



# Critical reflections on *Space for Interference*

PER GUNNAR EEG-TVERBAKK

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1. Critical reflections	3
2. Introduction	5
3. The selection of artists	9
4. Marianne Heier, <i>Pioneer</i> and <i>Saga Night</i>	10
5. Matias Faldbakken, <i>Untitled (Book Sculpture)</i>	21
6. Nathan Coley, <i>Thoughts from Above</i> , exhibition	29
7. Contextualising the works	44
8. The term Institutional Critique	54
9. The role of the curator	65
10. Conclusion	83

## **Critical reflections on *Space for Interference*** **Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk**

The research fellowship *Space for Interference* was completed in the period 2005–2009 at the Art Academy, Oslo Academy of the Arts, as part of the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme.

My primary supervisor has been Måns Wrangé, practicing artist and Dean of Kungliga Konsthögskolan, Stockholm. My second supervisor has been Claire Bishop, Associate Professor at the Ph.D. Program in Art History at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. I have also had ongoing conversations with Stian Grøgaard, Professor of Art Theory at the Art Academy in Oslo, and with art historian Ika Kaminka, during the final stages of writing up. I would like to thank everyone for their involvement, comments, objections and constructive advice.

As the dates reveal, these reflections have been written a disproportionately long time after the practical parts of the research fellowship were completed. The delay was due to family reasons, and I would like to thank the Oslo Academy of the Arts in Oslo for providing me with a place of work for this final stage of the process.

As part of *Space for Interference* the following works were developed and brought to completion:

Marianne Heier, *Pioneer*, exhibition at Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture, Oslo, 9.11 – 16.12 2007.

Marianne Heier, *Saga Night*, intervention at Maihaugen Museum, Lillehammer, 25.5. 2008 to present.

Marianne Heier, *Saga Night*, documentary film, first launched at Heier's exhibition *Jamais-Toujours*, at the Stenersen Museum, Oslo, 14.1 – 14.3 2010.

Matias Faldbakken, *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, intervention in Deichmanske Main Public Library, Oslo 13. 10– 26.10 2008.

Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above*, exhibition in Bergen Kunsthall and projects at various locations across the city of Bergen, 8.10 - 1.11 2009.

## **1. Critical reflections**

Critical reflection is a compulsory part of completing the fellowship programme. The rules of the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme state that this critical text should expand on the candidate's 'personal artistic position in relation to chosen subject area nationally and internationally, how the project contributes to professional development of the subject area, critical reflection on the process (artistic choices and turning points, theory applied, dialogue with various networks and the professional environment and critical reflection on results.)'<sup>1</sup>

The reflections are based on observations and experiences I made during and after the completion of the individual curatorial projects. I am, therefore, writing in the capacity of a contributing observer, who is assessing the material in retrospect, complete with the possibilities and pitfalls inherent in such a position. The temporal distance has relaxed the relationship to the different activities, but has also made it possible to see new aspects of the work. At the same time, this distance allows for retrospective rationalisation and interpretations that may obscure the actual turn of events.

As I now describe my working method and my collaboration with the three artists, it is not my freelance curatorial practice per se that is the object of study, but how the artists and I worked together under the specific terms of this research programme. The production budget granted to me and the project's time span made it possible for the artists and I to enter into a comprehensive and long-term collaboration. In that sense, the programme could be said to function as a protective bubble. For some artists this can be positive as it allows for in-depth study and concentration over time. For me, as the curator and producer, the protection of the programme also had negative implications, as the economic climate on the inside is very different from that of the outside, in the rest of the professional field. Funding for art projects in public spaces is almost never neutral, but tied – to varying degrees – to corporate or cultural-political interests, which is reflected in the curator or producer's mandate and must be taken into account when reflecting on these types of commissions. The funding for the research programme was not tainted in this way, since its main aim was artistic research and development. I expand on the issue in the section where I discuss my own role in the research project.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the 'Procedure for Final Appraisals' on the website for the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme: <http://www.kunststipendiat.no>.

In my case, the research process was allied to observations about my working methods as a curator and researcher. To procure the basic data, I had to perform this role while observing myself as a professional practitioner. The feedback from Heier, Faldbakken and Coley indicated that this factor did not noticeably affect our collaborations. It was always a real art production, rather than a mere research project, and this was the main priority throughout the process and in the different solutions found for each project.

