

institutional critique

an anthology of artists' writings

edited by alexander alberro and blake stimson

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The field is a network of objective relations (of domination or subordination, of complementarity or antagonism, etc.) between positions. . . . All positions depend, in their very existence, and in the determinations they impose on their occupants, on the actual and potential situation in the structure of the field.

—Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*

In actuality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, are stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male. The fault lies not in our stars . . . but in our institutions and our education.

—Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”

Art . . . always was, and is, a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions . . . no less than it reflects their substance.

—Theodor W. Adorno, “Theses upon Art and Religion Today”

Our task is to link up the theoretical critique of modern society with the critique of it in acts. By detouring the very propositions of the spectacle, we can directly reveal the implications of present and future revolts. I propose that we pursue . . . the promotion of guerrilla tactics in the mass media—an important form of contestation, not only at the urban guerrilla stage, but even before it.

—René Viénet, “The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art”

Like the institutions of the university and the library or public archive, the art institution was advanced by Enlightenment philosophy as dualistic. The aesthetic, discursively realized in salons and museums through the process of critique, was coupled with a promise: the production of public exchange, of a public sphere, of a public subject. It also functioned as a form of self-imagining, as an integral element in the constitution of bourgeois identity.

The artistic practices that in the late 1960s and 1970s came to be referred to as institutional critique revisited that radical promise of the European Enlightenment, and they did so precisely by confronting the institution of art with the claim that it was not sufficiently committed to, let alone realizing or fulfilling, the pursuit of publicness that had brought it into being in the first place. They juxtaposed in a number of ways the immanent, normative (ideal) self-understanding of the art institution with the (material) actuality of the social relations that currently formed it. That juxtaposition sought at once to foreground the tension between the theoretical self-understanding of the institution of art and its actual practice of operation, and to summon the need for a resolution of that tension or contradiction. Indeed, one of the central characteristics of institutional critique in its moment of formation was that both an analytical *and* a political position were built into the critical interpretive strategy—that if one problematized and critically assessed the soundness of the claims advanced (often tacitly) by art institutions, then one would be in a better position to instantiate a nonrepressive art context.

That gesture of negation, of negating the established conventions of art, was modernist at its core. It posited that the aesthetic exists in the critical exchange, in the debate, within the context of the art world. It was also dialectical: its aim was to intervene critically in the standing order of things, with an expectation that these interventions would produce actual change in the relations of power and lead to genuine reconciliation. Besides negation, it also sought the possibility of a moment of synthesis. Institutional critique, at least

in its initial years of development, held out for the ideal institution of art; it held on to the old promise, and did not rest on the moment of negation as if that was in itself the truth. So when, for instance, artists such as Eduardo Favario or Daniel Buren in the late 1960s closed the gallery for the duration of their exhibition, or when Julio Le Parc and Enzo Mari withdrew from the Documenta 4 exhibition and called for noncomplicity with the dominant cultural institutions, they dialectically negated that which was the vehicle of their voice, and yet held on to it at the same time.¹ That kind of critical dialogue is the modernist moment, the Enlightenment moment, the moment of the attempted production of publicness within the established institutions of the public sphere, and it is evident in many other early instances of institutional critique. We get a glimpse of it in the 1968 tract “We Must Always Resist the Lures of Complicity,” with which Osvaldo Mateo Boglione and the other authors helped to galvanize their peers in Rosario, Argentina, to organize into an artists’ coalition that would protest against the questionable values and practices of local museums.² It is there in Robert Smithson’s call in 1972 for an “investigation of the apparatus the artist is threaded through,” and in Michael Asher’s integration of the bureaucratic and operational activities of the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles in the fall of 1974.³ We also see it in a large number of art projects (some of which are featured in this volume) that provocatively linked previously unconnected spheres of public experience together in unexpected knots, in unexpected combinations of trajectories, traversing their separateness, breaking their isolations, and pointing to the fact that there is a radical disjuncture between the ideal presentation—and even the self-understanding of the museum as an autonomous space of neutral cultural experience—and the actuality of what Pierre Bourdieu in *The Rules of Art* refers to as the “objective relations” that structure it.⁴ These works thus called not only for a critical reassessment of the purportedly autonomous and neutral art museum, but also for public cultural institutions that operate free of political and ideological interests, in a manner that functions precisely according to the structural logic that is at the core of historical institutional critique.⁵

