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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

2013 RESEARCH PAPER

AESTHETICS OF SYSTEMS / SYSTEMS OF AESTHETICS

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This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.
Summary

Studio

The creative component exhibited alongside this research paper comprises a series of artists’ books suspended from steel cables above a carpet. The books deal with various formal concepts of art and include text and images. This installation is entitled *The Best Model of a Cat is a Cat* (2013) exhibited at the Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate Exhibition, December 2013.

Abstract

This paper investigates the role artists play in maintaining their legitimacy through participating in various roles across the entire art world by tracing the careers of selected artists with expanded practices. Where actions are performed on behalf of artists, artists lose the ability to represent themselves and even participate in their own disenfranchisement. Systems and systems aesthetics are first explored before the art world itself is revealed as a system. The positions that artists take up in the system is explored through the careers of various artists, including those that work as curators, writers and gallerists, challenging the hegemony that threatens to manipulate the system and remove the independence of the art object.
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Introduction

Art functions within multiple systems. These systems construct and define meaning and value within art and can be as omnipresent as language, or as specific as the corporate sponsorship policies of museums and their effect on exhibition programs. With an influence equivalent to the lighting of a gallery or the attitudes of a curator, these systems impact art in regards to how it is produced, preserved and perceived. Understanding the systems of art has been taken on as a task by artists through their practices and beyond. Both the methods and discoveries of artists will be uncovered through the chapters that follow.

By no means a study of aesthetics, looking at systems allows an appreciation of how we come to understand aesthetics. Rules and structures are used to create meaning constantly – we communicate through an agreed upon structure of language, drive around regulated by an agreed upon traffic signalling system and exchange a currency that also forms part of a system. Participation in these systems is more complicit than explicit and one can make use of them without being aware of the structures that govern their meaning. The less well we know a system the more likely, however, we are to err. Social taboos are often transgressed unintentionally by well meaning travellers simply because the institutions and customs are not understood.

Art, with communication at its core, requires a clear understanding of the systems that govern it, in order to function effectively. Much research has been dedicated to language, signs and semiotics, but the less obvious systems of art are equally important in affecting it. The focus inwards for a subject that comes with modernism begins to address some of these areas that are then continued and to the present day in the practices of several artists from the conceptualism of the 60s and 70s to today’s institutional critique and relational aesthetics.

Systems in their own right have become subjects of art and science. At the same time that Systems Analysis is developed in the fields of science, artists began to work with systems too. This practice of using systems as either subject or object extends from the abstract conceptual work of artists like Sol Lewitt and Donald Judd to the social systems work of Hans Haacke and Helen and Newton Harrison.
Contemporary artists include Liam Gillick, Simon Denny, Heimo Zobernig, Franz West, Andrea Fraser and Adrian Piper.

These contemporary artists increasingly work across the entire system of art, including curating and writing into their practices as a parallel concern. This active participation in the system as an artist is brought to light in the chapter on curation as well as in more detail in its own specific chapter.

Beginning with a look at Systems Analysis, a science that develops in the late fifties, a structural basis for the investigation of art as a system is established. These chapters explore more specific aspects within art. *Spaces of Art* investigates the way artists have dealt with the different spaces of art in literal and figurative senses defining the position of both art and the museum as a heterotopia, looking at the structure of art as a lateral organisation.

Increasingly the rise of the independent curator in line with post-structuralism has meant that artists’ responsibilities end with the production of the artwork and the curator takes over from there, controlling the reception of the work in the gallery. This chapter looks at the development of the installation as medium and how that relates to current curatorial trends where artists and curators perform increasingly similar roles. This affects the disenfranchisement of the artist that is addressed in the following chapter.

The final chapter examines the practices of artists that use the idea of system as a subject of practice, either of the art world specifically in the case of artists like Liam Gillick or of the system in general. This chapter is important because it reveals both the ability and necessity to be critical of the system from the inside.
Systems Analysis

A gestalt is an organised entity or whole in which the parts, though distinguishable, are interdependent. They have certain characteristics produced by their inclusion in the whole, and the whole has some characteristics belonging to none of the parts.¹

‘Art’ extends its definition from a singular object to the entire system that produces it. Although somewhat confusing, this befits the idea of art itself, where those singular objects establish their meaning as art through the context of art in which they are read.

Art is a system of parts, where whilst independent, all parts work together and influence each other in their coming together. It is difficult to understand the parts in isolation as their meaning hinges on external conventions and frameworks. Further complicating this, as conscious and active agents, artists work with self-referentiality and adaptability manipulating these relationships.

Thus to understand an artwork one must appreciate the system that generated it and in turn an artwork can alter ones understanding of that system as well as affect that system. There are specific relational properties that exist for parts of a whole that do not exist for those parts in isolation. Meaning is created within a system. Without a context a work of art is meaningless, relying on the history of art as a referential system to derive meaning.²

It is not uncommon for an art fair to hand out stickers to participating galleries to help the cleaners distinguish between rubbish to be collected and artworks on display. Here components of the art system, such as the white cube of the gallery, work to allow an object to be classified as art, where without these in place it would more easily be identified as something else.

For centuries art has been used as a diagnostic tool to understand the cultures in which it was produced. Broadening the focus of research to the systems that produce art will allow for a better understanding of art itself, looking not only at art as an individual part, but at its relationships with the whole. The systems framework allows for a greater understanding of both art and culture.

**Evolution of complexity**

As our understanding of the world has developed, problems have required increasingly sophisticated answers before we can accept them. We are unsatisfied with the blaming of a drought on the misdeeds of a king. A cane toad can cause more problems than it solves. Wars are not started by single events but due to a combination of factors overlooked by facile arguments.

Up to the twentieth century we understood the world in terms of problems of simplicity. Everything had a cause and effect connected by a simple causal chain. There was a limit to how many factors could be included in a problem before it became impossible to address. These were problems of simplicity where controlling one variable would allow for the prediction of another. The temperature of a known quantity of gas could be estimated due to its pressure.³ Although this knowledge would be responsible for important developments such as the diesel engine, it did not allow for the tackling of larger problems with greater amounts of data.

It would require the statistics and probability theories of the turn of the twentieth century to approach problems with more variables – problems of disorganised complexity.⁴ Elements of a system could be understood according to an average behaviour and average set of results provided the circumstances were average. From this the laws of Thermodynamics can be established. Although this too will help in identifying and predicting behaviour, it does not give insight into why this behaviour occurs.

⁴ Weaver, “A Quarter Century”, 10.
‘Why’ questions cannot be answered in terms of disorganised complexity. Although, on average, a cancerous cell may only be present some of the time, it is important to know what distinguishes that cell and why it begins an unregulated multiplication into a tumour. ‘Why’ questions are a matter of organised complexity; understanding the relationships between factors within a whole, or as they may be alternatively understood - a system.

**What is a system?**

The idea of a system is itself abstract. There is no set definition and attempts to define it are varied, ranging in complexity and usefulness, while revealing the philosophies and motives of the taxonomist.

Kenneth Boulding, an English economist and philosopher, describes a system most simply as “Anything that is not chaos.” Ludvig von Bertalanffy, an Austrian biologist, proposes a more descriptive definition, but no more definitive. Von Bertalanffy posits the idea of a system as an interrelated group of parts, interdependent on one another, further adding that the system must perform a transformative procedure on the input, slowly moving away from a state of entropy. This procedure should be a goal, which requires both regulation and the differentiation of elements within the system to achieve this. The organs of a body can be seen as a system working to sustain the body they inhabit just as a Reserve bank and financial institutions can be seen as part of an economic system.

Derek Hitchens, a systems engineer, proposes a simple yet practical definition, “A System is a collection of interrelated entities such that both the collection and the interrelationships together reduce local entropy.” The concept of reducing entropy here can be understood as the active functioning in order to sustain the longevity of the system. A system that achieves its full state of entropy will be a non-functional system, a system in chaos. Thus a system

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7 Skyttner *General Systems Theory: ideas and applications*, 51.
8 Skyttner *General Systems Theory: ideas and applications*, 53.
can be understood as an organisation of entities that will continue to resemble itself despite internal and external changes whilst fulfilling a function.