The position of contributing observer is unlike that of the distanced researcher. There are, nevertheless, methods within the social sciences where a researcher takes part in what he or she is assessing, for example, 'participatory observation' or 'action research'.<sup>2</sup> Both belong to a tradition of qualitative research that seeks to map and understand social situations and contexts, which stands in contrast to a quantitative research ideal that seeks to provide concrete explanations on the basis of scientific verification. Both forms of participatory, qualitative research take place within a specific period of time, in which the researcher takes part on the same basis as the other participants in their natural environment. However, the researcher's association with the social context in question is only temporary, and he or she soon returns to their 'real' environment, namely the professional milieu where their loyalties lie. I have chosen to highlight these two forms of participatory scientific method because they conflate the role of participant and observer in the same way as I did for the *Space for Interference* project. My case is, nevertheless, somewhat different in that the field research took place in my own professional field. I am a curator and a producer, not a researcher who assumed this role temporarily. The area of research and the specific context I was observing was my own professional position. This aspect opens up for a potentially extensive discussion on the possibility for self-observation, but this is not an issue I will be pursuing here since self-observation was included as a fundamental part of the programme.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Participatory observation' is a research methodology from the social sciences where the researcher takes part in the social processes he or she is studying. This methodology is common within social anthropology, but it is also used by sociologists for the purposes of studying smaller groups or environments, such as the workplace. Similarly, 'action research' refers to a kind of research process where the researcher adopts a position in close proximity to the area of study, unlike the distanced observer, where he or she can have a direct and immediate impact on the object of research.

## **2. Introduction**

The background for my application to this research programme was the opportunity it offered to examine my own professional occupation and my position as a freelance curator with an educational background in fine art. I had a degree in fine art, but for several years I practiced as a freelance curator and producer; a role I gradually assumed as an extension of my artistic practice. You could say that my art practice fuelled my role as a curator and producer, which gradually became more evident, and was finally given room to flourish. Early on in my art practice, I initiated a collaborative project entitled *GOODGUYS BADGUYS* where two fictional characters were listed as the producers.<sup>3</sup> These two went on to commission other individuals (both real and fictional) to develop art projects that played with the notion of the authentic artist-subject and exposed the production of meaning in the art field as a fabrication. Later, this investigative approach towards the institution and the phenomenon of art was further developed through the independent art space Galleri Otto Plonk. The Plonk label opened up possibilities for a number of collaborative projects where artists experimented with exhibition concepts and devised new strategies for the distribution and promotion of art. A number of these concepts aimed at ‘contaminating’ the gallery and art practices by letting them come into contact with commercial and mass culture (for example, street culture, fashion, flea market aesthetics, corporate branding etc.). These manoeuvres functioned as display contexts, as well as independent artistic approaches. In a number of cases, the various levels merged, and it was difficult to distinguish the role of the artist and that of the curator.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of increasing involvement in exhibition productions, my identity as a curator crystallized. As a freelance curator I became drawn to working methods that reminded me of my art practice. My interest in contexts external to the art world itself, and the attempt to incorporate art projects into other social systems and discourses blurred the distinction between artist and curator.

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<sup>3</sup> *GOODGUYS BADGUYS* was a collaborative project carried out by Tor Børresen and myself in the period 1993-97.

<sup>4</sup> This conflation of roles was also noted by critics and commentators, for example, with reference to Galleri Otto Plonk, the art critic Veronica Diesen wrote: ‘[...] one could say that the gallery owners functioned as performers in that they quite consciously created a concept not only for the place but also of themselves as makers of the place. As such they did not put on the mask of the ordinary curator who watches his decisions from a distance. Rather, they were taking part as artists in the making of the gallery [...]. *Art action, 1958-1998: Happening, fluxus, intermédia, zaj, art corporel/body art, poésie action/action poetry, actionnisme viennois, viennese actionism, performance, art acción, sztuka performance, performans, akció művészet*, ‘From Art Action to Art Interactions Different Aspects of Scandinavian Action Art’ under the section entitled ‘Gallery Activism: Otto Plonk’ (Éditions Intervention, October 1998), p. 244.

My transition from artist to freelance curator led to what one might term ‘loss of purity’, but it also allowed for the development of issues that had concerned me as an artist. These included not taking the institutionalised framework for granted, but creating new formats and conditions for the production and display of art. As a freelance curator, I have carried out a number of projects in so-called non-art contexts and environments, outside the established display arenas for art. It is this type of practice that I am developing in my research project.

