“Whatever happened to the Institutional Critique?”

*Andrea Fraser’s reformulation of critical practices*

by

Amira Gad

14,698 words

A dissertation submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Masters Degree in Contemporary Art

Sotheby’s Institute of Art – London

©

2009
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all lecturers of Sotheby’s Institute of Art – London for a productive and enriching programme; and in particular Dr. Anthony Downey, Programme Director and Amy Gostelow, Programme Coordinator.

I would like to thank my supervisor Pierre Saurisse for his generous feedback and advice.

I am grateful to my father and brothers who have always encouraged and supported me in my choice of study.
Abstract

Posing the question “Whatever happened to the institutional critique?” aims to express a renewed interest in ‘institutional critique’ in contemporary art practice. This dissertation investigates the notion of institutional critique defined as an art practice that questions, comments and criticizes the very institutions involved in the production, display and commerce of art. This artistic activity is thought to have first emerged with the critical practices of Conceptual Art. Thus, in an attempt to provide an understanding of institutional critique and situate it in contemporary art practice, the dissertation will focus on American performance artist Andrea Fraser; and in particular her performances: Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk (1989) and Official Welcome (2001).

Chapter 1 explores the art-historical background, which led to the emergence of institutional critique. It sees Marcel Duchamp as the forefather and Conceptual Art as the precursor of such critical practices. Artistic activity of the 1960s and 1970s are identified as the first-generation of institutional critique as they examined the conditions of the museum with an aim to brake out from the institutional framework.

Chapter 2 argues that the second-wave of practitioners, situated in the 1980s and 1990s, developed a new approach to institutional critical practices. It looks at Performance Art as a new approach in uttering an institutional critique. Since a focus on Andrea Fraser’s performances is observed, gender issues and feminist practices of the 1970s, in relation to this utterance, is discussed.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the idea of an ‘institutional context’ important to the reformulation of institutional critique. It argues that in addition to a socio-economical discourse a growing awareness of a spectatorial agency and an interactive dimension is incorporated. The institutional context draws the attention to the underpinnings of an art network and its relationship with the viewer, and its role in society.
Statement of Authorship

DECLARATION

I herewith declare that no portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

NOTES

Copyright in the text of this dissertation rests with the author. Copies (by any process) both in full, and of extracts, may be made only in accordance with instructions given by the author and lodged in the Sotheby’s Institute Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian.

The ownership of any intellectual property rights which may be described in this dissertation is vested in Sotheby’s Institute, subject to prior agreement to the contrary, and may not be available for use by third parties without the written permission of the institute, which will prescribe the terms and conditions of any such agreement.
# Table of Contents

List of illustrations ................................................................. p. vi
Introduction ................................................................................... p. 1

I. **Chapter 1** ............................................................................... p. 7
   **The Emergence of Institutional Critique**
   A. From the Duchampian Paradigm to the first-generation of Institutional Critique
   B. The Second-Generation of Institutional Critique

II. **Chapter 2** ............................................................................ p. 21
   **Institutional Critique as Artistic Phenomena**
   A. Reformulating Institutional Critique through Performance Art
   B. Feminism and Performance Art

III. **Chapter 3** .......................................................................... p. 34
   **The Institutional Context**
   A. The dematerialization of the Art Object
   B. The Society of the Spectacle

Conclusion ..................................................................................... p. 45
Bibliography .................................................................................. p. 49
Illustrations .................................................................................... p. 52
List of illustrations

Figure 1  .................................................................................................................. p. 52
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)

Figure 2  .................................................................................................................. p. 53
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)

Figure 3  .................................................................................................................. p. 54
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917)

Figure 4  .................................................................................................................. p. 55

Figure 5  .................................................................................................................. p. 56
Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968)

Figure 6  .................................................................................................................. p. 57
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989)

Figure 7  .................................................................................................................. p. 58
Daniel Buren, *Vertical Stripes (glued over gallery door thus closing show)*, (1968)
Milan, Gallery Apollinaire

Figure 8  .................................................................................................................. p. 59

Figure 9  .................................................................................................................. p. 60
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989)
Figure 10  ........................................................................................................... p. 61
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)

Figure 11  ........................................................................................................... p. 62
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)

Figure 12  ........................................................................................................... p. 63

Figure 13  ........................................................................................................... p. 64

Figure 14  ........................................................................................................... p. 65
Introduction

“Whatever happened to the institutional critique?” is a question that was first posed in 1993 by critic James Meyer, in a catalogue essay for an exhibition at the American Fine Arts. Institutional critique as an art practice aims at questioning and criticizing the very institutions involved in the sale, display and commerce of art. The exhibition included artists such as Renée Green, Mark Dion and Andrea Fraser, whose various critical practices indicated several possible answers. Though institutional critique has been widely explored by artists over the past decades, posing the question again, nearly a decade after James Meyer seems all the more relevant today. Indeed, the notion of institutional critique appears to have become more of a platitude and has little been defined in relation to artistic practice today – as opposed to art criticism. James Meyer argued that the exhibition at the American Fine Arts confirmed that institutional critical practices are still undergoing and that artists such as Andrea Fraser have developed new strategies; they “confirmed that the scrutiny of art institutions and their supporting structures […] was alive and well. Building on earlier models, artists such as Fraser and Fred Wilson used the museum itself as primary source material, developing approaches that involved, in Fraser’s case at least, new kinds of strategy. [Emphasis added]”

If one would agree with James Meyer that the aforementioned artists confirmed an institutional critical artistic practice, nevertheless developing new kinds of strategies, then the question to be posed today, in retrospect is, what are those strategies and how do they differ from institutional critical activity from over a decade ago? As James Meyer pointed it out, Andrea Fraser developed new approaches, which is the reason why it seems appropriate to look at her work as an analysis of new strategies in institutional critical practice.

---

2 Ibid
In the preface of *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice* (2009) Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray also identify institutional critique as best known through the practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s by artists who presented radical challenges to the museum and gallery system. They argue that since then institutional critique has been pushed in new directions by new generations of artists registering and responding to the global transformations of contemporary life. They interrogate the shifting relations between ‘institution’ and ‘critique’ and argue for a mutual enrichment between critical art practices and social movements. The book also elaborates on the conditions for politicized critical practice in the twenty-first century. The essays collected in this book are the result of a three-year research project (Transform) of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp). The project encouraged artists, writers, theorists, researchers to interrogate the relation between ‘institution’ and ‘critique’ as well as to consider the present and future possibilities for the theory and practice of institutional critique. In the preface of the volume, the editors justify a renewed interest in institutional critique within the field of art. According to the editors, the beginnings of the Transform Project in 2005 coincided with a series of symposia, publications and art journal issues that confirmed a renewed interest in institutional critique. The discussions explored its genealogy and its canonizations. Raunig and Ray further argue that these series represent a ‘third wave’ of institutional critique and attempt to re-assess contemporary art practice. Nevertheless, the third phase is referred to as ‘instiutent practices’, which they define as:

“strategies and initiated processes that in some respects take their bearings from traditions of institutional critique, even as in other respects they go beyond anything recognizable in the movement now canonized as part of art history. [...] this tendency towards new activist and instiutent practices is one direction in which practitioners and theorists are actively attempting to renew and reinvent institutional critique under difficult contemporary conditions.”

---

4 Ibid, p. xv
Though the term ‘instituent practices’ may be accurate, this essay will continue to use the term ‘institutional critique’ in discussing the possibilities of a third wave. In doing so, the genealogy of institutional critique is being emphasized, and the third phase is not viewed as separate from the previous generations.

A thorough investigation of the notion of institutional critique is a difficult endeavour. A look at the history of institutional critique (and art history in general) is inevitable to understand the core ideas of this notion. One is bound to question whether it is still relevant to speak of institutional critique in relation to contemporary art, how does such a notion take form in contemporary art practice, and finally, can one refer to an institutional critique movement? In other words, as Frazer Ward puts it in his essay “The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity” (1995): “The narrative of the development of institutional critique must be situated within a broader account of the public sphere. One effect of this is to suggest that institutional critique has been prematurely buried. [Emphasis added]”5 Hence, the aim of this paper is to look at the notion of institutional critique in relation to contemporary art practice and its relevance or status in the current art world.

In respect of this investigation, it is necessary to look at art history and art movements that have influenced institutional critique and consequently its practices. In this view, tracing a genealogy of institutional critique will start with its forefather Duchamp, and its precursor Conceptual Art. These art movements will be analyzed in terms of their questioning of the art world and its art practices, which led to the emergence of institutional critique. As was mentioned, according to Ray and Raunig, three generations of institutional critique practitioners can be counted. Nevertheless, this paper will focus on the works and writings of Andrea Fraser as a second-generation practitioner, one who has developed

---

new strategies in her critical practice, and one who allows an understanding of what the third wave entails.

An elaboration on the different generations in relation to their respective art movements will be discussed in a chapter entitled ‘The Emergence of Institutional Critique’ where the art-historical background is outlined. The second chapter, ‘Performance Art’ will look at Andrea Fraser’s performances in depth and investigates this genre as a critical practice in compliance with institutional critique. The third chapter ‘The Institutional Context’ elaborates on performance art as genre that allows an utterance on the contextual and sociological framework. Hence, Andrea Fraser’s performances will be are explored in terms of formulating a critical discourse on the art world. This discussion is elaborated further to position artistic practice within a – using Guy Debord’s words - “society of the spectacle”. This dissertation takes institutional critique as its backbone, further investigating it – in a cross-referential manner - through the analysis of Andrea Fraser’s work, focusing on two of her performances: *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) and *Official Welcome* (2001).