Systems will suffer both extrinsic and intrinsic feedback. In the case of a negative feedback cycle this will help to diminish entropy and sustain the system in its function as it achieves equilibrium. A positive feedback system, however, will increase entropy, produce exponential results and amplify any deviations.⁹

**The theory of systems**

Systems theory, as a basic science, deals with the abstracted properties of systems found in all manifestations across all areas. It is furthered by the discovery of analogies and isomorphisms that enrich the understanding of both particular systems as well as the science. Systems theory unites natural, artificial and conceptual systems through their shared properties¹⁰, allowing insights gained from the study of one system to be applied to others.

Early systems theory stems from writing by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and Kenneth Boulding. Bertalanffy wrote that systems had shared characteristics irrespective of the field to which they belonged¹¹ and developed a *General Systems Theory*.

General Systems Theory is the scientific exploration of wholes, previously broken down into areas of specialisation. Increasingly sophisticated forms of technology in step with developments in science and understanding have created a limitation for any single person to understand their intricacy. It is the perspective of the abstraction provided by systems theory that grants a broader understanding of the complexities involved in a system and more importantly how these aspects function together. Although a system will be simplified in its elements, its multidimensional aspect is preserved.¹² Reduced to inputs, outputs and agents, the relationships between parts are sustained for

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investigation. What is learnt about specific systems can then be applied to other areas.

Rather than being an analytic type of thinking that dissects elements to piece together an understanding, systems theory is synthetic, looking comprehensively at all aspects, similar to Gestalt psychology that sees a whole as greater than the sum of its parts.\textsuperscript{13} Systems themselves are being studied as entities with researchers attempting to understand the abstract idea of a system rather than particular examples. The work done across various disciplines of science has helped to inform a synthesis of knowledge in the field of systems theory.

Systems analysis has practical applications in several fields. As the General Systems Theory was being developed by von Bertalanffy and his associates, the RAND Corporation simultaneously developed their version of systems analysis for the Pentagon, allowing the military to better understand and predict future conflict. The systems analysts at the Rand Corporation developed an abstract understanding of issues of national security and strategy, allowing for variable inputs. This would allow for the development of new weapons and weapons systems such as radar\textsuperscript{14} and new strategies to search for submarines or deploy destroyers and troops\textsuperscript{15}. Systems analysis provides the perspective that allows for problems to be seen as a whole, within a context.

The military application of systems analysis differs to the main school in that the military is more concerned with the creation and prediction of future systems. They are faced with alternatives and options that must be valued and preferred.\textsuperscript{16} This preferencing is performed according to scales of economy and performance.

\textsuperscript{13} Skyttner \textit{General Systems Theory}, 31.
\textsuperscript{14} Skyttner \textit{General Systems Theory}, 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Quade and Boucher, “Introduction”, 2.
Abstracted enough, however, the military application of systems analysis becomes irrelevant, with inputs and results becoming mere variables in a system that could just as easily be applicable to a business or a hospital.

General Systems Theory uses the abstracted idea of a system to develop an understanding of all systems - using known systems to better understand unknown systems and pooling knowledge across areas of specialisation. Identifying the system of art allows it to be interrogated in terms of its parts and relationships. This will provide a greater understanding of art as a system and as components of a system.

**Art as System**

Art can be seen as a complex system, itself made up of other systems. No work of art can be separated from the artist, the commercial gallery, the institution, the audience and collectors. Each of these components of the system can affect the other and these components are reliant upon each other for their meaning. A commercial gallery holds a symbiotic relationship with the work of art, each reliant on the other for legitimacy.

Although rarely cohesive, the disparate, antagonistic elements of the art system serve as feedback agents – maintaining its function and reducing entropy. Agents acting against established relationships and conventions have caused significant moments of development. At times artists will struggle for a lifetime before receiving recognition and canonisation. With so many active agents within the system, change is rapidly accommodated – despite their radical nature, performance and conceptual art of the 60s were quickly commercialised.

Where in a system each component is interrelated and interdependent on the next, so too in art do components both derive and create meaning based on relationships present. A Dan Flavin fluorescent installation relies on the context of the gallery to derive its meaning, without this it returns to being
utilitarian objects. These relationships often serve as a subject for artists
themselves interested in the way meaning is created by these other agents.
Other examples with be investigated in depth later, but here the museums of
Marcel Broodthaers and Marcel Duchamp serve as examples.

Art is also an open system – with infinite resources available to it and variable,
shifting boundaries in its environment. Von Bertalanffy defines an open
system as “A system in exchange of matter with its environment, presenting
import and export, building-up and breaking down of its material
components.” The openness of the system aids in avoiding a state of
entropy as pockets of order can exist amongst disorder. An open system can
achieve a steady state despite its environment. The vastness and longevity of
art is due to the open environment that supports it.

The techniques of systems analysis have been adapted by certain artists as a
way to approach art. The systems aesthetic approach within art deals with
problems on a multidisciplinary level rather than trying to achieve a single
technical solution. Artists now collaborate across skill areas that they do not
possess and have become designers and project managers of projects they
would have previously never attempted alone. Artists are not necessarily
artisans trained in a particular craft but rather use their freedom to connect
disparate ideas and techniques seeing the connections that perspective affords.

In Quade’s Systems Analysis he defines the essence of the approach to,
“construct and operate within a ‘model’”. The model develops a “structure
and terminology” providing a context for the analysis. This analysis can be
seen to be creating abstractions of situations in reality, to play out imagined
scenarios. Simultaneous, alternate realities are created with languages
relevant to them developed to test out theories and ideas before moving to
applying them in the real world. Models can be anything from a

17 Jack Burnham, The Great Western Salt Works, (New York: George Brazillier, 1974),
22.
141.
19 Von Bertalanffy General Systems Theory, 41.
20 Burnham The Great Western Salt Works, 21.
21 Quade and Boucher, “Introduction”, 11.
22 Quade and Boucher, “Introduction”, 11.
mathematical equation to a computer program and even a “purely verbal
description of the situation”\textsuperscript{23}. The understanding of a system through the
interrogation of its model is often applied within art on various subjects as it is
to art with the systems of art as the subject itself.

Models will betray the reality they claim to portray, functioning as analogues
of only a particular situation. Multiple models would be needed to capture
reality in its fullness. Thus they are functional objects, used in order to
understand aspects of realities.\textsuperscript{24} They do, however, have value. This value is
justified through the model’s ability to accurately portray the systems and
patterns present within what appears as chaos.\textsuperscript{25}

Any model of a complex system would ideally achieve equal complexity in
order to achieve true accuracy. Thus without replicating the subject in its
entirety, models allow for understanding of the elements of a system as they
function, sparing the analytic deconstruction of traditional research.

Herbert Simon, an American political scientist and economist, warns against
expanding abstracted properties across systems where superficial similarities
can be misleading.\textsuperscript{26} He does, however, admit that Cybernetics as a paradigm
has been useful in many applications.\textsuperscript{27} Along with Cybernetics, ideas such as
feedback, homeostasis and evolution have established relevance in several
fields.

As a system that we inhabit but can easily manipulate, art also allows for an
understanding of other systems. Vilém Flusser, media critic and philosopher,
established a philosophy of photography where by viewing it in terms of a
system he frequently relates it to other systems such as politics. As a case in
point, where cameras have become increasingly sophisticated, the hardware

\textsuperscript{23} Quade and Boucher, “Introduction”, 12. See also R.D. Specht, “The Nature of
\textsuperscript{24} Specht, “The Nature of Models”, 212.
\textsuperscript{25} Ervin Laszlo, “Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a new paradigm of
contemporary thought” (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972), 15.
\textsuperscript{26} Herbert A. Simon, “The Architecture of Complexity” in Complexity: critical concepts
that makes them function is becoming cheaper and easier to acquire. Thus companies are heavily invested into the software and this is kept secret as intellectual property, protected by patents and copyright. Identifying the system which makes the hardware function allows for its manipulation for ones own means – political lobbyists are keenly aware of this and will use politicians to represent their interests in government.\textsuperscript{28}

The photograph as an object of a system also bears the changes of that system. As the photograph has evolved from a chemical reaction to a digital file, its means of reproduction and distribution have changed. Society has been affected by this change as much as the system that caused them, but it is the photograph that evidences them.\textsuperscript{29} Value has shifted from the object to the information encoded in the object revealing to an extent how power is now retained by the creators rather than being carried with objects.\textsuperscript{30}

The channel of the photograph’s distribution determines the significance of the image. The same image seen on a Tumblr blog graces the cover of \textit{Vanity Fair}.\textsuperscript{31} Photographers are constantly working against these channels rather than letting the channel determine the image. Flusser believes the channel wants to be invisible and that if critics ignore this then they are complicit with it.\textsuperscript{32} As the making of a photograph is done with some degree of antagonism to the channel it is important to read this in its interpretation.