In the period 2005–2009 I invited the three artists Marianne Heier, Matias Faldbakken and Nathan Coley to create new works under the umbrella of the project *Space for Interference*. The invitation involved commissioning a site or context-specific work of art as part of my research project. My collaboration with Heier ran from January 2006 to May 2008, and culminated in a permanent art project at Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer. Faldbakken and I began our collaboration in December 2006, and finished in October 2008 with a two-week project at the Deichmanske Library in Oslo. The final project, involving Coley, began in December 2008 and ran until November 2009, culminating in an exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall and several displays in public spaces across the city of Bergen. The research fellowship provided the production funds and fees for the artists.

One of the conditions of the research project was that I would be curator and producer of the three art projects, and that I would participate in the different stages of each: from conception, through production, presentation and mediation of the finished work. The point of departure for my invitation to the artists will be expanded on in the next section, but a defining factor was my knowledge of and interest in their respective practices. It was, therefore, natural for me to work with them and develop existing aspects of their work or to inspire experimentation in different directions, which they themselves found fruitful in light of their existing artistic interests. My aim was to participate in the production of comprehensive art projects, rather than provoking isolated or ‘shadow’ works of art, by which I mean works that formally and thematically resembled each artist’s existing production, but – because they are a response to a specific commission – actually are merely isolated and irrelevant sidetracks to the artistic practice.<sup>5</sup> The aim was to avoid this trap and instead to create fertile ground for

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<sup>5</sup> Procedures for public art commissions that are automatic and that initiate, produce and conserve made-to-order public art generally do not create much discussion in the art world. Public Art Norway – KORO, for example, have Norway’s largest budget for the production of art, and it is telling how little involvement and discussion this organisation creates within the professional art world. This may have something to do with organisational models and their consensual approach. There are a number of reasons why a work of art created within the confines of a commissions almost never sets a discursive or critical agenda.

important works, which also had the potential to suggest new directions within each artist's practice.

The works produced as part of *Space for Interference* were the distinctive product of each artist's approach and were, therefore, clearly different. There were overlaps in the sense that all three took place, fully or partly, outside the traditional display arenas for art and intervened in the specialised areas of other social spheres, properties, systems, tasks and mandates. They were part of an art historical trajectory that connected them to terms such as 'site specificity', 'interventionism' or 'institutional critique'. The works can be seen as part of a form of Institutional Critique that has largely taken place within the art institution itself, as well as being linked with interventionist artistic practices and art activism, which has traditionally taken place outside the art gallery and, thus, had weaker ties to the art world's systems of finance and distribution. At the same time, aspects of all three works challenged and stretched these terms.

In these critical reflections text, I discuss the interplay and conflicts of interest that arose during the process between the artists, the institutions involved and myself. The emphasis is on my own role, but I also discuss the specific works produced as part of the research project as they contributed to defining my working methods and the commissioning process.

The three art projects produced under the *Space for Interference* umbrella serve as a basis for reflections on how I, as an independent curator, am involved in the progress and completion of the art productions, which took place outside the specialised space of the art gallery - works that can be deemed site or context-specific, where the involvement and contribution of other fields was a prerequisite for the realisation of the works of art. By participating in the

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The commissioning body's approach, production apparatus, bureaucracy and political, social or economic expectations all seem to play a part. Organisations or departments that administer public art commission often interfere in what is usually considered to be the artist's domain. This may include interventions in the research stages of the work, which then affects the professional decisions made by the artist. Commissions are mostly allied to specific building projects, and the location of the works of art is often decided before the artist enters the frame. The text describing the commission is often highly detailed and prescriptive in terms of the thematic, format, location and artistic medium. For many artists, these choices are central to the creative process that culminates in the work's completed form. Originality and relevance often occur where there is room for surprises, contradictions, contrasts and disharmony, even failure. When the uncontrollable elements are removed, even established and experienced artists risk becoming reduced to shadow versions of themselves. There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule, for example, Richard Serra's classic *Tilted Arc* (1981) commissioned by the United States General Services Administration's Arts-in-Architecture Program for the Federal Plaza in New York, NY, USA or Hans Haacke's public art work *Der Bevölkerung* (2000) for the Berlin *Reichstag*, initiated by the German *Bundestag*.



different working processes from start to finish, I was able to test which responsibilities and tasks naturally fell to me, and which I could potentially take on. In a sense, I assumed the role of guinea pig for the exploration of the role of the freelance curator. One significant change to the curatorial role brought about by the rise of site-specificity and the altered and expanded concept of 'site' is the fact that the curator now occupies a space between the artist and the traditional position of the curator (as someone who displays and organizes pre-existing objects). In *Space for Interference* the initiative, distribution of responsibilities and the power relations shifted between the artists and myself. The tension and uncertainty this created resulted in a form of unrest, which was partly productive and partly a complicating factor. I expand on this issue in the sections dealing with each artist, and in the section that explores my role as the curator.