F R A M I N G

The parallel increasingly made in the late 1960s between the managers of the institution of art and those who have assumed responsibility for continuing the established cultural order prompted artists to scrutinize and gradually challenge the roles of museum directors, cura-

tors, trustees, and the like. One of the most powerful early critiques from this perspective was carried out by the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, who in 1968 created his first fictional museum, the Department of Eagles, Museum of Modern Art. The artist recounts in “A Conversation with Freddy de Vree, 1969” (1969) that the idea came to him as a direct result of the highly charged political events of 1968. The upheaval of this period had prompted a group of artists, gallery owners, and collectors to join together to analyze the relations between art and society. Broodthaers recalls that while setting up shipping crates for the group to sit on during a scheduled meeting in his studio, he was struck by the similarity of this process to that of installing artworks for an exhibition, and concluded that “the museum was born, not via a concept, but by way of circumstance; the concept came later.” This discovery led him to invert the structure of the readymade: “Marcel Duchamp once said, ‘This is a work of art’; all I was saying was, ‘This is a museum.’” By creating a fictional museum that rendered all that circulated within it part of the art institution, Broodthaers implicitly critiqued the logic of museums, asking not only how museums come into being but also who determines their *modus operandi* and how their collections are amassed. Somewhat to his surprise, the model of the museum fiction was soon transported and reinstalled several times over, leading Broodthaers to comment, in words that recall those of Julio Le Parc in “Demystifying Art” (1968), that “at present every art production will be absorbed quickly into the commercial cycle that transforms not only the meaning of art but also the very nature of this art.”

As an institution, the museum is multifaceted and can be critiqued from a number of different standpoints. Broodthaers focuses on the museum’s frame—a frame that over-determines what it encompasses, a frame that is inherently ideological and made of a myriad of cultural, social, and political elements. At the same time that Broodthaers developed this immanent critique of museums, which used that institution’s internal contradictions to criticize it in its own terms, a number of artists in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Paris, Warsaw, and elsewhere launched what could be termed a prescriptive critique of the museum as institution. These modes of criticism stood outside the objects they criticized, asserting norms against facts—offering judgments from a particular point of view (or criteriological position). The criticism took various forms, including boycotting exhibitions, organizing public meetings and sit-ins, disseminating pamphlets, producing false identification cards to enable free entry into museums, and performing actions and other demonstrations that sought to radically transform the dominant art institutions. For example, in New York

important protests were coordinated in the late 1960s by the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) and the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) against the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in particular. According to the AWC, if the museum truly is a democratic public institution, then the composition of the board of trustees should reflect the general population and not an elite minority. As Jean Toche of GAAG notes in his statement to the AWC Open Hearing in 1969, reform is not enough; there has to be "*effective participation in the running of these institutions* in the same manner as, today, students are fighting for the control of the schools and universities." While in the United States, where museums tend to rely heavily on private funds, artists targeted individual shareholders and corporate patrons, for European artists, working within a context of predominantly state-funded museums, the critique of institutions quickly become a critique of national policy and of the ideological meanings with which the institutions imbued art.

Daniel Buren's "The Function of the Museum" (1970) analyzes the process by which the museum naturalizes what is in fact historical, and endows the objects it exhibits with economic and mystical value. The sovereign status of museums, Buren writes, is supported by the way art is installed and exhibited. Art is hung on walls, carefully framed so that only the image is displayed. "The non-visibility or (deliberate) non-indication/revelation of the various supports of any work," including its stretcher, frame, verso, pedigree, and price, is deliberate: it is "a careful camouflage undertaken by the prevalent bourgeois ideology" to conceal the social and political consequences resulting from the museum's machinations. Mierle Laderman Ukeles's "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!" also focuses on the hidden orders of the museum, but more specifically from the perspective of labor. Ukeles emphasizes the indispensable labor of installing and maintaining the site of an art exhibition, such as painting and washing walls, sweeping and polishing floors, cleaning windows and vitrines—labor that is often gendered and/or raced, and always carefully kept out of sight.

