "not via a concept, but by way of circumstance" (Broodthaers, 1969 *in* Alberro & Stimson, 2009, p.39), arising from his growing frustration with the lack of institutional support for contemporary art. The first presentation of the *Musée* bypassed the conventional institutional exhibition space by being shown in Broodthaers' home, and later on a beach. Similarly to Oldenburg's *The Store*, the boundaries between the space of the studio and the gallery were blurred. By using his own home as exhibition space, Broodthaers' went further by collapsing the private and the public. His museological enquiries included a critique of museum text labels[8] and the institutional creation of values, which he dubbed 'fiction'. These fictions included imbuing art objects with an aura of power, nobility and spirituality (part of the *doxa* – a Bourdieusian term explained on p. 23), a mystification he wished to disavow. Parodying museum protocol, he announced that "Touching the objects is absolutely forbidden". The objects in question were sand sculptures on a public beach.

Broodthaer's recognition within the area of institutional critique can be traced to the canonical text *Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions* by Benjamin Buchloh. Published in 1990 – with the benefit of hindsight – Buchloh ended his essay by naming Weiner, Broodthaers, Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren as practitioners operating using methods of institutional critique.

Sharing Broodthaers' criticism of cultural and museological politics, Hans Haacke's consistent investigations in institutional critique employ a far drier wit, spanning all the 'waves' of institutional critique. A member of the activist group Art Workers' Coalition, he employed

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[7] Duchamp produced portable mini-museums in suitcases, filled with reproductions of his most recognisable works
[8] With a nod to Magritte, Broodthaers directed attention to museum labels by displaying texts that read: "This is not a work of art!" Such labels referred to the disparity between word and object (*see* Puttnam, 1991).

activist methods in his art[9]. To say that all art is political is somewhat of a truism, but Hans Haacke's critical work is marked by its distinctly overt political nature.

Turning his investigations to the top of the food chain, Haacke frequently looks to the governance and ethical conduct of the art world as subjects of his critique. One of his earlier works on the topic took place during MoMA's *Information* exhibition in 1970, the first example of a major institution inviting works of critique[10]. With the Vietnam War raging, Haacke installed a text on the gallery wall which read: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not yet denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" (Fig. 1). Below the text were two transparent ballot boxes reading 'Yes' and 'No'. In this participatory work the artist allowed the visitors to answer his question in a way that made a visually simple, yet powerful, political statement. Not only were US politics addressed, Haacke brought the issue – quite literally – home. The Rockefeller family were linked to MoMA as far back as its establishment. The target of Haacke's poll – Nelson Rockefeller (the Governor of New York at the time) was planning to run for Presidency. He was serving on the board of trustees at MoMA, with other family members in positions of influence. 25,566 voters answered 'Yes' to 11,563 'No''s.

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[9] It has also been argued that the role of the social and anti-capitalist protest movements of the sixties galvanised institutional critique activism; drawing on influence from beyond the artworld (Kastner, 2006).
[10] According to Julia Bryan-Wilson (Bryan-Wilson, 2003).

Haacke noted that "The MoMA poll was harmless. At best it was embarrassing for the museum and its backers and served as a valve for the anger of a surprisingly large portion of the visitors" (Haacke *in* Alberro & Stimson, 2009). But embarrassment can be such a strong tool that – certainly for the purpose of this thesis - the effects are more significant than the work itself. The following year, his attention turned to the Guggenheim and social systems within and around it. He proposed to exhibit photographs and documentation relating to Manhattan real-estate, specifically holdings owned by a Harry Shapolsky, a slum landlord (*Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971)). By his account, the documentation was to simply be displayed and contained no evaluative content. He also planned to conduct other, daily polls during the exhibit, asking Guggenheim visitors questions on their demographics and socio-political thoughts, exhibiting the anonymous results. A month prior to opening, the museum cancelled the show (*ibid.*).

The Guggenheim's Director, Thomas Messer, had got cold feet. In a letter to the artist, he cited the works' libellous nature and his fears of legal action as the reason behind his decision. Haacke argued that this was a 'smokescreen' since lawyers had confirmed the work was not defamatory and merely re-presented publically-available information (*ibid.*). The interest in the cancellation fuelled several art magazines to publish excerpts from the real-estate documentation. Haacke noted that they were never sued (*ibid.*).

But what did Shapolsky's practices have to do with the Guggenheim, and why did it react so strongly? Haacke's reasoning behind the work was that it intended to show the disparity between the rich, hallowed halls of the Guggenheim and the reality of working class life in New York (Glueck, 1987). In addition to his legal concerns, Messer stated the Trustees decision was based on the following:

> "We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. On those grounds the trustees have established policies that exclude the active engagement toward social and political ends." (*ibid.*)

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What is particularly interesting in this case is how the story has been mythologised over time. A number of art historical writings refer to Shapolsky as a Guggenheim Trustee at the time (Rosenthal, 2003), or as being financially linked to some of the Trustees. This would certainly account for the cancellation, but the rumour remains unsubstantiated. If Messer's reasoning is to be believed, the neutrality of the art gallery was still deemed to be a pillar of the institution[11]. Considering that this is one of Haacke's most famous works, it is conceivable to suggest that its reputation is built on the act of the Guggenheim's *refusal*. Never shown in its original context, the work nonetheless became a sensational embarrassment for the institution. The curator, Edward F. Fry, lost his job, and Haacke wasn't shown in a US museum for twelve years (Grasskamp, 2004, p.47).

Haacke's muckraking was the cause of another cancellation of the exhibition of one of his works. Haacke's *Manet – PROJEKT '74* (1974) was the result of Haacke's investigations into the provenance of the Impressionist artist's innocuous painting: *Bunch of Asparagus* (1880) and the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, where Haacke's work was to be exhibited. The Manet had been brought into the Museum's collection by its own Chairman, Hermann Josef Abs, a previous owner. Haacke planned to exhibit the Manet beside the provenance documents. In them was revealed Abs' Nazi-tainted past, made all the more poignant in juxtaposition with the many prior Jewish owners. The Museum rejected Haacke's work. In an act of support, fellow artist Daniel Buren displayed Haacke's provenance text panels in his own installation at the *PROJEKT '74* show. The Director arranged for Buren's panels to be censored, once again[12].

Haacke's extensive critique also focused on methods of museum display. In *Viewing Matters: Upstairs* (1996), he was invited to guest-curate an exhibition in Rotterdam's Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Given carte-blanche with the collection and exhibition, he – and technical staff - selected works in the collection were exhibited in his own designated 'categories': 'Artists', 'Reception', 'Power/Work', 'Alone, Together, Against Each Other', and 'Seeing'. The metal-rack environment of the store room was reproduced in part of the exhibition space, where "close packing is the governing principle" (Haacke, 1996). In the context of this unconventional *Wunderkammer*-style display, new dialogues between a diverse array of objects were facilitated: consumer goods with ceramics; Old Masters and contemporary art; textiles with prints. The

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[11] Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube; The Ideology of the Gallery Space* would shake that presumption on its publication just a few years later, in 1976.
[12] Haacke replicated his strategy of exposing provenance in later works (such as *Seurat's 'Les Poseuses' (Small Version), 1888-1975*), drawing attention to not only its commercial history, but the economic and social status of its owners and the void between them and the 'average' visitor.

thematic - rather than chronological - display method[13] would later be used by Tate Modern in 2000 to a mixed reaction. But both exhibitions worked in similar ways, offering fresh insights, and new meanings generated from unusual juxtapositions. Furthermore, the selective and interpretative role of the curator was also made explicit.

The institution's belief in its own neutrality has long been regarded by Haacke as akin to apathy, believing they have a duty to be dissenting and critique the dominant belief system where it conflicts with art's integrity. His forced transparency reveals ulterior motivations and the artworld's concealed structures. As Andrea Fraser succinctly notes, he has made his role "to defend the institution of art from instrumentalization by political and economic interests." (Fraser, 2005a).

The earlier work of institutional critique's practitioners such as Haacke and Broodthaers[14] is not without its criticism. This pertains to ironies, paradoxes and perceived hypocrisies that plague the practice. Firstly – and this extends to a number of Conceptual works – there is the irony of collection. As Peter Bürger pointed out, post-Duchamp: "If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it" (Bürger, 1984, pp. 52-53). It is the adaptability of the market to the avant-garde that neutralises these intentions: despite efforts to produce ephemeral or site-specific works to evade the stasis of museum collection or its commodification, the fact is that they are often represented in a material form by their documentation in the very kinds of institutions and markets they resisted[15], becoming victims of 'its success or failure' (Fraser, 2005a, p.409).

Artists sustain contemporary art museums, and (to an extent), vice versa. The powerful statement institutional critique intends is also somewhat reliant on this symbiotic relationship to the object of critique. Its exhibition in the site of its critique reinforces its message and helps empower a critical audience, relying on the institution's complicity to exhibit the work. However, this can be circumvented in the form of protests, interventions or unexpected events which yield their own impact. The reception, as well as the production of institutional critique is therefore also framed in irony. Thomas Messer's cancellation of Haacke's Guggenheim exhibition served only to fan the flames of the critique, arguably contributing to the work's infamy. Despite

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[13] This display method had been advocated as far back as Alexander Rodchenko, who called for thematic installation over than chronological (Rodchenko, 1919).

[14] Not to mention oft-cited artists such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Lawrence Weiner.

[15] For example, *Shapolsky et al.* is now owned by the Whitney Museum.

unwittingly circumventing the opposing agents whose capital overrode his own, Haacke's *Shapolsky et al.* managed to create its impact and regain its power.

The dominance of the museum in the cultural arena can be paralleled to that of the art canon itself. The canon can be criticised for a kind of homogeneity, the perpetuation of selected narratives and the omission of others[16] - itself a principal player in the institution of art. It is therefore ironic that the very practitioners of institutional critique contribute to its institutionalisation in their writings. Even the most basic form of institutionalisation – its own naming - was first used in literature by one of its principal artists, Andrea Fraser (Fraser, 1985 and Fraser, 2005a). It is the recognition of these ironies and their inescapability which marks the defining attitude of institutional critique's second wave.

This self-reflexivity was key to the second wave artists, and whilst the early work of institutional critique required some critical distance, theirs did not. Andrea Fraser is generally credited with the assertion of artistic self-reflexivity and recognition of the artist's own role in institutionalisation[17]. In acknowledgment of this, she positioned her artistic practice site-specifically as a counterpractice to that of the institution's. Her work *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) was a performance at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Invited by the Museum, Fraser presented herself to the public as a docent called Jane Castleton. Imitating the Museum's own language, Castleton led visitors on a tour. Rather than visit the collections, Castleton's tour visited 'service' areas such as the reception, cloakroom and cafeteria; drawing focus upon the usually-hidden support structures of the museum itself. Signifying Castleton's class through her appearance was intended to prompt reflection on the docents themselves (often volunteers with similarities in terms of gender, class and race) and the narratives and authoritative voice they re-present. Embodying the museum's 'domination effect', docents regurgitate museum-learnt knowledge without the means for reflection (Fraser, 1992).

Taking Bourdieu's theory, Fraser identifies various 'sectors' within the institutional field that struggle against one another (Fraser, 1994, p.5). As an artist, she crosses from one to the other when performing invited critiques. However, in her oft-discussed contribution to theories of

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[16] Such as histories of women, non-heteronormative, non-white artists and a distinct European/USA-bias.

[17] Whilst much of Fraser's work is concerned with this, Hans Haacke's critique did not overlook artists' roles within the institution, noting: "'Artists', as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners in the art syndrome, and relate to each other dialectically. They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame, and are being framed." (Haacke, 1974)

institutional critique- *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005) – she makes an important assertion. She states that institutional critique is itself institutionalised. As artworld participants, there exists no binary inside/outside dichotomy between artists and arts institutions: institutionalisation is internalised within agents, and inescapable. She declares:

> "It's not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to. Because the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals, these are the questions that institutional critique demands we ask, above all, of ourselves." (Fraser, 2005a, p.416)

So in recognising our institutionalised artworld participation, Fraser acknowledges a sense of responsibility for it. This self-critique prompted a shift in her own positioning. Where she had performed as and somewhat identified with museum staff, she realised this was a 'misidentification'. Her status as agent, position in the field, function and intention were likewise internalised, but vastly different. From that point onward her critiques were performed as an artist.

Like Haacke, Fraser's work also serves to counter artworld mythology in presenting and questioning corporate structures and logic. In her text *"A Museum is not a business. It is run in a businesslike fashion"* (Fraser, 2003), she describes a timeline of artworld events, offering a snapshot of its corporatisation. She points out industry hypocrisies in the huge salary disparities in major institutions. She links market logic to a lack of support for contemporary art. For example, the MoMA expansion's financial loan was underwritten by Goldman Sachs, who declared MoMA a sound investment due to its fiscal responsibility and cutbacks on "financially unpredictable exhibitions" (*ibid.*). In that expansion (ostensibly to showcase more of the collection), just 47% of it was for exhibitions.

Fraser asserts her work is not 'art about art'. But, like Haacke and Broodthaers, it is arguably still largely rooted in the art sphere in its production and consumption in art gallery sites (Fraser, 2005b). One artist who successfully straddles both the art and wider museal sphere is Fred Wilson, who is arguably one of contemporary institutional critique's most notable practitioners.

Fred Wilson performed institutional roles as a staff member prior to his critique as an artist, having worked in various positions in both major and smaller institutions. In this regard he is well placed in his understanding of institutional conventions from the standpoint of a person in

the employ of an institution and later as a contracted agent. Wilson's early critical installations frequently addressed issues of representation in the museum, from a post-colonial standpoint. *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content, and Context in Art* (1987-88) highlighted the ways in which architectural and aesthetic methods of display and labelling dramatically contextualise objects. He displayed artworks within simulated exhibitionary environments such as a Victorian salon, an ethnographic museum and a contemporary white cube. So powerful were these alternate contexts that a visiting curator failed to recognise a work that had recently been shown in their gallery; mistaking it for a 'primitive' artifact (Karp & Wilson, 1996). In *The Other Museum* (1991) at the Washington Project for the Arts, he blindfolded African masks with colonist flags and stated that they were stolen in their labels. *Primitivism: High and Low* (1991) took 'primitivist' modern art exhibitions to task by having Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* ask: *"If my contemporary art is your traditional art, is my art your cliché?"* (Corrin, 1994a). Wilson's interest in race in the museum extended to staff diversity too. In the same exhibition, he installed *Guarded View* (1991) where he displayed dark-'skinned' mannequins dressed in the security uniforms of several major New York museums. Here, he made a significant point about the low-level status of ethnic minority museum employees. The point was reinforced at a performance at the Whitney where Wilson met with visitors on the premise of a tour. He left, promising to return, and reappeared in a guard's uniform. The visitors failed to recognise him and he was subsequently ignored.