In the case of Marianne Heier, I took my lead from the artist's own approach to production, which involved using structural and institutional conditions as the material and topic of her art projects. Here I assumed the role of a sounding board and a facilitator. In relation to Matias Faldbakken, I did the same, but I also functioned as a source of inspiration and encouragement. I put forward an interventionist aspect of his practice that has not previously been highlighted. Both cases were long-term collaborations, based on prior professional contact and knowledge of each other's respective practices.

Nathan Coley's project involved a more formulated commission on my part, where I, to a greater extent than with the other two, created a framework that the artist responded to. The framework I presented him with turned out to be a leading one and a conflict of interest arose, which led to a turn in the project, and, on my part, a shift in my own role. A more in-depth description of this scenario can be found in the section on Coley's work.

### **3. The selection of artists**

Marianne Heier, Matias Faldbakken and Nathan Coley are all established artists with their own specific approaches and career trajectories. Faldbakken and Coley are both part of an international art scene: they have several galleries and have participated in a range of international exhibitions and biennials. Faldbakken predominantly shows in museums and galleries, whereas Coley has made a number of site-specific works, and oscillates between showing in traditional exhibition spaces, urban environments and landscapes. Heier, despite the fact that her work has been shown in galleries and exhibition spaces across Europe, is not quite so internationally oriented and has predominantly been active in Norway. This is partly related to her time-consuming working method, which I explore in more detail in the chapter that deals with her work specifically. Despite these different exhibitionary approaches, there were certain common denominators that determined my selection of these three artists specifically. They all make conceptually-based objects or sculptures that develop from an investigative, research-led practice, but which also retain their own autonomous quality. All three artists point to the symbolic quality and power inherent in physical structures: Heier through her specific improvements levied at particular institutional conditions; Faldbakken in his appropriation of signs and artefacts belonging to different subcultures; and Coley through his architectural mock-ups and models, at once both concrete and imaginary, showing how edifices can manifest and represent collective political and religious systems of thought.

A further common denominator is that all three artists have shown their work both in traditional art viewing spaces and in environments and contexts where the works come into contact with a non-specialised audience and touch other fields and cultural milieus. As a freelance curator (and previously an artist), I have a similar approach, where my practice spans both exhibitions in conventional display contexts and in extra-artistic contexts in an attempt to incorporate art projects into wider social systems and discourses. Notwithstanding their respective differences, I found within these artists' practices resonances with my own approach. Part of my motivation for working with these artists was a desire to become better acquainted with their working methods and to gain insight into the way they think, by developing productions in collaboration with them, which explored some of the potential avenues I felt lay implicit in their existing practices.

**4.Marianne Heier, *Pioneer*, exhibition in Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture, Oslo, 9.11 – 16.12 2007.**

**Marianne Heier, *Saga Night*, intervention at Maihaugen Museum, Lillehammer, 25.5, 2008 to present.**

My previous contact with Heier had included a collaboration in relation to the UKS Biennial in 2000, where I was one of four co-curators.<sup>6</sup> At the time, Heier had just returned from Milan, where she received her education. A few years later, in 2005, I saw her solo exhibition, also at UKS (the Young Artists' Association), where several works highlighted thematic and strategic problematics that were central to her practice. I observed that her artistic interventions seemed to be triggered by her own close contact and daily experiences with a particular institution. This was particularly the case for institutions where she had been employed. As an employee, she saw and experienced aspects of the various working environments that struck her as questionable. Financing gifts in the form of architectural or interior improvements became her method to constructively change what she perceived as dysfunctional environments for the staff.

One of the works that was documented at this UKS exhibition was *Construction Site* (2005) produced when she was employed as an invigilator at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo.



Marianne Heier, *Construction Site* (2005), National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

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<sup>6</sup> The other three curators were Kjersti Myrhagen, Tiril Schröder and Elin Sørensen.