Unlike the military application of systems analysis, art does not require its systems to be economised or solved. Systems as a subject within art are there purely for the purposes of study.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{29} This encoding of information into the photograph happens regardless of the operator of the camera being aware of it, and in turn a study of the system can be done of photography in general irrespective of the subject of the photographer. \\
\textsuperscript{30} Flusser \textit{Towards a Philosophy of Photography}, 53. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Flusser \textit{Towards a Philosophy of Photography}, 55.
\end{flushleft}
Spaces of Art

Although easier to understand as a pyramidal structure, where artists at the bottom feed the galleries and institutions above them, the world of art is, however, not hierarchical. Artists, as a primary producer feed into galleries that feed into museums, but these relationships are dynamic and reciprocal. Artists are affected by the choices of museums and this in turn affects their production, works are made for an audience and markets can be manipulated.

Foucault & Emplacement

The spaces of art can be understood as a lateral organisation of elements rather than in terms of a hierarchy. French philosopher Michel Foucault suggests that our understanding of space has evolved over time from one of ‘localisation’ to that of ‘emplacement’. Localisation preferences spaces over one another in a hierarchy. Emplacement sees space understood through the relationships between points rather than the location of those points; seeing points for their connections rather than their differences.

Although in theory place may be understood in this way, in practicality there maintains a sacralisation of space where we treat spaces differently either due to sanctity or sterility. Foucault refers to these spaces as ‘utopias’ and ‘heterotopias’.

Utopias are a placeless place, bearing an inverse analogy with the real space of society – a perfect place where the rules of reality need not apply. Imagined and talked about in opposition to reality, they do not exist in any physical sense.

Heterotopias on the other hand are real spaces common to all cultures. These spaces, incompatible with and outside of time, allow for a juxtaposition of emplacements in a single real space.33

Foucault classifies heterotopias according to those of crisis and those of deviation. Crisis heterotopias, whilst somewhat antiquated, serve as an elsewhere space for those in a crisis of life, death or sexual maturation. Graveyards, the rites of passage

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cere monies across many cultures and the honeymoon all present examples of heterotopias.34

Heterotopias of deviation are spaces for behaviour that are outside of the norm, providing an outlet and a function for a society. Prisons, mental institutions, hospitals and brothels all provide a place for deviation. A cinema, theatre, artwork and gallery can all be seen as heterotopias,35 but rather than having a direct relationship to a behaviour within society, these heterotopias are flexible areas for experimentation. Where a brothel is in opposition to marriage, a cinema can explore multiple areas of opposition.

A museum is a space outside of time presenting entire histories all at once - a heterotopia of accumulated time. It is also a space of illusion, however, denouncing real space and creating a new space.36 Deviance is permitted within the museum; it is the place for studying anything that is not welcomed in society. Viewers are able to stare without feeling ashamed, to exhibit curiosity where it would otherwise be inappropriate. Thus for artists the museum and gallery become the perfect places to investigate and interrogate that which society does not permit.37

The desacralisation of space that Foucault focuses on is ongoing. Transgressions of social norms occur more frequently and thus become normal. Issues surrounding sex and gender are increasingly more acceptable. The desacralisation of space allows for elements to be understood in terms of the relationships they share with one another. The localisation and preferencing of space limits the understanding that can be attained, blocking off engagement. Differentiation via space is artificially constructed, betraying the true difference that exists and allows society to avoid confronting these issues.

34 Foucault, “Different spaces”, 180.
36 Foucault, “Different spaces”, 182.
37 The museums authority under the law is often challenged in relation to this idea. Censorship debates relate closely to this ability for the museum to be the safe, ‘other’ space where ideas inadmissible in normal society are allowed to exist. The reaction against these ideas in the museum can be seen as a fear that they will enter into normal society.
Relations of emplacement are unique, irreducible and non-superposable, allowing for a detailed understanding of both elements and systems.\textsuperscript{38}

**The de-sacralisation of space – The museum as heterotopia**

Art almost devoutly practises the sacralisation of space. From the studio to the museum, spaces are ranked within a hierarchy. The canvas as a space undergoes this sacralisation too. Art plays a double role in this as the gallery and canvas can be seen as heterotopias; areas for experimentation where the rules of life can be broken, hierarchies inverted, and space and time denounced. Thus the de-sacralisation of spaces can occur within art, or more particularly within an artwork, but art itself must be de-sacralised in order for the relationships within it to be appreciated.\textsuperscript{39}

It is within the field of institutional critique that the sacralisation of the space of art is both explored and subverted; the structures of art are used both formally and as a subject matter, often interchangeably. Artists desacralise the spaces of art, revealing the relationships involved, whether this be Angela De la Cruz’s broken stretchers or Hans Haacke’s tracking of the providence of a painting, both artists reveal the greater elements of the system that construct and influence the meaning of the work. Performance artist and lead proponent of the 1960s Happenings, Allan Kaprow uses the idea of purity and impurity to talk about a similar idea to Foucault. Purity represented both structural, formal qualities as well as moral ones such as chastity and cleanliness. For Kaprow, purity relates to a classical idea of truth and qualities of authenticity and essentiality. Purity is reliant on separation of space to maintain itself. Impurity lacks these qualities but, as Kaprow suggests, it reveals the “truth of nature”.\textsuperscript{40} Without the embellishment, impurity offers a more direct path to truth. What presents itself as a truth in purity is in reality masked.

Kaprow intended for his happenings to be as close to life as possible, “…directly involved in the everyday world… of the unconscious daily rituals of the

\textsuperscript{38} Foucault, “Different spaces”, 178.
supermarket, subway ride at rush hour, and tooth brushing every morning.”\textsuperscript{41} They were invitations to participate, “wholly in the real nature of the art and (one hopes) life.”\textsuperscript{42}

Formalism over time has played a role in both establishing the sacredness of the artwork and system around the artwork – to trying to dismantle this and move towards the profane. The Rothko Chapel in Texas literalises this, but for centuries galleries have served as a sacred space for art. The Church, as patron of the arts helped to set up this relationship by placing art within the church as an object and transferring sacred qualities to the work via the narratives they depicted. The paintings depicting sacred scenes became sacred themselves.

But Kaprow goes against this, attempting to move art from the outside into life itself. When writing about the \textit{Happenings} Kaprow lists several rules:

1. \textit{The line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible.}
2. \textit{Themes, materials, actions, and the associations they evoke are to be gotten from anywhere except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu.}
3. \textit{The Happening should be dispersed over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing, locales.}
4. \textit{Time, closely bound up with things and spaces, should be variable and independent of the convention of continuity…}\textsuperscript{43}

These rules directly address the issues of the sacralisation of space that prevents direct engagement with art. Kaprow was aware that the pre-existing conditions for art affected the public’s relationship to it and so made efforts to subvert this. By avoiding locations, materials and formats previously associated with art the influence of those structures could be avoided.

The museum as a space for natural history is easily understood, outside of time or space and objective in their acquisitions. Mammoths didn’t know they would be collected, and behaved accordingly. Art museums however are problematized by the fact that artists are aware of the museum and its collection. As German philosopher Boris Groys states, since Modernism artists are working primarily to be acquired by museum collections\textsuperscript{44}. In understanding contemporary art, therefore, the museum must be included in the discussion and seeing it as a separate entity betrays the true relationships involved. For Groys this relationship is so influential that one must look through the gaze of the museum to see what is new – the museum acts as a filter on our own reality and influences how it is defined.

Although the separation of space aids in the sacralisation of space, making the work of art appear special as it becomes distinguished from the profane it is not required for the appreciation of art\textsuperscript{45}. The gallery is too entwined within the system of art to subvert it entirely however, thus the de-sacralisation of that space is for the purposes of understanding its emplacement.