Wilson's seminal work, *Mining the Museum* (1992), reused similar strategies in a significant site-specific installation at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Wilson chose the Society after being invited by the Contemporary – a 'museum without walls' - to do a residency in the area. Setting up his office-cum-studio in the office of the President, Wilson familiarised himself with the collection, exhibitions, staff and internal processes of the Society over the course of a year.

A 19th Century-founded institution, the Society's displays were outmoded: white, affluent and patriarchal. Re-displaying objects on the Society's third floor, he drew attention to methods of display and object exclusion in relation to racial narratives. Using the museum as his palette (Karp & Wilson, 1996) and spotlighting and revealing the hidden; he questioned the Society's singular 'truth'.

Setting the scene for the visitor, *Mining the Museum* opened with a video which acted as a curatorial statement and introduction to the exhibition. It reminded viewers that the museum

was a site to "make you think, to make you question" and asking visitors to reflect on what had changed in the space (Corrin, 1994a). Wilson's response to the white, elitist narrative that dominated the space positioned objects in an entirely new light for visitors. Justus Engelhardt Kühn's portrait of Henry Darnall III features an African-American child at his side, wearing a metal collar. Wilson spotlighted the unnamed child as visitor movement triggered an audio recording which asked "Am I your brother? Am I your friend? Am I your pet?" (Fig. 2) (*ibid.*, p.393). Throughout *Mining the Museum,* Wilson replicated the technique of highlighting and giving voice to unacknowledged African-American figures in the painting collection.

Fig. 2. Justus Engelhardt Kühn, *Portrait of Henry Darnall III* (ca. 1710), oil on canvas, Maryland Historical Society. Reproduced with permission from the Maryland Historical Society.

Using the power of juxtaposition, Wilson reminded the audience of the true cost of some of the fine objects on display. He displayed fine silverware alongside slave shackles and a model slaveship in a section titled *Metalwork 1793-1880*: prompting viewers to reflect on those that produced it; whose slavery made owners rich enough to but it; and who served meals on it. Similarly poignant was a Ku Klux Klan hood displayed in a baby carriage, displayed adjacent to photographs depicting black nannies with their wards, (as Lisa Corrin points out, "rearing their future oppressors") (Corrin, 1994a, p.394). Another method Wilson used was absence as an

illuminator. He displayed empty pedestals, indicating with labels the names of prominent African-Americans from Maryland who were unrepresented in the museum[18].

Emphasising the narratives of a marginalised group did far more than bring them 'into' the museum (which, the artist noted, was the Director's hope in agreeing to the residency). The institutional effect is evident in its recognition, particularly in the museum world. Winning the Best Museum Exhibition Award from the American Association of Museums, and twenty years on, *Mining the Museum* is still considered a groundbreaking exhibition. These effects will be further discussed in the following chapters.

First wave institutional critique emerged from proto-critique and Conceptual art. They held museums accountable for their practices, revealing information that they deemed to be 'in the public interest'. Institutions were initially not ready to hear – much less publically exhibit – such critiques. And the artists themselves maintained a certain distance from the institutions and attempted to emancipate themselves from them. Using a variety of methods and subjects of critique, the current practitioners of institutional critique share a commitment to collapsing the boundaries between the space of art production and consumption. Andrea Fraser's work acknowledged the shift from fault-finding and distance-making, to involvement and co-operation. What the canon fails to do is examine the wider effects of such critiques on the parties involved. The following chapters examine the changing positions of artist-agents.

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[18] This description of parts of *Mining the Museum* is indicative of the devices and themes that ran throughout the exhibition: Wilson redisplayed many more objects than have been described here.

Chapter Two

The Artist-agent

Framing the museal world in Bourdieu's Field theory is useful for understanding the role of institutional critique as a transformative practice. As mentioned in the Introduction, the museal profession is understood here as part of a *cultural field* in which stakeholders (agents) operate. Agents possess distinct dispositions (*habitus*), which govern their outlook and actions. Habitus is determined by the social and cultural histories that contribute to their unique personalities, such as upbringing, social class, nationality, education, career, personal interests and so on. It guides agents in their struggle for power in the field. But is neither calculated nor absolute; it will also contend with, or be overridden by, practical matters and reasoning (Johnson, 1993, p. 5). Habitus is important because it contributes to an agent's cultural capital: Bourdieu argues that the museums' perceived accessibility to each agent depends on upbringing and education which contributes to "….that *acquired knowledge of how art objects are encoded* which makes museums accessible" (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007, p.76).

Bourdieu uses the term *doxa* to describe the unquestioned 'truths' that exist within the field. Doxa is often understood as "the rules of the game" (Grenfell, 2008, p. 122). In the cultural institution, the doxa might be understood as its symbolic values and structures. These could include the vision of the world institutions perpetuate: categorisation; the normalisation, representation (or misrepresentation) of agents, cultures and objects; value systems (symbolic and economic); hierarchies; heteronormative narratives; 'truths'; colonial inheritance; stasis; cultural and social influence, and so on. Doxa can be understood as the cultural monopoly institutions and agents claim. It is these rules that agents within the field wish to conserve or change. This desire is based on their own habitus and the benefits the doxa provides them. For agents practicing institutional critique, those rules no longer exist as given truths and therefore are subject to scrutiny.

Since the basis of this thesis is to ascertain institutional critique's effects in terms of change (Bourdieu's *transforming*) it is useful at this point to verify the basis on which change was sought, and what the nature of that change actually means. Here I will turn to another theorist, Michel

Foucault, who considered the nature of critique itself. In critique, Foucault acknowledges the desire to be governed, but:

> "… 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, 1978, p. 44)

Importantly, Judith Butler distinguishes Foucault's notion of critique from mere binary judgements, stating: "the primary task of critique will not be to evaluate whether its objects — social conditions, practices, forms of knowledge, power, and discourse—are good or bad, valued highly or demeaned" (Butler, 2002). Whilst the truly critical works described in this thesis inescapably contain judgements, they go much further. These critiques are used as a tool to expose the illegitimacy of the doxa using methods of deconstruction.

As Foucault's interest in critique lies with the critiquing *subject* rather than the critiqued *object*, his ideas are useful when we consider the critical agent – in this case the artist. Andrea Fraser's summary of the aims of critical on-site practices verifies Foucaultian critique's desire to counteract the institution's governance. Confirming change *is* desired, she states:

> "… the methodology of critically reflexive site-specificity may have first emerged as a practical principle. If you want to change something, a relation, particularly a relation of power, the best, if not only way to accomplish such change is by intervening in an enactment of that relation. Like psychoanalysis, as Freud put it, artistic interventions can only work effectively on relations made "actual and manifest" in a given situation." (Fraser, 2005b, p.307)

The statement makes clear the argument for the artist's intervention, but how successful such interventions are in modifying power relations is not easily quantified. This chapter aims to discuss institutional critique as an instrument of change for the *artist-agent*'s status, in relation to the institution.

The Guggenheim's director, Thomas Messer, referred to Hans Haacke's rejected work *Shapolsky et al.* (1971) as "an alien substance that had entered the art museum organism" (Puttnam, 1991, p. 28). Messer's terminology makes explicit a general feeling of unease in response to early institutional critique, and a belief in its inherently harmful nature. It is suggested that institutions

of the time relied on the distinction between high art and everyday life to uphold their status[19] (Rosler, 1979). Overtly political works such as Haacke's were too rooted in the untidiness of social politics to maintain the necessary division. And neutral, they were not. Alternatively, one could argue an artist who makes critical statements in and about the museum dramatically undermines and destabilises it. In this sense the artist-agent is a significant threat, particularly to the institution's role as society's space of authenticism and truth-telling (which, during this period was its *raison d'etre*). For the Guggenheim to allow this would signal a shift in its power. Certainly, Haacke's 'exposure' of unethical practices fuelled Messer's belief that the attention drawn would cause bad PR for the Guggenheim. Bourdieu's Field theory comes into play here, particularly his observation of "the bourgeois tendency to uphold an inherited dominant position" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 153) that Messer (and the Guggenheim) exemplifies.

Despite this, artists began to occupy more institutional roles throughout the 1970's. Andy Warhol's 1969 installation, *Raid the Icebox I with Andy Warhol,* at the Rhode Island School Museum of Art is often credited as the first instance where an artist-in-residence was invited to use an institution's collections as the basis for their work. Early series' of rearranged collections included *The Artist's Eye* series at London's National Gallery in the 1970's and later *Artist's Choice* at MoMA in the 1990's[20]. Organisations big and small participated in this trend, from national institutions including the British Museum, to small university museums. As MoMA curator Robert Storr commented, museum objects do not grow stale, their presentation does (Storr, 2000). Such opportunities were devised to address these issues of uninspired display, and met other needs such as showing other viewpoints and attracting audiences. At the very least they produced displays of surprising juxtapositions and used overlooked objects with non-academic approaches to counterbalance curator's shows. Often, they fulfilled redisplay functions in tandem with an insightful critical framework, such as Hans Haacke's *Viewing Matters* (1996). Amongst other display methods, Haacke commented on institutional predilections to show ostentatious historical figures over the every(wo)man; found inspiration in the haphazard displays of the collection's vaults and used randomised selection methods. Importantly, such curating also challenged unrealistic notions of institutional neutrality by framing their displays as subjective, even personal, endeavours (Puttnam, 1991).

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[19] The Guggenheim had been a supporter of Pop art during the sixties. What I suggest here are more overt, realist works commenting on serious social and cultural issues and politics.
[20] Artists as exhibition designers are popular guests in institutions and often work with varying degrees of criticality, blurring the lines between art installations and exhibitions. Examples include Peter Greenaway's *Some Organizing Principles* at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Wales (1993); Fred Wilson's *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* at the Seattle Art Museum (1993); Richard Wentworth and Fred Wilson's British Museum installations (1997); Jorge Pardo's permanent pre-Columbian display at LACMA (2008).

During the 1990's the work of critically-minded artists became popular and increasingly subject to invitation. Encouraged by their reception – if not their critical practices – such invitations changed artists relationships to institutions and their own roles. The artist-in-residence who produced site-specific, institutionally critical work was not new to this decade. But owing to the previous decades' now-canonised critical practices, the artist's development from an inside/outside dichotomy, the trend of artists curating their own shows[21] and shifting attitudes in the museum world, it reached a greater acceptance at that time.

So, institutions of Messer's mindset who condemned institutional critiques as attacks were changing. From the artist-in-residence position evolved a new role for the artist – the artist-curator. Fred Wilson's early work *Rooms with a View* was originally proposed for installation at the Natural History Museum, Metropolitan Museum and the Frick Collection in New York, but the institutions refused. *Mining the Museum* was the first instance in which Wilson was able to use an institution's collection in his work. His placement within the Maryland Historical Society allowed him to become integrated in the organisation. Regarded as the project's director, he was given full access to the Society's collections and processes, and control over the final concept and design of the exhibition. He collaborated with staff members, independent research assistants and community groups. The resulting exhibition exposed and used curatorial agendas, translating his previous strategies into a 'real-time' situation which galvanised the work. Making it in situ produced a far more powerful message and resulted in wider acclaim (Cook, 2008)[22]. After the success of *Mining the Museum*, Wilson received invitations to perform similar residencies in exactly the kinds of institutions that had previously denied him. The potency of the now-contextualised message and critical reception of *Mining the Museum* with both the public and the museum profession amplified Wilson's cultural and symbolic capital. In a Bourdieusian framing, this shift can be understood thus: as an artist-agent, the capital Wilson had gained in recognition of his work made him – and therefore institutional critique - a far more desirable force within the museum.

It can be argued that the adoption of a curatorial role is an act of empowerment for an artist (Stein, 2003, p.6). By directing the focus, design and realisation of the exhibition - as well as

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[21] Grassroots exhibitions of artist's shows (perhaps ironically) avoided entering into the artworld's mainstream by affording artists complete control over the exhibition of their work. This opened a world of possibility in terms of display strategies, juxtapositions, marketing, programming and sites.

[22] Wilson's later travelling retrospective – *Objects and Installations 1979-2000* - featuring dislocated works from *Mining the Museum* (amongst others) was less popular. Hillary Marie Cook notes that many of its reviews "described the works as powerful and effective in their original contexts but rendered impotent in their new surroundings" (Cook, 2008, p. 43). This is reiterated by Martha Buskirk in her interview with Wilson where she states: "… you are not trying to make a gesture that exists entirely in another space" (Wilson, 1994, p.351).

content - the artist maintains greater control over the communication of their work. This rules out problems of misinterpretation, but rejects the potential for readings from curators or interpretive planners who might provide valid translations and better understand the needs of the institution's audiences. The idea of empowerment assumes that the exhibition's management is with the curator, which is a half-truth. Contemporary museum practice finds that curators operate within networks of decision-makers. And, depending on the institution, exhibitions may be managed by institutional governance with an agenda that extends beyond programming[23] (Fraser, 2003 and Möntmann, 2006), possibly superseding the artist's intentions.

Nonetheless, critical practice can arise from artist-curating. Fred Wilson describes exhibitions viewed through the framework of art as distinct from the products of a museum. He says: "The fact that I'm an artist in an institution gives the viewer a certain leeway in how to respond to this work… I'm always trying to push the exhibitions farther than I would expect a museum curator to go." (Wilson, 1994). One method Wilson uses which has proven problematic for institutionally-produced exhibitions is irony.

In her comparative essay, Enid Schildkrout discusses Wilson's *The Other Museum* (1991) and the Royal Ontario Museum's (ROM) *Into the Heart of Africa* (1989-1990). The ROM's exhibition is regarded as a disastrous attempt to take a critical look at colonial collecting and representation in museums. Using irony to be self-reflexive and self-condemning was catastrophic for the exhibition. Objects presented in curio cases and dioramas were accompanied by labels written in insulting, colonial voices and headed by ironic titles such as 'Commerce' – for displays concerning the slave trade. Interpreted as glorifying rather than subverting issues like racism and colonialism, the exhibition completely misread its publics and was considered highly offensive by a number of groups. *Into the Heart of Africa* was so inflammatory that the ROM was picketed with violent demonstrations, lost the trust of many visitors and all subsequent institutions cancelled the touring leg of the exhibition (Schildkrout, 1991).