Since the late 1960s Hans Haacke has also produced works and written texts that probe the breadth of the field of art and call into question the many unspoken and yet fundamental tenets of the art world. In "Provisional Remarks" (1971), he notes that he "was no doubt pushed in this direction by the general political awakening that followed years of absolute apathy after World War II." Describing his projects of the late 1960s and early 1970s as "real-time social system[s] operating in an art context," Haacke claims that they function as snares to capture the concealed machinations and assumptions of museums—as

“double-agents” that enter into the institution of art to show that much of what it presents as natural is actually historical and socially constructed.⁶ His immanent critique of the operating logic of museums and galleries soon expanded to reflect on the part that the art public played in maintaining the status quo, and on the instrumentalization of the institution of art by political and economic interests. As Haacke writes in “The Agent” (1977), “the corporate state, like governments, has a natural allergy to questions such as ‘what?’ and ‘for whom?’” Its influence is capable of coalescing a whole range of constituencies, including museum directors, curators, critics, artists, and dealers, who together form a block to support only art that is neutral, unproblematic, and unthreatening to their economic interests. Haacke also observes that the impact that commercial galleries have on the art world and artists extends far beyond the sale of art and success in the market: “Commercial art galleries are powerful agents in that small segment of the consciousness industry which we know as the world of so-called high art,” influencing which artists receive important grants and influential academic positions. Fortunately, Haacke writes, “the peculiar dialectics of consciousness” in “liberal societies” provides a space (what Wieslaw Borowski, Hanna Ptaszkowska, and Mariusz Tchorek theorize as a “PLACE”) for critical work. This site is enabled by the logic of financial speculation and the relative lack of uniformity of interests of the major players of the culture industry. Whereas artists such as Le Parc, Buren, and Broodthaers caution that the institution of art is able to quickly appropriate and instrumentalize anything new, Haacke seizes this reality as an opportunity and concludes that the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of the field should be mobilized against it—that wherever possible “the very mechanisms” of the institution of art, what Bourdieu calls its “objective relations,” “should be used without hesitation for a critique of the dominant system of beliefs.”

Thus by the late 1960s and the 1970s it had become especially crucial for artists who took up the challenges of institutional critique to expose the institution of art as a deeply problematical field, making apparent the intersections where political, economic, and ideological interests directly intervened and interfered in the production of public culture. At the same time, however, that reality was countered by a call for a careful reassessment of what is lost when the museum—which, as I noted earlier, was founded as a democratic site for the articulation of knowledge, historical memory, and self-reflexivity, and as an integral element in the education and social production of civil society—is infiltrated by political and corporate concerns. For, as rigorous as many of these early critiques of the institution of art clearly were in juxtaposing the myths that the institution

perpetuates with the network of social and economic relationships that actually structure it, they ultimately championed and advocated for the institution: the critiques culminated in a demand to straighten up the operation of this central site of the public sphere and to realign its actual function with what it is in theory.

I N S T I T U T I O N O F A R T

The term “institutional critique,” used to describe the politicized art practice of the late 1960s and early 1970s, first appeared in print in Mel Ramsden’s “On Practice” (1975). Here Ramsden, writing as a member of the collective Art & Language, criticizes the overall instrumentalization of art, and in particular the hegemonic dominance of the New York art world. He observes that “the administrators, dealers, critics, pundits” of his time had become “masters,” and the New York artists “imperialist puppets.” The capitalist structure of the art market has been completely internalized by all those who participate in it, thereby making resistance close to impossible. Under these conditions, the chasm or disconnect between aesthetic practice and everyday politics is unbreachable.

Ramsden acknowledges that in the late 1960s there were genuine challenges to the status quo (he mentions the AWC and conceptual art), but he sees these as having fallen short of exacting any significant change because they were either ameliorative, calling for specific changes in the institution of art but affirming its basic structure, or opportunistic, allowing themselves to become co-opted by the system to attain commercial success. Nevertheless, he maintains the possibility that radical change might result from a number of initiatives that, working in concert with each other, will alter the careerist mindset that has become so internalized. In particular, he stresses the importance of developing a “community”—a base from which traits that the market preys upon, such as individual subjecthood, can be destroyed, and an art can be produced that evades the limits of institutional determination.

In “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience” (1979), Martha Rosler shifts the terms of Ramsden’s critique, which is specifically focused on the operative dominance of the New York art world, to question what factors have produced the elitism that characterizes the institution of art more generally. Rosler underscores the importance of social class in the field of art, acknowledging its significant impact on the relationship between artist and audience as well as on “the relation between those who merely visit

cultural artifacts and those who are in a position to buy them.” The purchasing power of the upper class and the fundamental role it plays in aesthetic production cannot be underestimated. It affects not only the immediate livelihood of individual artists but also the very definition of art by influencing museum exhibitions and collections. Rosler notes that “big collectors, . . . aside from keeping the cash flowing, have a great deal of leverage with museum and gallery directors and curators and often are trustees or board members of museums and granting agencies.” This leads her to push Haacke’s conclusions about gallery-goers in “The Constituency” (1976) one step further by insisting that the relatively affluent visitors to galleries and museums, including those who become directly involved in the art market, reproduce through the art world the very same values and ideological formations existent in society at large.