Continuing the notion of art into life, the work of Franz West takes life itself as its main reference\textsuperscript{46}. West’s works are often only completed once they are engaged with by their audience. The engagement is prioritised over reception in works where the audience is forced to face away\textsuperscript{47} from the work they encounter or works are situated in specific environments and visual fields such as \textit{Eo Ipso} (1987) a sculpture installed at a traffic intersection in Münster, Germany. Works such as 1992’s \textit{Auditorium}, a series of 72 couches installed at \textit{Documenta IX}, allow for the viewer to rest amongst the vastness of the exhibition. This practical function of the artwork encourages the viewer to become a part of it whilst expanding the ontological definition of his sculptures\textsuperscript{48}.

West’s solo exhibition of 1989 at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna consisted of multiple metal couches being installed within the collection of the

\textsuperscript{44} Boris Groys, \textit{Art Power}, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c2008), 25.
\textsuperscript{45} Groys, “Art Power”, 31-32.
\textsuperscript{46} Fleck, Robert “Sex and the modern sculptor” in \textit{Franz West}, Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra (eds.) (London: Phaidon, 1999), 28.
\textsuperscript{47} Eva Badura-Triska “Everything Could Be Other Than It Is” in \textit{Franz West: Where Is My Eight?} Eva Badura-Triska et al. (eds.), (Cologne: Walther König, 2013) 19
\textsuperscript{48} Fleck “Sex and the modern sculptor”, 40.
museum. Despite being installed on plinths, the couches were accessible for the audience to sit on either to rest or peruse the collection. This doubling results in the audience becoming a part of an artwork within a museum forcing themselves into a position whilst gazing at an artwork in a museum of another person forced into a pose.\textsuperscript{49}

This attitude not only allows the audience a closer engagement with the art, but allows for the art to have a higher degree of influence over the viewer. The trespassing of space reifies the relationship between the audience and the artwork.

Art’s relationship to the heterotopia makes it the perfect place for the exploration of ideas. Where traditions and rules are not required, alternate relationships can be tested and proved. Difficult subjects such as death, war and sex have been approached through art for centuries allowing them to be accepted into life. However art itself is also guilty of sacralising spaces and having its own rules and to understand the complex relationships of museums, collectors, galleries and artists this sacralisation needs to be removed.

\textsuperscript{49} Fleck “Sex and the modern sculptor”, 64.
Artist-Curator

A sneaker store in Houston curates their merchandise to reflect a lifestyle; music and events are also now introduced as being curated. The idea of what a curator is has changed as much in the world of art as it has outside of art and has evolved a long way from caring for a collection. In 2006 German/American based art theorist Boris Groys declared that the creative act had become the act of selection, and that the distinction between artist and curator was becoming obsolete – both were just selecting. If curating is equivalent to the creative act, is this acknowledged and does this affect our understanding of exhibition which must now be read as installation? An artist can be a curator, but can a curator be an artist?

The Creative Act

If selection is a creative act, what are the consequences of having a curator involved with an exhibition and how does this affect the meaning and reception of the artwork included?

The ability to make art out of something that was not art once belonged to a curator. This person would distinguish items of religious significance collected throughout the world by including them in collections of beautiful objects. And so the 19th Century saw the first museums forming through the exploits of empires across the globe. Seeing something as art would be to see it for a mere aesthetic value without the sacred function it once had. Groys describes this as iconophobia, fear of the power of images as sacred icons leading them to being reduced to impotent artworks.

By the 20th Century, however, the understanding of art had changed and curators were no longer able to create art, but relied on the artist to provide this. Marcel

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52 Groys, Art Power, 43.
53 Groys, Art Power, 44.
Duchamp's famous urinal piece *Fountain* (1917) elucidates the ability that he as an artist had to turn a readymade into art, an ability not shared by curators.

This celebration of profane objects as aesthetic is referred to by Groys as iconophilia, and is the framework under which the majority of art since the 20th Century has functioned.

Despite the ubiquity of ‘curating’ as a verb to describe any activity of choice, it draws its definition from the roles performed by a caretaker of a collection. Even in museums, however, the role of a curator is still not well understood and curators will often move from planning a project with an artist to calling on sponsors for money and later directing a fabrication team or fulfilling some other requirement of an artist. Independent, freelance curators have narrowed down this role to a more academic and less practical of professions, using existing museum staff to take on tasks such as preservation and promotion. The way curating is understood now is limited to a definition that involves the careful selection and presentation of something and cares little for archiving and preservation.

**Museum as subject**

With Duchamp we see the artist turning to look at the museum as a subject. It is from this gesture that much of the involvement of artists-as-curators stems as artists explore and reveal the systems within which the work and themselves must function. Duchamp exposes the museum as the vindicator of art by placing the readymade inside. The museum becomes integral to the functioning of the artwork.

As artists became more aware of the museum as an influence it began to feature more highly as a subject of interest. *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable*, a show curated by Joseph Kosuth looked at how context affects the reception of art, including works that were controversial at their time of creation but had by then become accepted as well as works only considered


controversial long after they were made. The exhibition also featured large wall
texts of quotations used to reframe and influence the viewers’ reception of the work.

This can be seen as Kosuth as an artist, acting as a curator, to create an exhibition
that doubly functions as an artwork. Viewers could walk in and see an exhibition
curated by Kosuth, or alternatively see an exhibition of Kosuth’s where he acts as
curator.

As an artist, Kosuth has created a work that explores how artworks are received
over time, using as a medium other artworks and a technique akin to curating.
Those other artworks are represented as an abstracted idea of their self despite being
in the gallery in their full capacity. In this regard Kosuth's role as an artist can be
distinguished from that of a curator - but the line is beginning to blur. The gap
between an artist's extension of their practice collaging the works of others to make
a work of their own and a curator expanding on a personal thesis using the work of
artists not necessarily related, is narrow at best.

Avoiding the use of pre-existing artwork, Marcel Broodthaers performed a similar
role to Kosuth with his Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (1972), a
fictitious museum initially created in his studio out of borrowed packing crates and
found objects. Broodthaers labeled each eagle-themed work with the description
"This is not a work of art", however collectively the work did function as one and
has been installed in various locations since.

Broodthaers, when talking about his intentions regarding the work stated, "What is
also important is to ascertain whether the fictitious museum sheds new light on the
mechanisms of art, artistic life, and society. With my museum I pose the
question." The criticality on the role the museum had in influencing the reception of work
helped foster a generation of curators that would strive to achieve a neutral,
objective environment for the exhibition. The Dia foundation in New York is an

56 Marcel Broodthaers “A Conversation with Freddy De Vree, 1969” in Institutional Critique
57 Marcel Broodthaers “Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (1972)” in
example of this, curated on the rule of “one artist, one space, one work … forever.”\textsuperscript{58}

The alternative to this is the curator that introduces a subjective interpretation of the work through their curatorial influences. Curators have been able to contextualise works and expand upon ideas through the careful placement and juxtaposition of works. Post-structuralism has allowed for curators to take this and run with it, returning the world of art to the beginning again.

Daniel Buren, known for specifically placing works within exhibition contexts wrote about his concern for this trend as early as 1972 saying,

\begin{quote}
For if, even yesterday, works were revealed thanks to the Museum, nowadays they are no more than so much decorative gadgetry helping the Museum to survive as a picture or tableau, the author of which is none other than the very organizer of the exhibition. And the artist hurls himself and his work into this trap, because the artist and his work are powerless, by dint of artistic practice, and can do no more than let someone else – the organizer – do the exhibiting. Whence the exhibition as art tableau, and as the limit of art exhibitions.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Galleries and museums, either with a sympathetic view of the subjectivism that they assert or to capitalise on it, have invited artists to curate exhibitions of their collections generally promoting the artists perspective of the collection. The National Gallery in London ran a program called \textit{The Artist’s Eye} in the late 1970s\textsuperscript{60} and the Queensland Art Gallery has an equivalent in \textit{Artists Choice}. Although forward thinking in some respects, this betrays the fact that the existing program is not representative of the artist’s choice and that subjectivity does play a large part in the reception of work.

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\textsuperscript{58} Dan Fox “Being Curated” in \textit{Frieze} Issue April 2013. Issue 154 http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/being-curated/
\textsuperscript{59} Daniel Buren \textit{Exhibition of an Exhibition A work in 7 pieces}, (Work in Situ and Accompanying text) Documenta V, Kassel, 1972
\textsuperscript{60} Terry Smith, \textit{Thinking Contemporary Curating}, (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012),120.
Contemporary Curating

A museum of natural history uses archaeologists and historians to accurately understand history and portray this history through the collections of the museum. The historical collections in museums attempt to do the same, reflecting on the styles and attitudes of the time and trying to make sense of them. Museums that deal with history as it is being made however, must try to understand history without the benefit of hindsight. To ignore the voice of contemporary artists when trying to understand contemporary thought misses the point.

