

## Shifts in power between artists and curators: from institutional critique to new institutionalism

Artists' power to challenge and critique the institutional framework of art reached its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. The institutional critique practices of artists, Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Fred Wilson, in their individual and specific ways, contested, confronted, and aimed to change the nature of institutional hegemony. During the 1980s, changes in museum and gallery practice led by responses to shifts in cultural policy, funding imperatives, and a more open approach to audiences, provided a less fertile ground for this type of critique with a corresponding shift in power for artists. The possibility critique from outside the system (if this had ever been possible at all) was replaced by the notion of critique from within, in evidence in the practices of Andrea Fraser and Christian Philipp Müller. Artists' response to the innumerable constructs of power dispersed throughout the social system became possible through a practice of collaboration with institutions, while institutions themselves appropriated the construct of institutional critique in acts of self-validation, prompting curator / academic, James Meyer to ask in the early nineties; "Whatever happened to the institutional critique?"<sup>1</sup>

Recently there has been a call for the radicalisation of contemporary cultural institutions, attested by independent curator, Jonas Ekeberg in *New Institutionalism* (2003), curator / academic, Claire Doherty in "The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution!" (*Engage*, 2004) and writer / academic, David Beech in "Institutionalisation for All" (*Art Monthly*, March 2006). Building on recent curatorial experiences: Charles Esche at Rooseum, Malmö, Nina Möntmann at NIFCA, Helsinki and Maria Lind at Kunstverein München, this paper explores whether institutional radicalism is genuinely possible. Is it feasible to recuperate sixties-style enthusiasm or are we rooted in post-Fordian cynicism, where the art institution serves as a repository of cultural (read monetary) value? Can curators recuperate political radicality in contemporary art? Can artists through their practice make a difference? Examples are drawn from the Venice Biennale 2007, Documenta 12 in Kassel and a case study: Alfred Jaar: *The Politics of Images*.

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, J., 1993. *What Happened to Institutional Critique?* American Fine Arts Co., New York, reprinted in Weibel, P., 1994. *Kontext Kunst – Kunst der 90er Jahre* Cologne: DuMont.