For Rosler, then, the role that class plays in the field of art is much more complicated than merely determining purchasing power; it is also, far more insidiously, what determines what is culture and art in the first place. An understanding and appreciation of art is intricately linked to a liberal education, where the cultivation of aesthetic taste occurs. High art, though, has to be carefully monitored, and its social value “depends *absolutely* on the existence of a distinction between a high culture and a low culture.” Rosler traces the foundations of what presently constitutes high art back to Immanuel Kant’s notion that the aesthetic has no purpose other than the cultivation of taste, and the Enlightenment philosopher’s belief that all direct social and political concerns should be excluded from aesthetic contemplation. The impact of this aesthetic ideology is manifest in several areas of artistic production: first and foremost in the importance of the formal aspects of the artwork; second in the construction of the romantic figure of the artist (as “utterly alone,” “unassimilable within bourgeois social order,” “uncomfortable in his own existence”); and also in the distanced, even alienated relationship between the artist and the audience, a relationship that Rosler characterizes as being inherently “passive.” This passivity and disconnect are reinforced by an exhibition structure that ensures that the “gallery is a space apart from any concern other than Art, just as art’s only rightful milieu is Art.” Like Ramsden, Rosler calls for an expansion of the frame of the institution of art, and for a reintegration of art into everyday life: “We must inventively expand our control over production and showing, and we must simultaneously widen our opportunities to work with and for people outside the audiences for high art, . . . to rupture the false boundaries between ways of thinking about art and ways of actively changing the world.”

The two essays by Adrian Piper included in this volume, both from 1983, pick up the conversation begun by Haacke, Ramsden, and Rosler on the importance of education within the field of art. "Power Relations within Existing Art Institutions" takes as its springboard the concept of what Piper calls "aesthetic acculturation"—i.e., "the process by which individuals are recruited into the ranks of art practitioners as artists (and also, secondarily, as critics, dealers, etc.) within existing art institutions and thereby abdicate their social, intellectual, economic, and creative autonomy." Like Rosler, Piper sees the economic background or class of the subject as fundamental to this process. The decision to take on the identity of an artist is preconditioned by a degree of economic comfort and privilege; creatively inclined individuals who grew up in conditions of economic hardship are less likely to decide to become artists. As a result, institutions such as art schools are disproportionately composed of students from wealthy backgrounds and thereby reproduce "the artistic values and interests of those socially and economically advantaged individuals." These values include "a concern with beauty, form, abstraction, and innovation in media," and the interests render "political and social subject matter . . . either largely subordinate or completely absent." The result is the reproduction of the status quo, with artists continuing to produce formalist apolitical works that museums will exhibit, dealers will support, and collectors will purchase. As Piper puts it, "The socioeconomically determined aesthetic interests" of these fortunate individuals define not only what counts as quality, but "what counts as art, period."

Piper is also skeptical of the art critic's role. She traces the division of labor between the artist and the critic within art education and concludes that the authorial voice of the critic is yet another aspect of "aesthetic acculturation." What particularly troubles her is that the critic comes to control the meaning of artworks, and in turn the artist's career. Underpinning this assessment is the belief that under the prevailing conditions of the institution of art, those whose writings on art are most public work in tandem with collectors and the market. All of these constituencies demand that the artist remain within a well-established formula and develop a signature style. At best, departures from the norm are reprimanded by negative reviews, but they are more likely to meet with complete disregard and disavowal. Piper calls on artists to respond to these adverse conditions by producing work that can be effectively inserted into fields outside of the institution of art and therefore can survive without the support of the art market. But to produce such work, artists must first rigorously question the constellation of elements that go into their own

self-construction as artistic producers. Piper's concluding remarks are similar to those of Ramsden and Rosler, as well as to the thoughts of Linda Nochlin expressed in my second epigraph. All stress that an education emphasizing the predicaments artists face is important to any attempt to transform the conditions of artistic production, exhibition, and distribution.

