

Dissertation

Steve Smith MA Visual Culture 13130035

Contemporary Post-Studio Art Practice and its Institutional Currency.

Contents

Introduction

From Post-Studio's beginnings 5

Out of the Studio 7

The Art Object and The Artists Sovereign Decisions

The first frame or 'reality' 12

The site of display & its customs 14

Sovereign decisions and infringements 15

The agency of objects and actions 17

Sovereign vs. Institutional Freedom 23

Artists Practice and "Dissensus"

Gatekeepers of sense? 26

The social destination of art 28

Dissensual Practice 29

Visible Landscapes and Sensory Regimes 33

Art's social field

We are the Institution 37

Relations 43

The Post-Institutional field 43

Values, Desires, Rewards (Conclusions) 45

Bibliography 49

Appendix i – Artists Statements 54

Appendix ii – Interview Audio 55

Introduction

From Post-Studio's beginnings

Post-Studio practice in the visual arts has changed the face of art since the 1960s and 1970s, established methods of art practice using the media of paint and sculpture have been augmented by installation and performance, these newer forms of practice stepped out of the gallery and museum and embraced the world outside. When they did enter the gallery, museum or art institution they in many cases critiqued those very institutions they had been invited into. By the 2000s post-studio practice had thoroughly established its status but in recent times questions regarding the ability of such practice to remain critical of the institutions of art and to be viable in the face of institutional relationships which co-opt, confine or instrumentalise such practice: Can artists still provide a strong critical voice within institutions? Has the subsumption of institutional critique, such as that observed in the practice of artist Andrea Fraser, into the very institutions it critiques now undermined its critical power? Is this critique managed and controlled by a “prevalent bourgeois ideology” of the conventional institutions of arts display, its museums, galleries and the wider art market? Indeed, do artists who use post-studio methods still use them for critique or opposition or are these methods which result in art manifest outside of these institutions the practices of artists alienated from them?. Finally how might we understand contemporary post-studio practice outside of these conventional institutions and a conception of ‘institutions of display’ in which artists can continue to present such work in the face of the prevalent ideologies in which art has been increasingly determined by market ideologies and instrumentalised by public institutions of display?

In investigation of these questions I have interviewed five U.K based artists, Louise Ashcroft, Claire Blundell Jones, Helene Kazan, Danny Pockets and Paula Roush who have to a greater or lesser extent adopted post-studio methods in their art practices. Through a series of semi-formal interviews or conversations I have asked the artists to describe their practice methodologies, explain their motivations and their attitudes to the conventional institutions of display. In doing so I hope to investigate the contemporary nature of concerns raised by some of post-studio's key artists. I seek to understand post-studio's historical legacies, for example Danny Pockets practice is embedded in the customs of the studio, however, much of his work manifests itself in the style and manner of post-studio's installation methods and contexts of display. Paula Roush's practice is heavily informed by post-studio's elements of institutional critique and performative processes but has increasingly taken a trajectory from conventional

institutions to other destinations. Louise Ashcroft's work is reminiscent of artists such as Robert Smithson that focus on siting rather than production. Claire Blundell Jones uses performative methods within and outside institutions, her works do not carry an overt institutional critique when produced in institutions, however they can still be observed as critique of social and institutional codes that are exposed in the unfolding of these works. Finally in the practice of Helene Kazan we see an artist who is thoroughly conversant with the legacies of post-studio methods and is concerned with wider issues of social relations within the field of art, Kazan insinuates these concerns within her post-studio methodologies of practice.

For all these artists the concerns of their post-studio forebears such as Daniel Buren, with his questions of the functions of studio, museum and gallery, Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta Clark's explorations of artist practice removed from confinement in institutions to a new physical and social space for art and Andrea Fraser and Hans Haacke's investigations into institutional critique, investigations of the social relations and the social field of art are carried forward and contained, if only subtly, into the practices of the five contemporary practitioners I have interviewed. The practices of artists such as Buren, Smithson, Matta-Clark, Fraser and Haacke constitute the canonical elements employed of post-studio by its foremost practitioners, it should be noted that these methods differ in their trajectories and destinations and that their critical positions are determined as either overt institutional critique within institutions or by exposing a critical practice in redefining art's codes and modes of production from outside conventional institutions of display, however, all these differing practices in intention and destination can be seen as oppositional.

Using issues raised by Boris Groys regarding artist's Sovereign Decisions, Jacques Ranciere's explanation of Dissensus and Andrea Fraser's reappraisal of Institutional Critique and the Social Field of Art I hope to assess the current efficacy of post-studio methods in art practice in 2011. By my conclusion I hope to have shown that despite the familiarity and establishment of post-studio methods within the customs of arts' conventional institutions that the institutional relationships with such artists increasingly results in alienation from these institutions. I will argue that the alienation of such practice highlights a tendency in the social relationships of the field of art in which the prevalent bourgeois ideologies of conventional institutions of display are suppressing critique and freedom in the production of art by its practitioners, in favour of an uncontested and increasingly reinforced privileged hold on art's cultural currency and

capital. Subsequently when such practices seek not to critique institutions the very nature of post-studio practice continues to carry critical power and opposition in its customs.

Out of the Studio

The role of the studio was critiqued in Daniel Buren's 1971 essay 'The Function of the Studio'. Buren's essays of this period remain some of the key influencing texts on post-studio art practice and the role of the studio, the museum and the artwork and its institutional contexts. In his analysis of the role of the studio Buren explains the effect that an artwork undergoes on its removal from its place of origin, the studio, to the museum.

The work thus falls victim to a mortal paradox from which it cannot escape, since its purpose implies a progressive removal from its own reality, from its origin.¹

Buren's later 'Function of the Museum', published by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford for his 1973 exhibition, expands on themes Buren raises regarding the institutional context in which art is viewed.

among other things the function of the Museum as we have rapidly examined it – place the work of art once and for all above all classes and ideologies. The same idealism points to the eternal and apolitical Man which the prevalent bourgeois ideology would like us to believe in and preserve.'²

Both texts highlight conditions within art practice that understand the studio and the museum as institutions that still inform practice, production and display even when an artist seeks to work outside of the normal processes or contexts of these institutions.³ Buren criticises these institutions (the studio, and museum and gallery) for their "ossifying customs", invoked by the studio production and institutional practices of the museum that do not allow for the truest understanding of the artwork. Buren describes the works' travel from studio to museum as an act of distancing.⁴

¹Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.53

²Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum', in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 192.

³"The Importance of the studio should by now be apparent: it is the first frame, the first limit, upon which all subsequent frames/limits will depend" - Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.51

⁴Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.53



Portrait de Daniel Buren - Image tirée d'une vidéo pour l'Encyclopédie audiovisuelle de l'art contemporain -
Auteur : Pantalaskas, 1995. (<http://www.moreeuw.com/histoire-art/daniel-buren.htm>)

In the development of Buren's ideas, the post-studio artists sought to remove the distance between the production of the artwork and the space of its display and its ossifying customs. Those works that were developed outside these institutions, such as Robert Smithson's land art or the interventions of Gordon Matta-Clark, attempted to work outside art's conventional institutional systems, and by doing so attempted to develop an art practice free from the constraints or mediations in the usual artist-institution relationship. Matta-Clark describes his works, which altered buildings by dissecting them with cuts, apertures and slices revealing structures hidden by walls, floors and ceilings. These works were often in socially deprived areas and Matta-Clark hoped to explore the social environment engendered by our immediate home and built environments "By undoing a building there are many aspects of the social conditions against which I am gesturing"⁵ Matta-Clark intended to develop his work in sites and

⁵Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Building Dissections' in *Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark – Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York, 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2011), p .107

contexts in which his art became an act of agency⁶ As these post-studio methods moved forward they took their critical and oppositional focus beyond art institutions to critique the social and environmental conditions existing in the sites they were presented in.⁷



Conical Intersect, 1975. 27-29, rue Beaubourg, Paris. Courtesy of David Zwirner, NY and the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark. (<http://www.megastructure-reloaded.org/gordon-matta-clark/>)

For other artists the major influence on post-studio methods became institutional critique. Institutional critique arose from a need for artists to assert a more critical stance on the

⁶ “I could adapt my work to still another given level of the given situation. It would no longer be concerned with just personal or metaphoric treatment of the site, but finally responsive to the express will of its occupants” - Gordon Matta-Clark, ‘Building Dissections’ in *Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark – Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York, 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2011), p .107

⁷Of particular interest are the case studies and analysis of Richard Serra’s works and practice in Douglas Crimp’s essay ‘Redefining Site Specificity’. – Douglas Crimp, *On The Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T Press, 2000), p.150-186

production and display of their work and the ability of the institutions to determine the framing of their artworks through their institutional customs. Post-studio practice not only enabled artists to develop their practices in more autonomous ways but also to place themselves within the institution as a legitimate critical voice. This enhanced critical role for the artist within the institution enabled artists such as Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler⁸ and Andrea Fraser to build a practice around critique itself⁹.

‘Museums define legitimate culture and legitimate cultural discourse and accord me, and other authorized individuals, an exclusive prerogative to produce legitimate culture and to possess legitimate opinion. They divide the field of material culture into legitimate culture and illegitimate culture-or rather, non-culture, to the extent that the illegitimate is denied a representative function in the public sphere framed by these institutions. And they divide the public created by this sphere into producers and nonproducers of culture.’¹⁰

Andrea Fraser created works such as ‘Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk’ which was performed in a number of museums as a live performance in the form of a museum tour. Fraser subverted the institutional language of such tours, acting the part of a museum guide, Jane Castleton, with a scripted tour highlighting disregarded or insignificant aspects of the museum, its architectural detailing and insinuating unexpected language.¹¹ Practices such as Fraser’s questioned the role of the artist, the institution, the politics of exhibition, economies of art but

⁸ Louise Lawler was highly influential on Andrea Fraser’s practice, Lawler’s photographic critique’s of institutional displays of art are described by Birgit Pelzer: “These photographs chop up established meaning. They feed of the presupposition of a body of knowledge already developed, indexed, and codified.” – Birgit Pelzer ‘Interpositions: the Work of Louise Lawler’, in Phillip Kaiser (ed.), *Louise Lawler and Others* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2004), p. 19.