Increasing financial pressures have contributed to a professionalisation of the art world. Specific roles are created and those that take them on are held accountable for their performance. Curators that perform their role quietly, choosing not to brand the exhibition with their name or allow artwork and artist to represent themselves, go unnoticed. If a curator wants a career, it is increasingly important that they both perform and lay credit to a larger role than mere producer of exhibitions. Aligned with Groys, this entails performing the creative act, creating an installation rather than an exhibition and framing the works according to the curatorial premise.

Karsten Schubert, a German art dealer and publisher, in his book, The Curator’s Egg refers to the cultural industry that has forced museums into relying on box-office successes in highly popular exhibitions. Ever more reliant on high attendance, museums can ill afford to take chances with the exhibitions shown. These exhibitions favour art easier to understand, that which is figurative, emotional and issue driven rather than abstract, intellectual or without a narrative.61

With this in mind, there is an increasing responsibility of the artist to question and problematise the role of the museum in the aesthetic acculturation of the artist in order to remain a participant in the cultural discourse. This discourse over the meaning, value, social impact and fate of the object has been taken over by gallerists, curators and writers, despite being of central relevance to the artist.62

At the centre of the discourse of art, artists should also be a part of the meta-discourse of art that takes place in institutions. Interventions and participation in exhibitions that go beyond the capacity as an exhibitor allow artists to improve institutions for their own means - to align the museum with their own interests proactively rather than waiting for the system to react\(^{63}\).

The 2013 Venice Biennale can be seen as a reemergence of the ability for curators to behave as artists. Massimilio Gioni’s *Encyclopedic Palace* was an expansive collection of art and non-art objects from different periods in time. Without distinguishing between these art and non-art objects, Gioni uses the exhibition to put forward his idea of “fashion[ing] an image of the world that will capture its infinite variety and richness”\(^{64}\) using attempts by people who have tried to do the same before. Not only does Gioni not distinguish the art from what is not, but he equates these objects for the sake of favouring his own argument.

In the prior biennale Franz West was asked to curate a Para-Pavilion within the arsenal. Initially sceptical of the request, West complied with this commission through replicating his kitchen complete with the art that hung inside it\(^{65}\). The Para-Pavilions of the biennale were intended to be “sculptural, architectural natural capable of harbouring works by other artists”\(^{66}\) that the curator would continue to work with, but West extends his liberties by acting as a curator himself and introducing artists into the biennale who would otherwise have not been included.

Artists such as Maurizio Cattelan have developed their practices in light of the curatorial system and don’t make work as much as they make whole exhibitions. Cattelan’s retrospective at the New York Guggenheim, *All* (2011), saw the majority of his back catalogue suspended from an aluminum truss in the centre of the building. With this as the main premise for the exhibition, the only room for the curator was in helping to arrange the ‘mobile’ and coordinate the production. However, Nancy Spector, the curator of the retrospective can be credited for not

\(^{63}\) Piper “Power relations within existing art institutions”, 262.  
\(^{65}\) Andreas Reiter Raabe “Hanging in the noise: The singular and collective art of Franz West” in *Art & Australia* 2011, vol. 49.  
only selecting Cattelan for the show, but also for believing in his idea and pushing forward with it.

In 1999 New Yorks’ Museum of Modern Art held an exhibition entitled *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*. Curated by Kynaston McShine the exhibition revealed the extent to which the museum had become a subject in art, as well as the somewhat ironic turn where this practice itself had become a part of the museum system.

Artist Andrea Fraser remarks that critique of institutions leads to institutionalised critique. The willingness to institutionalise this critique by the museum should be seen as a positive - a chance to create change from the inside. Alternatives to this are campaigning the museum from the outside or going off independently as Donald Judd did in creating Marfa as an archive. Fraser however continues to work within the museum despite the institutionalisation rather looking for ways to retain a criticality that is otherwise threatened.

Artists that take on the museum as a subject interrogate the mechanisms in place that structure the exhibition. Artists as curators expand and enrich the discourse of the field and it can be performed as a legitimate extension of the artist’s practice. Not only do artists use curation as a medium to explore the subject, but artists also genuinely work as curators in a parallel practice with an alternate venue to explore ideas.

The position of a curator, performing creative acts of selection, challenges the authorial autonomy of the artist. Groys sees it as a, “private, sovereign strategy of selection.” A position must be taken to acknowledge this authorship or to avoid it. If we are to accept the role of the curator in structuring and influencing the works of art they curate, then we must acknowledge this influence as a part of the exhibition – thus enabling the audience to distinguish between the decisions of the artist, the curator, the museum board and director and the corporate or government sponsors.

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The alternative is the artist-curator, the curator of artists who limits their role in the exhibition to selecting the artists. Despite the limited level of involvement, this still requires a deep understanding of contemporary art and a close connection with artists while allowing artists full control over their work. Walter Hopps as a commercial dealer staged historical shows at his Ferus gallery and introduced a relatively unknown group of artists to West-coast America. Hopps was recognised for his contribution, later becoming the director of and curator at the Pasadena Art Museum.

In spite of the work of artists like Hans Haacke the public is quick to forget the influence of directors of museums. In 1971 Thomas Messer, the director of the Guggenheim museum cancelled Haacke’s solo exhibition on the basis of inappropriate artwork and fired Edward F. Fry the curator of the exhibition for defending the work. Holding the balance of power, directors, sponsors and curators are unlikely to relinquish this back to artists, making it important to constantly reveal this and remind audiences of it.

Hans Haacke often revealed more about the system when the system refused to play along with his plans. Where directors or curators refused to go along with his ideas issues of censorship and the intricacies of museums were brought to light. Messer’s response to cancelling Haacke’s exhibition was, “I think that while the exposure of social malfunction is a good thing, it is not the function of a museum.” Haacke’s work functions within the context of the museum and gallery in order to desacralise the space around it. For Haacke the gallery is a necessary element for the meaning and functioning of the artwork.

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72 Burnham “Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art”, 136.
Critical Participation in the System

_We who collaborate in perpetrating the existence of galleries and museums are not spectators but participants, not audiences but players, planning and executing tactics for the pursuit of our own self-interests._ 73

From practices in the traditional sense of painting or sculpture, to practices in the expanded sense of discursive models that include writing, curating and activism across all areas of the art world, artists have and continue to focus on the system as a subject. This subject sits comfortably with many in their expanded practices and is included in understanding their work, even if it is traditionally a separate role such as that of a gallerist or writer. This is important for a number of reasons, in a modernist sense it continues an investigation into those structures that make and influence meaning, but more importantly it provides a voice for artists in areas where they are increasingly becoming spoken for. This is explored in the practices of the artists below, noting particularly the importance of critique from inside the system.

Following from developments in systems theory, isomorphisms discovered across diverse systems allow for knowledge gained of one system to be applied to another. Artists that focus on systems as a subject constantly place art in a relationship with other elements of other systems.

Traditional mediums have a particular history and theory and new work will relate to this body of work – a new painting exists at the end of a long line of paintings that came before. However, as the fields of sculpture and painting expanded over the course of the twentieth century, these lineages became harder to trace. A digital print of a television does not obviously reveal its connection to painting through the medium as in the work of New Zealand artist Simon Denny. Denny investigates the social impact of technology through his installations, focussing on the translation of information into image and image into information. For Denny, “It’s easier to see a structure

73 Adrian Piper “Some Thoughts on the Political Character of This Situation” in _Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume II_ (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) 43
in a medium other than itself” encouraging the pursuit of isomorphisms to understand his subjects.

This can also be seen as the shift from one system of display to another; allowing for information to be experienced in another way – taking a linguistic system to that of the visual. Denny often uses familiar modes of display such as corporate videos (Envisaging Vocational Rehabilitation, 2012) or the iTunes Coverflow (Corporate Video Decisions, 2011) to display his information. The corporate video is generally a crude attempt to convey as much information as possible through overt signalling and gestures, however sharing in art’s desire to communicate information visually; Denny reminds us of this through his installations.

Simon Denny refers to his practice as, “…trying to use details of changing technological forms to suggest some social and sculptural processes, often highlighting very specific material to point to more universal themes.”