Heier discovered that the invigilators did not have access to the staff canteen, but were left to their own small and rundown room for lunch breaks. She initiated the refurbishment of this room and paid for most of the associated costs.<sup>7</sup> As an employee, she took on issues that strictly belonged to the employer's area of responsibility. From the outside, of course, this made the museum look like it could not meet its duties as an employer, and exposed how badly it treated its staff. As a consequence of *Construction Site* a specific institutional hierarchy was revealed and discussed, both internally in the National Museum and more broadly within the media.<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of this exhibition and my previous contact with Heier, I invited her to a collaboration where she, according to the principles of the project set out above, decided on the location and the approach. The collaborative project started with Heier putting forward some ideas, which were largely unfinished and, therefore, somewhat unclear. They were all based on her meeting with and experience of Maihaugen Museum, an open-air museum of cultural history at Lillehammer and how it presented Norway as a nation.

The initial phases of an art project are often silent and vulnerable. It was, therefore, not a given that I would take part in this stage of the project. Because of our collegial relationship of trust, it was, nevertheless, possible for me to respond to and to critique Heier's initial ideas. It is common for curators (and also occasionally for gallerists) to enter into a dialogue or an exchange of ideas with the artist at different stages of the art-making process in relation to different strategies or the development of specific works. The curator's input can take the form of constructive suggestions, attempts at persuasion, or outright battle. Since these discussions are mostly carried out in confidence – behind the scenes as it were – they are seldom focussed on. In the cases where such discussions are published, they are carefully edited and adapted for public consumption. In this text, I touch upon some of the discussions I had with the artists.

Let me return to the order of events. The selection of Maihaugen as a site remained and after a few internal discussions, the project had developed sufficiently that we could contact the

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<sup>7</sup> Heier covered the expense of architects and construction workers to a total of 128 000 Norwegian kroner. (15 000 Euros) The museum provided the construction materials.

<sup>8</sup> Media reports and reviews have emphasised how Heier's gift exposed negative aspects of the Museum, for example, Aksel Kjær Vidnes's review 'Kritisk oppussing' ('Critical Refurbishment') in *Aftenposten* 16 November 2005 and Marit Paasche's critique 'En gave som svir' ('A Gift with a Sting') *Aftenposten* 18 November 2005.

Museum. The idea of the project was based on Heier gaining access to the physical territory of the Museum and being given a mandate to intervene in their core activity, which is the collection. Heier and I developed our strategic approach and together met formally with the Museum's director and head of communications and marketing. They accepted the terms of our proposal and Heier could begin.

Marianne Heier's works for *Space for Interference* spanned a number of years, and involved several stages of work and forms of presentation. The final work was entitled *Saganatt* (Saga Night).<sup>9</sup> The starting point for this work can be traced back to November 2006. Heier had begun to buy oil and offshore shares for the money she received through a government grant for artists.<sup>10</sup> Heier then placed the income generated by these activities in shares in the oil and offshore industry. In this way, she reinvested the grant money back into the origin and main source of the Norwegian economy. Her investments became a point of departure for an exhibition *Pioneer* at Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture in Oslo in November 2007, where she displayed photographic and video works drawing parallels between the oil industry, Norway's image of itself as a nation, and Heier's own art practice that is part of the Norwegian economic landscape.

The video entitled *Pioneer* depicted the barren depths of the ocean, accompanied by a former North Sea diver's voice-over.<sup>11</sup> Six light boxes – titled *Landscape* – mounted on the wall presented the fluctuations of a share price, the curves of which resembled dramatic mountains, creating associations to National Romantic painting. The exhibit drew an aesthetic parallel between two eras of Norwegian nation building and between two types of rhetoric: the oil industry with its revolutionary significance for the Norwegian economy and the romantic idealization of 'quintessentially Norwegian qualities'. Heier's idea was to question the role of culture in the construction of the national sense of self. Despite the nation's *nouveau riche* position, the Norwegian self-image still appears to be rooted in traditions and Protestant ideals tied to frugality and hard work.

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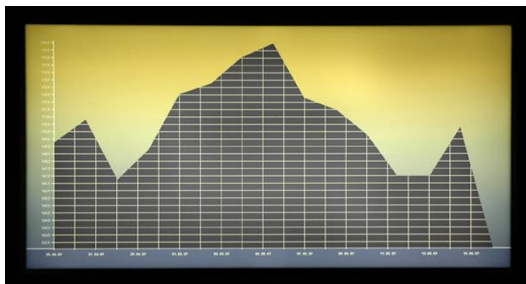
<sup>9</sup> *Saganatt* translates as 'Saga Night' and is taken from the first verse of the Norwegian national anthem.