The institutional critique strategy of shifting the viewer's perspective, or making viewers see what they had previously taken for granted in a new and different light, also informs the work of the artist Rasheed Araeen. As Araeen explains in "Why *Third Text*?" (1987), which served as the founding statement for the British-based visual culture journal *Third Text*, the periodical's mission is to expand and redefine the institution of art. To accomplish this, Araeen asserts, the publication will seek to find a third way, an alternative to predominant "models of binary opposition," with an awareness that "considerations of art cannot be separated from questions of politics." Binary oppositions, which structure everyday life and the ordering of the world, are inherently limited, for they arrange and classify "cultural practices . . . in terms of Same or Other." Araeen thus forges a link between art and politics, and proposes the development of critical investigations capable of challenging some of the basic beliefs about culture. One of the most consequential of these is the humanist notion that the value of art is measured by the degree to which it succeeds in conveying human self-expression. This is sheer myth, according to Araeen, for it is "only through its exchange value" that art "assert[s] itself as a valuable product." Art's ideological function, what Haacke in "Museums, Managers of Consciousness" (1984) refers to as art's manner of "channeling consciousness," is therefore posited by Araeen as intrinsically bound up with its exchange value. The important role played by the market in legitimating art is of course an added handicap for those outside of the conventional frame of art, and these adverse circumstances are usually fatal for artists whose gender, race, and ethnicity also place them at a disadvantage. In short, Araeen reiterates Piper's notion that an artist's identity is always "overdetermined by considerations of nationality, race, gender, and class," and "maintained and reproduced within the institutional context of liberal scholarship and the market place." But he adds geographical location to Piper's equation. As visual anthropologist Trinh T. Minh-ha once remarked, the center depends on the periphery in order to maintain its centrality.⁷ In striving to eliminate binary models, Araeen and *Third Text* seek not as much to expand the center to the periphery as to dissolve those established boundaries and theoretical impasses.

I N S T I T U T I O N A L I Z I N G

The institution of art, as Theodor Adorno writes, is intricately linked to the governing ideology at large.⁸ It is its ally, counterpart, and underside, and as such it inevitably rehearses and reiterates the very mechanisms of social control and oppression that ideology performs. The art institution, as much as the works that are made for it, will always be the site of the types of injustice that characterize existing conditions in society. So there is a peculiar moral contradiction in aesthetic production in that on the one hand it often radically denies the reigning doxa, and yet at the same time it articulates, not necessarily in an affirmative manner but as a form of critique, the extant contradictions at the most extreme level. Linda Nochlin's groundbreaking essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) addressed this paradox from the perspective of gender inequality or discrimination in the early 1970s.⁹ Rather than attempting to resolve the contradiction by constructing a remedial history of art that includes women artists previously excluded from that history, she called for a transformation of the institutional structures that have historically functioned to exclude women in the first place.

Many of the art practices that have followed on historical institutional critique function in a similar manner, putting pressure on the disjuncture between the self-presentation of the art institution (as democratic and free of discrimination, partisanship, and, plainly put, ideology) and the highly gendered, raced, and classed ideology that actually permeates it. One of the key questions that confronted artists in the 1980s who developed work informed by feminism was how to produce representation without reproducing existing patriarchal or otherwise oppressive conventions. How could artists develop a counter or alternative public sphere with images, if images when rendered rehearse and reiterate precisely those forms of domination against which the new visuality was to be posited? For instance, artworks such as Barbara Kruger's *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face* (1981) very specifically refer to something that artists and art historians informed by feminism and institutional critique (and I am linking the two here because I think the dynamic is essentially the same) then theorized, namely the concept of the gaze, which posits that all acts of looking are inextricably bound up with patriarchal forms of control, domination, and behavior. So the very question of how representation could be constructed to transcend the parameters of oppressive culture within the visual field was as much at the center of the

operation as the question of how the governing forms of visibility, seeing, and speech could be dismantled from within.

The urgent quest in the 1980s to position artistic production within the public sphere without resorting to—or relapsing into—the use of monumental structures led to the production of a great deal of art that was articulated within easily accessible forms of communication (such as language) and representation (e.g., smart graphic design), and publicly distributed as fliers, billboards, newspaper advertisements, and videotapes. But while their motivations for developing these strategies were obviously laudable, in the process of adjusting their work to easily disseminated distribution forms and to the existing conditions of reading and seeing competence, these artists inadvertently began to produce art that crossed the border into the realm of pure publicity.