⁹ Fraser states that she is influenced in her attitudes to institutional knowledge by Pierre Bourdieu when he recognises “cultural allodoxia, that is, all the mistaken identifications and false recognitions which betray the gap between acknowledgement and knowledge...the heterodoxy experienced as if it were orthodoxy...engendered by...undifferentiated reverence, in which avidity combines with anxiety”. - Andrea Fraser, ‘An Artists Statement’, in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p. 9

¹⁰ Andrea Fraser, ‘An Artists’ Statement’, in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p 4-5

¹¹ A script of the tour sets the scene: ‘The West entrance hall of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, February 5, or 11 or 12 or 18 or 19, 1989. Two or three dozen museum visitors are waiting in the southeast corner of the visitor reception area; some are waiting for a Contemporary Viewpoints Artist Lecture by Andrea Fraser; some are waiting for one of the Museum’s many guided tours; some are just waiting for friends. At three o’clock, Jane Castleton enters the West Entrance Hall and begins whoever appears to be listening. She is dressed in a silver and brown houndstooth check double-breasted suit with a skirt just below the knee in length, an off-white silk button-down blouse, white stockings, and black pumps. Her brown hair is gathered into a small bun held in place with a black bow.’ - Andrea Fraser, ‘Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk’, in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p. 96

also a wider recognition of the power imbalances in relationships between arts institutions, artists and audiences and the social conditions and relations that facilitate it.



Andrea Fraser performing *Museum Highlights* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_Fraser.jpg)

The Art Object and The Artists Sovereign Decisions

The first frame or 'reality'

Daniel Buren explains two major criticisms of the foremost institutions of art, the studio and museum. If we understand the journey of the art 'object', the displayed artwork that issues forth from the artist's studio into the institutions of the museum, and in our understanding we might include all of the institutions in which the artwork is viewed¹², we arrive at Buren's central condition of the social relationships between artist and institutions of display. In his essay "The Function of the Studio" Buren describes the artist's studio as the 'first frame' for the artwork, the making of the work in the studio is for Buren a filter, the place in which the artist makes individual decisions regarding the art work screened from public view.¹³ Danny Pockets is an artist who works in the most conventional of studio practices of the five artists interviewed for this dissertation, producing paintings and sculptures for gallery spaces Pockets also creates performative installations and street interventions. However, he uses the studio to conceptualise works that appear to an audience in post-studio traditions. Pockets describes the role of the studio in terms which echoes Buren's understanding of the studio as first-frame and refuge

'I can zone out and get myself into almost a trance state, like a meditation, a very zen kind of thing, just me and the work, its very intimate and were talking to each other. Sometimes I walk into the studio and there's all these bits of work sitting around and there looking at me, there all quite threatening, like walking into a village pub and there's all these people going "what's he doing here, what does he want?". So you need a little bit of time to acquaint yourself with what's going on in there and then it gathers momentum and then your able to focus and one idea leads to another and a process starts to take shape.'¹⁴

Buren describes the artist's studio as a refuge and as such the work conceived in this refuge becomes increasingly distanced from its own reality once it leaves the studio, in Pockets description of the works almost brooding, territorial presence we see Buren's conception of the

¹² The context of Buren's understanding of the museum as the determining force in the customs of the wider framing of art are explained in his notes to *The Function of the Museum*: "It must be quite clear that when we speak of "the museum" we are also referring to all types of "galleries" in existence and all other places which claim to be cultural centres. A certain distinction between "museum" and "gallery" will be made below. However the impossibility of escaping the concept of cultural location must also be stressed." – Daniel Burn, 'Function of the Museum', in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 192.

¹³ Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p52

¹⁴ Interview with Danny Pockets, 23 July 2011

studio.¹⁵ On leaving the studio the artwork, in Buren's eyes becomes compromised by its distancing from its point of origin¹⁶

'The work is thus totally foreign to the world into which it is welcomed (museum, gallery, collection). This gives rise to the ever-widening gap between the work and its place (and not its placement), an abyss which, were it to become apparent, as sooner or later it must, would hurl the entire parade of art (art as we know it today and, 99% of the time, as it is made) into historical oblivion. This gap is tentatively bridged, however by the system which makes it acceptable to ourselves as public, artist, historian, and critic, the convention that establishes the museum and the gallery as inevitable neutral frames, the unique and definitive locales of art. Eternal realms for eternal art!'¹⁷

In the processes that ensue in the studio Pockets invests the artwork with the necessary conditions for its survival in the ossifying customs of its conventional framing and distancing from the studio:

'...if I'm doing something which is about using a space or an intervention or whatever then that idea takes shape there (in the studio) so that whenever I go to the space or installing something I know that I've got everything under control, when I get to that space obviously there's going to be externals again but I've done the research. It's a lab, it's a laboratory, I don't wear a white coat, maybe I should.'¹⁸

It is in this environment that Pockets attempts to control the details of the work's conditions of display by processing the external elements that the work will meet, using the studio as a means of exerting a pre-emptive sovereign control, an attempt by the artist to bridge the gap prior to the work's inevitable distancing by institutional codes.

¹⁵ "All the same, it is in the studio and only in the studio that it is closest to its own reality, a reality from which it will continue to distance itself" - Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.53

¹⁶As described earlier by Buren as the "...mortal paradox from which it cannot escape."- Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.53

¹⁷Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58, p.53

¹⁸Interview with Danny Pockets, 23 July 2011



Danny Pockets - Prekarisierung. The Stars Down From The Sky. The Nunnery. London. 2006
(<http://www.pickapocket.org/artworks.php?s=disposable%20exhibitions>)

The site of display & its customs

In Buren's later 'Function of the Museum' we see a further development of the issues that arise from the distancing of the work from its place of origin, the studio, to the museum.

Once delivered within the institution¹⁹ the work's framing is determined through the conventions of the institution. Ultimately the questions Buren intended to ask related to the bridging of the gap between the work that is produced in the studio and the conventions that determine its institutional context. The major convention Buren recognises is the Museum's role in preserving the work²⁰, there is another significant aspect that appears in Buren's analysis, that which understands the artist subordinating their authorship of the artwork to the museum as the determining 'prevalent bourgeois ideology', Buren's response to this condition was to 'leave' the studio and develop his works within the museum or gallery in direct response

¹⁹Although Buren titles his essay "Function of the museum" he highlights an increasing trend of the merging of the roles of the museum and gallery (in this case, concerned with commercial sale of the artwork) in their handling of the artworks. "One of the initial (technical) functions of the Museum (or Gallery) is preservation. (Here a distinction can be made between the Museum and the Gallery although the distinction seems to be becoming less clear-cut: the former generally buys, preserves, collects, in order to exhibit: the latter does the same in view of resale.) This function of preservation perpetuates the idealistic nature of all art since it claims that art is (could be) eternal. This idea, among others, dominated the 19th century, when public museums were created approximately as they are still known today. – Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum', in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 189-190.

²⁰ 'It was/is a way – another – of obviating the temporality/fragility of a work of art by artificially keeping it "alive", thereby granting it an appearance of immortality which serves remarkably well the discourse which the prevalent bourgeois ideology attaches to it. This takes place, it should be added, with the author's, i.e., the artists' delighted approval.' - Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum', in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 190

to the conditions of the space in which his work was viewed. It was this realisation of their place within the discourse of the prevalent bourgeois ideology that led many artists influenced by Buren's concerns to assert a more oppositional voice in this institutional discourse through post-studio methods.

Either through institutional critique within the institution or the presentation of works in alternative sites, these efforts understand two major elements of Buren's critique, that of the author/the artist questioning in a sovereign manner the discourse that determines the conventions that frame their work in the museum or gallery or creating a place or destination for the work that could contest the cultural currency held by the prevalent ideology. In both cases the artists concerned questioned the right of artists to determine the conventions or framing in which their art would be received. Just as Buren attempted to bridge the gap created by the distancing of his work from the 'reality' of the studio to its place of display so other artists explored alternative mechanisms to bridge this gap and in doing so questioned the power of the institution in the social relationships between the artist, institution and audience.

Sovereign decisions and infringements

Art historian Boris Groys describes an artist's decision-making in the production of their work as the employment of "sovereign decisions". We can relate Buren's conception of the 'reality' of the work to Groys' understanding of the artist's right to 'sovereign decisions'. Groys highlights similar conditions of the artist's subordination to the prevalent bourgeois ideology recognised by Buren when he states:

'The inclusion of any artwork in a public exhibition must be – at least potentially – publically explained and justified. Though artist, curator, and art critic are free to argue for or against the inclusion of some artworks, every such explanation and justification undermines the autonomous, sovereign character of artistic freedom that Modernism aspired to win: every discourse legitimizing an artwork, its inclusion in a public exhibition as only one among many in the same public space can be seen as an insult to that artwork.'²¹

Robert Smithson was one of the first artists to use post-studio methods outside of the gallery and museum system by employing unexpected sites for the creation of his works, his most

²¹Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

famous being 'Spiral Jetty' at Utah's Great Salt Lake. Smithson echoes Buren's attitudes to the works distancing in the museum when he remarks "Things flatten and fade. The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that immobilize the eye".²² In these generalizations the individuality of the work is lost and absorbed, as Groys recognises, as 'one among many' into the institution. For Smithson his opposition to this process was not to critique the institution from within, such as Buren or Andrea Fraser, but rather to explore new sites for the presentation of his works. Smithson recognised the power of the art object to exist in an expanded public sphere of art and in the negotiations in the development of his land-works a new conception of the place of artists and other agencies to claim influence in the social field of art.