<sup>10</sup> The Government grant for artists is intended to serve as salary, thereby allowing artists to free up their time from bread-and-butter jobs to focus on their artistic development. Nevertheless, Heier opted to spend this time taking paid jobs. These temporary jobs all shared a common didactic purpose that reproduced Heier's own artistic expertise.

<sup>11</sup> Drawing on his own experience, he tells the story of the first hazardous dives that laid the foundation for the Norwegian oil adventure.

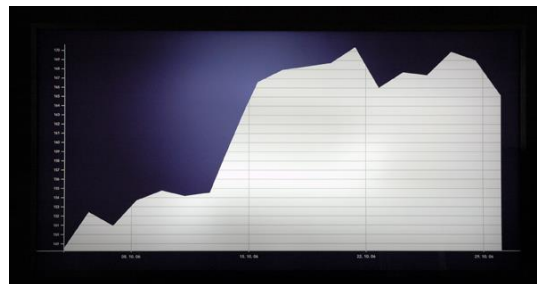


Marianne Heier, *Landscape*, light boxes (2007), Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture, Oslo (6 elements, each 170 x 87 x 17 cm.) Photo: Marius Wang.



*Landscape*: 25. 04. 07 - 16. 05. 07 (Detail)

Photo: Marius Wang.



*Landscape*: 17.08. 06 - 16.09. 06 (detail).

For this exhibition, my role was that of a freelance curator hired to enter into a dialogue with the artist with regards to the selection of works, the installation, and relations with the media. The gallery's director and curator to a great extent left the installation and profiling of the exhibition to Heier and myself. The exhibition functioned as an independent presentation of her work, but also as an introductory phase for the later, larger work, which would complete the project. The exhibition, therefore, marked an intermediate stage, rather than an end product, which was the case with Nathan Coley's project and which I will be discussing later on.

Heier sold her oil and offshore shares in April 2008, thus inaugurating the next phase of the project, and using the earnings to finance the gift to Maihaugen.

Maihaugen is Norway's largest museum of cultural history and receives the highest number of visitors. The outdoor collection consists of around 200 houses and is divided into three sections: 'the Village' (*Bygda*); 'the City' (*Byen*); and 'the Residential Area' (*Boligfeltet*), which reflect different historical eras. The collection covers 500 years of Norwegian history, and for many it represents what is fundamentally 'Norwegian' in our culture.

As in Heier's other projects, this project utilised the power of the gift. As we know from the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the gift is not 'free': it invariably requires some form of reciprocity.<sup>12</sup> Only by giving something in return does the recipient avoid being seen as unworthy compared with the donor. As a system, the gift economy affects social relations and the positions the giver and receiver in relation to each other. In this case, Heier used the gift as part of a strategy aimed at reformulating the role of the artist, which she had also used in several other works.<sup>13</sup> The idea is that Heier's gift sets her in a position where she has both the power and the responsibility of changing her relationship – as an artist – to different societal institutions.

Heier explains it as follows:

'In order to maintain the role of art as a free voice in society, it is necessary to fight the art field's assigned role as an economically helpless activity, and instead make the artist visible as a public, responsible and serious operator [...] A marginalizing strategy produces art that can be rejected the very second it commits or provokes. 'Eccentric' means outside the centre. Art should be central.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In the essay 'The Gift', Marcel Mauss's basic notion is that a contribution (a gift or a service) requires reciprocation; if not, the receiver will end up in a shameful and unworthy position vis-à-vis the giver. Any delay in reciprocating will make the recipient diffusely indebted to the donor. In this way exchanging gifts create social obligations and lasting bonds between the parties. Mauss's original piece was entitled *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* ('An essay on the gift: the form and reason of exchange in archaic societies') and was originally published in the *Année Sociologique* in 1923-1924.

<sup>13</sup> For example *Permanent Installation (5783 Euros)* (2005) in Sparwasser HQ, Berlin. The work consisted of an architectural model, a speech and a cheque for 5 783 Euros that Heier donated to the gallery. The money had been earned through odd jobs in Norwegian art institutions over a period of eight months, and was earmarked for architectural improvements to the exhibition space. Another example is *Promesse de Bonheur* (2008), a work that was launched at Art Academy in Oslo in the main entrance. It took the form of a refurbishment, including specially designed glass lamps and furniture. The walls were brought back to their original colours, and new, functional furniture was installed. Heier's typical handover speech was also part of the work. See <http://www.marianneheier.org/> for further information about this work.