The operative method in the work of artists such as Louise Lawler, which critically examines the production, reception, and contextualization of art, is to dismantle the conventional myths that the artist is an autonomous progenitor of meaning and that artistic value is solely located in art's intrinsic qualities. Lawler's photographic and design practice determinedly shows that a complex ensemble of promotional, social, and economic activities sustains the position of the artist today and endows works of art with value. Her pictures and objects address an array of practices of making, displaying, selling, and viewing art, and ask those who encounter them to consider their place in art's discursive field. But Lawler's work makes these claims with a sense that if the institutional boundaries that determine and separate the roles of art are adequately disrupted, and the dependence of works of art on the conventions governing their context is made plainly evident, then the public function of art that was the initial promise of the institution might be regained. For while her work is meticulous in showing that art is always already contingent and culturally constituted, it also suggests that the aesthetic's historical roles and promises remain residual and capable of negotiating with the meanings attributed to art today. This dialectic, as I noted earlier, defines the central impulse of historical institutional critique, and is evident in much of the work produced by artists featured in this volume's first three parts. For instance, while the tactical media projects of the Guerrilla Girls have for several decades now persistently foregrounded the flagrant discrimination and prejudices that contradict the art apparatus's avowed equitableness and lack of bias toward anything but disinterested quality, they do so with a sense of possibility. The underlying belief of these interventions

is that the injustices that presently characterize the institution of art can be altered and corrected if the institution's internal contradictions—the discrepancy between its ideal self-understanding and presentation and the current reality—are exposed for all to see. In other words, the work does not maintain that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the institution itself, but rather that the problems are located in the conventions that currently manage and configure it.

The third section of this book opens with the work of a generation of artists emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s who questioned all aspects of the process of artistic institutionalization. These artists—Christian Philipp Müller, Fareed Armaly, Renée Green, Mark Dion, Maria Eichhorn, and Nils Norman—were too young to engage fully in the art world activities of the late 1960s and 1970s. They represent a plurality of positions that hold in common their exploration of the ways in which artistic (and other) practices become sufficiently regular and continuous to be considered as institutions. Many of these artists attempt to link the identity politics of the new social movements of the period to new forms of artistic subjectivity. This often entails creating connections between art practice and the various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination. A case in point is the work of Fred Wilson, which developed earlier institutional critique practices that radicalized or reradicalized questions of class and gender into critical historical analyses linking institutions of power such as the museum with questions of racial politics. Works such as Wilson's *Guarded View* (1991), which features four brown-skinned male mannequins, all headless and each clothed in a New York City museum uniform, foreground the class and race discrepancies that are still prevalent in the institution of art, and draw connections between the two. But the continued focus on the museum by Wilson and his peers suggests that institution's staying power and relevance for this new generation of artists, as well as its ability both to withstand and to incorporate even the most trenchant of critiques.

Andrea Fraser's "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" (2005) acknowledges the important ways in which institutional critique has been successful in shaking and eroding the foundations of the museum and bringing about significant transformations in the institution of art. The frame that allows something to be called art is now broader than ever. But Fraser concludes that this very success has also led to the appropriation of institutional critique: in their efforts to redefine art and reintegrate it into everyday life, artists have not escaped the institution of art, she writes, but have brought more of the world into it. The underlying relations of power remain the same. This leads

her to conclude that even artists whose work is informed by institutional critique should acknowledge that they are “trapped” in the field of art, that they themselves constitute the institution and should take responsibility for its disposition and mode of operation: “It’s not a question of being against 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.”

EXIT STRATEGIES

The final section of this collection brings together art projects and writings that stem from international collectives whose radical agendas and cultural politics resonate with earlier forms of institutional critique but reject significant parts of its legacy. In particular, many of these artists have little patience for the types of critique featured in the third section that can analyze and problematize the institution of art but cannot imagine an alternative to, or an outside of, its framework. Not content with merely dismantling or disarticulating the operation of art institution sites from within, that is to say, the immanent critique part of the institutional critique equation, artist groups such as @™ark, RepoHistory, the Yes Men, subRosa, Raqs Media Collective, and the Electronic Disturbance Theater develop tactical media strategies to intervene effectively in an array of fields that are far removed from the institution of art. As the Vienna-based WochenKlausur writes in “From the Object to the Concrete Intervention” (2005), “Art should no longer be venerated in specially designated spaces. . . . Art should deal with reality, grapple with political circumstances, and work out proposals for improving human coexistence.”