SPIRAL JETTY, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, April 1970, mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, water coil 1500' long and 15' wide, Collection: DIA Center for the Arts, New York.
(http://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/spiral_jetty.htm)

Groys notes the role of the institutions mediating influence. Through the influence of the institution's intermediary, the curator, on the sovereign decision-making of artists results in a process that disempowers the artist and viewer alike²³ and therefore the abilities of the artwork to communicate fully. It is interesting to reflect that in 2006 curator and critic Lynne Cooke highlighted a concern by curators of a loss of power in the face of artists employment of post-studio methods, she describes graduates of the 2003 class in curatorial studies of the Royal

²²Robert Smithson, 'Some Void Thoughts on Museums (1967)' in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996), p.42

²³"This us why the curator is considered to be someone who keeps coming between the artwork and viewer alike." Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

College of Art in London perceiving an ‘infringement’ by the artist on their territory²⁴. This can be seen as a battlefield in which the artist’s sovereign decisions clash directly with institutions of displays and its functionaries, the curators. This curatorial sense of entitlement to the cultural currency of the artwork over that of the artist, exposes the very confinement of the work we have discussed, the implications of such perceptions by these curators, that the experience of the site of display predominates over the sovereign decisions of the artist and a scripting of the potential viewer's experience in the gallery space exposes the very political agency in the work and practices of artists. In institutional attitudes towards artist and viewer by these curators, this attitude can be seen as the very prevalent bourgeois ideology that Buren recognises, one that continues to dominate its hold on cultural currency. This tension between institution, curator and artist has the potential to reinforce the orthodoxy of its own tension and instrumentalised critical responses, its cycle of institutional critique and co-optation, as JJ Charlesworth suggests

‘Add to this growing acceptance of socially-engaged art, in both its state-sponsored and politically oppositional guises, and what emerges is a picture of a wide section of artistic practice whose terms of legitimacy rely on a critical opposition to orthodox formulations of gallery-bound, commercialised and institutionalised forms of artistic production and presentation. The only problem with this is that the tendency to declare a critical opposition of circumvention of orthodox positions has become a bit, well, orthodox.’²⁵

The agency of objects and actions

In the battle for an artist's sovereign rights to determine their artwork, and therefore in the battle between the sovereign decisions of the artist and the conventions, or as Buren puts it “the ossifying customs” of the museum or gallery Groys suggests the autonomy of the artist acts as political agency. When the conventions of institutions of art as ‘the prevalent bourgeois ideology’ subordinate the sovereign decisions of artists, a very important role of the autonomy of the artist and the right to determine their work within the institution is exposed, the

²⁴Cooke opening paragraph reads “Beneath the subheading “The Undeclared Struggle between Artist and Curator”, the graduates of the 2003 class in curatorial studies at the Royal College of Art in London muse on what they perceive to be a growing infringement on the traditional role of the curator. Identifying recent artistic practices that, they will believe increasingly encroach upon their professional freedom and proficiency, these fledglings assert that “a subtle and undeclared territorial war is in progress, . . . (a) rush for the division of power.”- Lynne Cooke, ‘In Lieu of the Higher Ground’, in Paula Marincola (ed), *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia: University of the Arts, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006) p32

²⁵J Charlesworth, ‘Curating Doubt’, *Art Monthly*, no. 294 (2006), p. 1-4

increasingly important oppositional role of the artist. In the discussions of art's autonomy and sovereign decisions an unusual paradox appears. Noel Carroll discusses the autonomy of the artist and states

‘For nearly two centuries the artworld and the philosophy of art have to a surprising degree defended the viewpoint that art is autonomous from other social practices. An immediate consequence of this has been a decoupling of art and ethics, despite their long-standing affiliation heretofore. The hegemonic trend of ambitious art though much of the modern period has been to stress the independence of art from morals not only as a hedge against censorship, but also a way of removing self-perceived constraints upon the self-expression of the artist.’²⁶

Carroll’s critique of autonomy conflicts with Groys’ suggestion of artists’ sovereign decisions in that they are defined by its need to not ‘justify’ to the public or institution²⁷. Carroll would generally speaking not be in favour of such practices, suggesting that in public justifications the artist should relinquish their autonomy in favour of a more socially engaged practice and not doing so marginalises artists’ practice and limits its social agency. However in Groys’ analysis we see that limitations on the artist to make objective representations highlight a confinement of the artist and the artworks’ potential to present new possibilities of experience and freedom itself. This marginalisation is held within the institutional codes the artist is expected to be subordinate to. Conversely by enforcing autonomy through sovereign decisions the artist creates a new space for reflection on the nature of individual freedom within the wider public sphere.

‘By taking aesthetic responsibility in a very explicit way for the design of the installation space, the artist reveals the hidden sovereign dimension of the contemporary order that politics, for the most part, tries to conceal. The installation space is where we are immediately confronted with the ambiguous character of the contemporary notion of freedom that functions in our democracies as a tension between sovereign and institutional freedom.’²⁸

²⁶Noel Carroll, ‘Art and Alienation’, in Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willson (eds), *The Life and Death of Images-Ethics and Aesthetics* (London: Tate Publishing 2008), p. 108-109.

²⁷Boris Groys, ‘Politics of Installation’, *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

²⁸Boris Groys, ‘Politics of Installation’, *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

Carroll's argument ultimately comes full circle in relation to the spirit of Groys analysis on sovereign decisions and arts ability to act as a social or political agent.²⁹

Whether artists wish to critique the institutions of display, be they commercial gallery or public museum, one very clear aspect appears, that if the prevalent bourgeois ideologies that control the display and conventions in which art is presented become so dominant that artists' works are stifled, hidden or appropriated and instrumentalised, the major role which art can play in society is jeopardised, that of art's political agency. In the work of Andrea Fraser this concern was evoked within the institution itself, through lectures and performances Fraser questioned the power of the institution and its hegemonic role in the social relations surrounding art, its use by the institution and its presentation and receptions by audience or public.

Andrea Fraser highlights the significant power art institutions wield when she observes

‘The museum, as a public institution, offers up fine art as a general public culture, a national or even universal civic culture, and turns it into the single cultural currency that can be traded by members of the civic community. The Museum's patrons are represented as being *in primary and privileged possession of this cultural currency*, while all of the symbolic objects produced outside of the specialized sphere of publicized artistic activity are banished to the oblivion of individual lives, without authority to represent “public experience.”’³⁰

Fraser's performances, museum tours and lectures within institutions attempted to subvert public experience and therefore question the existing development of the institutions' grip on and ongoing abilities to determine cultural currency. Whether through the development of sculpture and paintings within the museum or gallery rather than the confines of the studio as with Buren, Fraser's performative subversions of the artist, museum and audience relationships or Smithson's interventions in sites not normally associated with the display of art, this cultural currency, normally defined by the prevalent ideology of the museum, was being questioned and contested. Smithson describes the institutional display of art as a form of ‘cultural confinement’:

²⁹ ‘The marginalisation of serious art is a practical problem that I believe flows from the artworld's continued affirmation of autonomy and the policies that stem from it. The antidote, broadly stated, is that artists once again have to become involved in the life of culture, taking up many of the responsibilities that modern art has shed under the sign of the autonomy of art. This includes re-entering the ethical realm, not only, I stress, in the role of social critic, but also a transmitter and shaper of that which is positive in the ethos of their audience.’ - Noel Carroll, ‘Art and Alienation’, in Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (eds), *The Life and Death of Images-Ethics and Aesthetics* (London: Tate Publishing 2008), p.109.

³⁰ Andrea Fraser, ‘Notes on the Museum's Publicity’, in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p 93

‘Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition rather than asking an artist to set his limits. Artists are expected to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine they’ve got a hold of them. As a result they end up supporting a cultural prison that is out of their control. Artists themselves are not confined, but their output is.’³¹

As we can see from the examples of Buren, Fraser and Smithson early post-studio artists recognised the abilities of such methods to remove the distance between the studio and the easy subsumption of their work into the museum or gallery by the prevalent ideology, but also by creating a more immediate response to the creation of their work could attempt to assert more authority over the framing of their work, no longer subordinating this framing to the curator and institution. This assertion of authority can now be read, as Groys explains, as an assertion of the artist's sovereign decisions. Some 30 years later we might ask: what is the legacy of these post-studio methods? Has the legacy of artists such as Buren, Smithson and Fraser resulted in a continued presentation and development of oppositional works from contemporary artists?

The work of Santiago Sierra is a contemporary example of an artist that picks up and develops post-studio methodologies as an overtly oppositional practice. There is a certain ambiguity in Sierra’s position but his artworks appear to aggressively question the social codes that surround us. Sierra works such as ‘Person paid to have 30cm line tattooed on them’ in 1998 or his 1999 ‘Workers paid to remain inside cardboard boxes’ induce shock with what many feel is an exploitation of workers employed to become part of a performative artwork, however, these works also reflect on labour relations and the economies and exploitation of labour. Sierra continues to use such methods in his work and the reception of his works continue to expose the uneasy clash of codes between labour and the aesthetic and ethical codes of art practice in its institutions and spaces of display. Such overt expressions of opposition of existing institutional codes shows the extent to which contestations by artists can be co-opted into our conventional institutions of display even when an artist such as Sierra asserts a sovereign decision over the manifestation of his work.

³¹Robert Smithson, ‘Cultural Confinement (1972)’ in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996) p.154



Santiago Sierra, «Laborers who cannot be payed, remunerated to remain in the interior of carton boxes», 2000, Eight people paid to remain inside cardboardboxes, 1999 | Courtesy: Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich | Photography | © Santiago Sierra. (<http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/artist/sierra/biography/>)

It is clear that many artists are attempting to exert sovereign decisions, however it seems that the overt opposition to the power of the institutions of display has for some artists dimmed. The artist Paula Roush recognises in the historical development of institutional critique that critique has now been subsumed and controlled with curators within institutions inviting artists to take part in a predetermined programme of critique, she comments:

‘the curators working within the institutions are doing their institutional critique through their creative curating... all these participatory strategies and institutional critique strategies that came from a specific context by creating a platform and then bringing in people. I don’t think it has anything to do (with it), it’s a pastiche of institutional critique.’³²

Roush describes this process as simulation, as ‘empty floating signifiers’. We can observe this pastiche or simulation as an appropriation by the institution that neutralises critique and re-sites the sovereign decisions of critique that once rested with artists back in the hands of the institution, in these appropriative methods by the institution we can define a new realisation of criticality and opposition. As we have seen in Andrea Fraser’s analysis it would follow that this

³²Interview with Paula Roush, 16 July 2011.

process allows for the institution to re-appropriate the activities of the critical artist within the institution to transfer cultural currency back in to the institution's hands. Further to this we might reflect on the following statement by Robert Smithson and echoed in the words of Daniel Buren³³:

‘The function of the warder-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement.’³⁴

The appearance of institutional critique in conventional institutions can now be observed not as critical but as processes that appear as signified criticality, only as the ‘appearance’ of criticality, not true opposition as an agent of change within the institution. This is where we can draw a distinction between critique and opposition, critique is now embedded and confined, and to return to Smithson’s phrase, ‘politically lobotomized’, within the institution's codes.