Andrea Fraser (b. 1965, Montana, U.S.A) began her career in the 1980s and completed the Whitney Independent Studies Program in 1985. She is a New-York based performance artist known for her work and writings on institutional critique. Her most renowned performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) is thought to have brought the notion of institutional critique back on the map. It is in that perspective that this oeuvre has been chosen in this discussion. It is a taped performance by Andrea Fraser that was conducted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in February 1989. It was developed for the Contemporary Viewpoints Lecture Series organized by the Tyler School of Art of Temple University and was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and Art Matters, Inc. The performance was remastered at the Wexner Center Media Arts program at the Ohio State University in 2003. *Museum Highlights* exists in different forms, each with the same script but with different frames. It existed as a live performance in
the form of a museum tour, a recorded performance as an introduction to
the museum and finally a script. The script – complete with stage directions
and discursive academic footnotes – was published in the journal *October* in
summer 1991.

Andrea Fraser’s performance *Official Welcome* (2001) was
commissioned and first performed at MICA Foundation in New York [Fig. 1-2]. It is structured as a monologue and was performed during a reception
at the home of Barbara Morse and her husband, the president of the
Foundation on November 28, 2001 before an audience of invited guests.
The script of the performance was published in the MICA Foundation
Newsletter 1, no.2 (Fall 2001). This performance is a more recent piece,
which enacts the same goal of criticism, through performance, however
touching upon different issues related to art institutions. In this view, an
analysis of her work gives an illustrated view on how an artist makes use of
the notion of institutional critique in their art practice (and how it can take
form). Inasmuch, considered as a second-generation practitioner, an
analysis of her work also lays out the influences and criticisms of first-
generation artists, which enables to hypothesize on the status of
institutional critique in today’s art world and its respective strategies.

Fraser’s critical performances uncover prominent issues in the art
world all the while keeping with a humorous and satirical tone. It is in that
view that the analysis of Andrea Fraser’s performances and writings may
elaborate a better understanding of the notion of institutional critique,
understand how institutional critique may take form as an art practice and
finally see the evolution of institutional critique onto its third generation
practitioners.

To get a grasp of the notion of institutional critique in relation to art
(practice), it is necessary to trace its history. Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887,
France) is seen as the forefather of this genealogy; followed by Conceptual
Art practices in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed the critical practices of
Dadaism and Conceptual Art may be perceived as important shifts in art
movements and traditions. Those two periods have changed the way art is perceived, theorized and needless to say how artistic practice is thought. While Dadaism questioned the status of art and aesthetics within institutions, Conceptual Art explored the meaning of art within institutions and the discourses it engages in. Conceptual art and Dadaism emerged as a reaction to a socio-political context where the value of art was feared of being lost in the midst of mass-production and capitalism. Not only did the artwork depict the socio-political context but it also rebelled against it and geared toward a re-assessment of the nature and role of art within institutions. It is in this view that one can point to a ‘beginning’ of the art of institutional critique where artworks do not act as mere depictions or representations but rather act as (or enact) a criticism. Institutional critique is, hence, an artistic activity that takes criticism at its core.
Chapter 1
The Emergence of Institutional Critique

"The institutions of art, and principally the museum, have predetermined not only the form but the content and meaning of art."6

- Frazer Ward

A – From the Duchampian Paradigm to the first-generation of Institutional Critique

If the 1920s is seen as a beginning of what is referred to today as Institutional Critique, it is because that period has been theorized as an important shift in art where the movement of Dadaism shook our thinking and perception of artworks and art practice. This questioning of the role of institutions starts with the realization that art goes through an inevitable process of institutionalization – otherwise also known as the Duchampian paradigm.

The Duchampian paradigm exposed the legitimizing function of the institution. It shocked the definition of what should be considered as art. Boris Groys in his book *Art Power* (2008) writes that:

"Modern art operated not only as a machine of inclusion of everything that was not regarded as art before its emergence but also as a machine of exclusion of everything that imitated already existing art patterns in a naïve, unreflective, unsophisticated – nonpolemical – manner, and also of everything that not somehow controversial, provocative, challenging."7

The paradigm is identified with Duchamp’s work *Fountain* (1917) [Fig. 1], where he inserted a ready-made object within an art institution (gallery space). The inevitable process of institutionalization of Duchamp’s work is understood through the fact that the significance of the artwork was entirely dependent upon the institution as context. Taken outside this

---

context, the ready-made (urinal) would not have achieved such a discursive extent. Boris Groys sees the introduction of a readymade into an art context as characteristic for contemporary artworks, which he identifies as “paradox-objects”. The art object is a paradox for it can be considered both “non-artwork” when placed outside an institutional context, and “artwork” when in an institution: “Already in the framework of classical modernity, but especially in the context of contemporary art, individual artworks began to be paradox-objects that embody simultaneously thesis and antithesis.”

The point of a ‘paradox-artwork’ is also relevant when speaking of institutional critique art practice, for the paradox lies in a practice that aims to be critical of art institutions as well as it is a practice that cannot be taken out of (or take form outside of) its institutional context, nor achieve its critical goal without this framework. Groys further writes:

> “the artistic embodiment of self-contradiction, of paradox, began to be especially practiced in contemporary art after World War II. [...] We are also confronted with artworks that aim to be both documentary and fictional, and with artistic interventions that want to be political, in the sense of transcending the borders of the art system – while at the same time remaining within these borders. [Emphasis added]”

Institutional critique was retrospectively established with the practices of the 1960s and 1970s recognized as its ‘first-generation’ practitioners. In the essay “Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a new critique of Institutions” (2007), Brian Holmes identifies three generations of institutional critique, which comply with three discourses that engage in the evolution and emergence of institutional critique as an art practice. According to him, the first-generation includes figures such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke [Fig. 2] and Marcel Broodthaers. [Fig. 3] The second generation being practices of the 1980s and 1990s coinciding with the retrospective recognition of an institutional critique current; and the third one involving current practices adopting new approaches and reassessment of the concept. To put it swiftly, quoting the editors of Art and

---

9 Ibid
"What appears in retrospect as the 'first wave' of institutional critique was initiated in the 1960s and 70s by artists such as Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers, among others. They investigated the conditions of the museum and art field, aiming to oppose, subvert or break out of rigid institutional frameworks. In the late 1980s and 90s, in a changed context, these practices were developed into diverse artistic projects by new protagonists like Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. To the economic and political discourse of their predecessors, the practices of this 'second generation' added a growing awareness of the forms of subjectivity and the modes of its formation. Second wave practices continued however to circulate under the name of institutional critique."

The first-wave thus examined their art practice as limited by art institutions such as museums and shared the goal of 'breaking out' and moving away from the conditioning of institutions. A 'brake-out' of the museum implies a democratization of art, for it should not be limited to an 'elite' viewer (recalling Ward Frazer's statement of a necessity to take artistic activity to the public sphere) and confined within institutions; rather it should be taken out to the wider public and involve society as a whole. Indeed, much art of the 1960s and 1970s questioned how artists could find another audience and a context where the artist's 'minority' view would not be forced to co-optation. The answers offered to such questioning were art forms that were “site-specific, temporary, non-purchasable, outside the museum, directed toward nonart audience, [or] retreating from object to body to idea [...]” With regards to the idea of breaking-out from the museum, Groys speaks of a “liberation from art history”:

“Given that we experience art history first of all as represented in our museums, the liberation from the new, understood as liberation from art history – and, for that matter, from history as such – is experienced by the art world in the first place as a chance to break out of the museum. Breaking out of the

museum means becoming popular, alive, and present outside the closed circle of the established art world, outside the museum’s walls.”

In addition, Groys sees the goal of such democratization or liberation as a “tense double-bind between the desire to transform the specialized ‘cell’ into a mobile potential of living knowledge that can reach out into the world, and the counter-realization that everything about this aesthetic space is a trap, that it has been instituted as a form of enclosure.”

A liberation from such an institutional enclosure is performed by artists by recognizing the framework in which their work is confined, and having the ‘freedom’ to comment on the general discourse and context. Andrea Fraser engages in such commentaries in her performances.

*Official Welcome* (2001) is a performance in the form of an exhibition opening speech where Andrea Fraser assumes the persona of actual artists or professionals in the art world. It takes the form of a monologue though her discourse oscillates between one character to another. During the performance, she refers to the role of the artist, using quotations of Thomas Hirshhorn and Gabriel Orozco from articles (mainly Artforum): “So, why am I an artist? I guess it’s because I take a critical position toward the world. It’s not about hope. It’s about showing my disgust with the dominant discourse.”

It should be noted that during her performance, it is not as much which artist said what that is highlighted, but their words placed in a different context that matter. The audience is not always aware of all the references she is making, though they might be familiar with some of the enacted personalities. It is the interested viewer that will go beyond the performance and read the script and thus have a full grasp of all the references as she includes all her sources in the text. In some way, the performance is able to reach two so-called types of audiences, the general public who is not necessarily confronted to the specifics of the art world.

---

and its different characters but who is nevertheless aware of the different professionals (the general headlines sort of speech). The second type of audience is usually art-historically educated and knows of the allusions referred to in her performance, they are familiar with the writings of Benjamin Buchloh for instance and have attended opening speeches by artists such as Gabriel Orozco. Her performance is playful – like a game of charade - in a way that it questions the audience on who knows what? Who does the viewer recognize? Her ability to reach to a wider audience is slick and points to institutional critique’s goal – initiated by Conceptual art – to bring art to the public, and the democratization of the art world, distancing itself from a Bourgeois confinement.