The main problem identified as *Into the Heart of Africa*'s failure was the ROM's mistaken audience expectations. Schildkrout asserts that the postmodern use of irony by a museum wasn't understood because it wasn't expected or made explicit in the exhibition. Despite dealing with similar issues such as race, colonialism and stereotypes in the museum, Fred Wilson's methodology proved far more successful. As an artist, his use of irony in *The Other Museum* was

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[23] Fraser argues that market logic governs larger institutions, naming MoMA, Tate, the Metropolitan, Guggenheim and others. She discusses the trend for more business-oriented management and corporate labour relations as transferring increased organisational authority to governing staff.

less surprising when he gagged tribal masks with the flags of their oppressors and used subversive label texts to parody museum displays. Importantly, he contextualised his work from the beginning, explicitly stating that irony was employed in prominent artist statements with clear explanations of his critical, post-colonial intent. Schildkrout suggests the use of irony is more appropriate in an art installation since there is a fixed expectation that museum exhibitions are didactic, truth-telling and literal, based on their precedent (*ibid.*). The audience failed to 'get the joke' because it was thrust upon them without context. This indicates that not only did the ROM misjudge the audience, they misjudged their institutional position too.

Artists found other institutional roles in addition to that of the curator. Contemporary institutional practices – particularly in art spaces – see artists involved in pedagogic and research-based roles. The Director of Vienna's Generali Foundation of contemporary art, Sabine Breitwieser, commissioned Andrea Fraser's *Project in Two Phases* (1995). The idea for the project was borne from Breitwieser's own discomfort with the Foundation's corporate establishment by the Generali Group, a financial conglomerate - and its institutional influence. Fraser's history of institutional critique and strategies of intervention proved valuable in this context. In her consultative role, Fraser's 'two phases' took the form of an interpretative research study followed by an intervention. The study involved interviews with staff from all levels of the Foundation's hierarchy and archival research. The intervention responded to that information and resulted in a 'de-installation' where Fraser removed and reinstalled objects from the headquarters and exhibition space. What distinguished Fraser's work from that of a consultant was the self-reflexiveness of her findings, making the project beneficial for both parties. She recognised the contradiction inherent in artistic transgressions against institutions that support them and played with these ironies in her text. The commission is an interesting one from a Bourdieusian perspective. Here, the "tendency to uphold an inherited dominant position" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 153) is brought into relief. The dominant position lay with the Foundation, but Breitwieser exercised her power (and her actions imply her habitus didn't align her with corporate dominance) to seek a critical review of the institution. Why did she do this? Because Bourdieu's cultural and symbolic capital, or legitimacy, which is required of artists and institutions to be considered 'successful' was desired. When earned, it would ultimately strengthen the institution. And vice versa, Fraser earned the prestige associated with the Generali Foundation. In answer to Fraser's question: *What do I, as an artist, provide?* The answer – amongst the other provisions laid out in this thesis - is cultural capital (Hoffmann, 2006 and Malone, 2007).

Circumventing physical intervention in exhibitions has been useful in the work of Harwood of the artist collective Mongrel. Harwood was commissioned to create *Uncomfortable Proximity* (Fig. 3) in 2000 by Sandy Nairne, Director of Programmes at Tate. Both Nairne and Harwood shared critical views of the institution, enabling the artist to make "an uneasy strategic alliance" with parts of Tate (Harwood 2012, pers. comm. 1st March). Parodying Tate's own website, *Uncomfortable Proximity* presented the artist's disparaging observations on the institution's history. Critical themes include the museum as a civilising site of redemption through aesthetics; as a tool of power; the presence and absence of selected narratives and the shaping of cultural history.
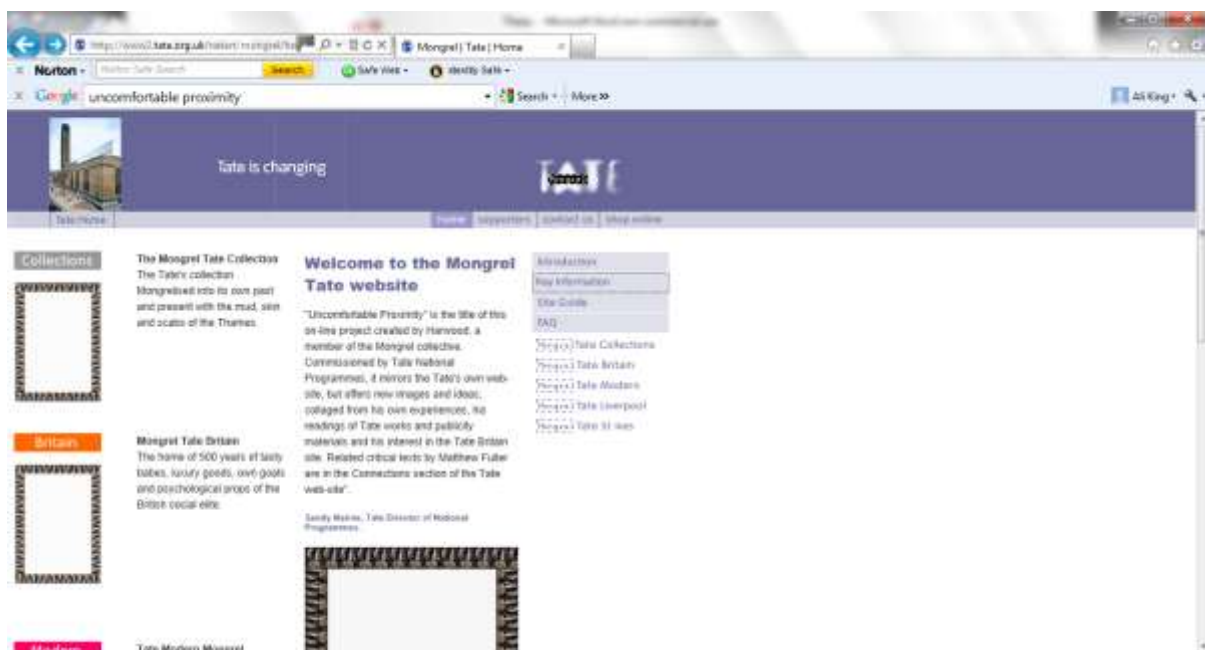
Fig. 3. Harwood, *Uncomfortable Proximity* website (2000). From: http://www2.tate.org.uk/netart/mongrel/home/default.htm. [Accessed 10th May, 2012]. Reproduced with permission from Harwood.

In an agreement with Tate, every third visitor to the 'official' site over the course of the first year would be redirected to *Uncomfortable Proximity* via a pop-up window. Harwood stated: "In this way the work made a direct intervention into the transmitted image of the Tate" (*ibid.*). It also ensured it reached a number of web visitors and extended it to a global audience[24]. Nairne made some efforts to edit Harwood's work, acting on behalf of the institution's – and certain stakeholder's - interests. Harwood was keen to replicate Tate's website down to the inclusion of

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[24] No report exists online for the year 2000, but Tate's 2002-2004 report states that its website received nearly four million unique visitors during that period.

sponsor's logos. When the artist offered to replace logos with a text reading *Image removed at the behest of the Tate*, the gallery relented, allowing the logos to be shown after enquiring with sponsors. Harwood notes: "The work was taken off the server 3 times I think and re-negotiated back on. When the project went live I would receive frequent emails asking if I would allow them to drop the pop up feature. As you can imagine I refused." (*ibid.*). Harwood maintains that his uncompromising stance was supported by Nairne. As agents in the institution's sphere, each worked according to their own habitus and professional and institutional responsibilities. These were dominated by a willingness to work with one another and negotiate the terms of the work. The difficulty in reconciling artistic freedoms and the interests of Tate and the sponsors was Nairne's role. The success that Harwood attributed to the project indicates that his original intention, that Tate "…would embrace [*Uncomfortable Proximity*] as a legitimate counter point to some of its own agendas" was realised. The website format ensures its longevity, and it is still online[25].

No longer confined to the studio, these revised positions moved creative and productive space into institutional sites, so the museum became the site of production, consumption and – as Fred Wilson described it – 'the artist's palette' (Karp & Wilson, 1996, p.181). These roles are the very manifestation of Andrea Fraser's assertion that institutional critique is institutionalised. "We are the institution" she declared (Fraser, 2005a, p.416). The artist–in-residence and artist-curator made material her theory, were conscious of it, and worked with it.

Integrating themselves into the museum's inner workings contributed to the reconfiguration of artists' historical roles as suppliers in a chain of production. And as artistic institutional critique fostered greater dialogues with museums, so the role of the artist expanded in another sense – becoming active agents in the spheres of both art *and* museums. As Foucault argued, discourse is power (Dillon, 2009, p.359). As their work is (often, but not always) bound to the institution in terms of display, interpretation, dissemination and value, they have a vested interest in maintaining those institutions. Using institutional critique empowers artist-agents to become discourse participants, enabling them to manipulate the doxa to their own ends.

As the role of the institutionally-integrated artist became more functionalised, a new set of considerations arose. Fraser addressed the issue of site-specific critical projects as a form of service. She observed that, in their changing roles, artists perform a number of functions traditionally occupied by museum and gallery staff. They include – in addition to curatorial work – educational, consultative, event and design-oriented positions. In recognising their institutional

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[25] At: www.tate.org.uk/netart/mongrel/home/default.htm

role and accepting, performing and being paid for work within this increased artistic scope, Fraser identified these endeavours as providing labour and service. Bringing service provisions into the artist-museum relationship further complicated and changed it (Fraser, 1994).

Like Hans Haacke, Fraser acknowledged project-based artistic works as efforts within an art *industry*. This recognition dissolves the romanticism[26] of artistic myth and pragmatically adapts itself to today's art world. Practicing as an artist relies on economic stability and payment is required. Artistic work itself is not regulated and lacks professional guidelines or adequate contracts. But this has as many as disadvantages as it does benefits. Fraser candidly remarks that working for prestigious institutions on such projects does not guarantee enough to make a living. This puts her and her peers in a position discussed by Bourdieu, whereby agents with a high level of cultural capital, like Fraser, may have a low level of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1983)[27]. Therefore, she advocates professional self-regulation to address the imbalance (Fraser, 1994). To increase her economic capital (to equal her cultural and symbolic capital) would enable her to regain control in the field of power by improving her position. The vast range and lack of uniformity in artistic practice suggests this would have to be on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, Fraser raises important questions about artist/ institution service relationships. Her concerns are another part of the dialogue of agent power negotiations and attempts to adapt to the doxa's subtle fluctuations.

Fraser asserts that what distinguishes artists from museum staff is their *autonomy*. By preserving their autonomy they retain artistic integrity, which is consequently what makes them so useful to institutions - and gives them capital - in the first place. Thinking about the act of service necessitates a consideration *for whom* the service is ultimately intended. It goes without saying that actions are always in the subject's own service. Artists produce work driven by their own interests, whatever they may be. Critique, in Foucault's terms, places the primary aim with the agent's own desubjugation (Butler, 2002, p.12). And a framing using Bourdieu must also acknowledge this – the agent seeks to retain or improve their position in the field. But there is no reason such actions should not serve others as well; in fact it might be in the agent's interest that truths are questioned by others. In a roundtable discussion between Fraser and several other artists, it is suggested that institutional critique should also serve the audience (Fraser, 1994 and Barry *et al.*, 1997). Since the institution is ostensibly also in the public's service, their goals may

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[26] Haacke believed this in itself was perpetuated as a commercial benefit (Haacke, 1984).
[27] Inversely, agents such as wealthy business-trained museum board members may lack cultural capital, but have plenty of economic capital.

align to a degree. The notion of consciously providing something for the visitor is a marked change from early institutional critique's art- and artist-centred exercises in liberation.

Emerging from curatorial roles, the artists in this chapter enacted direct, in situ critiques of institutions. In doing so, they demonstrated that they wished to co-operate with institutions, and indeed that they themselves were part of them. But they would not conform to the doxa of producing artworks to flatter, sit in, or be framed by institutions. In fact, they would publically subvert them. These artistic works showed that the institutional voice was one of many, challenging the monolithic authority of museums. Permitting the artist to publically interpret their practices in ways that could make them appear unfavourable to the public was progressive, but required negotiation and a cetain amount of struggle which still occurs today. Artists tried to resolutely retain their autonomy, and therefore their capital.

Vice versa, artists could offer institutions ways to improve their capital. In describing an encounter between a journalist and historian, Bourdieu makes the point that often agents are representatives of their respective fields. He notes that "the statutory objectivity that is granted to the historian is not linked to any intrinsic properties of the person but to the field of which he or she is a part" (Bourdieu, 1995, p.31). In the context of the artist-agent vs. the curatorial-agent, the former operate within a field in which subjectivity and individualism are necessary. The products of artist-agents are always highly idiosyncratic, whereas (traditionally) institutional output is marked by the 'statutory objectivity' of Bourdieu's historian. Thus, the artist offered an alternative, and was able to use methods not traditionally at the institution's disposal, such as irony. Such strengths found their artistic roles expand into institutional ones – as researchers and consultants. Becoming participants in museal discourse made their voices even louder. The collaborations between artists and institutions expanded artists' positions and their capital.

Aiming to provide a fresh perspective from the canonised writings on artistic institutional critique, this thesis now turns to another agent in the field – the visitor. When we consider institutional critique's social function, the gaps between art, the institution and the visitor become smaller.

Chapter Three

The Visitor-agent

Considering artist-agents of institutional critique, Hal Foster states:

> "Each treats the public space, social representation or artistic language in which he or she intervenes as both a target and a weapon. This shift in practice entails a shift in position: the artist becomes a manipulator of signs more than a producer of art objects, and the viewer an active reader of messages rather than a passive contemplator of the aesthetic or consumer of the spectacular." (Foster, 1982, p.1)

As Foster implies, institutional critique changes the position of the artist. But he states it also supports *visitors* in developing active engagement with objects and institutions, and therefore another valuable facet of institutional critique. As French citizens were formed through their critique of the monarchy, so too were artists as "political, social or individual subjects" (Steyerl, 2006, p. 13). In that vein, the formation of the independent visitor is expedited by their own critical thinking. Artistic interventions can aid this formation by helping the visitor understand the covert framings they find in a museum.