Paula Roush, Found Photo Foundation. (<http://www.msdm.org.uk/index.php?/photography/found-photo-foundation/>)

³³‘The museum not only preserves and therefore perpetuates, but also collects. The aesthetic role of the museum is thus enhanced since it becomes the single viewpoint (cultural and visual) from which works can be considered, an enclosure where art is born and buried, crushed by the very frame which present and constitutes it’.
- Daniel Buren, ‘Function of the Museum’, in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 190

³⁴Robert Smithson, ‘Cultural Confinement (1972)’ in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996) p.155

Sovereign vs. Institutional Freedom

We can see elements of post-studio practice that are employed by artists being appropriated into institutions; even performances or actions that were once critical are now, in their appropriation, neutralized and confined, 'politically lobotomized'. As much as the paintings and sculptures of the past that have been absorbed into the ossifying customs of the museum or gallery even more immaterial and contestable critiques of the institution can be appropriated and repackaged by the institution into its customs and employed to reinforce itself as the prevalent bourgeois ideology. If the most critical elements of art practice are thus absorbed into the customs of the prevalent ideology we might ask: just what measures artists must take to assert their sovereign decisions? What becomes clear is that if such overtly critical work can be appropriated by the institution then artists are increasingly alienated from developing their sovereign work in the institution. In Paula Roush's experience the institution can stifle a very important element of artists' methods in the realisation of their work:

'...the new generation of creative curators that have a very specific idea of what they want and they come with all their institutional critique ideas that they want you to fill in to their platform...there's a type of curator I don't have very good experiences, I call it creative curator as a joke... that put you in an agenda, they want you to fulfill a certain role in their agenda, and because I'm a bit unpredictable, as you can imagine, if there expecting something and then I don't deliver exactly what they need in that platform that they've created, its quite rigid, it puts you in a certain category.'³⁵

Roush indicates an important element in the tensions between the institution, curator and artist and the issues of sovereign freedom in the realisation of the artwork. Not only do institutional systems confine the artwork, they are increasingly in more participatory, responsive and performative roles stifling an artists very practice, those that rely on contingency and unpredictability in the making or performance of the work. The measures taken by curators in institutions to contain or control these processes in many case jeopardise the realisation or seek to appropriate the very practices of the work as their own cultural currency. As we have seen this tension between sovereign and institutional freedom has become very real, so much so that an assertion of sovereign freedom by the artist in the institution may be seen by that institution as an 'infringement'. That Smithson uses such strong a term as 'politically lobotomized' brings in to question the ability for art works to act as political agency that Groys suggests although we

³⁵Interview with Paula Roush, 16 July 2011

might argue that artists' practice can still exert this political agency in its alienation, or as in Roush's case a certain self-exclusion, which as we will see later seems an increasingly viable response by artists in the furtherance of their practice. Groys is hopeful when he concludes his essay by explaining

'...the artist who designs a certain installation space is an outsider to this space. He or she is heterotopic to this space. But the outsider is not necessarily somebody who has to be included in order to be empowered. There is also empowerment by exclusion, and especially self-exclusion. The outsider can be powerful precisely because he or she is not controlled by society, and is not limited in his or her sovereign actions by any public discussion or by any need for public self-justification.'³⁶

Groys begins his essay by focussing the ability for artists who specifically create installations for their work to act as oppositional or critical in its assertion of an artist sovereign decisions and that this sovereign act questions in a wider political way questions of freedom in the face of the prevalent ideology of the museum or gallery. Groys suggests this assertion of sovereign freedom highlights the wider political consequences of freedom in the face of dominant or prevalent ideologies that govern any individual's sovereign freedoms.

We might observe contemporary artists who employ post-studio methods outside of the existing prevalent institutions, concentrating on new sites and methods to employ an artist's sovereign decisions, becoming a political agent by their alienation or exclusion from these institutions. Even as far back as 1972 Smithson may have presciently recognised the failure of the art work in the institutional site of gallery or museum to act as political agent or through the sovereign decisions of the artist. Work confined in the museum or gallery was described by Smithson in the following terms:

'I am speaking of a dialectics that seeks a world outside of cultural confinement. Also, I am not interested in works that suggest "process" within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioural game playing'.³⁷

³⁶Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

³⁷Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement (1972)' in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996) p.155

Beyond the supposed 'behavioural game playing' of institutional critique within the institution, the continued contest for cultural currency between the artist and the institution in the display and confinement of the artist's work exposes the political agency of art practice. Even in alienation or self-exclusion from the institutions of display artists continue to question and reframe the ownership, acquisition and use of cultural currency, and in their assertion of sovereign decisions from outside can still critique the institution in the battle to test the limits of sovereign and institutional freedom. Groys chooses to define such practice as Sovereign Decisions rather than artist's autonomy, with this reframed definition we might understand Sovereign Decisions as being the first and fundamental right of the artist to define the appearance, contexts and manner of display of their work. In a wider sense we must also understand the Sovereign Decision as being the right to assert a legitimate uncontested voice and action within the social codes and field in which any individual finds themselves. These codes become contestable and as such Groys is suggesting the true democratic nature of practice the face of institutional power. This is where art practice through its assertion of Sovereign Decisions can oppose the prevalent bourgeois ideologies that assign a specific role to its artists and audience.

Artists Practice and “Dissensus”

Gatekeepers of sense?

Jacques Ranciere in ‘The Paradoxes of Political Art’ describes a phenomenon that could be understood as the tension between sovereign and institutional freedom but further can be seen within the relations that determine art that is displayed or presented within its institutions and its political and oppositional abilities. He describes ‘dissensus’ as

‘a disconnection between the production of artistic *savoir-faire* and social destination, between sensory forms, the significations that can be read on them and their possible effects. Let us call this the efficacy of *dissensus*, which is not a conflict between *sense* and *sense*. Dissensus is a conflict between sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or ‘bodies’. This is the way in which dissensus can be said to reside at the heart of politics, since at the bottom of the latter itself consists in an activity that redraws the frame within which common objects are determined. Politics breaks with sensory self-evidence of the ‘natural’ order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to public or private lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific ‘bodies’, that is to specific ways of being, seeing and saying.’³⁸

As Art's institutions continue to reinforce their hold on cultural currency within art and reinforce their status as the prevalent bourgeois ideology, artists continue to find their work appropriated through its curation, cultural confinement within the institution and the increasing distance from the reality of its site of production. For many artists this results in alienation from the institutions but also from the nature of artists' practice itself, with the market and public museum/gallery increasingly powerful in their abilities to determine the cultural currency of art, the very nature of arts production and presentation is removed from the power of the artist to exert sovereign decisions, indeed when reflecting on the art market in as early as 1971 it was recognised by Ian Burn the extent to which the influence of market had wrested power from

³⁸Jacques Ranciere (ed. & tr. Steve Corcoran), *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London & New York: Continuum 2010), p.139

artists to determine their own works.³⁹ Increasingly a capitalistic mode of production has been absorbed into the public institutions of art, so much so that the cultural currency created by the twin institutions of public arts and market are embedded within each others customs

‘...some galleries which do not have permanent exhibitions nevertheless use the word “museum” in their title. Commercial galleries may display works produced by practicing artists or craftspeople in receipt of grant funding. Subsidised galleries may generate income from sales of work. Works by the same artist may be simultaneously shown, and for sale, in both public and commercial galleries working together for their and the artist’s mutual advantage. Private galleries, dealers and auction houses provide important sources of acquisition for other museums, galleries and collections, some of which will be in the public sector.’⁴⁰

Within this heightened power relation between market and museum or gallery the ‘frame’ of the institution exerts dominance on cultural currency⁴¹ and the confinement of the work, this dominance continues to exert control over the types of arts practice and artworks that constitute the highest value cultural currency, that which increasingly is defined by its financial and speculative value as former chairman of the U.S National Endowment for the Arts, Bill Ivey notes in describing the ‘gatekeepers’ of cultural institutions:

‘We like to believe that the nature of art that gets through these gates is determined only by artistic vision and talent, but in fact it’s more often forces acting within the world of cultural enterprise that ultimately determine what finds its way to consumers. We are deeply dependent on these intermediaries, and as arts companies have increasingly been bundled into multinational corporations, key decisions shaping the

³⁹‘The historical relations of up-to-date modern art are the market relations of a capitalist society. That much I believe is obvious to everyone. What we have seen more recently is the power of market values to distort all other values, so even the concept of what is and is not acceptable as ‘work’ is defined *first and fundamentally* by the market and only secondly by ‘creative urges’ (etc.). This has been the price of internalizing an intensely capitalistic mode of production.’ - Ian Burn, ‘The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation’, in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory - 1900-2000* (Malden: Blackwell 2009), p.935

⁴⁰Bernard Casey, Rachael Dunlop, Sara Selwood, *Culture as Commodity?*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1996) p.108

⁴¹The strength of alienation that can be felt by artists in this dominance over artists by market and institution can be heard in the following quote by Hans Haacke in his discussion with Maria Eichhorn when discussing his use of the controversial contract ‘The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement’, “Dealers, collectors, and-as the example of the Museum of Modern Art shows-museums are against it. They lobby through powerful professional organizations and thus have considerable influence. When dealing with artists, the Museum of Modern Art works like a company that tries to reserve as many rights for itself. It’s not on the side of the artists.” – Hans Haacke & Maria Eichhorn ‘Interview with Hans Haacke – 6 September 1997, Berlin’, in Maria Eichhorn (ed), *The Artist’s Contract* (Koln: Walther Konig 2009) p67-77

arts system are realigned in accordance with shareholder and management values that have nothing at all to do with art.’⁴²

The social destination of art

The social destination of art rests in institutions which isolate the artist from their sovereign decisions and subordinates the audience's public experience to market values, as Hans Haacke remarks:

‘Works of art, like other products of the consciousness industry, are potentially capable of shaping their consumers’ view of the world and of themselves and may lead them to act upon that understanding, Since the exhibition programmes of museums and comparable institutions, with large audiences from the upper and middle classes which predominate in contemporary opinion and decision-making, are influenced by commercial galleries, it is not negligible which ideologies and emotions are traded in these establishments.’⁴³

These values distance the work further from its first frame or reality, increasingly confines the artwork and distort its social destination, furthermore determining its sensory regime as a tool of institution and market and assigning its producer, the artist and its consumer, the audience as very specific ‘bodies’. As artists continue to employ methods of practice exploring the place of sovereign decisions, to define their work first and fundamentally, their practice and those places are increasingly found outside of the institutions of museum/gallery and market we might see these practices less as post-studio than post-institutional. For those artists whose work is increasingly alienated from the formal institutions of art, the studio, the gallery, museum or market a new practice emerges from the assertion of sovereign decisions in these post-institutional territories. As we have determined in our observations of Groys’ understanding of the oppositional and political role of such sovereign practices this becomes, in its alienation or self-exclusion, critical of the institutions of display. When allied to Ranciere’s conception of dissensus we might ask whether this post-institutional frame of art is the political territory of dissensual practice in art. For many artists the intentions in these post-institutional territories are not of deliberate critique or opposition but a means of exploring new sites for the sovereign

⁴²Bill Ivey, *arts, inc.* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California 2008), p187-188

⁴³Hans Haacke ‘The Agent 1977’, in Grasskamp, Nesbit, Bird (eds), *Hans Haacke* (London: Phaidon 2004) p106-107

decisions of artists to exist, sites in which they can determine first and fundamentally. I would argue that this is the very place of dissensus in art.