Likewise, Andrea Fraser’s *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* creates an ambiguity as to who the audience she is addressing to is. This ambiguity is emphasized by confusing between Andrea Fraser, the artist and Andrea Fraser acting out the character of Jane Castleton, the tour guide. The performance appears to start as an impromptu tour. At the West Entrance Hall of the museum, visitors are waiting (or expecting) a Contemporary Viewpoints Artist Lecture by Andrea Fraser, while other visitors are waiting for one of the museum’s many guided tours. Andrea Fraser disguised as Jane Castleton appears. She is heavy in mannerisms and appearance. Jane is dressed in a silver and brown houndstooth check double-breasted suit with a skirt, an off-white silk button-down blouse, white stockings, and black pumps. [Fig. 4] Jane Castleton begins to address whoever appears to be listening and introduces herself as a tour guide – but yet alludes to the title of her performance: “I’ll be your guide today as we explore the museum, its history, and its collection. Our tour today is a collection tour – it’s called ‘Museum Highlights’”

This seemingly impromptu presentation already sets an ambiguity as to the audience she is addressing. While some visitors were awaiting her lecture, other visitors are listening to her believing she is a tour guide. In that way, there is divide in the audience between those who view her

---

speech as a tour guide or those who view it as a performance – assuming that those waiting for the lecture would recognize her or be familiar with her work. A few minutes later into the performance, she literally presents the discrepancy of her character between Andrea Fraser, artist and lecturer, and Jane Castleton the tour guide:

“I’m a visiting lecturer, a guest of the Division of Education. Uh, I am also, like the Board of Trustees and the Museum Guides, a volunteer. It is thus my privilege, my privilege as a guest, as a volunteer –and, shall I say, as an artist – to be able to express myself here today simply as a unique individual, an individual with unique qualities.”

To return to Brian Holmes’ identification of different generations of institutional critique, one could argue that such a division is valid; however bearing in mind Dadaism’s impact on art theory and Marcel Duchamp’s – in particular - influence on artistic practice. Following on a process of questioning the role of institutions, the practices of the 1960s and 1970s revolted against the institutions and developed a practice that went beyond ‘conventional’ artistic practices, fusing art criticism with practice. The second-generation (starting in the late 1980s) aimed at an artistic practice that formulated a critical discourse, which relates art institutions with its socio-political and economical context. In that view, Andrea Fraser is part of the second generation, emerging with her piece Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk in 1989.

Nevertheless, being a living and still practicing artist, it could be argued that her most recent pieces – such as Official Welcome (2001) - bridge between the second and third wave of institutional critique. As Alexander Alberro writes in the introduction of Andrea Fraser’s book Museum Highlights, this generation is sometimes referred to as ‘Kontext Kunst’ (context art) “or as third-generation practitioners of institutional critique, these artists often work collaboratively and produce artworks that take the form of discursive projects.”

---

16 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 97
17 Alexander Alberro, in Preface to Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. xxiii
Following on the Duchampian paradigm, Daniel Buren (b. 1938, France), in the late 1960s attacked his strategy by directing his critique toward the institution itself. Buren’s strategy was the introduction in situ of a ‘visual tool’ constant in terms of its structure. Buren’s work – such as in *Vertical Stripes (glued over gallery door thus closing show)*, (1968) at the Gallery Apollinaire in Milan [Fig. 5] - is constant in its structure through his recurrent use of stripes; there is neither background nor figure but only a two-coloured plane divided into an even number of alternately coloured stripes. His work functions in two manners: the stripes are a constant stimulus as well as they deplete art’s content. The strategy is otherwise understood through his artworks as shocking the conventions of pictorial and sculptural representations and enabling a critique of artistic conventions and traditions.

Though Buren might have aimed at questioning notions of uniqueness – through repetition - and complied with Conceptual practices of the ‘death of the author’ (using Barthes’ words); his strategy became a ‘signature’ and re-gained its authorial claim. Conceptual practices reflected upon the implications of Duchamp’s legacy and redefined the role of the spectator, thus performing “the postwar period’s most rigorous investigation of the conventions of pictorial and sculptural representation and a critique of the traditional paradigms of visuality.”

Conceptual artist Michael Asher (b. 1943, U.S.A) took this idea one step further and took Minimalism to its logical conclusion by removing the object or image altogether, creating an art that forced the viewer to analyze what should not be seen: making the invisible, visible. At the Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, in 1974, Michael Asher temporarily removed the partition wall that separated the office from the exhibition space, thus exposing the functioning of the gallery to the audience. [Fig. 6] Visitors were then able to observe day-to-day operations of the gallery. Once the wall removed, desks, chairs, books, papers, telephones, file cabinets and

---

other administrative items located in the rear of the gallery were on display. By removing the wall, the gallery itself became the artwork (and the gesture, the medium).

Through a similar strategy, Andrea Fraser exposes the underpinning functioning and economical aspect of a museum by referring to the patronage of museums. In Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk, she draws her viewer’s attention to elements of the museum that are usually not presented in a conventional tour guide: “It [the museum] also houses the Museum’s brand-new combination information desk, admissions desk – I hope that all of you have paid your admission fee.”20 Andrea Fraser further invites her audience to become a museum member for there would be no need to pay an admission fee (since an annual fee is being paid). This contrast brings to the fore, the economics and functioning of a museum but also the social or cultural status that is associated with being a museum member. Likewise, commenting on the patronage of museums, Jane speaks of the recognition attributed to donors in the museum. She refers to the Muriel and Philip Berman Drawing and Print Galleries which were named as part of the Museum’s Donor Recognition Program: “The Museum you know provides prospective donors with a veritable cornucopia of Name Space Opportunities. [...] For $750,000 you could name the Museum Shop.”21 Always with an underlying satire, Jane expresses her desire, should she have the means, to name a room after a “nice name” such as Andrea. Ironically enough, a few steps further, Jane points out to the Museum Shop named Andrea in 1989 by Mrs. Castleton (naming the museum shop Andrea was not actually applied, hence is only part of her performance). This reference, is yet another ‘reality check’ to remind the audience of their viewing of a performance and not an actual tour guide – highlighting her commentary on art institutions. As an emphasis, she adds that “Mrs. John P. Castleton, [was] a onetime Museum guide and eternal art appreciator. Jane, as she was called, always liked to say that ‘patronage creates a personal sense of ownership in a beautiful home of the arts and unites the most

20 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 96
21 Ibid, pp. 106-107
enlightened spirits of the community in a high devotion to public good.”

Thus, institutional critique emerged with the realization by artists that all works can be exploited for economic and symbolic profit. Recognizing the determined character of artistic activity, institutional critique developed as a defence of art institutions, admitting that (critical) art cannot be conceived outside of this institutional framework. This was achieved “either through reflection on the discursive and systemic mechanisms of reification and instrumentalization, as in the work of Broodthaers and Haacke, or through the development of rigorously transitory post-studio practices that directly resisted commodification, as in the work of Asher and Buren.”

Indeed, in *Official Welcome*, Fraser iterates to be honoured to be an invited artist to present her work, she states (in set 3): “I’m honored – to be, ehem, honored here this evening. You know, ‘remember me’ is what all artists whisper in their work. It’s a mark you want to leave in the world.” This comment could be regarded as an allusion to critical practices of where artists seek at the same time ‘recognition’. Hence, this is a reference to the idea that art goes through an inevitable process of institutionalization and that institutional critique has been ‘institutionalized’. On a different note, with regards to artists being institutionalized and the idea of ownership, Andrea Fraser refers to the relationship between collectors and artists (from the viewpoint of an artist): “I mean, of course my work’s going to go to rich, white collectors and they’re going to be proud of owning me and I’m going to be, you know, corrupted by the man.” The designation of ‘white collectors’ should be noted as a comment on the still dominant view of collectors as a bourgeoisie.

---

25 Ibid, p. 223
In a similar quip as Duchamp’s Fountain, she comments on the role of the critic and the authoritative voice attributed to critics in the recognition of artists and appreciation of artworks. Using different ‘voices’ from Daniel Birnbaum to Michael Kimmelman, the supporter in the second set is an art critic and she says: “If he is the most important artist of his generation – and I believe he is – it’s because his imagination is so very big. [Emphasis added]”26 She makes use of the art critic’s voice to note and ridicule the Bourgeois and high language that was long attributed to discussions on art. The meaning of the artwork was thus lost within such discourses, and an objective regard of art is undermined in preference of an idea of art placed on a pedestal: “If masterpieces still can be made, he has managed to make them: full, exquisitely realized works of power, vision, and extraordinary beauty; works that rise to a level of humanistic allegory significant for all of us, even while we may not know exactly what they mean.”27

This comment on art critics is quickly contrasted with artists’ discourse on their work. In the second set, the artist speaks in a "painfully slow, almost stuttering voice.”28 It has been suggested that the artist enacted here – though using the words of different personalities – is Jackson Pollock, recognized from his mannerisms and hesitant speeches: “And, uh, um, that’s why, uh, I don’t like to, uh, to talk about my work. I made it, and, uh, and, I hope, I hope, uh, that’s enough.”29

---

26 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 217
27 Ibid
28 Ibid
29 Ibid
Art practices engaging in institutional critique can be traced back to the historical avant-gardes and artists’ activity differ greatly as there is no specific methodology that can be attributed to institutional critique as an art practice except its ultimate goal, which is to reveal, question or interrogate the institutional determination of art. This process of interrogation may focus on particular aspects of art institutions, be it the architectural characteristics of museums or galleries ranging from Asher’s and Buren’s situational constructions (or deconstructions) of architectural frameworks in galleries and museums; to commenting on the art market and the commodification of the artwork: “The notion of art became [after World War II] almost synonymous with the notion of the art market, so that the art produced under the nonmarket conditions was de facto excluded from the field of institutionally recognized art.”