Michael Stevenson (b. 1964) investigates histories through systems and systems through histories. His 2005 exhibition Art of the Eighties and Seventies investigated the creation of the Museum Abteiberg and the relationship it had with a Count Panza who was to loan his significant collection to the museum for which they were specially designing the galleries to suit. The Count’s insisting on an apartment above the gallery complicated the plans and roles of private and public partners and ultimately neither the collection nor apartment was included in the museum. This investigation into a particular history brings insight into multiple areas, such as the significant interest in minimalist art by European collectors, their influence over museums and the position of the citizen in this relationship.

77 Michael Stevenson “Art of the Eighties and Seventies” 2005 accessed 13 October, 2013
A 2008 series of projects saw Stevenson explore a history of the financial loan through performing museological loans. His first installation at the Kröller-Müller Museum borrowed historical artefacts from the Dutch Central Bank from the 1920s. The Dutch Central Bank’s role as lender of last resort in the Dutch banking crisis had significant impact on the Kröller-Müllers and consequentially on their art collection, influencing their museum.\(^{78}\) The work explores the complicated history as well as the relationship between capital and commodity in relation to art.

This parallel investigation into the systems of art becomes a central concern to artists such as Liam Gillick and Adrian Piper who use their practice as a form of activism.

Liam Gillick (b. 1964) is a New-York/London based artist that came to prominence with the YBAs and later closely associated with Nicholas Bourriard’s *Relational Aesthetics*. Gillick works with a broad practice of installation as an investigative model. He uses writing as both a complementary and parallel practice. Despite being sceptical of and deeply questioning the structures of art, Gillick is an active participant playing the role of artist, critic and curator.

*How can you be inside and a corrupting influence simultaneously?*\(^{79}\)

Gillick begins to answer this in an essay published in 2004, suggesting his research techniques as a means of practice provide an alternative model to the standing art-structures that disempower the artist.\(^{80}\) Here the artist is able to develop, challenge and change the existing structure because they are acting as an agent of change just like the other standing agents of change such as curators, museum directors and the market. Understanding the system of art as laterally organised, any element can and does have an effect on the system.


Liam Gillick’s curated *Umbau Raum* (1995) was an installation at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart where a reading room was created without an exhibition that it would normally accompany. Increasingly exhibitions have expanded beyond the showing of artwork to include information rooms, children’s activity rooms, gift shops and visitor centres – the *Umbau Raum* is modelled on the reading or information room and visitor centre\(^\text{81}\) and explores this as a structure in the museum.

Gillick refers to it as, “…something in itself and as such focuses attention on parallel structures in general.”\(^\text{82}\) Gillick’s philosophy of art is reflected in his creation of the *Umbau Raum*, where the artist is able to contribute to the reading and reception of the work through alternative strategies such as selecting materials to be seen alongside it and including his own writing while simultaneously revealing the museum structures present. For Gillick its importance in that structure is for a place to develop work beyond the primary art object that artists are normally limited to, empowering the artist,\(^\text{83}\) and giving them an opportunity to control how the work is ‘digested’ after it has been received in the exhibition.

In addition to his installation-based practice, Gillick also works as a writer where his texts function both as central to his work and in parallel to it.\(^\text{84}\) Texts explore the practices of other artists in the form of reviews and essays, replies to critics and can sometimes be seen as works in themselves.\(^\text{85}\) His *Constucción de Uno – Construction of One* (2004 -) is an on-going project investigating post-Fordism car production in Brazil, incorporating lectures, writings and artworks.\(^\text{86}\)


\(^{82}\) Gillick “A Viable Place: Der Umbau Raum”, 105.

\(^{83}\) Gillick “A Viable Place: Der Umbau Raum”, 108.


In a review of *Proxemics*, a collection of Gillick’s texts, Marcus Verhagen reinforces Gillick’s need to be a writer in order to challenge and expand the readings of his work since the publication of Nicholas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* in 1998\(^{87}\). Gillick’s work, despite sharing much in common, differs in key aspects that he elaborates on in his essays; such as a closer relationship to historical perspective and a more notional idea of participation than commonly associated with the movement.

It is this role of engagement that reveals Gillick’s knowledge of the system of art and the importance of addressing it. Regarding the new model of curatorial thinking Gillick refers to it as, “a peculiar grey area that requires more careful examination and potentially requires redirection.\(^{88}\)” The activism of Gillick allows a self-interested control over the destiny of the artwork beyond where the artist is normally in control of its fate, but more importantly preserves a voice for the artist in areas where they are likely to be spoken for. The suggestion of redirection is critical as it suggests an agency of the artist in controlling the world in which they function rather than complicity with it.

Gillick understands that whether he is responding to a critic through an essay or installing a work within a gallery his gesture is political.\(^{89}\) However, further to this he values an active role in revising critical structures, challenging the models set out by collectors, museums and journals such as *October*.\(^{90}\)

*Documents sur l’art* (1992-2000), a journal founded by Gillick and Bourriard can be understood as a clear way to retain a voice in the critical discourse, not only of his work but of other artists too.

Adrian Piper (1948), an American artist and philosopher is more political in both her artwork and her writing. Concerned with what she terms the

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\(^{89}\) Gillick “Driving Past a Building with a Camera Strapped to my Friend”,146.

\(^{90}\) Gillick “Driving Past a Building with a Camera Strapped to my Friend”,146.
“infantilization of the artist as bare producer of art” 91 Piper stresses the need for the artist to hold a voice in the interpretation of the work, its economic destiny and its social and political impact.

Piper sees the responsibility of both the artist and the viewer being removed as decisions are made for them regarding the ends to which their art serves. 92 It is this ‘being spoken for’ that concerns Piper lest she risk losing voice completely.

Piper recently requested to be withdrawn from an exhibition, Radical Presence (NYU, 2013) on black performance in conceptual art because she did not want to be marginalised as a black artist. 93 As marginalisation and otherness are concerns in Piper’s work she is able to express this by not participating and insisting her work in seen amongst her peers in terms of its broader contribution to art.

Vera Zolberg, a professor of Sociology, wrote elatedly in 1994 of a change that was happening where the museum was no longer the arbiter of public taste, but now it was in the hands of, “…Universities, governmental agencies, foundations, media critics, dealers, art advisers…” 94 and lastly artists. This positioning of the artist as last in the hierarchy of determining the fate of their own art is what artists like Gillick and Piper speak out against. Knowledge of the system and a constant participation in all areas of it are the only things that will work against the disenfranchisement of the artist.

Working outside of the system fails. Kaprow, despite trying to integrate life into art, always held back enough that it remained art. The artists that went

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93 “I appreciate your intentions. Perhaps a more effective way to ‘celebrate [me], [my] work and [my] contributions to not only the art world at large, but also a generation of black artists working in performance,’ might be to curate multi-ethnic exhibitions that give American audiences the rare opportunity to measure directly the groundbreaking achievements of African American artists against those of their peers in ‘the art world at large.’”
too far and worked outside of the system are not part of history and failed to change anything. Changes to language are made from the inside.

Isabel Graw, editor of Texte Zur Kunst, in an article written for another journal Mousse, outlined her opposition to the, “Rise of the Direct Source” as an “infiltrating” influence on critical theory.95

For Graw, communication is seen as a device for value production where social relations determine worth. Graw suggests that artists having a vested interest in creating value for their work use the interview to do this rather than letting the critic or market determine this. Despite being aware that this communication occurs across all aspects of art, it is only with artists that Graw sees a problem.

Graw has valid points when it comes to the lack of criticality that may be expressed in the personal, polite situation of an interview where objects are not addressed, however, this creates a false dichotomy by implicating it in a binary opposition to the critical review. Interviews and reviews are different forms of research and should stand side by side.

The critical review is often locked into a specific moment, with a specific paradigm and a limited subject. Reviews often seem relevant at a time and will lose or gain relevance with changing attitudes, Michael Fried’s Art and Objecthood (1967)96 being a prime example. In terms of value creation, the critical review of an object can be the guiltiest – bringing the object to the status of a fetish.

The interview, alternatively, relates directly to the artist in a more timeless manner and is able to span entire careers in single paragraphs while capturing the intimacies of a moment. Branden W. Joseph’s Random Order (2003)97 researches Robert Rauschenberg’s relationship to John Cage and the neo-

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avant-garde relying heavily on interviews with the artist, texts published by the artist and writings on John Cage on Rauschenberg. It is source material such as this that allows for a re-reading of the artist’s career and influence.