Into the Heart of Africa alone proves that visitors are critical thinkers. The racist texts in particular signified a set of values that audiences found offensive and provoked strong reactions. In this case, the exhibition's perceived prejudices were wholly explicit to the audience. Their messages were such that anyone with a basic awareness of civil rights, racial prejudice, or colonialism would recognise and react to. However, the more covert museum languages (the museum's 'silent messages') of architecture, display, value judgements, curatorial narratives, inclusions and omissions are perhaps less obvious to the casual museum visitor. They read and are influenced by them, but are far less conscious of them. Furthermore, they are valued highly as objective, educative, truthful and trustworthy sources of information (American Association of Museums, 2012). Institutional critique's relationship to the visitor should not underestimate their own critical thinking skills, but further heighten their sensitivity to the imposed museum framework. More importantly, introducing or encouraging a critical vocabulary reinforces the idea that visitors have every right to be critical and ask questions.

Mining the Museum is an example of an event which successfully drew attention to museological biases and encouraged visitor's critical thinking. Fred Wilson's position as a figure operating – to some extent - outside the institution made his subjective 'voice' in the exhibition clear. The manipulation of objects was no longer hidden underneath a supposed neutrality. On a basic level, it aimed to show that the museum could – and should – be subject to questioning. Using the museum as a tool to discuss its problematic practices rendered it transparent and challenged the (largely) unquestioned acceptance it – and other museums – receive from visitors. In her thesis *Mining the Museum and After: Fred Wilson's Institutional Legacy*, Hillary Marie Cook sums up the event thus:

> "Wilson allowed the public to see the MHS as a real museum where real choices were made by real people and real consequences happened. He opened up the discourse about whether the MHS was a "good" or "bad" museum and what that might mean for its future development…. and he allowed a public of museum visitors and professionals to be a part of the evaluation of the institution." (Cook, 2008, p.26)

The founder and Director of the Contemporary, George Ciscle, was instrumental in inviting Fred Wilson to Baltimore for *Mining the Museum*. Explaining one of the goals for the collaboration, he said: "Although we received great acclaim and recognition, very few people realised we had hoped to at the same time provoke the public to examine what, why and how museums exhibit what they do and to and for whom." (G. Ciscle 2012, pers. comm. 19th March).

Working with local groups allowed the artist to better understand the needs of Baltimore's underserved audiences and make informed choices about *Mining the Museum*'s content and strategies. He stated: "… I don't want to make an exhibition that's for a few curators and critics and artists in New York City when I'm doing it in another country or city. I want it to be for the people that are actually going to see it. It's those dialogues that I have, those conversations and interactions that really show me how far I can go for people to deal with the things I bring up" (Wilson, 2010, n.p). Hillary Marie Cook cites a number of reviews describing the exhibition's effects on viewers. She notes that the exhibition was successful in bringing under-represented and never-before-visited audiences to the museum[28]. Its institutional-referential content and Wilson's appeal for visitors to use *Mining the Museum* as a framework with which to view the rest

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[28] This was the primary aim of the Historical Society's Executive Director at the time. A number of the sample questionnaires' underrepresented groups felt that 'their' history had been addressed.

of the Society's collections struck a chord. A questionnaire revealed visitors reactions, gauging visitor demographics and feedback.

In Lisa Corrin's accompanying catalogue to *Mining the Museum*, she includes a number of these questionnaires to give a flavour of the range of responses. Some were positive; some negative. In the sample, the question: "*Did the installation make you reconsider your ideas or feelings about museums, artists, history, contemporary art…? How?*" was often answered affirmatively. There are no figures available with which to draw a conclusive analysis[29], but Wilson's and the Contemporary's intent was certainly successful with some visitors. Remarks included observations on the tendency "to passively accept the labels presented in museums… Now I think I have to be more actively questioning" (Corrin, 1994b, p.68) and "…it is about time that museums begin to be inclusive in their storytelling" (*ibid.*, p.75).

One reviewer noted: "A lot of artists may please you, but they don't change your way of thinking. Once you see one of his shows, you have some Fred Wilson in you. You're looking for ironies. It's more than about intellectual interest. It changes the way you think about art." (*in* Cook 2008, p. 22). At its most successful, it also changes the way one thinks about museum displays in general, providing a point of focus for questioning. What Wilson's installations encourage is "audience participation and awareness" (Rodrigues, 2002, n.p). One method used was a curator-produced handout which was installed in all the elevators at the MHS, simply asking: "What is it? Where is it? Why? What is it saying? How is it used? Where are you?" and so on (Fig. 4).

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[29] The Maryland Historical Society failed to respond to requests for information.

MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM

What is it?
Where is it? Why?
What is it saying?
How is it used?
For whom was it created?
For whom does it exist?
Who is represented?
How are they represented?
Who is doing the telling? The hearing?
What do you see?
What do you hear?
What can you touch?
What do you feel?
What do you think?
Where are you?

MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM-MINING THE MUSEUM
THESE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE CURATORS OF THE
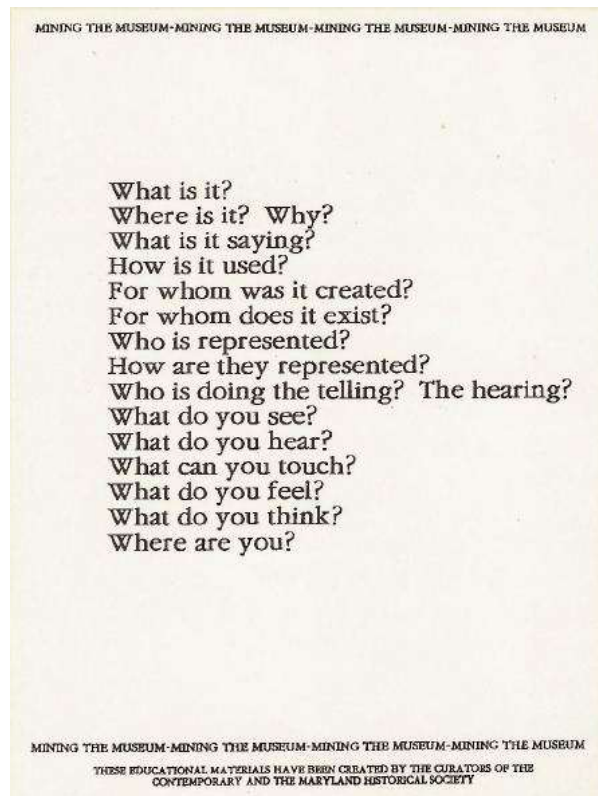CONTEMPORARY AND THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Fig. 4. The Maryland Historical Society's visitor handout for *Mining the Museum* (1992). From: Corrin, L. (ed.), 1994b. *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*. New York: The New Press. Reproduced with permission from The New Press

Institutional critique brings museological concerns to the museum's publics, extending the discussion outside the borders of academia and the intra-museum field.   As Schildkrout observes, what distinguishes this kind of critical work from its academic equivalents is its *audience* (Schildkrout, 1991, pp.185-16). The most successful critiques - such as *Mining the Museum* - are developed with museum visitors in mind and address them directly. The more responsive visitor-agents may be awakened to critical thinking and such concerns. For those interested in engaging discursively with institutions about their practices, the limited options of traditional surveys or visitor books are improving[30]. However, such critiques provide another, more phenomenological point of entry to the conversation. Assuming the work is geared toward audience understanding[31] and is successful in relaying its messages, institutional critique only acts as an intermediary tool which interested parties may use if they wish to more actively engage with

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[30] Social media and the more creative, participatory strategies (advocated by figures such as Nina Simon) make this a more appealing experience for visitors.

[31] Wilson's work, in particular, *is* geared toward the audience. For *Mining the Museum* he spent time with community groups, stating: "I don't just come into a community and say "There it is. Now you have to figure it out" Sometimes it just doesn't translate… I want people to get involved in a work that is very important to that community." (King-Hammond 1994, p. 33)

museal discourse: it all depends on how it is used. Foucault's theory that discourse is power comes into play again here. As visitor-agents use institutional critique as a point of entry they are empowered to become discourse participants. Remembering Foucault's principle that institutional critique is an instrument, visitor-agents who choose to participate transform *themselves* from subjects of the museum by use of that instrument[32].

Audience-centred projects are crucial to institutional critique in this regard. Andrea Fraser's argument that "If you want to change something… the best, if not only way to accomplish such change is by intervening in an enactment of that relation" (Fraser, 2005b, p.307) holds true. But it is only of limited use if the audience addressed is already initiated. The museum's access barriers prevent many potential visitors from entering. Again, Fred Wilson's work with Baltimore community groups and focus on their history in *Mining the Museum* overcame this hurdle. Museums, too can uphold their end of the bargain by targeting accompanying programming and marketing at these groups.

The criticism of the museum as a hallowed temple is a hallmark of New Museology. By way of widespread cultural reverence, insiders and outsiders alike are complicit in its reinforcement, maintaining the "naturalness of class distinctions" (Rosler, 1979). Perhaps the tendency to accept things as they are unless provided with an alternative is characteristic of a lack of critical thinking in general. In his performance at the Whitney as a security guard, mentioned in Chapter One, Wilson drew attention to visitor's own expectations toward museum staff and visible minorities. By exposing audiences to their own preconceptions about museums, objects and socio-cultural issues, it may initiate their *own* self-reflexiveness too.

As Fred Wilson would agree, critiques that ape exhibitions still manipulate their audiences, but they do so more transparently. Using the rhetoric of art as an alternative to educational institutionally-produced exhibitions acts as a mediator between visitor and museum. With one foot in the realm of the public, and the other in the museum, such projects offer a different kind of communication. Using the museum and its systems as the source for investigation, the artist dissipates the notion that the endpoint of cultural discourse lies with the museum and its displays. The dialogue that it prompts involves the other major agent in the field: the visitor. The artist uses the tools at their disposal that are, perhaps, unavailable to the museum: emotion, fantasy, subversion, humour, irony, subjectivity and criticism[33]. When critically turned toward the

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[32] Naturally, in order for participation to be effected, the institution must provide receptive points for feedback. This will be discussed further in later chapters.

[33] Such tools might be used in more progressive, art-based curatorial practice but appears to be historically less successful in non-art museums.

museum, they present the means for visitor discernment, prompting the individual questioning of our institutional spaces.

Critique's transformation of visitors as receivers of information to analysers and meaning-makers marks yet another shift in power. In other words, the doxa is revealed to the visitor and becomes open to their acceptance or rejection. The visitor who approaches the museum's collections aware of their framings can do so knowing that the object's inclusion is dependent on certain historical and contemporary criterion of selection; that there may be ethical principles at play; that there are notions of value ascribed; that its method of display contributes to the story that is being told; that the label tells one side of the story, and so on.

However, understanding art is not always universal or easy. Bourdieu notes that it requires 'deciphering' (Bourdieu, 1968, p.215). Inherent in art itself is its own perceived myths, mysteries and barriers that appear unnavigable for many visitors. Care must be taken to avoid positioning the artist as a spokesperson for a counter-institutional audience. They are neither a heroic myth-breaker nor problem-solver (in other words, they should not replace one mythic truthteller for another). Nor does this thesis seek to contribute to the myth of the artist. Peter Vergo argues that so-called 'aesthetic exhibitions' display an arrogance in their reliance on the objects to speak for themselves, assuming a great deal of visitors (Vergo, 1989). To be successful in terms of accessibility and to become critical stimuli for audiences requires preventing the artist's voice from appearing absolute. In order to avoid exhibiting a work that is either too didactic, or that appeals to a narrow audience of art aficionados or museum professionals, there must be a network to support and explicate it. When a work is taken up by an institution in a fuller capacity to elucidate its own workings and framings for the critical visitor, the key is in its participatory elements and accompanying programming, to ensure that hermeneutical 'deciphering' is assisted if necessary.

Bourdieu argues that agents compete for control of the interests of the field to defend or improve their positions within it. This thesis holds that, in the museum, these symbolic interests include the production, dissemination, legitimation and framing of culture. But he maintains that unequal power relations are concealed and therefore can go unquestioned (Johnson, 1993, p.2). Institutional critique "… hones viewers' awareness about the disciplinary effects of institutional power and its authority to shape meaning." (Bryan-Wilson, 2003, p.91). In Bourdieu's terms this could be considered to expose part of the doxa, or what Fred Wilson terms 'the silent message of the museum' (Puttnam, 1991, p.101). If institutional critique is to render framings transparent to visitors, institutions and artists (agents contributing to the production and narratives of

culture) must not monopolise the field and these symbolic interests. As Andrea Fraser noted: "Museums accord me, and other individuals of recognized competence, an exclusive prerogative to produce culture and discourse, to possess legitimate cultural opinion." (Fraser, 1992, p.318). As major stakeholders, visitors are agents essential to the survival of the museum. But traditionally, they lacked the means – or perhaps even awareness - to compete to keep their interests buoyant. A Bourdieusian framing leaves visitor-agents with the lowest cultural capital at the bottom of the hierarchy, the least likely to visit and the least likely to understand a work's implications unless assisted. It follows that they are therefore unlikely to fully enter the field, or be able to change their position to become more powerful within it without this assistance. The agent best placed to provide that is the museum itself, a site where Bourdieu claims ".... the habitus of field participants can be transformed." (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007, p.76).

The public, in-situ critique of the institution is one way of exposing the visitor to its encoded practices and their relation to the way they experience the institution. But they should not be excluded, as Fraser's quote above implies, from the cultural discourse produced by the artist-agent or the museum. Their 'legitimate cultural opinion' must also be encouraged.

Chapter Four

Institutional Effects

Agents in the museum field are many and their demands are as varied, each competing for their voices to be heard. Agreeing on an umbrella goal of their own sustainability, museums must navigate a number of ideologies circulated by professional bodies, academia, their peers and society at large aspiring for best practice. Museum studies established itself as a critical field and stimulated the analysis of museums and their practices, typically striving for reform by privileging new practices over old. Writing in 1991, Lynne Teather reflects on the academic study of museums, noting that there was an 'explosion' of interdisciplinary interest in the field (Teather, 1991), an approach which seems only appropriate considering the museum comprises so many disciplines. Despite this, Teather argues that the academic field made little impact on the professional one. However, as museum analysis became popular in classrooms it gained momentum and its own capital. As graduates entered the field the products of those reflections were enacted within institutions and theories came to fruition.