The second-generation occurs in the late 1980s and early 1990s where artists such as Renee Green, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser examined the relationships between the art networks and its links to economical restraints or power.

“What has been established, retrospectively, as the ‘first generation’ of institutional critique includes figures like Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers. They examined the conditioning of their own activity by the ideological and economical frames of the museum, with the goal of breaking out. They had a strong relation to the anti-institutional revolts of the 1960s and 1970s, and to the accompanying philosophical critiques. The best way to take their specific focus on the museum is not as a self-assigned limit or a fetishization of the institution, but instead as part of a materialist praxis, lucidly aware of its context, but with wider transformatory intentions. [...] the discourse of institutional critique took explicit form in the United States in the late 80s and early 90s. It was the period of the so-called ‘second generation’. Among the names most often cited are Renee Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Fred Wilson or Andrea Fraser. They pursued the systematic exploration of museological...

---

representation, examining its links to economic power and its epistemological roots in a colonial science that treats the Other like an object to be shown in a vitrine. [Emphasis added]"\(^31\)

Noting the history that brought forward the notion of institutional critique allows a better understanding of notion’s core but also enables a grasp of Andrea Fraser’s influences and references. She identifies in her essay “It’s Art When I say It’s Art, or...” (1995) three post-war artistic movements that influenced her projects: “minimalism, because it rethought the relationship between the viewer and the art object; institutional critique, because it complicated the manner in which the museum/gallery nexus defines bodies in terms of gender, class, and race; and the post-studio practice of site-specificity, because it called into question the conventions of artistic production, exhibition, and dissemination.”\(^32\)

As discussed, institutional critique was established to have first emerged with the critical practices of the 1960s. Indeed, it was not until Benjamin Buchloh’s essay “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” (1990) published in October that institutional critique appeared as a notion ‘in itself’ (or art current), in contrast with a critique of institutions. Buchloh’s essay outlines art movements from conceptual art to minimalism that went through the process of questioning the role of institutions, which eventually led to what is referred today as institutional critique. This essay clearly lays out an understanding of Institutional Critique’s essential ideas and its influences, which have enabled artists – like Andrea Fraser – in the 1980s to identify their work as such. In view of Benjamin H.D. Buchloh’s writing, Kirsi Peltomaki in her essay “Affect and Spectatorial: viewing institutional critique in the 1970s” (2007) notes that institutional critique was first theorized within the framework of poststructuralist art history, by a group


\(^{32}\) Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. xxiv
of influential art critics and historians associated with the journal *October* in the late 1970s and the 1980s. She notes:

“Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, and Craig Owens considered the ‘critique of institutions’ in the context of the 1960s postwar avant-garde, wherein material and phenomenological modes of viewing [were] combined with the organizational clarity of conceptual art, sociopolitical activism, and site-specificity. [...] Owens evoked the Barthesian ‘death of the author’ to clarify how contemporary practices of institutional critique reconfigured the social and discursive conventions of authorship.”

Nevertheless, Frazer Ward believes that the fail of institutional critique dates from the wake of Conceptual art:

“In the wake of Conceptual art, critics [...] were quick to suppose that what has come to be known as institutional critique had failed, because they could see, for instance, cast urinals in elegantly appointed galleries. Indeed, in the shadow of a punctual, linear, somewhat apocalyptic avant-gardism, it becomes very difficult to think about art after the 1960s as anything but always already sold out. Certainly, by the mid-1990s nothing like a movement has emerged even to act out the function of an avant-garde. Criticism finds itself at an impasse, and so, perhaps, do remaining notions of criticality.”

What must be noted is that Ward differentiates between the ‘institutionalized criticism’ in the art world and criticisms commenting on the art world formulated through art practice – but perhaps not yet theorized. In other words, Ward’s statement explains the failure of institutional critique as a failure from – ironically - an institutional point of view, where institutions and critics failed to identify institutional critique as an art movement and art practice. Hence, it has been retrospectively theorized because (as Ward states) it had been ‘buried’ but then picked up again by critics, notably Benjamin Buchloh, in the 1990s when criticism found itself in “an impasse”, and thus started looking backwards for justification. Ward Frazer further notes: “The 1980s saw not only the elaboration of various critical aesthetic practices, but a resurgence of

---

interest in traditional modes of aesthetic experience and models of artistic subjectivity. This was accompanied by a frankly ideological disavowal of the historical specificity of conditions of cultural production and reception.”

In addition, a renewed interest, notably by the Transform Project starting in 2005 exposed the ambiguities between ‘critique’ and ‘institutions’.

In that view, Institutional Critique took explicit form as an artistic practice (particularly in the U.S.A) – as opposed to an institutional criticism - in the late 1980s, early 1990s. On that point, Andrea Fraser writes: “'Critique' appears even less specific than 'institution', vacillating between a rather timid 'exposing', 'reflecting', or 'revealing', on the one hand, and visions of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing museological order on the other, with the institutional critique as a guerrilla fighter engaging in acts of subversion.”

While the architectural aspects of institutions and a refrain from a commodity status might have been characteristics of institutional critique in the 1960s and 1970s; one would agree with Amy Pederson’s statement in “Relational Aesthetics and Institutional Critique” (2006) that ideas of performativity characterize institutional critical practice in the 1980s and 1990s: “Notions of interactivity and performativity lie at the centre of the 1980s and 1990s reformulations of Institutional Critique.” In her essay, she argues for a ‘reformulation’ of artistic practice in terms of institutional critique, in accordance with James Meyer who argued for a “new kind of strategy.”

---

36 Fraser Andrea, “From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique” (2005), in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 127
37 Pederson Amy, “Relational Aesthetics and Institutional Critique”, in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 269
Chapter 2
Institutional Critique as Artistic Phenomena

“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.”

- Andrea Fraser

A – Reformulating Institutional Critique through Performance Art

As the essential ideas behind institutional critique have been discussed from an art-historical perspective, Andrea Fraser’s ‘new kind of strategy’ should be further elaborated. It could be argued – agreeing with Amy Pederson – that the 1980s and 1990s saw a reiteration of institutional critique that focused on notions of interactivity and performativity; or as James Meyer puts it, referring to Andrea Fraser’s practice, developing a new kind of strategy. In other words, the strategies of artistic practice during that period were to ‘perform’ an utterance of institutional critique. Taking this idea further, to act up this notion, is in compliance with ‘interventionary’ artistic practice. Indeed, an interventionary art project engages in the questioning and exploration of an institutional context in relation to artistic practice. In contrast with earlier practices where such questioning were imposed on and within an institution (Michael Asher’s modifications of gallery space in order to reveal its functioning); the 1980s and 1990s – particularly with Andrea Fraser’s practice – added a reflection on the notion that was contextually-determined and addressed its reformulation to the public as opposed to solely to the institution.

Ward Frazer identifies two strands of institutional critical practice: the first strand takes the museum as its medium to raise awareness on the functioning of art institutions; while the second strand accepts the art

---

38 Fraser Andrea, “From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique” (2005), in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 283
system, working within this framework to formulate their criticism. Indeed, as Hans Haacke puts it: “They [artists] work within that frame, set the frame, and are being framed.”39 In this view, one would agree that Andrea Fraser’s practice follows the second strand, as she does not attempt to brake away from the institutions that are inherent to her artistic practice; hence, admitting that critical practice cannot exist outside of the institution, defying the autonomy of the artwork.

“There are two interwoven strands within different institutionally critical practices and their historical antecedents. [...] The first strand of institutional critique takes as its task the material analysis of the perceptual protocols the museum uses to disguise or naturalize what is in fact the historical bourgeois subject. The principal historical figure here is Marcel Duchamp [...] subsequent artists include Buren and Marcel Broodthaers. The second strand, while related to the first, nevertheless insists that by means of a more direct address, the museum can be made to function as a site for the production of critical. Historical figures include El Lissitzky and again Rodchenko, and recent artists Haacke and Fred Wilson.”40

In addition, one would note Brian Holmes’ statement: “This situation of a critical process taking itself for its object recently led Andrea Fraser to consider the artistic institution as an unsurpassable, all-defining frame, sustained through its own inwardly directed critique.”41 In that perspective, as with Andrea Fraser’s practice, an institutional critical practice is to formulate a discourse in relation to the context where the formulation is ‘performed’. It is in that way, that performance genre is adequate. It has developed a new strategy in the sense that there is a literal formulation of criticism (the discourse used in her performances); enabling art criticism to emerge out of its impasse as well as it raises the public’s awareness towards an elaborate art system and institutions. Brian Holmes refers to this development as a tropism geared at extra disciplinary investigations. In other words, institutional critique is not only concerned with the

---

39 Haacke Hans, “All the Art that’s fit to show” (1974) in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS) (JR Ringier, 2006), p. 55
questioning of artistic practice as such but also with its relationship to the world (outside of the art world), such as the public, culture or society as whole.