The scope and tactics of these collective movements are broad, ranging from ideology critique to biological engineering, from pamphleteering at public demonstrations to electronic disobedience. For these artists, institutional critique is primarily defined neither by its relationship to traditional exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries, nor by the way it addresses issues of primary concern to the art world. Rather, institutional critique entails finding ways to get out of the frame altogether, evading the official art world and the attendant professions and institutions that legitimate it, and developing practices capable of operating outside of the confines of the museum and art market. Art is in these cases

connected to a much larger political and ideological project—it is more of a means than an end. The stated aim is nothing short of confronting and contesting “the rising intensity of authoritarian culture.”¹⁰

In this and other ways, the projects of these new collectives resonate with those developed by the Situationist International in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. These collectives’ counterspectacle strategies are much more indebted to the Situationist understanding of the crucial role that media play in contemporary societies than to the aesthetic games of Marcel Duchamp, which had an important impact on historical institutional critique artists such as Broodthaers and Haacke. As the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) explains in “Tactical Media” (1996), the rapid return to order following the political and cultural upheaval of 1968 made evident the power of the spectacle, with its strong corporate hold on media and distribution networks, to resituate itself. Thus the logic of resistance tactics had to change accordingly, continually evolving to remain disruptive. What were required were tactics that were “immediate,” could “address a particular real-space situation,” were “grounded in a sense of ‘community,’” and that, due to their “ad hoc nature,” were self-terminating and would not “[solidify] into a structure of authority.” The aims of CAE’s tactics of subversion are critical and diagnostic, seeking, as they put it, “to reveal the exploitive ideological imperatives that the spectacle masks,” “to reveal all that spectacle erases,” and “to collapse spectacle into its own meaningless rhetoric.” Fully aware of the fact that the “corporate state clearly understands that contained localized activity, even in aggregate form, does not affect general policy construction and deployment,” they propose, echoing the Situationist thinking articulated by René Viénet in my fourth epigraph, that artists develop an agile form of critique (“guerrilla tactics”) that is perpetually on the move.¹¹

The Paris-based Bureau d’Études also work just outside of the purview of the institution of art. Their text, “Resymbolizing Machines: Art after Öyvind Fahlström” (2004), explores the manner in which the work of the Swedish artist increasingly stepped out of the institution of art and gained its own autonomy. Fahlström “created paintings, maps, and games filled with precise information, analyzing the social, economic, and political situations of the present.” The Bureau d’Études commend Fahlström’s exit strategy, but note the strong resistance that such tactics continue to face: “This exodus of artists outside the art system is suppressed today by art critics assuming the role of legislators (and recruiters). With their stunted philosophy of forms, these critics reduce artists to the status of suppliers whose products meet the demands of the market and cultural institutions.” The Bureau

d'Études find Fahlström's interest in distribution and broadcasting machines particularly appealing. Like many collectives, they understand the importance of independent media systems, publishers, movie houses, and the like for the creation of a counter public sphere of information. Yet they realize that it is not enough merely to create the machines that can produce alternative systems of information, for capitalism can synthesize, appropriate, and selectively destroy all new information. Thus they consider the creation of "data maps" that connect the structures of capitalism with media concentration, the prison industry, and new military technologies, for example, as the most effective way to challenge the capitalist behemoth. These "maps" take the form of websites that are continuously maintained and updated, thus providing anyone with access to the Internet the possibility of maneuvering tactically.¹² The use of the Internet as a tool and site for interventionist critique opens a whole new range of possibilities with a virtually unlimited public. Art is no longer restricted to material sites of exhibition or to a secondary life in printed catalogues; rather, it now circulates rapidly and more broadly than ever in a world that is becoming "more wired" every minute.

Like many of the artist collectives that have coalesced in the past two decades, the Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) also harnesses the possibilities opened up by the Internet to effect social awareness and produce change. In "Engaging Ambivalence: Interventions in Engineering Culture" (2005), the group writes of their hope that by "addressing political issues" their projects may "challenge engineering culture." Their "tactical aesthetics" deconstruct the connections between military research and nongovernmental agencies that have become naturalized in order to break apart the logic of these relationships. The IAA's rallying cry is also Situationist: "Re-interpretation as Intervention." They *détourne* the visual and rhetorical devices of sanctioned research organizations in elaborate performances aimed at "infiltrating engineering culture." Relying on the performance strategy of simulation honed by artists as diverse as Müller, Fraser, Laibach, and the Yes Men, the IAA pose as engineers and present their work under the guise of scientific neutrality and expertise. They thus operate "as Trojan horses, carrying our critique through the gates of detachment that guard engineers against taking responsibility for the products of their labor."