There is a potential paradox between sovereign decision and dissensus as the sovereign decision is seen to subvert, question or set itself against the institution with its need to contain and bar any infringements on its own institutional freedom; in dissensus Ranciere suggests that it is through the placing or re-siting of practice that art's political agency is exposed in its search for new sensory regimes. It might be seen that the overt assertion of an artist's decision-making becomes a predetermined act of political agency by the artist. However when we understand Groys' conclusions of the act of exclusion or self-exclusion, in the assertion of sovereign freedom the artist begins the journey to new sensory regimes and new social destinations for the artwork and art practice. This is where Groys' attitude to sovereign decisions and its political agency can be seen to agree with Ranciere's. This is where the agency of both sovereign decisions and dissensual practice meet and new codes can appear in these reframed social destinations of art.

Dissensual Practice

By moving into these new territories of sovereign art the artist questions the sensory regime of the museum or market. For many of these artists the confinement of their work in the institutional setting infers credibility allied to the institution's dominant determination of cultural currency, but an artwork's sense in its sovereign intentions is confined or even crushed by the sense that is conveyed by these prevalent bourgeois ideologies. The reclamation in post-studio, or as we might understand it now, post-institutional methods creates a dissensual practice in art which exerts the political agency recognised by Groys. In this post-institutional dissensual practice artists create the very conditions to contest the political world, assigning specific ways of being, seeing and saying, rather than artist as a defined body by the prevalent bourgeois ideology. The artist's dissensual practice creates a reclaimed sensory self-evidence before the distancing and confinement occurs. In the tension that ensues in the relationship between artists, with their intentions of sovereign freedom, and the conventional institutions of art (the museum, gallery or market) with their intentions of institutional freedom, this post-institutional practice creates dissensual practice.

‘It is increasingly the case that art is starting to appear as a space for refuge for dissensual practice, a place of refuge where the relations between sense and sense continue to be questioned and re-worked. This fact has given a renewed impetus to the

idea that art's vocation is actually to step outside itself, to accomplish an 'intervention' in the 'real' world. These two opposed trends, then, result in a form of schizophrenic movement, a shuttling-back-and-forth between the museum and its 'outside', between art and social practice.'⁴⁴

The power balance in which institutions increasingly hold power to assign artists, and a public understanding of the role of artists, to specific ways of 'being, seeing and saying' can be contested by dissensual practice, as Hans Haacke remarks

'...consciousness is not a pure, independent, value-free entity, evolving according to internal, self-sufficient, and universal rules. It is contingent, an open system, responsible to the crosscurrents of the environment. It is, in fact, a battleground of conflicting interests. And interpretations of the world that are potentially at odds with each other. The products of the means of production, like those means themselves, are not neutral. As they were shaped by their respective environments and social relations, so do they in turn influence our view of the social condition.'⁴⁵

In Louise Ashcroft's art practice we can recognise this territory of dissensus: her artwork is produced almost exclusively outside of established institutional systems in post-studio traditions, often reminiscent of Smithsonian's landworks transposed to urban sites. During our conversation in interview Ashcroft recognises that although her work is not overtly used for political ends its manifestations expose the political systems that underpin the spaces in which the work exists:

'There's always political undertones in what I'm doing, but I don't think that I'm explicitly political. I think I'm responding to politics but only because politics is written into space, I'm responding to the codes of space and a lot of those are political but any kind of dominance or structure or power I like to play with in my work. Not necessarily because I want to make one political statement or convince people of one idea that I believe in. Its work made politically rather than work that is political.'⁴⁶

⁴⁴Jacques Ranciere (ed. & tr. Steve Corcoran), *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London & New York: Continuum 2010), p.145

⁴⁵Hans Haacke, 'Museums, Managers of Consciousness', in Brian Wallis (ed), *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York & Cambridge, Mass., The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and M.I.T Press 1986), p. 64

⁴⁶Interview with Louise Ashcroft, 1 August 2011

Ashcroft explains that her work is presented in sites to 'reveal by subverting', "If you do look through the things I've done there is a thread, maybe naughtiness, maybe politics"⁴⁷, she recognises the testing of codes within the sites that her work is placed, they expose the political elements within those sites, however this is exposed by behaviour within the site that is necessary to create the artwork. This recognition of the ownership or management of spaces exposed or revealing their social conditions through the intervention of an artwork is achieved not by questioning the governance or codes of the space but by the questions that are asked about the artwork when it intervenes in the space and exposes the codes within it. As we have seen earlier the co-opting of this role of the artist into conventional art institutions isolates the artist's ability to fulfill this role. Ashcroft's movement into exterior and unconventional sites exposes not only the codes of the sites she chooses but also in the questioning of the role of an artwork removed from its conventional settings it acquires agency. Ashcroft explains that she never expected to be accepted into these conventional spaces of display and although this could be viewed as a choice rather than alienation from these conventional spaces she recognises the control that she has gained to make sovereign decisions in her work

'I realised you can do it yourself, you can give it a logo or print out a poster, it made me realise it's all a façade, the authority badges that things have just from having the administrative conventions... once you realise you can do all that yourself quite easily then its liberating, there's always gatekeepers who invite you or allow you to be part of something, their all fictional really, you can just create them, you can be in them in a better way than how it is normally... If you do it yourself you can be a little more independent from that and not be a content provider.'⁴⁸

⁴⁷Interview with Louise Ashcroft, 1 August 2011

⁴⁸Interview with Louise Ashcroft, 1 August 2011



Louise Ashcroft, *The Crawling Eye*, 2009. (<http://www.louiseashcroft.info/crawling%20eye.html>)

Some thirty years after Smithson's statement on the confinement of the work, an artist such as Louise Ashcroft continues to recognise the confinement of the work in the museum or gallery when she explains her drive to be more than a 'content provider', as we have heard her work does not wish to overtly exercise an oppositional or political agency. What is exposed by such practice is the dissensual practice Ranciere suggests that art can be; by removing itself from the codes that govern it in its conventional homes the work exposes codes in new sites and reinvigorates its potential for agency, the work through Ashcroft's sovereign decisions reframing the sensory self evidence of the work and an artist's way of 'being, seeing and saying'. These methods create dissensus as they reassign ways of being, seeing and saying in a new landscape of the visible, as Ranciere explains:

'Practices of art do not provide forms of awareness or rebellious impulses *for* politics. Nor do they take leave of themselves to become forms of collective political action. They contribute to the constitution of a form of commonsense that is 'polemical', to a new landscape of the visible, the sayable and the doable.'⁴⁹

Claire Blundell Jones describes her artworks as a space between herself and other people, "I make my work in and of and about people and the interaction, that's the main interest and pursuit in every work I do, is the space between me and them, inevitably its never going to be

⁴⁹Jacques Ranciere (ed. & tr. Steve Corcoran), *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London & New York: Continuum 2010), p.149

pure... I don't create pure autonomous art".⁵⁰ These performative works are created within institutions and outside and exist in the performance traditions of artists such as Andrea Fraser. For Blundell Jones these works are conceived less as overt critique than the creation of impromptu and unscripted spaces of interaction with the public, even when the works exist within the institution Blundell Jones leaves her works open to public intervention. She remarks that the institutions she has worked with have not attempted to intervene in the working process, but we might observe in the institutional setting Blundell Jones subtly and quietly subordinating the framing of her work to the audience, she recognises that this is in fact a large part of the material condition of her artworks:

'50% of the work is when they are in it and their reactions, so in a way my documents, my artwork are in whatever responses come up, it wouldn't be the same (without it). That need is what made me realise I was an artist as opposed to an illustrator, I needed to show things to other people and this is my political approach, I was trying to say something about the world or have conversations that wouldn't necessarily happen if art didn't have my way of communicating... I wasn't happy to just make an object for myself'.⁵¹

Blundell Jones is subverting the power of the institution, similarly to Ashcroft, she explains that overt opposition is not the intention but more a communication and dialogue that is defined by its audience, a dialogue without which the work would not be complete.

Visible Landscapes and Sensory Regimes

Ranciere warns of the appropriation of external 'reality' brought into the gallery or museum

'The more art fills the rooms of exhibitions with monumentalized reproductions of the objects and icons of every day life and commodity culture, the more it goes into the streets and professes to be engaging in a form of social intervention, and the more anticipates and mimics its own effect. Art thus risks becoming a parody of its alleged efficacy.'⁵²

⁵⁰Interview with Claire Blundell Jones, 20 July 2011

⁵¹Interview with Claire Blundell Jones, 20 July 2011

⁵²Jacques Ranciere (ed. & tr. Steve Corcoran), *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London & New York: Continuum 2010), p.148

Blundell Jones talks about her work in relation to public rituals and codes. Where Ashcroft reframes the work by exposing the codes around it in sites external to conventional institutions, Blundell Jones reframes the codes of cultural currency in the institution. This reframing of codes does not critique the institutions codes but allows questions to arise within the institution by introducing external public codes into the gallery. What is evident in such practices is that they heed Ranciere's warnings, they do not mimic their own effect or reproduce every day life. Ashcroft and Blundell Jones subordinate their art practices and the works that issue from them to the contingent conditions that surround them and in doing so the works cannot be confined, their cultural currency is dispersed through the social codes that exist around them whilst the artists retain the sovereign decisions they require in the manifestation of their work. They embrace the contingency and social environment that surrounds, frames and reframes their artworks and practice.