Institutional critique as an art form is problematic because it is a practice where both theory and practice meet, that combines – despite their ambiguities – institution and criticism. If it has always been associated with Conceptual Art for instance, it’s because it appropriates old theories and incorporates old practices, as such that it has not been recognized as a ‘new current’. It is a form of practice that is at once self-reflexive as well as it feeds from the past and takes it as a departure point. Not only does it attempt to criticize the past but it also questions the present and its practices. It is a constant exploration not to be separated from its ‘root’: “In the artistic forms that result, one will always find remains of the old modernist tropism whereby art designates itself first of all, drawing the attention back to its own operations of expression, representation, metaphorization or deconstruction”42

Nevertheless, to put it in simpler words, quoting Andrea Fraser in her essay “From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique” (2005) where she offers a quite adequate definition of institutional critique art practice: “The practice of institutional critique is generally defined by its apparent object, ‘the institution’, which is, in turn, taken to refer primarily to established, organized sites for the presentation of art. […] Institutional Critique is art that exposes ‘the structures and logic of museums and art galleries.’ […] In either case, ‘art’ and ‘artist’ generally figure as antagonistically opposed to an ‘institution’ that incorporates, co-opts, commodifies, and otherwise misappropriates once – radical – and uninstitutionalized – practices.”43

Andrea Fraser’s strategies of practicing institutional critique can be seen as reformulated through performance genre. To be more specific, Fraser’s interventionist art draws on four primary artistic and intellectual

43 Fraser Andrea, “From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique” (2005), in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 127
frameworks – institutional critique, performance, feminism and Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology. Andrea Fraser sums it up as: “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.”

This comes down to a move from the critique of institutions to an institution of critique – as per the title of her essay - in other words an institutionalized critical art practice.

Performance art allows her to speak criticisms in her discourses as well as it allows her to act (up) such a notion. In this view, one should turn to her performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* performed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art during the winter of 1989. Jane Castleton gives a sarcastic guided tour of the museum where it becomes apparent in her speech her mocking of such practices. It should be noted that Jane Castleton’s character is an allusion to the inadequate art historical education and training. Indeed, in the United States museum guides usually have no formal art historical training. Andrea Fraser notes: “They are trained only by the museum’s professional staff and thus acquire a certain quantity of knowledge about art objects. But this knowledge, as it’s usually limited to the particular museum’s collection, leaves the museum guide entirely dependent on its particular source and without the means to generate a legitimate opinion independently of the institution.”

The script and its footnotes provides another perspective of the performance which may be regarded as more critical, enabling a distancing from the comical performance and more critically reflective stance: “the script provides a displaced version of the performance. In fact, the academic commentary appended to the script in the form of preamble or footnotes adds an additional critical dimension to the performance piece.”

---

44 Fraser Andrea, “From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique” (2005), in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 283
45 This point is to be understood within the context of the 1980s, at the time of her performance. Needless to note that art historical training in the United States has evolved since.
47 Ibid, p. xxvi
Jane Castleton points out that a visit to the coat and rest rooms are part of the tour: “we’ll be focusing on some of the rooms in the Museum today, uh, the Museum’s famed period rooms; dining rooms, coat rooms, et cetera, rest rooms, uh [...] And the Museum itself, the Museum itself, the ‘itself’ itself being so compelling.” She presents the building’s structural elements or facilities such as a drinking fountain or rest rooms as an artwork; describing the object in the same ‘elevated language’ that she uses to describe 17th century Dutch paintings; thus raising the public’s attention to the bourgeois language that has been associated in the presentation and discussion of art. Andrea Fraser researched the Philadelphia Museum’s history and writings on art institutions. Though her discourse may appear derisive, they nevertheless formulate a careful criticism. On this point Alexander Alberro writes:

“Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk thus demonstrates the act of cultural deception common to the self-presentation of museums of fine art [...] In sum, Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk is as much an essay that critiques the ideological function of taste and the production of value as it is a performance script. Fraser does not critique just the institution of the museum; by extension, she also analyzes the type of viewer the museum produces and the process of identification that artists embody.”

Hence, in her performance, Andrea Fraser mimicks as well as she deconstructs the museum, revealing structural biases, social prejudices and economic underpinnings of established cultural institutions.

Jane Castleton presents herself in dressing and mannerism as the stereotype of a conventional tour guide, highlighting social prejudices. Underlying a satirical tone, she introduces the history of the museum with ‘exaggerated’ and high language that is conventionally used by art tour guides: “its [the Philadelphia Museum] over two hundred galleries contain hundreds of thousands of art objects spanning the globe and centuries [...] an institution of the highest quality, one of the world’s great repositories of civilization [...] The Philadelphia Museum of Art is one of the oldest art

---

48 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 96
49 Ibid, p. xxvii
museums in the United States. It was originally the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art and it was established in 1877.”

Jane Castleton’s use of language should be remarked. Her presentation of artworks is recurrently expressed in overt and exaggerated adjectives, – all the while keeping with a satirical, mocking tone - which comment on the idea of ‘high culture’ and on the activity of observing art. She describes Nicolas Poussin’s *The Birth of the Venus* with words such as “resplendently... amazingly flawless.” The period room for the Grand Salon from the Chateau de Draveil is described through “the slender proportions of their frames [...] carved with the most extreme crispiness and brilliance [...] of great beauty and refinement [...] of the utmost delicacy”52. In addition, *Saint Luke* by Simon Vouet is seen as “the most spectacular, monumental, sculptural”.

By contrast, addressing a guard’s stool in the corner of the gallery “In scale and complexity... in the great European tradition... free from time and change.” Likewise, she presents the museum’s role ironically: “here you will be liberated from the struggle imposed by material needs, here you will find your ideal beauty, you will find inspiration, here you will find a place apart, you will find standards, here you will find civilization [...] the Museum’s purpose is not just to develop an appreciation of art, but to develop an appreciation of values.”

This tonality is further ridiculed, hence the criticism emphasized, by applying a similar tone to the public facilities that a museum building provides to accommodate its visitor, such as rest rooms, coatrooms and drinking fountains. During her tour, she stands in front of Diego Rivera’s *Liberation of the Peon* and points to the drinking fountain at the corner instead [Fig. 7]: “And isn’t this a handsome drinking fountain! [...] a work of astonishing economy and monumentality, it boldly contrasts with the severe and highly stylized productions of this form. Notice, the

51 Ibid, p. 100
52 Ibid, pp 99-100
53 Ibid, p. 101
54 Ibid, pp. 107-108
massiveness... the vast... most ambitious and resolved!”

Drawing the viewer’s attention to a fountain is undoubtedly a reference to Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) which emphasizes her criticism of high culture or of what is admitted or ‘institutionalized’ as artwork; but also referring to institutional critical practices of questioning conventions: “frequent this museum of yours and get in contact with tradition. You drink in the tradition that exists here and that is... piled up here [...] You will feel with me that these touchstones, these standards, after all, are not pedantic things but standards for a cultivated, governed, *discriminating instinct*. [Emphasis added]”

Andrea Fraser started doing her performances from the point of view of a tour guide (her alter ego Jane Castleton) and then in her later performances (such as *Official Welcome*), she chooses to stay as herself, an individual, artist; placing herself outside of the discourse, in order to have a distant and retrospective, critical-eye on the matter. She positions herself as such:

“As an artist, I may try to situate myself outside of the struggle between domestic and scholastic relations to culture, rejecting both rejections that constitute the dynamics of art institutions, perhaps refusing, as I refuse, to produce objects for them; perhaps attempting to position myself more directly in relation to their real stake: the museum’s public, or at least those not already disposed to the culture that I produce and that museums present.”

It could be argued that one of Andrea Fraser’s strategies is appropriation. The script of her performance *Official Welcome* is an assemblage of different written texts or speeches given by renowned personalities and artists in the art world. She has re-appropriated their discourse and placed it in a different context and has incorporated it within artistic practice. Particularly with *Official Welcome* where Fraser assumes the persona of actual artists, art critics and museum personnel. The

---

54 Ibid, p. 108
57 Ibid, p. 10
discourse oscillates between the artist and another figure such as an art historian or an art critic throughout the performance: “Fraser’s Official Welcome (2001) takes the form of oratory composed largely of quotations from relatively well-known figures in the art world such as Benjamin Buchloh, Gabriel Orozco, Kirk Varnedoe, Vanessa Beecroft, Michael Kimmelman, Larry Gagosian, Charles Saatchi, and Kara Walker.”

The script is divided into eight sets. In each set she contrasts an artist’s discourse with an art professional (art critic, art historian, art dealer, art collector, museum director, etc.). In her script, Andrea Fraser identifies the other party (the first party being the artist) as a supporter. By supporter she means a person active in the art world in a different way than producing artworks. The sets of ‘dialogues’ form as a whole a homogeneous monologue, where the discourse does not appear as ‘deconstructed’ as in the written script. In each set, the shift from one character to another is made more cohesive by starting the artist’s speech with a sentence that reiterates the words last spoken from the supporter.

For instance, Andrea Fraser uses quotes from Benjamin Buchloh’s texts and refers it to her work. Not only is she being critical of what has been written about art, but she is also being self-critical of her own work: “It is difficult to imagine what a critical art practice could be at the beginning of the new millennium. One factor in the demise of radical practice may be art’s own collaboration with the forces of spectacle culture.”