<sup>14</sup> Marianne Heier's text contribution to Tone Hansen's, 'Manifesto for An Independent Art Arena, An art project by Tone Hansen in the Norwegian newspaper', *Morgenbladet*, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005.



In this case, Heier's gift came in the shape of an asphalt sculpture entitled *Saga Night*. It was an ordinary, if somewhat peculiarly shaped, asphalt road creating a distinct physical division in the gravel footpath that runs through the museum's outdoor collection.



Marianne Heier, *Saga Night*, Sculpture/ asphalted road (2008), Maihaugen Museum of Cultural Heritage, Lillehammer. Photo: Marco Vaglieri.

The sculpture was placed in the section of the Residential Area, which consists of detached houses from the twentieth century. This section is organised chronologically along the footpath and reflects a society enjoying rapid growth, where the middle classes are affluent and live comfortably. This era stands in sharp relief to the rest of the outdoor museum, which depicts a society of farmers living in cramped, crowded and dark, little wooden buildings. The picturesque gravel pathway that runs through the whole museum connects the sections and the different eras, and continues uninterrupted through the Residential Area under the name of Lyngveien. The continuous gravel pathway functions both visually and practically as a seamless connection between the various parts of the museum, thus connecting modern-day Norway's wealth with the smallholdings of the seventeenth century farming communities.



Heier explains her experience of Maihaugen as follows:

‘I was born in 1969, the year after the first substantial oil discoveries in the North Sea. When I walk up Lyngveien and pass the Residential Area, I get a sense of *déjà vu*. The chronological order of houses shown here from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s fit with my own personal history. It feels very familiar; at the same time something is not quite right ... However, it took a while before I realised that it was the road that was the problem. The light gravel is the same as in the rest of the display, and gives the Residential Area a romantic feel that this era, in reality, did not have.’<sup>15</sup>

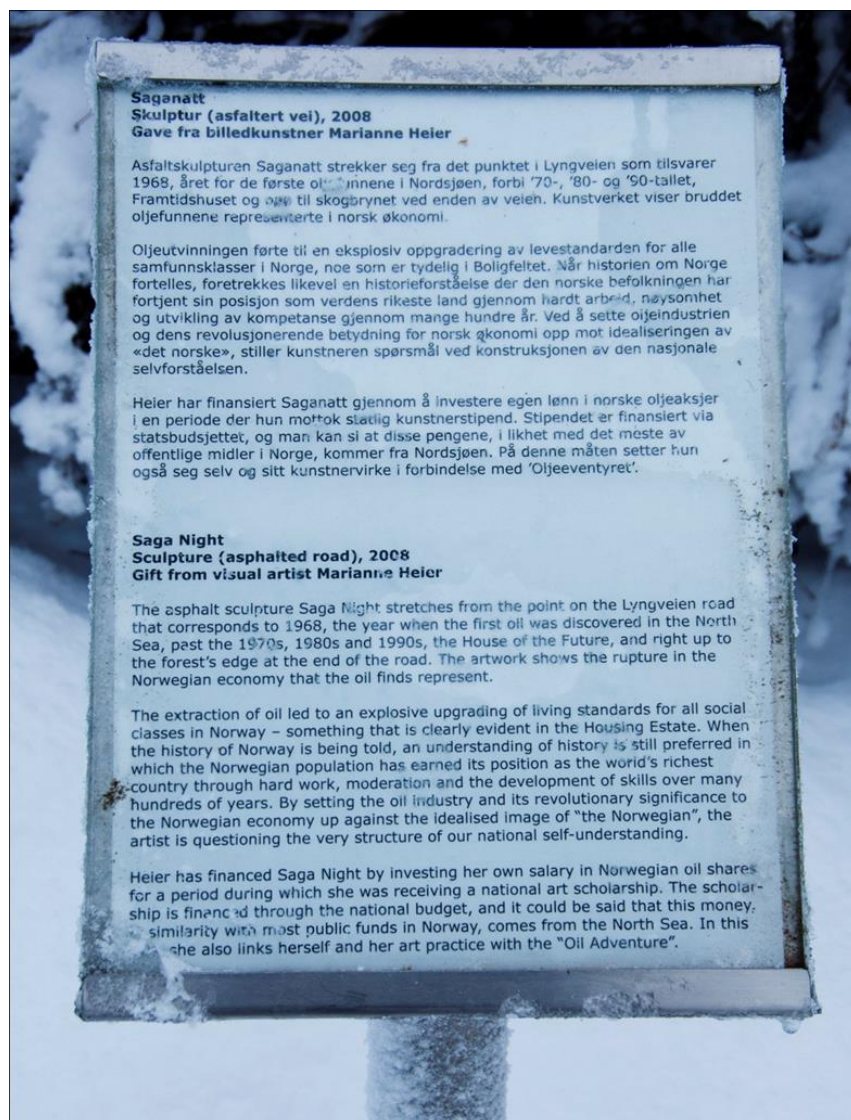
In other words, the museum had created environments that were chronologically accurate, but in which the history of the oil discoveries had been left out. The rise in living standards epitomised by the houses around Lyngveien was not explained. The gravel pathway implied a connection between the poverty, toil and stringency of the past, and today’s welfare society; the implicit narrative being that we are rich in Norway because we worked hard to elevate ourselves from a peasant culture. In short, we deserve our present wealth.