Museum-world changes peaking in the 1980's and 1990's prompted institutions to reconsider their role in society. Factors such as growing accountability[34], increased professionalism and the influence of professional bodies[35], accreditation and theories of New Museology[36] brought about a paradigmatic shift 'from being *about* something to being *for* somebody' (Weil, 1999). In other words; from object- to visitor-focused. It is not an overstatement to say that this shift was widespread, although it happened gradually and was implemented to varying degrees depending on the institution. This adoption of similar institutional goals indicates that museums are peer-sensitive organisations. Sociological studies of museum also suggest this. In their essay, Nicholas J. Rowland and Fabio Rojas argue that organisational behaviour is influenced by the field's expectations and standards, and that: "… trends and a shared institutional environment

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[34] Necessitated by the Thatcher government in the UK, for example.

[35] Such as ICOM's International Committee for New Museology (1985) and the growing membership of ICOM itself.

[36] Hugues de Varine and André Devallées coined the terms 'ecomuseum' and 'Nouvelle Muséologie' in (1971 and 1980 respectively) to name the paradigm shift towards the social in museums (Davis, 2010). Peter Vergo elaborated on New Museology in his book of the same name, published in 1989.

powerfully shape museums and produce observable similarities across them" (Rowland & Rojas 2006, p. 86). Curatorial practice, particularly in the interpretation of art, also matured in the 1990's, receiving scrutiny through newly-founded curatorial university courses and its acceptance in academia, plus at Biennials (Verwoert, 2006, p.135). During this time, artistic institutional critique was also utilised by a number of artists, making it visible again. With enough of their own 'capital', ideas gain momentum.

Pressure is felt no more acutely than from within the field itself. Copycat behaviour is common, particularly from institutions looking to others perceived as having greater capital (Rowland & Rojas, 2006). It therefore follows that the artistic practice of institutional critique gained momentum as it grew more popular with elite institutions, feeding its own 'capital'. Because the paradigm shift enforced the mandate that institutions are beholden to their publics both symbolically and practically, they have to react to social demands, which is key to their sustainability. Meeting the multitude of demands this entails is no mean feat. Huge financial pressures, technical, bureaucratic and site-specific limitations make this challenging. But change takes time, and institutional bodies comprise many agents whose attitudes did not modify in synch overnight.

In her accompanying essay to *Mining the Museum,* Lisa Corrin notes: "The Contemporary intended for *Mining the Museum* to be designed to address the 'crisis of identity' facing museums in the most direct way possible and to offer a particular, localized model for change" (Corrin, 1994a, p.390). The success of *Mining the Museum* was evident in its extended run, positive local, national news and art-journal coverage and international recognition. Previously attracting a predominantly white audience, it attracted diverse visitors and increased attendance numbers[37]. For a number of visitors, the exhibition revealed the possibility for real, emotive connections with the historical objects and narratives housed in museums, particularly where visitors were slave descendants themselves. It was highly popular with museum professionals, and its professional recognition was exemplified in its winning of the AAM's Best Museum Exhibition award. Its visibility in the museum world encouraged organisations to reconsider their own narratives, and the ones they weren't displaying. This ensured its impact reached far and wide, increasing the visibility of the MHS, The Contemporary and Fred Wilson. In its successful collaboration between an artist and a historical society, the project showed the potential benefits for museums in such a project.

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[37] The 1999 Americans for the Arts report stated that *Mining the Museum* brought attendance to an all-time high for the MHS (Americans for the Arts, 1999, p.18); some 55,000 visitors (Corrin, 1994c, p. 47), an increase of over 30%.

For the MHS itself, Wilson's strategies even had an effect on staff. In his semi-integrated position, Wilson noted that staff roles changed, particularly their relationships to the collection and as its interpreters. In his recollections, the African-American staff[38] appeared far more understanding of aspects of the exhibition than their white colleagues, as they lacked the personal insight and relevance the stories still had at the time. He noted that "Because it was dealing with African-American history, the maintenance staff was better at explaining what the show was about than the curatorial staff" (Barry *et al.*, 1997, p.121). In terms of the racial and slavery issues *Mining the Museum* discussed, the African-American staff members knew far more in real terms, which Wilson observed produced a 'power shift'. He said: "… it was palpable in the museum that for the run of this exhibition there was a very different relationship between and a closer one I should say between the not professional staff and the professional staff because of the subject matter of this exhibition" (Wilson, 2010). As the important main point of contact with visitors, docents participated in learning and meaning-making activities prior to conducting tours. They were encouraged to attend courses, lectures and the artist's own guided tours. Discussions were invited and questions provided to get them to think critically about "… the role of museums, curators, educators, and audiences in the interpretation of culture" (Corrin, 1994c, p.47). The result was that the activities "… had a great influence on their interpretive skills and on their ability to communicate with a racially and culturally diverse audience" (Shapiro, 1992).

The exhibition offered an entirely new perspective on its collection at odds with its previous bias and limitations. Hillary Marie Cook makes the point that that the pre-*Mining* exhibition narratives avoided controversy (Cook, 2008, p.16) by omitting painful stories from Maryland's past. Any programming designed with a more diverse demographic in mind was restricted to events like Black History Month rather than year-round. But in doing so the MHS created problems for themselves in excluding a major part of the locality's history, for both black and white constituents. This was not unrecognised within the MHS. At a time when museums were keen to attract more diverse audiences, the effort derived – in part - from more practical means. The MHS had lost all of its state funding in 1992 (Shapiro, 1992) and diversifying its audiences was another way to increase attendance and membership. With such low capital, the MHS had little to lose. The Chief Curator, Jennifer Goldsborough noted that bringing Wilson in aided the

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[38] Only a small number of maintenance staff, one docent and two trustees (out of sixty-one) were African-American. This information is gathered from several sources, including anecdotal statements from Fred Wilson and *Mining the Museum and After: Fred Wilson's Institutional Legacy* by Hillary Marie Cook (Cook, 2008, p.16).

increased drive for inclusivity, as "a way of gaining credibility for ideas which the staff had identified as important new directions for the institution" (Americans for the Arts, 1999, p.17). She indicated that there was an uncertainty on how to sensitively address them, and Wilson himself recollects discussing objects such as a public whipping post that the MHS said they didn't want to 'deal with' (Wilson, 2010). The resistance to discuss the problematic has since been labelled a 'curatorial cop-out' (Stearn, 2012, p.6). But Goldsborough's statement indicates that the artist's voice was regarded as less 'risky' than the institution's. And where the problems are bound to the institution, there is value in their examination by an external agent. It has also been suggested that this 'risk element' in a single project operates as a trial rather than launching it longer-term and institution-wide (Latimer, 2001). Wilson's emphasis on race and the history of slavery made these 'controversies' visible and tackled the institution's failure to discuss them head-on and in an innovative way. For whatever reason they were previously excluded, *Mining the Museum* then provided a model to work from.

Indeed, *Mining the Museum's* success was due to collaborative institutional efforts[39] to support Wilson's exhibition. The Society changed a number of object labels within the museum but outside of Wilson's intervention. Programming accompanying *Mining the Museum* included public lectures, tours led by docents and artists, and a course entitled *Exhibiting Cultures*. Subjects covered included race and gender in history and art (Corrin, 1994c, p.47). The Historical Society also organised an African-American Family Day:

> "The celebration, which includes craft demonstrations by African-American artisans, a workshop in collecting oral history, films, a living history depiction of Frederick Douglass and a guided tour of "Mining the Museum," is one way the historical society hopes to strike up a permanent relationship with African-American Marylanders and to redefine its own mission." (Shapiro, 1992)

Wilson's dynamic critique required a new approach to programming, one which improved on the old. Developing a high standard of thoughtful educational techniques for both staff and public facilitated more active engagement with the exhibition and the institution. It clarified and further discussed *Mining the Museum's* themes. It was never what Peter Vergo would call an 'aesthetic' exhibition; Wilson's sensitivity to his locale, audience awareness and powerful message resonated with audiences. But where visitors needed or desired more information, interpretation or clarity

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[39] Organised by both the Maryland Historical Society and the Contemporary.

of intention, it was provided by the programming. In the sense that *Mining the Museum* acted as a channel between the Maryland Historical Society and its audiences and local constituents, the institution itself employed effective programming as a support mechanism connecting visitors to Wilson's work. This symbiotic relationship was essential to the success of the work and helped it avoid being a niche exhibition popular with the artworld and museum professionals alone. Underlining *Mining the Museum*'s message that neither the institution, nor the artist's voice itself were the 'endpoint of cultural discourse'. Indeed, no endpoint existed at all. Its programming ensured it connected to and was meaningful for many of the general public who attended.

One artist-led exhibition which covered similar ground to *Mining the Museum* was *Bequest* by Renée Green at the Worcester Art Museum (1991-1992). Under the museum's patriarchal founding and history, Green explored the institution's neglected narratives of blackness and colonialism, comparing hidden and parallel histories of African-Americans. Like the Maryland Historical Society, this was the first contemporary work of art to be presented by the museum, which had recently appointed a contemporary curator to revitalise the space. Green's interest in colonialism was sparked by the collection, which she elected to work with. In an interview, the curator, Donna Harkavy, noted that the exhibition had proved popular with curators and arts professionals but less so for Worcester's public. In a conversation between a group of artists, Green herself noted that the audience's responses were "incredibly fractured" (Barry *et al.,* 1997, p.127) and suggests – in terms of audience reactions – the exhibition was unsuccessful. Fred Wilson responded by saying: "That's a typical situation. The institution is trying to make some sort of radical change but they don't want to do it themselves. So they bring you in to do it. …. But what it's really about is their denial of the predicament created by their place in their own community. In that kind of situation, whatever you do - unless it redefines their way of reaching that audience - is going to produce a similar reaction from that audience because the audience is not going to be reading your work, they're going to be reading the institution that they've known for x number of years." (*ibid.*). These statements indicate that critical artist interventions do not always fulfill their intentions. The symbiotic relationship and support network of museum to artwork wasn't there. If the intention is to open the visitor-agent to the framework – or doxa - of the museum, the artist must have an understanding of the visitor. So too, must the institution facilitate communication between artwork and visitor, and open them up to discourse[40]. Above all, *Bequest* lacked the community-driven objectives and nuanced, participatory programming that supported *Mining the Museum*.

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[40] A clear brief at the commissioning stage is important for this.

Institutional practices at the MHS appeared to be modified post-*Mining*. Wilson's formal work was done, but his relationship with the Society continued in an ad-hoc consultative capacity, occasionally advising on related issues[41]. Exhibition strategies from that point included more culturally inclusive displays featuring the African-American history of the community, with less focus on the museum-standardised affluent, white, male, historical narratives (*ibid.*). Selected exhibits, such as the Klan hood and baby carriage, were retained after *Mining the Museum* ended for a further eight years. The Historical Society also set up external groups to advise on education and gallery matters. Later programming reflected *Mining the Museum*'s legacy, such as *What's it to You? Black History is American History* which ran from 2002-3. Its 2007 exhibition *At Freedom's Door: Challenging Slavery in Maryland* examined black and white resistance to slavery and displayed both contemporary art and historical objects (Cook, 2008, p.29). Writing in 2003, Judith Stein noted that "Today the Society has five minorities and 10 women on their Board" (Stein, 2003, p.1). In terms of the museum's practices, *Mining the Museum* played a significant part in bringing the archetypal, dated, object-focused institution right up-to-date, bringing seemingly more progressive museological ideas the credibility the staff desired and setting the tone for the future of the institution. Overall, the event is an example of a successful collaboration between a contemporary artist, a contemporary arts centre and a historical museum.

When their relevance is seen as outdated, or their practices objectionable, museums are subject to reproach. Hans Haacke's notorious Guggenheim rejection *Shapolsky et al.* (1971) is an example of a most unwelcome early critique. A similar situation occurred with artist Kendell Geers' work *Title Withheld (Score)* (1995-7). Rejected from an exhibition on post-apartheid South African art at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt[42] in 1996, it was later shown a number of other times at festivals, but arguably lost some of its institutional impact. The work comprised of a wall text of statistics listing the ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations the Haus der Kulturen der Welt was showing in order to appear 'politically correct'. In doing so, it reduced the efforts of inclusion to quotas and revealed the exhibition to not be as diverse as it had hoped. Geers stated that, at first: "… the curator was extremely excited about this work, but when he saw the final numbers, he was shocked at the fact that in detail his exhibition was not as politically correct as he had thought it was - there were basically too many straight white male artists on the show and

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[41] Wilson recalls: "…one of the educators called me and said, "We have a school group coming in and some of the children are in the Klan. What should we do?" So in case you thought this is just historic, well no….. " (Wilson, 2010)

[42] A request to the curator for information about the reason for this rejection went unanswered.

he could not allow himself to make that fact public." (K. Geers 2012, pers. comm. 4 April)[43]. It is interesting that, despite Haacke's and Geers' respective invitations to contribute at these institutions, and as artists known to be highly critical of institutions and social and political systems, the works distinguished themselves as being 'too close to the bone' for actual display. *Title Withheld (Score)* did little more than highlight publically-available information, yet rather than address its embarrassing claims it was dropped. In these instances, being critically-minded was desirable as long as the criticism wasn't directed at the institution.

1960's and '70's artist-activism was an unwelcome ambush but had some success in terms of museum reform. Tactics used included demonstrations, protest-meetings, leaflet distribution, letter-writing and infiltrating museum reception events to embarrass institutions. The aforementioned New York-based Art Workers' Coalition targeted the city's large institutions and were successful in pressuring them into (in some cases begrudgingly[44]) introducing free admissions days (Volpato, 2010). The activist climate almost certainly influenced MoMA's decision to introduce a free admissions day in protest to the Kent State University shootings in May 1970[45]. This was an unusual gesture, particularly in light of the majority of supposedly apolitical institutions and MoMA's own Nixon connection. The Coalition, and the groups that followed, doggedly pursued their aim to make museums fairer. Feminism was experiencing a resurgence, and in its second wave it targeted the art canon and its institutions. A number of exhibitions were put together to showcase the work of women artists. Activists focused their efforts around theory and debate, art-historical revisionism, publishing, exhibiting and actions and interventions (MoMA, 2007).