In that view, she emphasizes the ambiguity between art theory and art practice, making the difference between the two invisible. One would add that one of the reasons behind this form of ‘appropriation’ is to draw the attention – once again - to the formulated ideas and ‘bring the issues back to the surface’. In addition, Andrea Fraser states that her power as an

59 With the exception of set 3, the supporter is usually the first to speak, followed by the artist.
60 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 215
artist in appropriating objects, texts, representations and practices is symbolic and lies in the ability to confer value and interest where before there was none.⁶¹

“A critique of the existing art market rules and art institutions is, of course, legitimate and necessary, but this critique makes sense only if its goal is to draw our attention to interesting or relevant art that is overlooked by these institutions. And, as all of us know well, if this kind of critique is successful it leads to the inclusion of the overlooked art in these institutions –and, therefore, ultimately, to the further stabilization of these institutions.”⁶²

B – Feminism and Performance Art

During the welcome speech, Andrea Fraser moves swiftly and discreetly from being one character (an artist) to another (such as an art critic). It opens with Andrea Fraser presenting herself as an artist and thanking Barbara and Howard Morse who have been supportive of her work and have commissioned this piece. Then moves from acting as herself, Andrea Fraser (the artist) to representing a personality from the MICA Foundation who is introducing her as an artist. These shifts in personalities are usually identified during the performance by her sipping of a glass of water or predominantly by her turning of the head (as though she was putting on a different mask, for a different character), and eventually the tone, mannerisms and language she uses. Andrea Fraser even comments on her drinking water, as though the audience should not disdain that gesture and put more attention to it: “I’m not choking up, really. I’m … just a little dry. Takes a sip of water, then clears throat.”⁶³ In this way, she cuts the distancing between ‘stage’ and ‘audience’ an effect commonly produced from performances, and brings her viewer back to the ‘genuine’ nature of her speech, a kind of reality check where the viewer is imposed to believe

---

⁶¹ Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 10
⁶³ Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 214
that her being on podium is truly an opening speech rather than a performance.

Her performance re-enacts an assemblage of the different characters that play a role in the art world, playing with the stereotypes that are generally associated with them. This constant move from one character to another engages in an idea of ‘morphism’ as she transforms from being one personality to another. Morphism is to be associated with the idea of the body in performance art. It should be remarked, that this is subtle reference to the position of feminism and the body in performance art practices of the 1970s.

Literally speaking, (in Official Welcome) one should note Andrea Fraser’s predominant use of the male pronoun [he] when referring to an artist. The female pronoun [she] is first noticed in set number 4 when the supporter speaks of an artist. This linguistic use alludes to much feminist discussion going against prevalent views on women, seen as an object of desire and subject to the male gaze. The supporter in this set states: “I was smitten, just dazzled by the sexy modern flair of it all. It was so right, so now. I wanted to take it home. [...] She’s our fantasy. She lives our fantasies for us.”64 It is right at that point that Andrea Fraser strips down to Gucci underwear and high-heel shoes, and adds (speaking with an artist’s voice) before standing motionless for 15 seconds [Fig. 8]: “I’m not a person today. I’m an object in an artwork. It’s about emptiness.”65 A statement, which recalls her statement as Jane Castleton in Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk: “I would like to live like an art object. An art object, of course, that is exchanged for the pleasure and profit of others. Wouldn’t it be nice to live like an art object...”66 This gesture emphasizes an allusion to not only feminist discourses but also to the place of the body in performance art.

As the Welcome progresses, she strips away her clothes – standing nude on the podium – revealing her body to the audience in a manner that recalls much performance art of the 1970s by artists such as Carolee

64 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 219
65 Ibid, p. 220
66 Ibid, p. xxx
Schneeman, Gina Pane, Valie Export or Hannah Wilke and more recent Vanessa Beecroft. As such, Fraser transforms her body into a vehicle of artistic production and “Official Welcome comes close to achieving the grotesque desire articulated by the Jane Castleton character nearly two decades earlier: An art object, of course, that is exchanged for the pleasure and profit of others.”67 [Fig. 9] The statement comments on gender discussions, positioning women as object of gaze, desire, constrained to be a muse; but also points to the institutionalization of artists despite their attempt to brake away from the museum, artists are constrained to work within an socio-economical and political framework.

In a comparable gesture, in Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk Jane Castleton holds out her arm pointing to David Smith’s Two Box Structure but instead talks of herself and clothing rather than the sculpture: “Notice how the light catches the fabric, the tiny houndstooth checks of the suit, and silvers the fabric a little more brightly, as it falls about the arm, the legs, uh, just below the knee, and creases slightly at the waist, double-breasted. [...] While her dress and bearing might suggest an upper-class, uh, lady, the discriminating, uh, the discriminating, viewer, will notice that her hands are scarred and poorly manicured, and her teeth have not been straightened.”68

In 1963, Carolee Schneemann (United States, b. 1939) performed Eye Body, a series of intimate actions documented through photography by Icelandic artist Erró. [Fig. 10] The photographs represented goddess imageries emphasizing female sexuality. Kristine Stiles notes that such works anticipated body and performance art and the feminist politics of identity: “The erotic female archetype, creative imagination, and performance art itself are all subversive in the eyes of patriarchal culture because they themselves represent forms and forces which cannot be turned into functional commodities or entertainment (to be exchanged as

---

67 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. xxx
68 Ibid, p. 104
property and value), remaining unpossessable while radicalizing social consciousness.”

Andrea Fraser’s reference to woman as art object thus, recalls much feminist discussions of the 1970s as well as gender issues in society and art. It is also a reference to the position of women as ‘muse’ in the art world, for their bodies and nudity were painted but the presence of women artists was lacking. One would bear in mind the Guerilla Girls poster, which states: “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.” [Fig. 11] While the accuracy of the percentages might be questionable, the question posed is relevant to most feminist discussions. Feminism had a great impact on art and art criticism in the early 1970s. Michael Archer – in Art since 1960 (1997) – notes:

“the political viewpoint of a society and its art had been the focus of much attention already, mainly within a neo-Marxist theoretical framework. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the distribution of power among those who produce and those who own the means of production, the vast majority of players on both sides appeared to be men.”

As a result, much activism of the early 1970s led to the revelation of different statistics that proved the extent of gender marginalization within society. In New York, Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) had formed out of the Arts’ Workers Coalition. And in 1971, the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists issued a statement pointing out that among 713 artists who exhibited in group shows (over the past 10 years) at the Los Angeles County Museum, only 29 were women; and among 53 solo exhibitions, only one featured a woman. In the same year, art-historian Linda Nochlin published her seminal essay “Why have there been no great women artists?” (1971) where she points out to the socio-political context and a patriarchal culture of education as a backbone for such ‘marginality’. She also discusses curatorial practices of museum and gallery staff and the

71 Ibid
values reinforced by art history\textsuperscript{72}. Nochlin writes: “A feminist critique of the discipline of art history is needed which can pierce cultural-ideological limitations to reveal biases and inadequacies not only in regard to the question of women artists, but the formulation of crucial questions of the discipline as a whole.”\textsuperscript{73} In terms of institutional critique, it is relevant for Andrea Fraser as a female artist to recall these discussions and further question the discipline as a whole. This is to be understood as an initiative, similarly to feminism in the 1970s, in historical reclamation, a critique and reappraisal of the criteria of judgment and finally, an examination of artistic activity.

On a similar note, artistic practice such as performance, allowed female artist to distance themselves from ‘traditional’ genres that would impose a perspective (the dominant discourse) on their work, that of being the object of men’s gaze and desire. In the 1970s, women questioned how they could represent themselves or pursue an artistic practice that would not lead to the furtherance of such point of views. Thus, the use of newer techniques and materials enabled such a distancing:

“[it] pre-empted, to a certain extent, the problem of having to deal with the entire history of art before one could say anything new. Photography, video, film, sound, Performance – those information-providing tactics that had so recently begun to expand the bounds of art – all seemed more appropriate means with which to address the subject matter.”\textsuperscript{74}


Chapter 3
The Institutional Context

“We are in the entertainment business and competing against other forms of entertainment out there.”

- Ben Hartley (Director of Communication - Guggenheim New York)

A – The dematerialization of the Art Object

A discussion on the choice of the performance genre in Andrea Fraser’s practice may be elaborated with Lucy Lippard’s idea of the dematerialization of the artwork (in relation to Conceptual Art). Lucy Lippard in her book *Six years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (1973) formulated the idea that the art object has gone through a process of dematerialization, in other words has undermined the physical aspects of an artwork. Lippard defines it as a de-emphasis on material aspects such as uniqueness, permanence, and decorative attractiveness. She elaborates this idea further as the process of dematerialization takes the form of an abstraction of content and a disembodiment of its own subject: “in maintaining the abstraction of content that was crucial to the high modernism valorized by the museum, Conceptual art also maintained the disembodiment of its own subject. It is precisely this to which institutional critique responds, insofar as it insists on legibility. [Emphasis added]” Ward Frazer adds to this point in relation to Performance art, that the disembodiment of the subject and the abstraction of content has allowed a critical function for performance art where the

---

75 Ben Hartley quoted in *Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser*, by Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 204
attention was turned to the actual bodies of artists, in order to produce a different analysis of the reification of ‘the artist.’

The idea of the body in Andrea Fraser’s practice lies – in addition to an (art-) historical reference of practices of the 1970s - in the importance of the human subject over the object, hence a questioning on the nature of art and the role of the artist. This recalls a refrain from a commodification of the art object and highlights the phenomenological experience of art. Kristine Stiles notes that after World War II, artists began to use their bodies as the material for visual art in order to increase the experiential immediacy of their work:

“Their powerful declaration of the body as form and content insisted on the primacy of human subjects over objects. [...] Emphasizing the body as art, artists amplified the role of process over product and shifted from representational objects to presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space.”

Similarly, Archer notes that once the emphasis in art shifted from the end-product to the process of its making, the acknowledgement of the artist’s presence in that process became unavoidable. This acknowledgement is also the recognition of the bodily factor that comes into play in the process of artistic activity: “Performance is that acknowledgment.”

A disembodiment of the subject subsequently geared the accent on phenomenological characteristics, and the experience of art. This idea commonly referred to today as relational aesthetics emphasizes the viewer or the public’s experience of the artwork. It established a relationship between the artwork, the context in which it is placed and consequently its public. Nicolas Bourriaud described ‘relational aesthetics’ (in 1998) as an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its

---

social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space”81.