A single artwork is not necessarily representative of an artist. Not only do artists now create entire installations that work together as a whole, but artists like Gillick and Franz West will continually through their careers revisit works including them in new installations or altering them. We come to understand artists over their careers rather than through single works.

When changes in art have occurred, these have been spurned by artists. It seems counterintuitive then to stifle the very voice that initiates this change. The museum that exists to represent and preserve the work of artists should have a direct relationship to artists, rather than one mediated through an opaque hierarchy.

Vilém Flusser sees playing against the camera as an expression of freedom. Where the apparatus of the camera and photography, the system in its entirety is directed towards certain actions for the photographer, to act in defiance of these is to express freedom. To Flusser this is when photographers make, “chance and necessity subordinate to human intention.”98 Beyond this, however, the expression of freedom corresponds to a broader philosophy against post-industrial society.

Because the photographic universe imitates the post-industrial universe, an exploration of or a reaction against it is a way to explore and react against the larger changes that are happening.99 Because of art’s peculiar nature as a heterotopia of heterotopias it encourages experimentation and deviance. Alternatives to dominant philosophies become possible. Because of the isomorphisms that occur between systems, actions inside of art have far reaching consequences. All actions are then political actions and have this weight. The necessity of participation within the system becomes critical.

98 Flusser, Towards a Philosophy of Photography, 80.
99 Flusser, Towards a Philosophy of Photography, 75.
Conclusion

The systems within which art functions define and structure the way it is produced and received. The factors that influence it are diverse and discreet; the role for artists is to discover and reveal them.

As a way of seeing, systems analysis provides for a broad understanding, seeing things as a whole and for the strengths of relationships and interconnectedness. Structures are not only understood as how they are, but importantly how they function and affect each other. This knowledge can be used to manipulate structures as in the case of military systems analysis or merely to be aware of influence, able to see through the veiling of concealed power.

As a social contract, we are participants in systems regardless of our intention. To step outside of language is impossible. To not participate in the art system simply makes one irrelevant to it. The more extensive one’s vocabulary is, the greater the ability to communicate.

Changes that have occurred in the art world have affected the position of artists, sometimes for the better as well as to their detriment. These changes contribute to the evolution of the notion of an artist. Artists continue to work despite these changes as well as promoting them. Museums have become far more contemporary and responsive, including a more diverse range of practices. Curators have evolved roles from that of caretaker to a cultural voice, structuring conversations and interpreting culture and artist’s practices in new ways. At the core, artists are aware of and in control of their practices – anything that challenges the integrity of the artist and the work needs to be treated with scepticism.

Increasingly the expanded practice in which artists work includes art making, writing and curation. Not only can this be seen in terms of a systems based approach – interrogating the whole of practice and approaching it from multiple
directions – but also as a way to stake the legitimacy of the artist over the system.

As a heterotopia, art provides a testing ground for ideas where that which society does not permit can exist. This role encourages the thorough investigation of concepts, the testing of ideas and relationships. It is the space where death is confronted because in the normal world it is too confronting. But the spatial separation that occurs to make death into this unapproachable subject occurs within art too, and the hierarchy that prevents the interrogation of the gallery or institution is fabricated. Rather than a hierarchy, all of these ideas can be understood in terms of relationships, contextualising them in a system, whether the artwork or the art gallery is used as the medium.

As artists like Adrian Piper and Daniel Buren have made a priority to discuss in their work, the delegitimisation of the artist is a genuine phenomenon that happens with good and bad intentions driving it. Despite working around the artwork, the art world is manipulated to serve the needs of all of the components of the system, even at its expense. As this happens it becomes increasingly important for artists to claim a voice and play a role in their own fate in these areas.

Developments have occurred that allow the artist to concentrate on making work, however, whilst liberating the artist this creates a world where they no longer have a say once the work is made. Instead of conversations being generated by artists, philosophers and critics, they will be made by governments, dealers and collectors. To be an artist requires an engagement beyond this - to be an active participant in the art system. If the independence of the art cannot be guaranteed then it is up to artists to play a deciding role in its fate. If only the art that is accessible and understandable is exhibited, scores of artists will go unnoticed.

Aided by the championing of curators and writers, it is artists that first bring change through their work. Artists are key players in education, exhibition and production and should be active in this role. With such influence attributed to these roles they are deserving of commensurate critical attention.

As an artist myself, preserving both the integrity of the work as well as a space for that to exist are important. The activities of the artists profiled above, as well as those of many of my peers incorporate this broader practice; working with and in
galleries, with histories and institutions.

This paper traces multiple paths where the legitimacy of the artist and the artwork is a concern, as well as responses and ways of dealing with this. Artists create a space for themselves through their research into an area. Not only is this paper an investigation into systems, but a potential history at the end of which I find myself as an artist who participates in a broader definition of art. The chapters that come before, all work towards a definition of art listed by Bourriard in *Relational Aesthetics*, and it is within this definition that I practice. “Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects.”\(^\text{100}\)

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Appendix 1

A case study of Peloton; a Sydney artist-run initiative of which the author was a co-director. The gallery received state funding for several years and the role of this gallery within the state plan and art world is investigated through the analysis of its funding arrangements.

The gallery in a system of galleries

Galleries have become an integral part of artists’ careers. Not only do they provide a space for the exhibition of work, but they also present a public face for artists and have a positive effect on artists nurturing their development. A typical stratified gallery system distributes the responsibility of looking after each period of an artist’s career. Blue chip galleries are concerned with preserving the legacy of an artist and placing them into important museums and collections, smaller galleries that deal with younger artists play a vital role in publicising their work. In a commodity system galleries fulfil a market role, bring artworks to sale either to collectors or museums, returning artists with the capital that allows them to continue to practice.

Artists at various times in the world have taken it upon themselves to represent their interests through galleries addressing perceived inequalities in the system. This history precedes the Salon des Refuses and goes beyond any institutionalised record. Australia has a rich history of artists taking it upon themselves to exhibit their art, dating from the Contemporary Art Society in the early twentieth century to today’s Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs). So permanent a fixture have they become, that these ARIs are now a part of federal, state, and local government funding. This decision to fund ARIs places a degree of significance on the role the galleries play in terms of the art world and the community’s cultural scene.

This is investigated below through the account of the Sydney ARI Peloton, active between 2004 and 2013. Over the years the gallery was active, funding guidelines were created and changed to reflect the state’s understanding of the roles of these galleries. As a former co-director of the gallery this will be contrasted with an alternative account of these roles.
Peloton

Peloton preceded the current vocabulary that has been developed to understand what goes on in this area of art and thus had little to do with the politics associated with terms such as *Artist Run Initiative* and *Emerging Artists* that have come to describe the field. This difference in what Peloton was trying to do, and what the institutionalised role has become reveals significant facts about the art world of Australia from the side of both artists and government.

The gallery showed young and old artists from all over the world. The majority tended to be early to mid-career artists from Australia, more by convenience than policy. The standard the gallery held and its focus on good ideas meant that students tended not to show, but were asked where appropriate and mentored towards an exhibition. Established artists with careers may not have afforded the time, but were equally grateful for an opportunity to show outside of the commercial arena.

Run by a committee of artists, deeply concerned with the ideas of other artists and less concerned with a profitably business, the gallery tended to attract other artists as an audience rather than collectors. After art schools and without anything like the Cedar Tavern, art galleries tend to be meeting places for artists, and gallery openings were always well attended.

The role Peloton saw for itself was to make up for a lack of opportunities for critical contemporary art in Sydney. Not only did the directors believe that there were not enough opportunities for emerging artists to exhibit but also that too many mid-career artists were unrepresented or under-represented.

As the gallery continued to exist and the Sydney art scene changed, the issues that became important changed too. By the end of the gallery’s span, the number of ARI’s had dramatically increased providing more opportunity for emerging artists, but running with a business model that placed the burden of costs on the artist.

In terms of a system, anarchic, artist-run galleries can act as a pressure gauge. Where trends and policies steer art in a certain direction these galleries react and provide an alternative. They give representation to the under-represented and if not
make up for, at least illuminate the failures of the system.