Despite the above actions, and the wider social protest movements, museums (major institutions in particular) failed to respond reflexively or adequately. This prompted some of their most pertinent 'uninvited' critiques in the eighties, when a group called the Guerrilla Girls began targeted campaigns in reaction to New York institutions' white, male bias[46]. Now institutionally 'embraced', the Guerrilla Girls' posters feature in major collections and exhibitions. Their

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[43] The artist recalls that Haus der Kulturen der Welt was surprised when he arrived in Germany. Upon meeting him at the airport, the institution's representative exclaimed "But you were supposed to be black!" (K. Geers 2012, pers. comm. 4 April).
[44] MoMA distributed a letter to visitors defending itself to the activists' negative claims, detailing their "… economic deficit of the museum over its purchases" and information on its existing guidelines for free entrance to artists, schoolchildren and underprivileged people (Lorente, 2011, p. 225).
[45] During student protests against the war, four unarmed students were killed and nine wounded after the Ohio Army National Guard opened fire.
[46] Including "Racism, sexism, classism, ageism, eurocentrism, nepotism, elitism, phallocentrism" (Guerrilla Girls, 1992). Coincidentally, the group was formed in response to *Museum as Muse* curator Kynaston McShine's show *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* (1984). McShine's statement that "any artist who wasn't in the show should rethink 'his' career" was particularly vexing (Guerrilla Girls 1995).

triumphs can be measured in a number of instances where their activism effected direct change. In 1992, they bombarded The Guggenheim's Director with postcards protesting the opening exhibition of the new Guggenheim SoHo location. Its featured bill of four white, male artists was objectionable, and their campaign led to the Director to add a female artist – Louise Bourgeois - to the list[47]. Along with the increased awareness of gender issues in museums, their work has contributed to internal women's initiatives in institutions such as Tate Modern and MoMA (K. Kollwitz 2012, pers. comm. 8 March). In 2007, they targeted the USA's national museums in an insert in the Washington Post (Fig. 5). They accused the National Gallery of Art in Washington of being 'boy crazy', citing just three one-person exhibitions of women to sixty-eight male in the previous decade. Embarrassing statistics showed that 98% of the on-view collections were male, the rest of the works by female artists remained in storage. Even more shocking was that just one work by an African-American artist was on display at the time (The Guerrilla Girls, 2007).

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[47] *From Brancusi to Bourgeois: Aspects of the Guggenheim* (June 28–September 6, 1992)

The publishing of these figures proved eye-opening for the institutions. "The National Gallery hurriedly installed a sculpture by an artist of color and the Hirshhorn suddenly found works by women and artists of color it never knew it owned!" (The Guerrilla Girls website, 27th March 2012). They critique institutions directly and indirectly, presenting lectures and workshops to reach the public and garnering support for the cause by communicating with the museum's constituents. Their billboards, bus advertisements, newspaper and magazine inserts and even surreptitious papering of museum bathrooms promote awareness. Their thousands of supporters internationally are testament to their powerful messages. They are welcomed as guests and invited to speak in the very museums they criticise, worldwide. But despite this, I suggest their institutional acceptance is still limited and often superficial.

The tactics the Guerrilla Girls' use are marked by their emphatic, site- or individually-specific targets. In pointing out irrefutable inequalities they provide an explicit basis for self-reflection in named institutions. The institutional reaction to their data and claims range from embarrassed reactions to more thoughtful, longer-term initiatives. Giving the Metropolitan Museum sixteen years to implement changes, in 2005 the Guerrilla Girls reviewed their findings from their infamous 1989 poster: *Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met. Museum?* (Fig. 6). It noted that, in 2005, less than 3% of female artists were displayed in the Modern Art sections, compared to 5% in 1989. And 83% of the nudes in 2005 were female, as opposed to 85% in 1989 (The Guerrilla Girls, 1989 and 2005). The gender gaps in the Met's collections are of little surprise given the museum's stance on diversity in its collections and staffing, which appear – at least publically - underdeveloped[48].

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[48] Their current mission statement lists the museum's role in subsections, with collecting, preserving, studying and exhibiting listed prior to their public service promises. This telling document implies the Museum's object-focused priorities are given precedence (source: Metropolitan Museum Mission Statement, 2000). In terms of diversity, the Museum has implemented a Multicultural Audience Development Initiative, but failed to respond to requests for information about diversity goals in any other aspect of the organisation (collections, exhibitions, staffing etc.), existing policy documents or statistics.
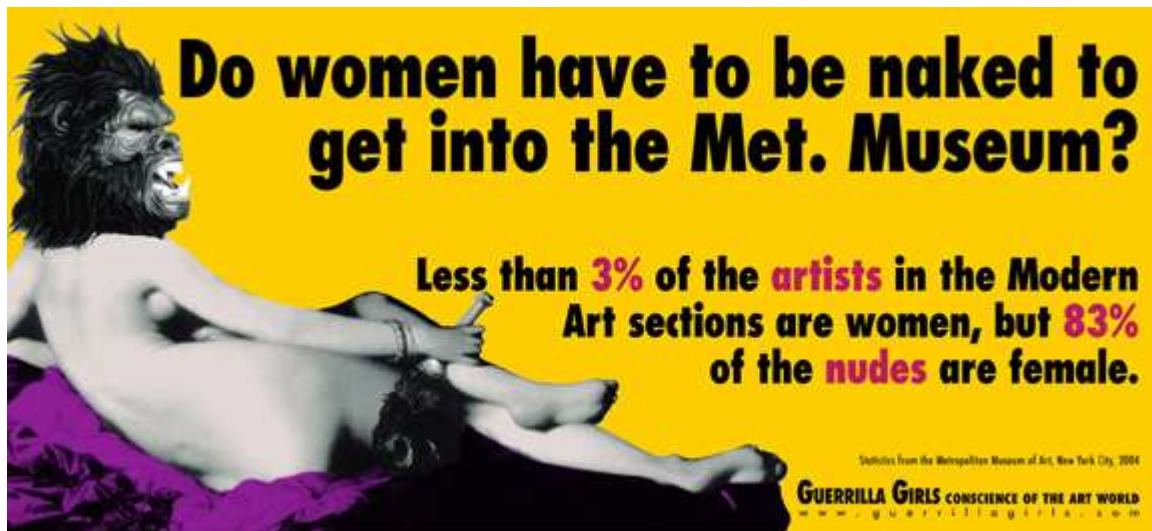
Fig. 6. *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?* Poster (2005). Copyright © Guerrilla Girls. From: www.guerrillagirls.com [Accessed 1st May, 2012]. Reproduced with permission from The Guerrilla Girls.

Published in 2004, the Guerrilla Girls *Art Museum Activity Book* parodied museum publications for children. On page is dedicated to rewriting the Met's label for the work *Madame Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord* (ca. 1808) by François Gérard. The original text reads thus:

> "Gérard, a student of Jacques-Louis David, was "premier peintre" to Napoleon's wife, the empress Joséphine. Because of the official nature of much of his work, it is rarely seen outside of France. This portrays one of the celebrated *beauties* of her time, Catherine Worlée (1762–1835). By the age of fifteen she had *seduced* her future husband, the Englishman George Francis Grand, an employee of the Indian civil services (as Madame Grand she was portrayed by Vigée Lebrun in an oval portrait displayed in this gallery). This was the first of a *series of liaisons* that culminated in her becoming the *mistress* and then the wife of Talleyrand, whose portrait by Prud'hon hangs nearby. Talleyrand tired of his *pretty but frivolous* wife, whom he had sent away in 1817. After residing in London and Brussels, she returned to Paris, where, separated from her husband, she lived a quiet and devout life." (Metropolitan Museum label text, n.d., *italics mine*)

The text reads as a classic example of a label written with an obvious bias[49]. The figure's characteristics are largely described in reductive, feminised terms: her beauty, seductiveness and male partners. In their revision, the Guerrilla Girls wrote:

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[49] This is even more surprising since the Met has a dedicated curatorial editor to oversee such texts.

"Catherine Worlée (1762–1835) couldn't wait to get away from her parents! With little choice but to submit to sexual advances that would today be considered statutory rape, she was forced to marry an older Brit with the hope he would take her somewhere. Despite her married state she had a sexually liberated life in Calcutta and London, where she soon became bored with her civil servant husband. She found her way to the intellectual salons of revolutionary Paris where her beauty and intellect attracted the attention of powerful men, She became the mistress of statesman Talleyrand, who helped her dump her dull husband and figured out a way they could marry in 1802. The corrupt Talleyrand became a political turncoat several times over so Catherine dumped him too, had fun in Brussels and London, and finally led the life of a wise old crone in Paris." (The Guerrilla Girls excerpts *in* Welchman 2006, p.216)

The revised text is laden with its own exaggerated judgments, satire and bias, and couldn't feasibly replace the original in reality. But it makes a good point. The information selected and presented in the first label paints a gendered, one-dimensional portrait and reveals much about the writer and the museum. If no further historical information was available, it would have been interesting to offer a critique of the biased or limited information on Catherine's history itself. Despite the Guerrilla Girls' explicitly highlighting flaws in this label, it remains unrevised today.

The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect exhibition at MoMA in 1999 opened with the following observation: "The public museum… has enjoyed a complex, interdependent, and ever-changing relationship with the artist" (*Museum as Muse* website, 1999). The exhibition displayed artworks concerning the museum; many of them critiques. MoMA also commissioned several artists to produce specially-made works in response to the exhibition. They approached artists known to be critical of museums, such as Michael Asher. For the exhibition, Asher produced *Painting and Sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art: Catalog of Deaccessions 1929 through 1998* (1999) which was distributed as a leaflet to visitors. It documented 403 items which had been either sold or exchanged for new acquisitions (Asher, 1999). Its deadpan list format revealed the artworks that were less desirable to MoMA, and in doing so its contribution to the art historical canon and participation in the art market (Asher & Pascher, 1999). Raising important questions of accountability to the public, it seemed to ask: "How can [artworks] be so arbitrarily introduced, and then just as arbitrarily removed?" (*ibid.* p.369).

Asher's short introduction in the leaflet was a seemingly neutral and descriptive text, indicating that the *Catalog of Deaccessions* was a work in response to MoMA's several catalogues of its

holdings, describing the format of the brochure and concluding with a list of thanks. Sharing the page was *A Note on Deaccessioning at the Museum of Modern Art* by Chief Curator Kirk Varnedoe. Asher later stated that MoMA insisted on the inclusion of Varnadoe's text against his wishes, which functioned as an apparent justification for the practice of deaccessioning at the museum. It outlined the policy and named the masterpieces that were acquired via the deaccessioning process which – presumably – raises funds and makes space.

The two texts worked against one another in their awkward juxtaposition, competing for the reader's support. In a revealing interview, Asher discussed the conflicting relationship that developed with MoMA over his contribution to *The Museum as Muse,* clarifying the tension evident in the introductory texts. He stated that the curator, Kynaston McShine, had indicated that despite Asher's background as a critical artist and explicitly inviting him to produce a work using the museum as subject, a *critique* was not desired. The work was excluded when the exhibition travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego[50] whilst the other special commissions were included. In publicising what MoMA would have preferred not to, Asher's work critiqued practices that were too close to home. Asher's account asserts that while *The Museum as Muse* was interested in looking at the museum as subject, it was uncomfortable with critical investigations that called MoMA's own internal practices into relief. Whilst the subject of deaccessioning is up for debate (it is arguably a reasonable and necessary part of museum practice[51]), Asher's work raised worthwhile questions over its accessibility and presentation in the public domain. As institutions 'in the public trust', transparency is particularly important, and public accessibility to that information is worth considering. MoMA's Collections Management Policy, which includes its rules for deaccessioning, is available to view online (MoMA, 2010), but the details of deaccessioned works are accessible in much the same way as they were in 1999[52].

A Bourdieusian analysis here places the competing agents Asher, McShine, Varnadoe and MoMA in two opposing teams. Whilst Asher questions the status quo of the doxa, his challengers attempt to preserve the integrity of the institution by producing a counter-message. In doing so, all agents act out the 'complex, interdependent and ever-changing relationship' the exhibition claims to illustrate.

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[50] Asher stated his belief that the work would travel with the exhibition, McShine denied any prior agreement to this.
[51] Deaccessioning became a major part of New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art's collections policy. During its formative years the policy stated that works which had been in the 'Semi-Permanent Collection' were deaccessioned to keep the collection truly 'new'.
[52] Not freely or publically available, information on deaccessioned works may be obtained on a case-by-case basis (MoMA Archives 2012, pers. comm. 26 March).

Despite the changes artist-activists have helped to effect, clearly there is still a way to go. As Guerrilla Girl Kathe Kollwitz noted, "Museum curators feel compelled to suck up to us on camera. They used to ignore us and hope we'd just go away" (Guerrilla Girls website, 27th March 2012). The examples given in this chapter exemplify the variety of institutional responses to critique. Reactions range from complete unacknowledgment, to mere lip service to appease persistent protesters and appear relevant. Uninvited critiques in particular, when garnering enough negative publicity, can prompt institutions to make changes to their practices, knee-jerk or otherwise. But their power lies in their pertinence and their publicity. As organisations beholden to their publics, museums cannot afford to ignore negative actions. A 2012 study revealed that Wall Street executives believed that the recent Occupy movement had had a negative effect on their businesses in terms of public perceptions. Interviewees admitted a priority shift toward customer satisfaction and improving their public image had occurred in response to the activism (Safdar, 2012), indicating that public shaming affects the most resilient of customer-dependent organisations. More than anything, invited and uninvited critiques hold institutions accountable for their decisions. When museum practices are attacked, the hope is that any changes are more than simply a PR drive and have longer-term, meaningful effects. Despite being subject to academic scrutiny and professional standards encouraging self-examination, often the institutions who have been on the receiving end of uninvited critique fail to accept them. Uninvited critiques must be pertinent and loud enough not to be able to ignore.

Rather than being reduced to simply an act of subversion, institutional critique's possibilities as an act of transformation were considered. Observing trends across the museal field, reflecting and relating them to specific sites is a fundamental part of museum practice. This chapter has set out a number of artistic critiques – invited and uninvited – which were met with mixed reactions. Lisa Corrin's intention for *Mining the Museum* to offer "… a particular, localized model for change" (Corrin 1994a, p.390) extended beyond its locality to influence institutions worldwide. This example is contrary to the harmful, alien substance critique was originally feared to be. For those institutions aware but unsure of how to institutionally address their own problems, the creative, critical interventions made manifest Elaine Heumann Gurian's maxim: "Museums are safe places for the exploration of unsafe ideas" (Gurian, 1995, p.33). And in welcoming critique they moved from the ostensibly objective, to the truly subjective. In a position of financial difficulty, and lacking in capital in the eyes of the museal profession and visitors, the Maryland Historical society had 'nothing to lose' in bringing a contemporary artist in and playing with riskier ideas. And the gamble paid off. This exhibition indicated the benefit for interventionist

artworks in non-art institutions as well, moving the static institution of storage and display to a dynamic, flexible, creative and relevant space.