In Andrea Fraser’s case, the viewer’s involvement is achieved through performance genre. In Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk for instance, the artist acting as a museum guide (Jane) leads the viewer throughout the museum and ‘imposes’ what should be looked at and what information they should know. Thus, the dematerialization of the art object has led to an emphasis on the art context:

“The most effective method in this case has often been the accent or overlay of an art context, an art framework, or simply an art awareness, that is, the imposition of a foreign pattern or substance on existing situations or information. The addition of accents rather than the delineation of an independent form led away from marking the object into remarking direct experience.”82

Kirsi Peltomaki in “Affect and spectatorial agency: viewing institutional critique in the 1970s” (2007) relates the notion of a phenomenological experience of art to the idea of spectatorship. She argues that with the avant-gardes, the viewer was expected to complete the work of art, whereas this is still relevant with early practices of institutional critique, the viewer is nevertheless inherent to the artwork, as their role has already been pre-determined by the artist. However, the difference to be made here between the avant-gardes and institutional critique practices is the account for the institutional context, while the avant-gardes expected their viewer to take the institutional context into account; institutional critique practices ‘spoke-out’ the framework and directly geared the viewer’s attention to the institutional context: “the 1960s and 1970s viewing subject had become an increasingly specific entity whose place in the work of art was scripted alongside material or processual relations.”83

Andrea Fraser takes into account these notions when she decides to literally tell her audience about the institutional context they are in. In her performance Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk, she does not fail to point

out the history of the Philadelphia Museum and remind her viewer of the institutional context (and art-historical background) in which they are viewing artworks. Likewise, in *Official Welcome* she incorporates in her speech the fact that the performance is a commission by the MICA foundation, raising her public’s awareness to the underpinnings of her performance. On that point, with regards to institutional critique, Peltomaki notes:

“Institutional critique offered an alternate version of the conceptual investigation that would have limited the viewer’s cognitive interpretation to elements internal to the artwork. Within institutional critique, the viewers were asked to perceive their environment as a social, ideological system. Architectural constraints, funding partners, political connections, and psychological expectations were considered inseparable from any discrete artwork and the conditions of its reception.”

By referencing the funding bodies (MICA Foundation), Andrea Fraser engages in the issue of a move to privatized public museums. Her speech directly addresses the foundation and process of her work down to the financing of her project. She addresses the MICA Foundation as her sponsor and states their mission, thus the supposed goal of her project. During the performance, she reads:

“The mission of the MICA Foundation is to sponsor projects by artists that positioned critically in relation to the production, exhibition, documentation, promotion, and distribution of art, and the conventional roles of artists, patron, and audience. It aims to provide crucial support for artists whose work has been rendered invisible because of political content, lack of marketability, or its challenging inquiry into the nature of art institutions.”

Indeed, since her performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) and her substantial writing on the notion of institutional critique, Andrea Fraser has been widely known for her critical practice. Ironically, knowing the nature of Fraser’s work as an institutional critical practice, the viewer is bound to understand the reference to the foundation as her

---


sponsor as part of her critique, hence commenting on the economics and financing in the art world as a whole. During Official Welcome, she states: “By engaging her to develop a text relevant to a private nonprofit foundation – and to deliver it here as well - The MICA Foundation is endorsing Andrea Fraser’s role as an institutional critic.”

In Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk, Fraser’s character Jane Castleton presents the Philadelphia Museum in relation to its role as a public institution and its being a product of public policy by reading the institution’s mission, mandate published in The New Museum and Its Service to Philadelphia (1922): “We have to come to understand that to rob... people of the things of the spirit and to supply them with higher wages as a substitute is not good economics, good patriotism, or good policy.”

Indeed, in the annotated script of the performance, Andrea Fraser explains that in the late 19th century, art museums began to be established in large numbers in the United States. This general movement was enabled by bankers and industrialists to reorganize public policy and limit ‘public relief’. She notes that the primary aim of the movement was to eliminate all extra-institutional public relief that was – quoting Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward – “making it possible for some of the poor to evade the new industrial assault.”

This comments on the museum as a product of Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution which emphasized social class differences, and where the institution served to educate the working class on ‘high culture’: “The Municipal Art Gallery ‘that really serves its purpose gives an opportunity for enjoying the highest privileges of wealth and leisure to all those people who have cultivated tastes but not the means of gratifying them.’ And for those who have not yet cultivated taste, the Museum will provide ‘a training in taste.’ [...] The public, who buy clothes and table china and wall paper

---

86 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 214
87 Ibid, p. 98
88 Ibid, p. 111
and inexpensive jewellery, must be forced to raise their standards of taste by seeing the masterpieces of other civilizations and other centuries.”

Hence, the museum’s role is to differentiate between ‘low’ and ‘high’ culture or to present ‘good’ art: “The museum’s task could be described as the continuous, conscientious and resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity.”

B – The Society of the Spectacle

The institutional context is a crucial point when speaking of institutional critique, particularly in terms of Andrea Fraser’s performances that use the context as an inherent part of her work. She uses the historical context – for instance – as a strategy in her performances by referencing the museum’s history in which she is performing. For instance, she adapts the museum’s historical context to her script writings through which she formulates her critique. Her scripts are satirical comments about the institution in which she performs and are framed accordingly. Similarly to Duchamp’s work, her performance and her script cannot be taken out of context, as it would lose most of its significance. Using an institutional context and making it an integral part of the meaning of the artwork also means using pre-determined elements set by the location. It is on that point that Andrea Fraser plays with, a make belief of institutionalization all the while criticizing the very same institution. This conditioning of the artwork, though perceived as a limitation by first-generation practitioners may be viewed as another form of appropriation, perhaps a discursive sort of appropriation – which filtrates and is essential to the formulated institutional critique discourse.

As was discussed in reference to Lucy Lippard’s notion of the dematerialization of the object and disembodiment of the subject, context was put at the fore. One might add that putting the context at the

---

89 Fraser, Andrea, *Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 98, 100
90 Ibid, p. 104
foreground, involves putting an emphasis on the physical (or spatial) context to the fore then engage in the institutional context as a whole. Looking at the greater picture, starting from a micro (particular) to a macro (general) perspective. Gaston Bachelard’s book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) had already expressed the importance of space (or setting) in relation to art. His writings revealed that spatiality is more than a setting and that it is often the armature around which the works of art revolve. In other words, this translates in Andrea Fraser’s performances in a literal engagement with the institution (generally museums) in which her performance is being conducted. In *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, she does not fail to remind her viewer the historical context in which they are placed by literally telling the museum’s history, thus placing her performance within a larger historical context. Jane Castleton engages with the physical context, as she moves around the museum giving a guided tour, actively involving her audience to the architectural elements of the museum, and does not fail to point out elements of the infrastructure.

A practice of institutional critique questions the relationships between the subject and the object, the viewer and the artwork, and to quote Frazer Ward:

“The neo-avant-garde’s concerns expand outward, in Conceptual art and post-Conceptual institutional critique, from an initial engagement with the immediate relations between subject and object, viewer and art work, through the broader constraints and conditions of that relationship. This entails an engagement that begins to turn the space of the museum itself into an object located in a social and ideological network (an object of inquiry, one term in an expansive set of social relations).”

Andrea Fraser defines her work as “’site-specific art that seeks to criticize and analyze aspects of culture that have largely been naturalized.’” To elaborate on the idea of an artwork developed and constructed around a particular framework, context becomes inseparable

---

and inherent to art: “Contemporary art works on the level of context, framework, background, or of a new theoretical interpretation. But the goal is the same: to create a contrast between the form and historical background, to make the form look other and new.”\textsuperscript{94} Indeed, the 20\textsuperscript{th} century is characterized by its investigations to the relationship between art and its context and to see the context as “formative on the thing, and, finally, to see the context as a thing in itself.”\textsuperscript{95} Brian O’Doherty’s book \textit{Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space} analyses the shift from art as an object to art in relation to the gallery space, highlighting the ideologies presented by the gallery space, defined as a White Cube, preached for its so-called neutrality. O’Doherty discusses the development of art in the 1920s to the 1970s and the evolving importance of context. Brian O’Doherty identifies Duchamp’s installations \textit{1,200 Coal Bags} (1938) and \textit{Mile of String} (1942) as breaking away from the separation between space and art, influencing much art of the 1960s and 1970s and further. The installations “stepped once and for all outside the frame of painting and made the gallery space itself the primary material to be altered by art.”\textsuperscript{96}

Indeed, making use of the established art institutional exhibition apparatus is what Conceptual Art practices attacked throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. The 1970s’ strategy of institutional critique was emblematized by “un déni d’exposition” (exhibition denial) a term borrowed from the French art historian Jean-Marc Poinsot. Conceptual Art’s strategy was, in contrast with Duchamp’s, to invade the institutional space. As with the assumptions operating in Buren’s work that “the institutions of art, and principally the museum, have predetermined not only the form but the content and meaning of art.”\textsuperscript{97} In the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists such as Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Michael Asher devised projects that took the museum as their medium in order to interrogate the institutional authorities. They revealed by means of their

\textsuperscript{94} Groys, Boris, \textit{Art Power} (The MIT Press, London, 2008), p. 40
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, p. 10
artistic projects that museum’s architectural structures are not as disinterested and neutral as they would like to appear. Thus, the questioning of the museum institution through its physicality is an interrogation that eventually reveals the so-called neutrality of the ‘white-cube’, “which they [artists] revealed as a physical disguise and ideological filter of sanctioned authority.” While Daniel Buren’s method was to introduce considerably sized panels within a museum or gallery space, Michael Asher on the other hand removed or added walls to the structure of a gallery, thus revealing ‘the behind the scenes’ and functioning of a commercial gallery; Andrea Fraser on the other hand makes use of these apparatus in her performances in addition to a ‘performative’ utterance of the dominant discourses in art.