This is different to how Australian funding bodies see this role. Where Peloton believed it was making up for inefficiencies and inequalities that should be covered by existing parts of the system, the Australia Council and Arts NSW both see a genuine role for ARIs or do not mark a distinction for these galleries at all.

Peloton was forced to close on notice that it did not receive funding for 2013. The short notice between hearing about the unsuccessful funding application and the end of the financial year did not allow the gallery time to source alternative funding.

According to Arts NSW, however, the body that had funded Peloton for the six years prior, the gallery had merely been unsuccessful in securing additional program funding for what was meant to be an already funded program. The grant criteria explicitly states that organisations shouldn’t be entirely reliant upon their funding to operate. Thus Arts NSW either encourages a program of charging artists, believes that a commercial model works and wants to support it anyway or sees philanthropy at a sufficient level.

But why fund an ARI at all? The NSW Government states on their funding guidelines that they invest, “…in artistic excellence and professional development and encourage[s] innovation by artists and arts and cultural organisations.” Peloton was one of these non-profit organisations that they saw contributing to the cultural sector. ARIs specifically fall under the general program funding area and are in competition with local government and other non-profit organisations. Organisations with vastly different business and funding models compete because the funding body sees them as fulfilling a similar role.

The Australia Council holds a slightly more nuanced understanding of the area, tailoring grants specifically for ARIs, “…to present programs and/or activities that

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102 ibid.
enrich the diversity of artistic practice in Australia and enable artists to make new work.\textsuperscript{104}

Not in a position to negotiate, organisations that receive the funding must take it and cooperate, while Arts NSW is able to both dictate the terms and absolve itself of any responsibility. The 30-35 thousand dollars that has been standard amongst small independent not-for-profit galleries in New South Wales is at the scale where it was hugely significant for small galleries like ours and far less significant to organisations a step up where wages and salaries are a concern.

Nominating the funding as additional program support absolves the organisation of the responsibility that follows when the funding is removed. It’s true that a Conservative politician could say that beneficiaries of the funding would move towards a state of ‘learned helplessness’, that they would become expectant and reliant upon future funding but Arts NSW’s role is solely to provide such funding and an under-resourced gallery is want to use that and focus their energies on performing their role of running a gallery. The contradiction between offering funding and not admitting responsibility for it was made clear in this year’s discussion paper released by Arts NSW,

\begin{quote}
“Many organisations are reliant on government income to support their operations. For the majority of organisations currently in receipt of Program Funding, funding does not stretch beyond covering ongoing operational costs. Other diverse sources of income (e.g. sponsorships and philanthropy) are required to sustain artistic work/ programs and organisational growth. However, many organisations, particularly in the small to medium sector, have limited ability to attract and maintain those diverse funding streams.”\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

Against the Conservative ideology, arts funding bodies do not have it in their charter to support entrepreneurs and small businesses in becoming self-sufficient, but rather to support culture through the organisations it funds. Arts NSW is charged with giving away money every year in a responsible manner that reflects

\textsuperscript{104} Australia Council, \textit{Arts Funding Guide} (Sydney: Australia Council, 2013), 67.
the states arts policies. Nuances in what these bodies prioritise as important are reflected in the range of organisations chosen for funding.

Despite the selflessness of giving, there are indeed responsibilities associated with it, as there are responsibilities with receiving. Galleries, on the receiving end of funding must spend it carefully and constructively in order to best honour the relationship between both parties. The benefactor, however, is also a part of this relationship and has a duty that goes beyond the initial benefit. Funding bodies thus become an integral part of the system, able to support and affect the art that is produced and exhibited.

The little amount of funding that most of these organisations live on means that any funding dramatically increases the resources available to the gallery. A gallery with funding is then far more likely to promote and archive their exhibitions, far exceeding the contributions of other galleries to the present and recent history.

For a gallery to have any kind of permanency, legacy and development, it needs to exist for longer than a year. When we look at the contribution of a gallery to a state's culture, its contribution to history is equally important. Unfortunately, fly-by-night and pop-up galleries do not achieve a lasting legacy and for some may disappear before they're known of.

Regular, consistent funding by Arts NSW allowed Peloton to plan into the future. Instead of working month to month, budgets could be created and plans made for the following year. Exhibitions were coordinated with artists from all over the world because of the time afforded. Choosing to fund galleries for only one year indicates this kind of ambition either as not a priority for the funding bodies, or one they are unaware of. Either way it suggests a more domestic role for these organisations.

Development of a community and an audience is impossible on a short scale too. It's peculiar then that audience development is both a priority for Arts NSW and an assessable criterion despite the hesitance to work with organisations to achieve this.

There is also the practical element that commercial leases are far easier to negotiate on longer terms, and a landlord will be hesitant to deal with a tenant that may not be funded for the length of that term. Smaller funding opportunities exist for
already funded organisations that allow for the betterment of the gallery’s program, if only you can last that long. With funding and time on one’s side, the gallery is then only limited by its directors. The once reactive, anarchistic side of ARIs has disappeared as they have become embraced by the system, such that these organisations are willingly footing the bill for the state’s cultural policy.

The funding of arts organisations relieves the stress of trying to source alternative streams of income. For theatre this allows directors to take chances in the plays they choose rather than falling back on ‘safe’ crowd-pleasing options. For galleries too often the alternative is to charge the artists to exhibit or to expect income through the sale of artworks. Both of these options encourage smaller, commoditised art to be produced.

Definitions become increasingly important when dealing with abstract ideas such as art and culture. How can the success of a gallery be defined in a quantifiable sense when what it does is quite intangible? We have not yet settled on a definition of art, let alone being able to place value judgements on it. Added to that is the complication of defining what constitutes a small not-for-profit gallery now referred to as an Artist-Run Initiative.

With artists themselves constantly questioning and re-evaluating what art is, how is the legislative body to keep up with their criteria for funding? Rather than funding and legislating art, the emphasis should be placed on artists, who will do as they do regardless of how current the latest Arts Funding review is.

Peloton was against charging artists to show at the gallery. Artists invest both time and money into creating work and this should be enough of a contribution. From there on, a curator or gallerist should validate the work by showing it in a gallery. In a commercial gallery it is capital that funds this, in an organisation such as ours it was the grant entrusted to us by the state that would fund it. Peloton prioritised the artwork and artist and did whatever possible to create independence for them.

For a healthy art world the funding of small organisations is important. These are organisations that are run on minimal funds by artists who genuinely want to do good by the artists they show, investing real time and money to get something intangible out. For Peloton this went beyond the supporting young artists, rather
becoming a discourse in its own right as artists from all over the world were connected through the gallery.

Without the financial constraints of a commercial gallery that must often cater to collectors, non-profit galleries are able to show new, experimental and un-commoditised artworks. Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr’s gallery Inhibodress introduced the beginnings of conceptual art in Australia in the early 1970s. Contemporary art organisations such as ACCA (Melbourne) and Artspace (Sydney) were initiated to specifically target this area of new, emerging and experimental art and continue to be both complemented and supplemented by smaller organisations.

The importance of these small organisations is now acknowledged by the commercial market, including ARIs and independent publishing houses in Art fairs. Recent examples include both Art Basel Hong Kong and the Sydney Contemporary art fair. Aware of the scope of the art world, art fairs encourage not only these galleries but will subsidise costs for newly established commercial galleries to lift the burden for their participation.106

In a system of galleries the ARI can potentially fill a role as an entry way to art for young artists, however, in reality the role of the artist-run gallery is far more complex than this and relates to the entire system. The agency of the artist here cannot be denied, using the gallery to manipulate the system.

Appendix 2

Selected recent work by the author

acrylic on wall
dimensions variable
installation view, Peloton, 2010
Portrait of a Gallery (2011)
pencil on paper
installation view, Sydney College of the Arts Degree Show 2011
No Photo (2011)
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
No Photo (Chroma) 2011
silkscreen print on paper
70 x 50 cm
dition of 25
CONTEXT (2011-12)
7 woodblock prints on Hahnemühle paper, wooden sculpture
dimensions variable
installation view, Firstdraft, 2012
Golden Rabbit (2011-13)
stills from digital video

Aipixi, the company producing ABC Mickey Mouse Sweets was nationalised and experienced its first re-branding in turn with the re-branding of China.

The naturalised drawing of a rabbit on the candy wrapper would undergo a transformation to the Manga Rabbit that features on the packaging more characteristic of Japanese animation.