Claire Blundell Jones, *Tumbleweed 3*, 2006. (<http://www.claireblundelljones.co.uk/tumbleweed.html>)

Nicholas Bourriaud suggests in his analysis of the relational forms in art that “The artist dwells in the circumstances the present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world. He catches the world on the move: he is a *tenant of culture*, to borrow Michel de Certeau's expression.”⁵³ Bourriaud's suggestion of relational aesthetics could be seen as a contrary expression to Ranciere's Dissensus, when

⁵³Nicholas Bourriaud (tr. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods), *Relational Aesthetics* (Les presses du reel, 2002), p13-14

Bourriard suggests that the artist is a 'tenant of culture' it could be argued that he is suggesting the artist responds at all times to the codes that surround them and responds to its relations, what we can see with Ranciere's attitude to Dissensus is that unlike Bourriard's analysis these codes can be a dialogue, not fixed. The artist can create a dissensual practice by resituating these codes or subverting the codes with new senses; we can see that Dissensus offers a more hopeful practice and act of agency, that the artist does not need to "dwell in the circumstances the present offers him" but can subvert and re-site the codes of these circumstances into new imaginaries and in doing so contest the relations around them. The artists we have observed site their work at points at which the prevalent bourgeois ideology cannot contest producers and non-producers or where legitimate and illegitimate culture might reside. This territory of practice affirms the artist's sovereign decisions. Its freedom to allow its cultural currency to be dispersed and its improvisation eludes confinement and creates new potentialities for these artists, one that wrests control from an easily managed and confined control by the existing prevalent bourgeois ideologies of conventional institutions and re-imagines art's representative functions. These practices seek to determine new frames for the artist and their potential audiences through new sites away from the inevitability of the sites and contexts expected by the prevalent ideologies of market and institution. They move away from the pinning down, fixity⁵⁴ or confinement of these sites, within these practices reside the very dissensus Ranciere encourages. In the practices of Ashcroft and Blundell-Jones is the play between the codes inherent in the social relations of art. The ability to introduce codes from other social fields into the social relations of art allows questions to arise regarding the nature of the social relations framed by institutional codes that establish themselves as the prevalent ideology in the field of art. These practices represent the points at which critique gives way to opposition, not by placing the art practices or the works that come from them as overtly critical in their nature, but by allowing codes that are not predetermined or expected by conventional institutions to infiltrate the field of art and subvert the conventional social relations of the field. This subversion of the conventional social relations of art creates new sensory regimes and in the

⁵⁴Daniel Buren highlights the importance of location in the 'fixing' and framing of artworks. "A considerable number of works of art...exist" only because the location in which they are seen is taken for granted as a matter of course. In this way, the location acquires considerable importance by its fixity and its inevitability; it becomes the frame (*and the security that presupposes*) at the very moment when they would have us believe that what takes place inside shatters all the existing frames (manacles) in the attaining of pure freedom. A clear eye will recognize what is meant by freedom in art, but an eye that is a little less educated will see better what it is all about when it has adopted the following idea : that the location (outside or inside) where a work is seen is its frame/*its boundary*'. – Daniel Buren, 'Standpoints', *Studio International*, vol 181 (Apr 71), p.181-5
1971

siting of the works in sites, as of yet untested by the codes of the social field of art, new visible landscapes are created. These are the new social destinations required by these artists to assert their sovereign decisions, and as we have observed, in doing so they do not critique but oppose the prevalent bourgeois ideologies of those conventional institutions. These new landscapes and destinations are the territories of artists' dissensual practice.

Art's social field

We are the institution

As we have established, the territories of critical practice and the oppositional nature of post-studio, and now as we might understand it in the legacies of post-studio practice, contemporary post-institutional practices are inherently imbued in their social relations to institutions of art as critical in their role as oppositional to the conventional modes of display. As we have seen post-studio's institutional critique is sited within the institution in the works of Andrea Fraser and the criticality in the landworks of Robert Smithson come in its oppositional attitudes to conventional sites of display. In the works of the contemporary artists we have observed, we can see a development from post-studio to post-institutional practice, one that understands its criticality and opposition as it seeks to work unhindered by the prevalent codes within art's institutions, but does not rely on critique of these codes to manifest and contextualise the artworks. These practices seek to develop new codes within arts social field not to react to existing ones.

Andrea Fraser became one of the most recognisable of the 'institutional critique' post-studio artists. In 2005 she wrote a reappraisal of what institutional critique could mean. In an ongoing practice which investigated the power relations between institutions of display, the artist and the audience, she recognised the difficulties of critique being absorbed within institutions.

'one finds a certain nostalgia for institutional critique arise as a now anachronistic artifact of an era before the corporate megamuseum and the 24/7 global art market, a time when artists could still conceivably take up a critical position against or outside the institution. Today, the argument goes, there no longer is an outside. How, then can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification? Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against.'⁵⁵

This analysis echoes Paula Roush's disillusionment with institutional critique and its appropriation and instrumentalisation, however as we have seen in our analysis of the artist's

⁵⁵Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol.44 iss.1 (2005): p.278

sovereign decisions and dissensual practice, the space for critique has moved from post-studio to a post-institutional territory, a territory that in its movement away from the conventional institutions of display can still in Groys' and Ranciere's understanding be an oppositional force to the prevalent bourgeois ideologies that Buren recognises our institutions to be. Fraser analyses assumptions of the 'death' of institutional critique and suggests that criticality is still both feasible and necessary, she however frames a new conception of 'institution' that accepts artists as having internalised an understanding of what our institutions are.

'Every time we speak of the "institution" as other than "us", we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. We avoid responsibility for, or action against, the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship-above all, self-censorship which are driven by our own interests in the field and the benefits we derive from it. It's not a question of inside or outside, or the number and scale of various organized sites for the production, presentation, and distribution of art. It is 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.'⁵⁶

Even when artists seek not to critique institutions, the very nature of the assertion of their sovereign decisions can be interpreted as an infringement and in that infringement an opposition that takes on a critical force.⁵⁷ Fraser argues that there is no 'outside', the artists we have seen that work outside of these conventional models would be understood by Fraser as still having internalised the institutions of art. However, in the siting of their practices the artist takes control of the codes of the social field of art and finds new social destinations for cultural currency to be created and employed. This is, as we have observed, an act of agency in its sovereign nature, and opposition in dissensual practice; where this may differ from Fraser is that it does not directly critique the codes of the institution but opposes by embedding in artists practice those very questions regarding the nature of values and rewards that Fraser suggests artists must now address.

'...the institution of art is not only "institutionalized" in organisations like museums and objectified in art objects. It is also internalized and embodied in people. It is

⁵⁶Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol.44 iss.1 (2005): p.278

⁵⁷Lynne Cooke, 'In Lieu of the Higher Ground', in Paula Marincola (ed), *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia: University of the Arts, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006) p32

internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as art,...

⁵⁸

Fraser describes her key analysis of these conditions of internalisation when she focuses attention on the codes and conducts within artist's practices "These competencies and dispositions determine our own institutionalization as members of the field of art. They make up what Pierre Bourdieu called habitus: the "social made body," the institution made mind." Fraser explains that we can observe an "outside" but that it cannot constitute art as it would exist outside of the 'field of art'.⁵⁹ Fraser's analysis is both useful and problematic, because it interprets the agents: its artists, curators, historians, dealers, collectors and museum visitors, within art as a 'field' acting in valorisation of each other. Pierre Bourdieu recognises the manner in which cultural goods and its economies are linked when he observes

'...every appropriation of a work of art which is the embodiment of a relation of distinction is itself a social relation and, contrary to the illusion of cultural communism, it is a relation of a distinction. Those who possess the means of symbolically appropriating cultural goods are more than willing to believe that it is only through their economic dimension that works of art, and cultural goods in general, acquire rarity.'

⁶⁰

The major factor that controls the right of artists to assert their practice in a post-institutional territory is one of economy, the financial rewards of allowing the co-optation of their work and the suppression of their sovereign decisions is one of pragmatic reliance on institutions to confer cultural and financial capital on the artist. With the all-encompassing apparatus of the prevalent ideology of the art market and public museum or gallery, cultural capital and financial capital are so entwined they feed off each other for the valorisation of both. Artist Helene Kazan approaches the issue of the ongoing financial security of artists by highlighting an interesting assessment of 'elitism', Kazan warns of art produced increasingly by artists whose financial security is secured not through the sale of their artworks or the funding of their projects but by

⁵⁸Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol 44. Iss.1 (Sep 2005): p278-286

⁵⁹Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol 44. Iss.1 (Sep 2005): p278-286

⁶⁰Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.224.

external wealth; she is concerned for artists without means to independent financing, many artistic activities, increasingly those post-institutional practices such as those encountered in our observation of contemporary post-studio practices that oppose or are seen to infringe on the activities of the museum or gallery, conducted outside of market financing and its attendant valorisation, will limit its practice to an elite of artists whose practice is determined by independent wealth.

‘...there has to be some monetary value to it because for an artist to exist in the long term, to sustain a career there needs to be some sort of exchange in that way, a recognition of a value in that way, not so much in a commercial bias in that there is some money to be made but that in the recognition of a skill or not even a skill but something that needs to be (recognised) ...I feel quite strongly about that, more and more, because I know how hard it is, I hate the idea that art becomes this elitist thing that only the rich can afford to do because we get more and more intrinsically in this system where people are expected to do something for nothing.’⁶¹

This has been a major concern within post-studio practice as more research- and performance-based works entered the institution, Andrea Fraser notes in 1994 with colleague Helmut Draxler the unwillingness of institutions to provide adequate recompense for the labour required for such practices within the institution:

‘there seems to be a growing consensus among both artists and curators that the new set of relations (emerging around project work)...needs clarification. While curators are increasingly interested in asking artists to produce work in response to specific existing or constructed situations, the labor necessary to respond to those demands is often not recognized or adequately compensated.’⁶²

By 2011 artists have seen these relations determined and established, currently young post-studio practitioners are neither valorised by the market in sales or in its adequate funding by the institution itself, the conventional institutions of display relying on the free or cheap labour of artists wishing to acquire some of the cultural capital that has been acquired by the now overwhelmingly dominant apparatus of these institutions, the same cultural capital that is created by the artists’ activities in these sites of display. Artists who continue to try to contest these

⁶¹Interview with Helene Kazan, 4 July 2011

⁶²Andrea Fraser, ‘How to provide an artistic service: an introduction’, in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p 154

relations are, as we have seen, either perceived to be infringing on institutional freedom to determine, acquire and hold cultural capital, and for others there are no other realistic sites for their practice within this apparatus, being increasingly unable to reconcile the loss of their sovereign freedom with its associated cultural capital with an inadequate exchange to financial recompense. What emerges is a social relation in which artists and audience are assigned their role in the field by this apparatus, this role predetermining the continued exploitation of the producer and consumer (audience) by the institution that dominates its grip on cultural capital, and in turn valorised by the auratic⁶³ value of the works they hold in their collections by the financial speculation and wealth created within the art market by its dealers and collectors. These institutions of art assign the being, saying and saying of artworks, artist practice and audience role to that of support to a frame of reinforcement of cultural and capital currency. It could be argued that the assertion of the political agency of artists against or within art's institutions has attempted to divert art and artists' practice from its instrumentalisation, commodification and the appropriation of its cultural currency. Artists as individual producers of culture have fought to retain sovereign control over their practices and the works that issue from them, as Groys notes this has been hard won but in recent years many agents of the 'social field of art' feeling that this constitutes an infringement have subverted these gains.⁶⁴

In this bleak picture in which these financial relations determine the social field of art for its subordinated agents, with very little space to contest the primary and privileged possession of cultural currency, there may be hope in the practices of the artists we have observed and their contemporaries. As we have seen in our observations of the potentials of sovereign decisions and dissensual practice and the paradoxical nature of contemporary institutional critique with artists self-reflection on what constitutes institution, a new hope might emerge.