The idea of the White Cube is understood by the imagery of a gallery space with its bare white walls. They are “unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – [and] the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics.” It is designed to act as a ‘neutral’ institution where the only focal point should be the artwork. This space must be sheltered from the appearance of change and time. It is a kind of non-space or ideal space where space and time are symbolically annulled. On that point, it is relevant to refer to the ending to Andrea Fraser’s Official Welcome where she says: “I think we should end by thanking the memories.” Thus, drawing to the temporality of her work, to the non-objectified character of the performance genre, and finally that such genre lives out through the audience, in a sort of collective memory.

The importance of context grew with modernism and the avant-gardes, to an extent that context has become content or an inherent part of the content. O’Doherty moves on to further argue that with postmodernism, there was a process of the institutionalization of the white cube and how

---

98 Pederson Amy, “Relational Aesthetics and Institutional Critique”, in Institutional Critique and After, ed. by John C. Welchman (California SoCCAS: JRP Ringier, 2006), pp. 268-269
101 Fraser, Andrea, Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 225
that process has affected the relationship with the viewer: “With postmodernism, the artist and the audience are more like each other. The classic hostility is mediated, too often, by irony and farce. Both parties show themselves highly vulnerable to context, and the resulting ambiguities blur their discourse.”

The use of context as an inherent part of content enables two directions of criticism: such gestures comment on art in relation to the institution within which it is placed as well as it comments on institutions as a whole, widening the discussion to art’s relation to society and culture and the wider context that contains it.

It is interesting to note the development of the art market in the 21st century as exhibitions have progressed to function similarly to a ‘blockbuster show’ in compliance with a spectacle culture. To put it swiftly, quoting the New York Guggenheim’s director of communication: “we [professionals of the art world] are in the entertainment business and competing against other forms of entertainment out there.”

Our society is one that “prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence [...]” With regards to a culture of spectacle, Andrea Fraser’s *Official Welcome* points to the ‘entertainment’ (and commercial) character of the art world where artists are presented as celebrities. In the fifth set, with a most probable allusion to Damien Hirst who is described to have an obsession with death [Fig. 12] - quoting Larry Gagosian (with a supporter’s voice) – she states: “Well, he’s done it again. He’s back, and he’s bigger and better than ever. He’s *staggeringly corporate*, breathtakingly professional and *eager to entertain.* [Emphasis added]”

The idea of the blockbuster show recalls Guy Debord’s idea of ‘the spectacle’. In his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Debord sees the

---

103 Ben Hartley quoted in *Museum Highlights: The writings of Andrea Fraser*, by Andrea Fraser, ed. by Alexander Alberro, (The MIT Press, 2005), p. 204
spectacle as epitomizing the prevailing model of social life.\textsuperscript{106} He writes: “42. The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that relationship to commodities is now plain to see – commodities are now \textit{all} that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity.”\textsuperscript{107}

It is in that view that the performance genre has found its way in the 1980s, through a new purpose and a reformulation of institutional critique. “In the moment of the blockbuster show, the museum clearly takes its place within an at least partly refeudalized spectacle culture.”\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{106}} Debord, Guy, \textit{The Society of the Spectacle} (1967), Trans. from French by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Zone Books, New York, 1995), pp. 12-13
  \item \textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{107}} Ibid, p. 29
\end{itemize}
Conclusion

“Whatever happened to the institutional critique?” is a question that was brought forward by an exhibition at the American Fine Arts in 1993. This re-assessment confirmed that critical practices were still undergoing and that artists such as Andrea Fraser were developing new strategies. To emphasize, a renewed interest in institutional critical practices was confirmed by the Transform Project – of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies – started in 2005. The project discussed the possibilities of canonization of institutional critique as well as it argued for a ‘third-wave’ of critical practice, identified as ‘instituent practices’. Though this identification might be accurate, this essay kept with the term ‘institutional critique’ in relation to a third generation practitioners in order to emphasize the continuity of an institutional critique current, and as not to separate it from its previous generations.

The first chapter explored the art-historical background, which led to the emergence of institutional critique. It first saw Duchamp’s questioning of artistic practice as foregrounding an institutional criticism; furthered by Conceptual Art practices in the 1960s and 1970s – such as those of Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers or Michael Asher - who questioned the role of institutions (museums, galleries, etc.). The first-wave examined the conditions of the museum with an aim to ‘brake-out’ of the institutional framework. In addition to the economic and political discourse of this generation, the second-wave (1980s and 1990s) added a growing awareness of the forms of subjectivity, incorporating a spectatorial agency.

Though Ward Frazer argued for a death of Institutional Critique with the wake of Conceptual Art, renewed interests in art criticism and new strategies in art practices confirm its continuity: Benjamin Buchloh’s seminal essay in 1990\(^\text{109}\) and the aforementioned exhibition at the

American Fine Arts, along with the Transform Project in 2005, a series of symposia and publications\textsuperscript{110}. Inasmuch, Andrea Fraser’s constant exploration of institutional critique in her work and writings, particularly with - picking up on Buchloh’s essay title - “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” (2005).

The second chapter looks at Performance Art as a new kind of strategy for an institutional critical practice. With a focus on Andrea Fraser, two of her performances are discussed: \textit{Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk} (1989) and \textit{Official Welcome} (2001). Both works existed as a live performance, a taped one and a script. The annotated scripts add a more ‘academic’, hence more critical, dimension to her sarcastic and humoristic performances. In this chapter, institutional Critique is discussed as being ambiguous between ‘institution’ and ‘criticism’, where a reformulation of this concept – particularly in the 1980s and 1990s – sought to combine both institution and criticism, both practice and theory\textsuperscript{111}. Hence, a differentiation between institutional criticism and institutional practice is established. Andrea Fraser’s reformulation of institutional critique in her performances is possible as the genre enables her to combine both ‘criticism’ through speech, and ‘institution’ through performance and the use of the institutional framework. It is further argued that Andrea Fraser’s strategies recalls much strategies of the practices of 1960s and 1970s, be it ‘Appropriation Art’ with her appropriation of different texts and writings; or Body Art or Feminist practices through her references in her monologues or her critical gestures. Inasmuch, her speeches have much allusion to Conceptual artists, practices of 1960s and 1970s, as well as art critics, historians and so forth, as brought forth in the annotated scripts or in her mannerisms.

The third chapter elaborates further on the importance of an institutional context in the reformulation of institutional critique. Institutional context is understood in Andrea Fraser’s performances

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110} California SoCCAS symposium and its publication \textit{Institutional Critique After}, ed. by John C. Welchman (JRP Ringier, 2006)
\textsuperscript{111} To recall Amy Pederson’s statement: “Notions of interactivity and performativity lie at the centre of the 1980s and 1990s reformulations of Institutional Critique.”
\end{flushright}
through her use of either the institution’s (The Philadelphia Museum of Art for instance) historical background or her drawing to its physicality or architecture elements. The institutional context is developed by her making visible the invisible, drawing the attention to the underlying finances or patronage of art institutions; furthered by a comment on the role of art in society and the production of culture. On this point, Andrea Fraser’s performance art as an utterance of institutional critique is seen as contributing to Guy Debord’s idea of a ‘society of the spectacle’. In this way, Andrea Fraser’s performances not only comment on the (role of) art and culture, but they also reiterate a characterization of contemporary society as geared by entertainment.

Looking at Andrea Fraser’s performances, it is thus viable to consider a reformulation of institutional critique onto a third wave, which encompasses not only artists and their critical practices but also involves art institutions, critics and the art world as a whole. It is important to view this development as extra-disciplinary, perhaps emphasizing the ambiguities between artistic practice, artistic criticism, the production of culture and their role in society: “As a ‘current’ it has meanwhile also sufficiently aged to provide welcome occasion for various historicizations, self-historicizations or even ‘examinations of topicality’, which regularly become entangled in the self-referentiality specific to the art field instead of examining it – and specifically examining it as institutional practice.”

Regardless, institutional critique has now been canonized as part of art history. Ironically enough, this complies with institutional critique’s essential idea that art goes through an inevitable process of institutionalization – by becoming a canon and part of art-history. However, on an ending note, one would note Stefan Nowoty’s statement:

---

“Wanting to canonize institutional critique art practices is a rather paradoxical endeavour. [...] canonizations are themselves an essential part specifically of the institutional critique practices that the practices of institutional critique refer to – and indeed critically refer to.”113

113 Ibid
Bibliography

Books


**Articles**


Videos

Andrea Fraser in ‘Walk-Through’, Kemper Art Museum, USA – Podcast provided by iTunes.

Kunstverein in Hamburg, September 9th, 2003
30 minutes
Commissioned and first performed at MICA Foundation, New York, 2001
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne

Conducted at The Philadelphia Museum of Art, February 1989
30 minutes
Developed for the Contemporary Viewpoint Lecture Series organized by the Tyler School of Art of Temple University
Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Art Matters, Inc.
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne
Illustrations

Figure 1
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)
Figure 2
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)
Figure 3
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917)
Figure 4
Hans Haacke, MoMA Poll (1970)
Figure 5
Marcel Broodthaers, Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (1968)
**Figure 6**
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989)
Figure 7
Daniel Buren, *Vertical Stripes (glued over gallery door thus closing show)*, (1968)
Milan, Gallery Apollinaire
Figure 8
Figure 9
Figure 10
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)
Figure 11
Andrea Fraser, Still from *Official Welcome* (2001)
Performance at the Kunstverein in Hamburg (9 September 2003)
Figure 12
Figure 13
Figure 14