What these tactical media strategies make clear is that by the 1990s there were two distinct trajectories of institutional critique, each with its own critical approach. As Gregg Bordowitz observes in "Tactics Inside and Out" (2004), the strength and effectiveness of the institutional critique of artists such as Fraser and others, who refuse "to stop believing

that the system can be different, better, truly committed to creativity,” rely heavily on how their gestures are captured by the field of art. Indeed, such critiques are legible only *within* that field, and it is there that they are most corrosive and dangerous. Politics has migrated into the institution of art and nowhere more so than where the institution seems to be politically dead. By contrast, Bordowitz writes, tactical media collectives such as CAE proceed in altogether different ways. Their work attempts to challenge the near totality of corporate and political instrumentalization of social life, and their frame of reference “often includes places far outside the art world.” They mobilize the progressive dimensions of new technologies and develop projects “critical of the modes of production now shaping our lives.” What both of these trajectories share is the conviction that in the context of a neoliberal economy the operative logic of institutions of public subject formation is significantly different from what it was in the earlier moments of institutional critique. Today, art institutions, and more broadly speaking the institutions of the public sphere, do not even pretend to be autonomous from the forces of economic power—a notion that museums claimed to uphold as recently as a couple of decades ago. With the ideals of the institution of art, and of other Enlightenment institutions of public subject formation, in ruins, artists who continue to work in the legacy of institutional critique are left to choose between contemplating the moribund cultural apparatus and engaging with social conflicts far beyond it. The most interesting art being produced today fuses these irreconcilable positions.

NOTES

I would like to thank Nora M. Alter for her editorial advice.

1. Le Parc and Mari withdrew the works they submitted to Documenta 4 on June 25, 1968, the day before the exhibition opened and released the following statement: “At Documenta we note once more that the main function of ‘cultural institutions’ resides in the process that renders art sacred, and consequentially in its mystification and its purpose, the marketing of cultural product. As artists, it is hard for us to sidestep this compromise in the current situation, and we are well aware of this. We have thus decided to withdraw our works from Documenta for good, thus making our symbolic contribution to the collective awareness about the cultural revolution.” Reprinted and translated in *Stratégies de participation: GRAV, Groupe de recherche d’art visuel, 1960–1968* (Grenoble: Magasin—Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble, 1998), 244.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and references made in this introduction come from or refer to texts or works of art featured in this anthology.

3. Bruce Kurtz, “Conversation with Robert Smithson’ on April 22nd 1972,” in Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 200.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (1992), trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 231.

5. Here I should acknowledge the importance of the writings of Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in establishing the framework of what has come to be called institutional critique. See in particular Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art: 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143, and the essays featured in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). The writings of Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, and Rosalyn Deutsche should also be noted, especially Owens's "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life after 'The Death of the Author,'" in Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 122–139; Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); and Deutsche's "Lawler's Rude Museum," in *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (Looking Back)* (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 123–133.

6. Pierre Bourdieu uses snares as a metaphor to describe Haacke's work in Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 20: "You make symbolic machines that function like snares and make the public act." Haacke agrees with Bourdieu's assessment of the catalytic role his work has played.

7. "In the colonial periphery (as in elsewhere), we are often them as well. Colored skins, white masks; colored masks, white skins. Reversal strategies have reigned for some time. *They* accept the margins; so do *we*. For without the margin, there is no center, no heart. . . . Thus, while we turn around and reclaim [the margins] as our exclusive territory, they happily approve, for the divisions between margin and center should be preserved, and as clearly demarcated as possible, if the two positions are to remain intact in their power relations." Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 16–17.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, "Theses upon Art and Religion Today" (1945), in *Theodor W. Adorno: Notes to Literature*, 2 vols., ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 2:293.

9. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 145–178.

10. This definition comes from the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) website, <http://www.critical-art.net>: "Tactical media is situational, ephemeral, and self-terminating. It encourages the use of any media that will engage a particular sociopolitical context in order to create molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that will contribute to the negation of the rising intensity of authoritarian culture."

11. René Viénet, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art" (1967), in Ken Knabb, ed. and trans., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 213, 214.

12. See the Bureau d'Études's online maps at <http://utangente.free.fr>.