Fraser's analysis is framed by a central concern, that of the continued critique of institutions, Fraser's recognition of the institutionalisation of this critique by those very institutions is where her analysis encounters a problematic paradox in her statement "we are the institution". If artists are left to only look to their own internalised institutional codes then we might wonder:

⁶³ Jonathan Crary explains the production of auratic value by the museum and the role that the perceived financial value and cultural value become embedded in the aura of the contemporary artwork and the perceptions of value by its audiences. - Jonathan Crary, 'Capital Effects', *October*, vol.56, *High/Low: Art and Mass Culture* (Spring, 1991): 121-131

⁶⁴ Lynne Cooke, 'In Lieu of the Higher Ground', in Paula Marincola (ed), *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia: University of the Arts, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006) p32

where artists are to site their work? As we have seen some artists choose to work outside of these conventional institutions but in Fraser's terms the artist still carries the institution of art with them.⁶⁵ Fraser's strong oppositional intentions are laudable, this strength of conviction is essential for artists to assert contestations of inequalities of cultural currency within the field of art but one might feel that Fraser's focus on critique itself and dismissal of the power of self-exclusion from the equation, with its attendant oppositional properties, negates the strength of Ranciere's dissensual practice. The artists we have observed continue to ask those very questions posed by Fraser when she asks: what kind of institution we are? In increasing alienation from the very cultural currency that was once generated by their practices, these artists understand they are as much the institution of art as the conventional sites of display. When these artists take their practices and works to these new sites they close the distance and reframe what the institution of art is and reframe their subordinated position by the prevalent bourgeois ideology. If we return to Hans Haacke's remarks of the effects of the display of art in museums, galleries and the art market that "it is not negligible which ideologies and emotions are traded in these establishments"⁶⁶ we can understand just how powerful these practices can be in reframing and re-siting art and its practices. As Gene Ray highlights:

'The art world is one complex set of institutions among others in which images and representations tend to reinforce dominant identities, messages, and agendas. But we are all familiar with critical and resistant art practices that make use of their relative autonomy and institutional platforms to contest such dominant representations. This need not be limited to ideology critique. From a biopolitical perspective, Empire controls bodies by controlling the production of desires or 'imageries'. If, to do that, Empire and its apparatuses ceaselessly colonise the 'ether', as Hardt and Negri put it, then oppositional artists must just as ceaselessly decolonise it by producing other desires and imaginations'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ 'There is, of course, an "outside" of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics. It is only what, at any given moment, does not exist as an object of artistic discourses and practices. But just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a "totally administered society", or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves' - Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol 44. Iss.1 (Sep 2005): p278-286

⁶⁶Hans Haacke 'The Agent 1977', in Grasskamp, Nesbit, Bird (eds), *Hans Haacke* (London: Phaidon 2004) p106-107

⁶⁷Gene Ray, 'Another (art) world is possible', *Third Text*, vol 18 iss 6 (2004): 565-572, p567

The Post-Institutional field

Post-Studio and its sibling Post-institutional not only takes the commodified art object out of these conventional institutions that present their favoured dominant representations, but also contests which ideologies and emotions can be traded, or are withheld from trade, through the resituating of artists' practice decolonised from the sites of the prevalent ideologies. Through exclusion from these sites two elements in art appear, that of arts political agency both opposing and critiquing its institutions and through these contestations a new conception of cultural currency in art. If the social destination of art can confer cultural currency such as has been determined up to this point by the conventional institutions of display as art's primary social destination, then artists might begin to reacquire some of the cultural currency by exerting a new sensory regime for their art in these new post-institutional social destinations. It remains within the social field of art for artists to reassess as Fraser suggests "what institution we are?" In doing so hope appears through the very ability of artists to determine where the cultural currency or capital they produce will be contested, art's status as legitimate culture is assured as agents of the production of legitimate culture.⁶⁸ In the following statement by Bourdieu we can recognise the potential power that artist can still have as agents of cultural capital or currency when he explains

‘the field of the social classes, are the site, struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, in other words, their internalized capital.’⁶⁹

The artists we have observed provide opposition and contestation through dissensual practice, the inability of the prevalent bourgeois ideologies to co-opt these practices, or the refusal by these artists to relinquish their sovereign decisions and in doing so their determination of the social destination of these works are what gives such practices strength and hope for the field of

⁶⁸As we have seen in the first chapter the phrase 'legitimate culture' is employed by Andrea Fraser in Andrea Fraser, 'An Artists' Statement', in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005), p 4-5 when she describes the valorisation of different practices in the art institution and the cultural currency deferred on such practices by the museum, this is counterposed by the concept of illegitimate culture. Fraser is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu when he explains 'Because the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competences are not distributed universally (although they have the appearance of innateness), these products are subject to exclusive appropriation, material or symbolic, and functioning as cultural capital (objectified or internalized), they yield a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means required to appropriate them, and a profit in legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right be. This is the difference between the legitimate culture of class societies, a product of domination predisposed to express or legitimate domination, and the culture of little-differentiated or undifferentiated societies, ...' - Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.225

⁶⁹Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.225.

art in these potential new sites and practices of post-institutional art. The spaces, both metaphorical and physical, where these practices find themselves realign where cultural currency exists. However, in many ways Fraser is also right when she states “we are the institution”, the post-institutional artists have attempted to escape the institutional hold on cultural currency by taking their currency elsewhere. When these artists place their work or practices in these new visible landscapes, they are not just investigating new physical landscapes but the truly dissensual landscapes of the visible that Ranciere imagines, we return once more to Bourdieu who reinforces the potential of these changes or reaffirmations of sense when he speaks of reframed conditions of existence that we might see created by new dissensual sensory regimes.

‘Thus the tastes actually realized depend on the state of the system of goods offered; every change in the system of goods induces a change in tastes resulting from a transformation of the conditions of existence and of the corresponding dispositions will tend to induce, directly or indirectly, a transformation of the field of production, by favouring the success, within the struggle constituting the field, of the producers best able to produce the needs corresponding to the new dispositions.’⁷⁰

Paula Roush asks a question of herself which also indicates the point at which artists can redefine the value and values of their work when she asks:

‘...everything can have a price, its not necessarily an object, a multiple that is sold and packaged and goes into a collection. It’s more knowledge work, now its called knowledge capitalism, something else we have to deal with, isn’t it?. The artwork became knowledge, now we sell under different packaging, it’s another problem, our knowledge about art is not sold as an object any longer, its sold as something else, I’m really aware of that problem, what does that mean? Everything I do is becoming a commodity.’⁷¹

The integrity and motives of post-studio are adhered to and revisited in post-institutional dissensual practice, they seek to close the distance of their reality, to unshackle the confinement of their works and reassign their cultural currency to a new social destination, something which the prevalent institutions with their voracious need for the rights to the cultural currency have yet to recognize. The knowledge created by these practices are for artists potential currency, if,

⁷⁰Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.225.

⁷¹Interview with Paula Roush, 16 July 2011

as we have seen, financial capital can valorise cultural capital, then the sovereign hold on the cultural capital created by knowledge generating practices might equally contest these established methods of valorisation⁷². These are quite possibly the burgeoning new economies and value-creating practices and ones in which artists can re-site where such cultural capital might reside. The post-institutional practices we have observed do not seek to contest the existing institutions and the codes of these prevalent ideologies but to find new codes and sites to explore practice, it is this new landscape of the visible and these new social destinations that dissensual practice and the assertion of sovereign freedoms exposes hopes for a renewed and reinvigorated social field of art with emergent new values. Values that emerge in the investigations of individual freedom in the face of a society increasingly determined by prevalent ideologies that continue to wrest those freedoms from the individual to the institutions of late capitalism, of which the museum, gallery and art market have become. We find both the necessity for artists alienated from the prevalent bourgeois ideology to find a new conception of the institution of art in this landscape. The understanding of political agency in late capitalist landscapes and its potential as critique by artists with these practices is affirmed by Eve Chiappello when she states

‘It seems to me that ‘artist critique’ continues to call attention to unresolved problems. It embodies a discussion as to the value of things and stands opposed to the commodification of other forms of values which money will never be able to take into account: artistic value, aesthetic value, intellectual value, and what Benjamin called ‘cultural’ value.’⁷³

Values, desires, rewards (Conclusion)

In conclusion what artists, and more importantly the conventional institutions of display and those representing themselves in support of artists, need to address deeply, is what the social field of art is, if the prevalent bourgeois ideologies, those of our field in primary and privileged possession of cultural currency refuse to allow artists to practice infringements, exert sovereign

⁷² We can reflect on the potential of knowledge production and its commodification and reappropriation by artists in post-institutional practice in this analysis of immaterial labour by Maurizio Lazzarato: “The role of immaterial labour is to promote continual innovation in the forms of and conditions of communication (and thus in work and consumption). It gives form to and materializes needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, the images, and tastes. The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (its essential use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the “ideological” and cultural environment.”- Maurizio Lazzarato ‘Immaterial Labour’ via www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm

⁷³ Eve Chiappello, ‘Evolution and co-optation’, *Third Text*, Vol 18 Iss 6 (2004): 585-594, p.593

decisions and critique both the institutions of art and the 'institution of art' either from overt post-studio or less overt post-institutional positions, we jeopardise not only our own social field but the uses of our shared cultural capital to inform, shape or critique the very abilities within our shared social field to act in agency for contestations of freedom itself. If we reflect on the following statement by Danny Pockets we understand how deeply embedded the importance of freedom is in the practice of many artists but also how such practice ultimately represents a wider conception of freedom:

'...as small people, the first thing we do is make marks, whether its with our food on our little tray, children love drawing, and then at some point in the process it becomes something you don't have to do any more, at that point the walls go up. At school (art) is seen as the joke subject but in fact it's a conduit, for spiritually where you are in your life, mark making is incredibly important...people are told, that's daft, you stop that now, like their told to stop playing guitar when you're a certain age or stop dancing when you're a certain age, all of those things are expressions of your existence.'⁷⁴

To limit such practice we not only jeopardise the apparatus of art's production but the apparatus of the whole social field of art, and risk creating a field not led by its institutions and the members of its social field but a field of nothing more than ossified customs and commodified cultural capital. Perhaps confining art practice ultimately indicates as Fraser, Groys and Ranciere suggest, wider social agency, that which exposes society's apparatus confining expressions of our own existence, we could observe these art practices in their sovereign nature to be defending and reinvigorating a conception of individual freedom and in that the very nature of democracy itself. That is its new economy, for the moment it is not an economy based on financial speculation or gain but by the creation of new cultural and social currencies, the unconfined nature of knowledge and freedom.