However, critique still remains unacceptable in some institutions today. Those mentioned with significantly greater capital – such as MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum and Haus der Kulturen der Welt - displayed identifiable institutional problems. But, when presented with them, they failed to address them. Whilst institutional critique is often hailed as mainstream and normalised (Beech, 2006, p.9), institutions do not always accept critiques, indicating the struggle between artist-agents and institutional-agents is ongoing.

Chapter Five

Institutionalising Critique

Chapter Four of this thesis opened with the idea that museums are organisations sensitive to the pressures of their field. The development of museal academia and the other agents – including artists practicing institutional critique - competing within it broadly contribute to what appears to be a self-reflexive field. And whilst best practice points to a general consensus on goals, in reality there are disputes on how to reach them. Progress is ongoing, and as the previous chapter showed, when presented with particular, localised problems by 'outsiders', museums often fail to react adequately.

Artists involved in institutional critique attempted to bypass institutional dominance (part of the doxa) - and regain control over their careers. They began setting up their own exhibition spaces from the 1960's. Often artist- rather than audience-driven, their goals were rooted in a desire for independence from the museum and gallery system, commercially and/or ideologically. They functioned as exhibition and performance spaces, and social spaces too, for those 'in the know'. In a number of cases, where artists and artist-run spaces established themselves and gained recognition, collaborations with larger institutions occurred later.

The institutionalisation of critique is the ultimate manifestation of Andrea Fraser's inside/outside theory and critique is characterised by many cultural thinkers as the contemporary state of affairs in art institutions (Farquharson, 2006 & 2010; Sheikh, 2006b; Möntmann, 2007). This chapter argues that institutional critique can be highly useful when fully accepted and integrated into the museum itself.

Characterising the institutional acceptance of critique, Simon Sheikh writes:

> "In its historical form, institutional critique was mainly conducted by artists, and was directed *against* the art institutions, such as museums, galleries and collections… Institutional critique thus took on many forms, such as artistic works and interventions, to critical writings and (art)political activism…. Instead, the current

institutional-critical discussions seem predominantly propagated by curators and directors of the very same institutions, and usually *for*, rather than against them. That is, not in an effort to oppose or even destroy the institution, but rather to modify and solidify it." (Sheikh, 2006b, p.142)

From artistic practices of institutional critique grew the establishment of alternative spaces with exhibitory, social and counter-cultural functions. These spaces and their larger institutional counterparts served roles that were similar in some ways (the public dissemination of art; the circulation of knowledge) but vastly different in others (the nature of the audience; the interpretation of the space; collecting or non-collecting practices, etc.). Discourses occurred in and around art institutions in the early 2000's that went back to basics and began to question their very purpose. This line of questioning, its theories, protagonists and spaces became known collectively as New Institutionalism. This thesis understands New Institutionalism as a wave of progressive thinking and doing that attempts to redefine the institutional spaces in which we house art. One of the leading figures of the movement, Charles Esche, described the ideal space as: "part community center, part laboratory and part academy, with less need for the established showroom function" (*in* Farquharson, 2006). Thus, key facets of New Institutionalism include social engagement and research. Superseding static exhibitions, it explores both temporariness and longer-term projects in an attempt to make the institution's output meaningful. Institutional spaces are rearranged to house studios, screening rooms, archives and libraries as well as exhibitions spaces. The institution's pace can be thought of as slower than larger institutions, with quality valued over the quantity of exhibitions. The visitor is valued and institution-audience dialogue is facilitated. The white cube is critiqued, with the events that occur within the space defining it, rather than the other way around (Farquharson, 2006). Engagements with spaces and people outside the institution is investigated.

One curator associated with New Institutionalism – Maria Lind – created a project from 1998-2001 whilst working at Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Using the museum as a base of production, artworks were created within the museum in liminal spaces such as corridors and shops. They also permeated the city in locations such as train stations, attempting to communicate directly with the audience without a physical institutional framing (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003 and Lind, 2000). Projects with New Institutionalist roots have taken artworks and residencies into gyms, schools, rehabilitation centres and health trusts (Buergel *et al.*, 2006 and Tallant, 2009). The institution works to establish its role in its public spaces through its output, rather than in

boardrooms solely via agents in its employ. Where museums' traditionally yielded research for a greater understanding of its contents by specialist groups, New Institutionalism puts the museum to work in way that attempts to benefit society at large.

In New Institutionalism we find that often its thinkers are also its practitioners. For all its ideals, however, the leading spaces associated with New Institutionalism went through a period of change and many ended up closing. This has since been attributed to their inability to attract visitors outside the small groups already committed to their practices (Ekeberg, 2003). The sense of exclusivity was alienating for many. The inability to truly understand its wider audience is – for all its democratic ideals – something shared with facets of Conceptual art. The small spaces had less visibility and failed to attract the diverse audience they needed to stay afloat. These failings illustrate a gap between an art and curatorial-heavy theory versus the practical needs and desires of visitors. One of the leaders in New Institutionalism, Alex Farquharson, suggests that its earlier manifestations may still be effective as a prototype (Farquharson, 2010). Indeed the original practitioners now operate as directors and curators in thriving arts spaces[53], suggesting that those ideologies have been adapted and improved for practical success. The hospitable role they strived for originally is now taking shape.

A number of writers argue that these institutional practices absorb and emulate the ideas of contemporary art and artists (Ekeberg, 2003; Farquharson, 2006 & 2010; Möntmann, 2007). The staff in spaces committed to New Institutionalism also recognised what artists and new museologist thinking did but larger institutions often didn't: theirs and the space's subjectivity[54]. They could play with ideas of their own neutrality. In rejecting the 'showroom function' that Esche had described, they realised art and the artist's wider capabilities. For example, the idea that art is more than an object and the artist more than a producer of objects. Like their artist forbears[55], the space for experiencing contemporary art has been experimented with outside the museum/ gallery space. These approaches have been adopted by larger institutions. Examples include the Hayward, Serpentine (both UK) and MoMA (USA) galleries' collaborative conference *Deschooling Society* (29th and 30th April 2010) which debated participatory and educative strategies in art and led to experimental events[56]. The conference stemmed from a wider critique

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[53] Alex Farquharson in Nottingham Contemporary (Nottingham, UK) and Charles Esche at the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands)

[54] There are, of course, exceptions to this, such as MoMA's Kent State shootings response (see p. 46).

[55] Examples of these include the artists discussed in Chapter One.

[56] The conference concerned art, with a focus on "critical ideas on collective and participatory practice, pedagogical experiments and how [it] can be understood and discussed." It was part of a larger initiative involving other

of art education, and included topics such as artistic and reimagined pedagogical methods, politics, teacher/ student roles and education's effects on the institution. Models of learning were examined, such as "laboratories, discursive platforms, temporary schools, participatory workshops, and libraries" and use of "the collective knowledge and agency of local communities" (Hayward Gallery website, 2012). In their embrace and use of critique as a means to strengthen themselves, they address the argument that the "delegation of critique to artists external to the institution [is] an avoidance of curatorial responsibility", or that it is a "curatorial cop-out'" (Stearn, 2012, p.6). Artist/institution collaborations such as *Deschooling Society* also recognise and put to work artist-interests in interdisciplinarity and art's societal function[57]. With the ultimate focus on reaching out to visitors, they address New Institutionalism's earlier problems of alienating audiences, responding to Alex Farquharson's statement "Without these publics [the institution] won't begin impacting on the real social forces beyond its walls" (Farquharson, 2006). Importantly, they also contribute to supporting the visitor's wider criticality discussed in Chapter Three.

New institutionalist, critically-based theories have had a marked effect on curatorial practices, particularly in the sphere of contemporary art. For the institutions and curators that practice them, artist collaborations play a central role and knowledge-sharing is key (Farquharson, 2006). Artists were integrated in the kinds of roles discussed in Chapter Two, as well as in programming and events. Artistic influence extended to curators' working methods to produce more experimental curating. Art itself was understood as a form of knowledge production and the space around it became charged with activity – functioning as "factory assembly lines, film sets or fully functioning apartments" (*ibid.*).

Through critical evaluations of art, the spaces that house and exhibit it, and their own responsibilities, the roles of artist, curator and institution changed. Jan Verwoert argues that Conceptualism and artistic institutional critique formed independent curator-agents. This was due to the fact that, like Conceptual artists, art curators were questioning the established

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symposia, research and community projects in London. It will end with the use of the Hayward's gallery space as an alternative public art school as a pedagogic experiment in the summer of 2012, led by artists. Its "atmosphere for exchanging ideas, so that all participants gain a direct experience of different ways of thinking, questioning and solving problems … workshops, group projects, seminars, lectures and/or performances about subjects in which they are passionately interested, and that may extend to topics far beyond the methods and scope of conventional education" grew from new institutionalist theory (Hayward Gallery website 2012).

[57] I am thinking here of Nicholas Bourriaud's theory of Relational Aesthetics which judges "artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt". Or, those which are take their "theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Nicholas Bourriaud *in* Pederson 2006, p. 269). As artists work to establish societal functions for art, institutions (as the spaces that facilitate them in the public realm) accommodate and contribute to them accordingly.

conditions of art display and modifying their practices accordingly. Like the artist, the new conditions of curating stimulated creativity and criticality. Curator-agents could assume multiple roles such as caretaker, facilitator, author, educator, politician and so on. Verwoert quotes Charles Esche's belief in the institution as a creative medium through which "ideas are formulated, tested and assessed" by both employees and non-employees (such as artists and visitors) (Esche, 2005). In this way, control was not relinquished but *redistributed* to agents outside the institutional building. The integrated roles of artists highlighted in Chapter Two necessitated collaborative exchanges with curators. In considering the effects of institutional critique, Verwoert argues that the new roles and labour divisions were freeing in some respects, but antagonistic in others. He cites exhibition authorship as a contentious issue, arguing[58]:

> "Institutional critique has, from the 60s onwards not simply opposed the institution but also helped to expand the field of its agency… the curator was empowered to claim the position of a free creative agent, in the course of the dissolution of conventions brought about by critical artistic tendencies. Secondly, it is through this renegotiation of the roles of artist and curator – and their relation to each other and the institution – that also the symbolic struggle of the right to claim the position of (original) cultural agency was instigated." (Verwoert, 2006, p.133)

Outside the art sphere, and around the same time, museology was similarly reconsidering its very foundations in a line of self-reflexive questioning attributed to New Museology. The tendency to self-examine paralleled New Institutionalism, and the rising popularity of the analytical artworks described in the previous chapters. Furthermore, the recognition of inherent bias and participation in politics mirrored New Institutionalism. Importantly, in its strong audience focus it advocated a reorientation of agent capital, with power relations that were less top-heavy. Projects and critical interventions such as *Mining the Museum* offered a model to work from, as Lisa Corrin had hoped (Corrin, 1994a, p.390). They proved their longevity and provided a testing-ground for institutional practices. They presented an economical, curatorial framework "… for museums to use their own collections in new and distinctive ways, particularly important in the current era of shrinking budgets for museum and art galleries" (*in* Cook, 2008, p.48). They gave experimental curating energy, integrating museological theories into curatorial practice. This serves to acknowledge the autonomy of the agents operating within the institution, and their ability to self-critique. To summarise, New Institutionalism and New Museology share a belief in effecting change from the inside-out, as well as from the outside-in.

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[58] *see also* von Osten 2005, p. 153

Reflexivity must be enacted behind the scenes of an institution before it appears in its public spaces. Critical strategies have been adopted by individual and subgroups of museum agents to effect positive changes in institutional practices. Where dominant institutional values overlook particular problems or require extra support, pressure groups may form internally. At the National Gallery of Art, Washington, a collective was founded in 2007, composed of gallery employees. They called themselves the Gallery Girls, and their principal focus was to tackle the issue of diversity in the collections. As mentioned in Chapter Four, gender and racial diversity was lacking in the Gallery. The Gallery Girls' sought to raise funds for new acquisitions to fill the gaps, purchasing (appropriately) the portfolio *Guerrilla Girls' Most Wanted: 1985-2006* (1985-2006), followed by artworks by Louise Rosalie Hémery, Marjorie Content and Nancy Spero. The online catalogue entry for the first acquisition reads: "Gift of the Gallery Girls in support of the Guerrilla Girls", making clear their alliance with the group's manifesto. The original group of twenty staff has grown to nearly sixty, and includes both men and women. These are not wealthy patrons - their financial contributions are based on their own personal generosity and belief in the need to develop more inclusive collections. The Gallery Girls' founder commented: "Curators inherit their collections, imbalances and all. In recent years the National Gallery has acquired numerous important works by women and minorities. But correcting the imbalances in our collection is a huge task that cannot happen overnight. The Gallery Girls are there to help. We are not working in opposition to the institution's policy but providing additional support." (Anonymous 2012, pers. comm. 16 March). This statement attests to the Gallery's position as being 'on board' with new museological drives for inclusivity, but having to play catch-up in practice. Any dissent here relates to the status quo rather than the attitude of the institution itself, which the Gallery Girls identify as separate spheres. The presence of such internal groups is not publicised and therefore it is difficult to gauge how common they are. But it is encouraging to know that voices of dissent exist within institutions; that those agents effect change; that they contribute to the institution's own mission and are dedicated to improving the status quo.