The new desires in these post-institutional practices are fed by a need to exert a sovereign freedom in the production and dissemination of artworks. These practices seek not to infringe on others freedoms but to allow new freedoms to be explored and understood; to confine them ultimately confines their cultural currency. The opposition and threat they currently pose is in the intentions of the artist not to have the cultural currency they create confined to or reinforce one social destination, that of the attitudes and codes of the prevalent bourgeois ideologies of

⁷⁴ Interview with Danny Pockets, 23 July 2011

our conventional institutions of display. The social destination of these works is integral to the continued ability of art to act both from the privileged cultural position it has established in its individual sovereign form but also in doing so to react to the contingent social codes that surround it. To assert, free from confinement and consistently reassess artistic value, aesthetic value, intellectual value and cultural value and our freedom to determine what those values are. That is the strongest assertion of the 'institution' that we are and the social field of art we exist in and that might well be the strength of our currency in a re-imagined cultural economy.



Helene Kazan, Drawn Territory Part 4. Polystyrene columns. All Systems Go, Departure Gallery. June 2010.
(http://www.helenekazan.co.uk/page/Work/Drawn_Territory_Part_4/14.Drawn-Territory-Part-4.jpg)

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2010)

Nicholas Bourriaud (tr. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods), *Relational Aesthetics* (Les presses du reel, 2002)

Bill Ivey, *arts, inc.* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California 2008)

Jacques Ranciere (ed. & tr. Steve Corcoran), *Dissensus – On Politics and Aesthetics*, (London & New York: Continuum 2010)

Essays

Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum', in Richard Hertz (ed), *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985)

Noel Carroll, 'Art and Alienation', in Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon (eds), *The Life and Death of Images-Ethics and Aesthetics* (London: Tate Publishing 2008)

Bernard Casey, Rachael Dunlop, Sara Selwood, *Culture as Commodity?*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1996)

Lynne Cooke, 'In Lieu of the Higher Ground', in Paula Marincola (ed), *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia: University of the Arts, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006)

Andrea Fraser, 'An Artists' Statement', in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005)

Andrea Fraser, 'Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk', in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005)

Andrea Fraser, 'Notes on the Museum's Publicity', in Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro (ed), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T Press, 2005)

Hans Haacke, 'Museums, Managers of Consciousness', in Brian Wallis (ed), *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York & Cambridge, Mass., The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and M.I.T Press 1986)

Hans Haacke 'The Agent 1977', in Grasskamp, Nesbit, Bird (eds), *Hans Haacke* (London: Phaidon 2004)

Hans Haacke & Maria Eichhorn 'Interview with Hans Haacke – 6 September 1997, Berlin', in

Maria Eichhorn (ed), *The Artist's Contract* (Koln: Walther Konig 2009)

Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Building Dissections' in Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark – *Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York, 1970s* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel 2011)

Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement (1972)' in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996) p.154

Robert Smithson, 'Some Void Thoughts on Museums (1967)' in Jack Flam (ed), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996)

Journal Articles

Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol 10 Autumn 1979: 51-58

Daniel Buren, 'Standpoints', *Studio International*, vol 181 (Apr 71), p.181-5

J J Charlesworth, 'Curating Doubt', *Art Monthly*, no. 294 (2006)

Eve Chiappello, 'Evolution and co-optation', *Third Text*, Vol 18 Iss 6 (2004): 585-594

Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol.44 iss.1 (2005)

Boris Groys, 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux*, no.2 January 2009

Gene Ray, 'Another (art) world is possible', *Third Text*, vol 18 iss 6 (2004): 565-572

Secondary Sources

Books

Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London & New York: Routledge 1991(2010))

Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997)

Dana Arnold & Margaret Iverson (eds.), *Art and Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003)

Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2009)

Daniel Buren, *The eye of the storm : works in situ by Daniel Buren*

(New York: Guggenheim Museum : Distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers 2005)

Peter Burger (tr. Michael Shaw), *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984)

Diarmuid Costello & Jonathan Vickery (eds.), *Art – Key Contemporary Thinkers* (Oxford/New York: Berg 2007)

Douglas Crimp, *On The Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T Press, 2000)

James Cuno (ed.), *Whose Muse?* (Princeton University Press 2004)

- Davidts & Paice (eds.), *The Fall of The Studio* (Amsterdam: Valiz 2009)
- Maria Eichhorn, *The artist's contract : interviews with Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Paula Cooper, Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, Adrian Piper, Robert Projansky, Robert Ryman, Seth Siegelaub, John Weber, Lawrence Weiner, Jackie Winsor* (Köln : Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2009)
- Andrea Fraser (ed. Alexander Alberro), *Museum Highlights* (Cambridge: M.I.T Press 2005)
- Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon 1998)
- Harrison & Wood (ed.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden: Blackwell 2003)
- Bill Ivey, *arts, inc.* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California 2008)
- Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press 1991)
- Phillip Kaiser (ed.), *Louise Lawler and Others* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2004)
- Jeffrey Kastner, Sina Najaff and Frances Richmond (eds.), *Odd Lots – Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's Fake Estates* (New York: Cabinet 2005)
- Kastner & Wallis (eds.), *Land and Environmental Art* (London: Phaidon 1998)
- Pamela M. Lee, *Object To Be Destroyed – The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge: MIT Press 2000)
- Guy Lelong (tr. David Radzinowicz), *Guy Buren* (Flammarion 2001)
- Manacorda & Yegdar (eds.), *Radical Nature* (London: Koenig 2009)
- Gerardo Mosquera (ed.), *Beyond the Fantastic* (London: inIVA 1995)
- Eckhard Schneider (ed.), *Santiago Sierra – 300 Tons and Previous Works* (Köln: König & Kunsthaus Bregenz 2004)
- Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive – art from bureaucracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press 2008)
- Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research* (London: Sage 2005)
- Ann Temkin, *Orozco* (London: Tate 2009)
- Wallis & Tucker (eds.), *Art after Modernism* (Lincoln: Godine 1984)
- Linda Weintraub (ed.), *Making Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson 2003)
- de Zegher (ed.), *Inside the Visible* (Ghent: Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boston 1996)
- Anderson, Brown, *Matta-Clark* (Munich: Prestel 2011)

Essay

- Ian Burn, 'The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation', in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory - 1900-2000* (Malden: Blackwell 2009)

Journal Articles

- Daniel Buren, 'The Function of an Exhibitor',
- Tyler Coburn, 'Glenn Ligon, I Am (interview with Glenn Ligon)', *Art Review*, issue 29 (January & February 2009), 56-65
- Alex Coles, 'A-Z', *Art Monthly*, no. 343 (February 2011) p. 1-4
- Paul Crowther, 'Art and Autonomy', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 21 no. 1 (Winter 1981): p. 12-21
- Wouter Davidts, "'The Studio"-Hugh Lane Gallery", *Artforum International*, v. 45 no. 8 (April 2007) p. 291
- Mary Anne Francis, 'Dirty Work: art beyond 'autonomy'', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol. 6 no 1 (May 2007): p. 33-44
- Charles Green, 'Group soul: who owns the artist fusion?', *Third Text*, vol. 18, pt. 6, no. 71, (Nov. 2004), pp. 595-608
- Brian Holmes, 'Artistic autonomy and the communication society', *Third Text*, vol. 18, issue 6, 2004, pp.547-555
- Joselit, David (Interviewer), 'Ring of fire: interview with Joe Lewis and Yong Soon Min', *Art Journal (U.S.A.)*, vol. 57, no. 4, Winter 1998
- Paul Krainak, 'Form Matters', *Art Papers*, v. 29 no. 6 (November/December 2005) p. 40-5, (2005)
- Jennifer A. McMahon, 'Aesthetic Autonomy and Praxis: Art and Language in Adorno and Habermas', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 19(2) p. 155-175
- Derek Pilgrum, 'The 'ontology' of the artist's studio as workplace: researching the artist's studio and the art/design classroom', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, vol 12 no 3 (2007)
- Raphael Rubinstein, 'When bad was good', *Art in America*, no. 6, pp. 83-87, Jun-Jul 2006
- Hito Steyerl, 'Is a Museum a Factory?', *e-flux*, no 7, June-August 2009
- Pauline J. Yao, 'Roundtable Discussion', *Yishu*, vol. 5, pt. 1, (March 2006), pp. 46-56

Essays

- Ian Burn, 'The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation', in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory - 1900-2000* (Malden: Blackwell 2009)

Website

- Maurizio Lazzarato 'Immaterial Labour' via
 <www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> Accessed 18/03/2011

Artists Statements

Louise Ashcroft uses processes of research, story-telling and intervention to explore the identity of places she finds interesting. Reacting spontaneously to the world around her, Ashcroft's work is often playful and uses humour as a catalyst for philosophical and political enquiry. Ashcroft graduated from The Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Oxford University, with first class honours in 2004. In 2008, she completed an MA in Cultural and Critical studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. Curating and critical theory are also important to Louise's practice. She is one of the founding members of radical education group alt-MFA and was curator of London's Departure Gallery for two years until 2010. Since 2011, Louise has also been collaborating with Helene Kazan on site-specific research project *16 Spaces*."

Claire Blundell Jones

Helene Kazan

"My practice uses bastardised architectural processes to create situation sensitive interventions that investigate notions of territory, occupancy, space and cultural growth. Focusing on emotional responses and reactions to our physical surroundings, by exploring interaction with space, light and materiality. Also developing techniques to understand this experience through animation and new media."

Danny Pockets, multi-media artist, uses the landscape as his starting point, his inspiration. The defining moment coming in to play when any two or more disciplines collide, when the layers of the palimpsest merge, when the paramagic takes its hold.

Paula Roush, msdm

"I, paula roush, founded msdm in London in 1998 for the homeless project, and at the time msdm emerged as an acronym-aggregator for a set of contemporary practices that as well as being art as research, appeared characterised by being mobile-strategies-[of]-display-[and]-mediation. In addition to synthesizing the aspirations of an artistic-interventionist-curatorial-critical practice, the label 'msdm' suggested a potential signifier for collective action, remaining to this day as a platform for both individual and collaborative work, shown in the context of exhibitions, publications, conferences and teaching/seminars.

In addition, I am senior lecturer of digital photography at the London South Bank University, where I teach courses on archives and counter-archival strategies, artists publications and self-publishing practices, post-subcultures and artists' placements, I also teach the theory module for the MA in Art and Media practice at the University of Westminster."

Appendix ii

Attached are the audio of the five interviews conducted for this dissertation, it has been affirmed by my supervisor, Marquard Smith, that no transcripts are required.