One example of an exhibition which used a self-critiquing format was *A Museum Looks at Itself: Mapping Past and Present at the Parrish Art Museum 1897-1992* (1992) which looked to its own history as the basis for an investigatory exhibition. The exhibition contained contemporary artworks, but also included the museum's architectural and exhibitionary history with a focus on original features and collections, even where they had since disappeared. The interests of the museum's founder– Samuel Parrish – were examined. Particularly emphasised was Parrish's penchant for reproductions of European works over American originals, his politics and belief in

his museum as a civilizing space. The implications of his early motivations shaped and defined the institution's values, architecture and collections. Even the visitor's physical experience was addressed, as the exhibition made use of the original entryway as the starting point for the historicised narrative. Appropriately, the accompanying catalogue was entitled *Past Imperfect* after the title of a review published in *Art in America* (Kenneth E. Silver, January 1993). The exhibitions acknowledged the institution's imperfections. The curator, Donna De Salvo, noted: "Museums don't want you to see what's going on under the surface. It is the mess left in the wake of organising exhibitions and programs that most museums strive to conceal. *A Museum Looks at Itself* reveals all the things that are not supposed to be seen" (Berger, 1993, p.49). Perhaps, it might be argued, the kind of self-reflexive exhibition rooted in an institution's distant history is less of a bitter pill to swallow. However, the stories the Parrish's collection omitted in its contemporary practices were brought into relief by the exhibition. They were framed with installations such as Fred Wilson's *Guarded View* (1991) and Judith Barry's book *A Somewhat Suggestive Guide and Recent Reminiscences of My Return After a Long Absence to the Art Museum of Southampton* (1992). The exhibition sought to illustrate the continuity of its practices, the positive and negative aspects of which viewers were able to discern for themselves (De Salvo, 1993). These installations introduced issues of race, gender, cultural and social elitism which palpably exist in museums today. Addressing the visitor directly, *A Museum Looks at Itself* included text-panels provoking visitors to question the nature of both the museum and the audience. They asked: "How do we define a museum? Whose history does it tell? What should it collect and what criteria should be used? Who is the public? Who are the patrons? Who in the end decides?" (*ibid.*, p.50). Reading material was available, plus local images and film produced during the museum's history to contextualise the museal and societal issues Barry's and Wilson's installations addressed (*ibid.*, p. 48). Reflecting on the exhibition, it was noted:

> "It is only through processes of self-inquiry that art institutions can become more responsible to their constituent communities. Exchanging the mythologies of coherence and unity for realizations about how such illusions insulate the museum from dealing with these responsibilities. *A Museum Looks at Itself* serves as a significant model for any other institution wishing to emerge from its comfortable, if imaginary, position at the center of cultural gravity." (Berger, 1993, p.50)

Using self-reflexive strategies and directly addressing and involving visitors in the conversation has been adopted by large and small institutions alike. As the most explicit method of

communicating with visitors, labelling offers a cost-effective and easily-adaptable way to do this. Creative label strategies have been adopted and developed the world over. During the time Fred Wilson was producing *Mining the Museum*, the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History was experiencing a paradigmatic change surrounding similar representation issues that *Mining the Museum* discussed. The Smithsonian's new Associate Director of Public Programs, Robert Sullivan, had arrived to an institution with hugely problematic exhibitions. He estimated there was at least 190,000 square feet of outdated displays, drastically out of touch with contemporary ethics and museal practices. Many had not been updated in forty years or longer and one – the *Origins of the Races* hall – proved so problematic it was shut down entirely[59]. The institution had received thousands of complaint letters from the public and was regarded as reprehensible by many groups. The labelling alone exhibited sexist and racist narratives, as well as bad information and inaccuracies and proved a prime area for improvement.

After consulting with many community groups, Sullivan's interim solution prior to the total refurbishment of the galleries was to implement 'dilemma labels'. The method involved installing new labels next to the old, acknowledging and drawing attention to the prejudices in the displays and old texts. The idea was to "alert the public to the issues they contained and allow them to think with us about the messages they were sending." (R. Sullivan 2012, pers. comm. 13 March). In addition, it aimed to regain some of the lost trust and instigate transparency between the visitors and the behind-the-scenes workings of the museum. The idea met with mixed reactions, and many negative responses came from within the museum itself. Sullivan's detractors had formed a group before he had even begun his appointment at the museum. Deeply rooted in their scientific disciplines, the staff reaction suggested a lack of understanding or disregard for new museological issues. This was at a time when the proliferation of New Museology's ideas, and writing which addressed the issues specific to natural history museums[60] were abundant. Sullivan himself had even run workshops as an instrument for self-study to identify sexism in the displays. But the strategies were poorly received, and he remarked: "It was not quite the quiet self-reflective moment you might imagine" (*ibid.*) Many agents within the Smithsonian were simply not ready to publically – or even privately - admit institutional mistakes. Therefore the public undermining of its own authority was particularly resented. Nonetheless, the sharing of the problem proved popular with many visitors. Some took tours just of the labels and follow-up

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[59] Sullivan recalls the anti-female and anti-minority sentiment was strong, citing one particularly insensitive display which used Native American skulls to represent a bar chart.
[60] Donna Haraway's *Teddy Bear Patriarchy* had been published in 1984, amongst others.

surveys revealed excellent results, particularly with families[61] (R. Sullivan 2012, pers. comm. 14 March). But clearly, there was far too much wrong with the exhibits to be solved with the dilemma labels alone, but it provided a good, temporary acknowledgment of the issues with the promise of better future exhibitions. The institutionalisation of critique was used here – in the most public way possible - to "modify and solidify" the Smithsonian.

The *Label Show* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1995) also tackled the power of the museum's texts in influencing visitor knowledge. Unlike the Smithsonian, its strategies included both addressing and involving non-curatorial agents. Dialogue with others such as visitors, artists, critics and staff members was enabled through the invitation to write descriptive texts. These kinds of participatory strategies recognise the real value in labels but address their didacticism. The technique is commonly used as a jumping-off point for research-based display development. An example of a museum that took this kind of engagement to a more meaningful, longer-term level is the Dallas Museum of Art. Visitor label-writing was one technique amongst many in a research project spanning several years and culminating in the opening of a centre dedicated to visitor engagement with art[62]. Another example is the San Diego Museum of Natural History's *Case by Case* project. It invited visitors to write their observations and questions about objects on sticky labels. Visitors gained a participatory experience and helped the museum in the long-term understand their needs. The result was that the labels that the museum wrote responded to the visitor's questions, and were drastically different from the specialist/curatorial texts they would have otherwise produced (Blackford *et al.*, 2011). In these cases, for all their specialist and museal experience, they could not predict what visitors wanted to know about the objects. Self-reflexivity coupled with visitor engagement allowed them to find out, and ultimately better serve the needs of their audiences. In this way, institutional critique remains reflexive. But like New Institutionalism, it transcends the limits of museal introspection to reach the wider world.

The theories, techniques and examples provided in this chapter largely depend on the assumption that institutional audiences desire participation. Often, they require audiences to participate to realise their intention. This thesis recognises the multiplicity of audience expectations, and argues that there is value in aesthetic contemplation. There will always be spaces that privilege the act of looking and label-reading for passive experiences. These

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[61] Sullivan anecdotally recalled that 82% of survey participants had found the labels useful in identifying problems with the displays, and helped them understand the bigger issues with the institution's representation (R. Sullivan 2012, pers. comm. 14 March).

[62] The Center for Creative Connections opened in 2008.

experiences are built on contemplation and the transmission of knowledge. And to a degree, some level of engagement is possible with the purely specular. What New Institutionalism and New Museology's participatory strategies do is connect with those audiences *who are open to them*. Part of being a diverse public means being able to opt-out of participatory experiences. As Verowert and Farqhuarson maintain, institutions must observe this right in order to be respectful (Verwoert, 2006, p.139). However, aestheticism and the distinction between high culture and everyday life do not a thriving institution make. In order to prove their worth, museums must make themselves meaningful to society. Participation, it is argued, is significant to addressing these problems[63]. This thesis argues that programming and exhibitions must operate on a number of levels to meet the audience's varying desires for participation and engagement. The regular re-evaluation of the institution's role and needs of visitors relieves stasis and keeps them socially relevant, with the institutions critiquing themselves and inviting critique all the way. Participation transforms visitor-agents into cultural *producers*, like their artist and curator counterparts. The examples given in this chapter function "by actively soliciting and responding to visitors' ideas, stories, and creative work, cultural institutions can help audiences become personally invested in both the content and the health of the organization" (Simon, 2010). Of course, this is easier said than done.

New Institutionalism and New Museology have been adopted and enacted to varying degrees across the museal world. They share a social focus, although New Institutionalism appears more willing to push the boundaries of the institution to do so - to experiment - something which could be applied to non-art institutions as well. Museums, for the most part, are engaged in an ongoing process of learning about and fixing their own problems. Their mission statements and progressive policies are public testaments to their self-improvement. Critical practices within institutions – such as critical groups, curating, programming, etc. – embody Andrea Fraser's theory that institutional critique is indeed institutionalised, physically and psychologically. Rather than become neutralised, it can be a force for change. But nor should the practice be overestimated, no single project is enough – in Maria Lind's words - to "turn the ship around" (Lind, 2011, p.31).

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[63] The advocate often associated with participatory strategies, Nina Simon, recently became the Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. The Museum's now heavily-participatory output is a marked change from its previous programming, and has proved popular with visitors. Anecdotal indicators include highly positive press. Financial indicators include an improved financial position "…from 10% in the red for years and no cash in the bank to 10 months in the black, 50% increase in overall income, $300,000 in the bank". The institution's participatory-led progression has secured two significant grants ("based on focus on active arts participation"). Footfall has increased by 62 % from July 2010 to March 2011 to July 2011 to March 2012, and with a 30% increase in membership (Simon 2012, pers. comm. 23rd April).

The emergence of critique from within demonstrates that institutional agents embody their own agency and autonomy. It is the *doxa* that they dissent. Their actions reveal their wish "... 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, 1978, p.44). They echo Fraser's acknowledgment of responsibility, as creators and enforcers of the doxa they participate in but wish to change. Institutional critique, New Institutionalism and New Museology share a common goal in attempting to reverse the positions of dominance in the field, knowing that ultimately, redistributions of power will "modify and solidify it."

Conclusion

This thesis ultimately sought to discuss institutional critique's legacies in the context of the cultural field; a 'site of actions and reactions' (Bourdieu, 1995). It examined "the ways in which [it] has changed the positions of selected agents within the cultural field and institutional practices themselves" (p.5). It illustrated its migration from an external to an internal practice, and established its methodology in a visual and public form via art installations and objects, interventions, websites, exhibitions, acquisitions, programming and display strategies.

Looking back at the historical concerns of the museum, we observe that they *were* object-based. Institutional output was generated by research, and their public role one of enlightenment, civility and didactic education, relying on the strength of objects and the doxa's class-elitism to generate cultural and symbolic capital and maintain distinct agent hierarchies. The paradigm shift 'from being *about* something to being *for* somebody' (Weil, 1999) reconsidered the agents they served, and in doing so, how they functioned. The museum began to accept the impossibility of its neutrality and 'truths' and became more interdisciplinary, rethinking the use of its spaces.

Early artistic institutional critique distinguished itself through its binary relationships. Artists situated themselves on the outside and institutions regarded them with suspicion. From being deemed an 'alien substance', museums caught up with their own ideologies and allowed critique to be enacted within the museum. Artists were invited to make critical statements and were able to question the institution's neutrality, changing their own position as 'outsiders'. Providing an alternative way to explore the museum's truths and fictions, art used its own visual and conceptual rhetorics to question the museum. Most important was its public display, allowing it to communicate these ideas to visitors. Offering a consultative function of sorts, artistic institutional critique brought the institution's practices to the surface for examination and where necessary – change. The practice, its social and museal implications relates to a wider question about what art can *do* and what – or who - it is *for*.

Critique's integration began when institutions started to follow suit. Perhaps it emerged as a mechanism of *adapting* to the criticality they faced from artists, new institutional and museological thinking, political and social agents. Bourdieu's reference to 'forms of symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1995) might apply here to the act of critique, or at least how it might have been perceived by its targets. The questioning of the purpose museums served in society steered them

into instability. It is conceivable that self-critiquing was a strategy to 'answer' their critics, to demonstrate that they were responsive, socially relevant and that they held themselves accountable to their own ideologies. They didn't simply reflect on their practices behind the scenes but (like their artistic forebears) publically, via exhibitions and programming. When taken up in this way, critique serves to strengthen, gives legitimacy and ultimately becomes constructive. In fact, critique is *vital* to museum practice. Without it, there would be very little diversity represented, narratives and displays would be outmoded and irrelevant, and objects would take precedence over publics. In short, critique is necessary to progress. Its commitment to transparency has left legacies which include the way we think about museology, and therefore include this thesis itself.

Bourdieu's theory, simply put, argues that agents are self-serving. Those discussed in this thesis adopt(ed) certain roles in relation to the pervasiveness of institutional critique – some police the borders of the field[64] with the aim of conserving it, others seek to gain influence over the dissemination of their culture, and others don't even realise they have the right to compete at all. And their institutional roles are no longer absolute indicators of their attitude toward critique, as 'internal' agents such as the Gallery Girls and Robert Sullivan exemplified.

The historical positions occupied by these agents has changed and is changing. The artist's role diversified and their institutionalisation – in the manner of Andrea Fraser - was acknowledged by themselves and the institutions they critiqued. The curator enacted their own criticality. The visitor was courted as a producer as well as consumer of information, encouraged (rather than hampered) to flex their critical skills in the institution. The institution sustained itself and found new ways of staying relevant. Nonetheless, this story cannot be neatly packaged with the agent's roles resolved and the balance of power harmonised. It is an ongoing, ever-changing process enacted in the agent-to-agent struggle that Bourdieu predicts, which is played out with each encounter between artist, visitor and museum. Institutional critique offers a methodology to keep agents' interests buoyant, thus maintaining its *own* usefulness and relevance.

The public enactment of institutional critique makes museums *appear* relevant, transparent, frank and in-line with contemporary -ologies and –isms. But in order for this to be more than superficial (such as in the Michael Asher/ MoMA affair or Kendell Geers' and Hans Haacke's recalled invitations), the critique must be given the freedom of autonomy and honesty.

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[64] An apt description borrowed from Stuart Burch (2011b, p.5).

Successful institutional critique, in the context of this thesis, must retain its autonomy from the institution. Producing truly critical, and therefore truly *useful*, knowledge under the eye of the institution is neither an easy nor useful endeavour for its commissioners or producers. But in retaining its autonomy, it can hold institutions accountable to their aims and ultimately help sustain them. However institutions change, their role as caretakers of culture remains important, and it is this *sustainability that unifies agents* in the field. Whilst they struggle to agree on the best courses of action, their ultimate (and ultimately self-serving) desires are to remain within a sustainable and flourishing field. Institutional critique can be an ally to museological practice, to "modify and solidify it".

Bourdieu's term for the individuals in the field – *agents* – implies agency, action, activity. Without critical awareness of the institution's framings visitor-agents are unable to do much more than absorb its narratives. And without participation, they remain viewers. This thesis argues that in creating a public display of criticality, a phenomenological discussion-point emerges with which museum visitors can engage with their institutions. By developing their understanding of the doxa and being invited to react to it, visitors may become more active players in the field that claims to serve them. As institutional critique became internalised and enacted within museums, so can it become an instrument for the visitor to use. This thinking would benefit from further empirical, quantitative research through visitor studies.

Bourdieu's field is not a level one, but in bringing cultural constructions to the fore and involving more agents in the discourse, the public enactment of institutional critique has participated in transforming and distributing its structures of power. Who defines knowledge, and the practices that define and occur in our institutions involve far more agents than ever before.

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