The asphalt sculpture *Saga Night* began at the point in Lyngveien that corresponds to 1968, the year when oil was first discovered in the North Sea, and continues to the current day. The sculpture became a physical, visual threshold that incorporated the North Sea oil discoveries into Maihaugen’s history of Norway. The improving element in *Saga Night* consisted of inserting the ‘missing link’ into the museum’s collection, namely the story of the Norwegian oil discoveries. At the same time, it highlights the premises of Heier’s own practice. As an artist, she is dependent on grants and funding; she is part of the government’s economy. This experience of being implicated was – as mentioned above – the factor that initially triggered her intervention into the museum to change the version of history it represented. With this work and by using herself as an example, Heier, inscribed and highlighted the role of the artist in the story of how modern Norway developed, as well as questioning this role and artist’s responsibility within the image of Norway as a nation that Maihaugen portrayed. In this sense, *Saga Night* not only critiqued Maihaugen as an institution, but also the Norwegian (state-sponsored) art system, and the individual artist’s connection to it.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Finding and eliminating irritations’, Interview with Marianne Heier, published on [www.innblanding.no](http://www.innblanding.no).

Common to *Saga Night* and all of Heier's works is their unusually transparent, almost instructive character. This was also the case in the official delivery of the gift of *Saga Night*.



*Saga Night* - museum signage

Photo: Ine Eriksen, ©Maihaugen Museum of Cultural Heritage, Lillehammer

In addition to the fact that Heier's donation was highlighted on the Museum's signage, she underlined it further in her speech that formed an integral part of the presentation of her gift.

In giving the speech, she assumed the role of a philanthropist or a political figurehead officially presenting a donation, but replaced the ceremonial tactfulness with a personal and somewhat admonishing tone, thus highlighting the power dynamics invariably implicit in the

relationship between donors and recipients where the one who gives always thrones above the one who receives.

As in other of her works, Heier used the speech performance to reformulate the role of the artist: from being free and ‘irresponsible’ to taking on wider social responsibility. This relates to her view of art as a means of changing society. Heier’s initiatives have consisted, however, of more than just using a gift: as a shrewd means to potentially belittle the object of her critique. In all her works, there has been a clear connection between art, life and work, and her practice straddles all three. The poetic and the functional aspects of the projects seem to be one and the same thing. In many of her works – like the above-mentioned *Construction Site* – the art has become part of other people’s working week and daily lives. Any wear and tear, changes or alternations do not compromise its autonomy as a work of art because it is already embedded as part of the institution and the working day, in its dual role as a work of art and a form of utility object. The problem only arises if the works are given status as pure works of art.<sup>16</sup> This would prevent the integration of art, life and work, integral to Heier’s practice. The work is intended to reflect her own situation, where she – like most other people today – relates to several parallel systems at the same time, and alternates between being a participant and an observer.

One of Heier’s stipulations was that the asphalt sculpture – despite being distinguished as a work of art – should be treated in the same way as the surrounding museum structures and be integrated into the collection of cultural history. The museum accepted this, and has included the sculpture, not just physically in the collection, but as part of the canonised version of Norwegian cultural history that this institution constructs and presents. Today, it is the museum, as much as the artist, which exhibits and owns *Saga Night*.

When Heier creates her works of art, she simultaneously recreates and reforms the social institutions that surround her. In this respect, a possible reading of Heier’s practice is one of a constructive critique of the given order. Her objective is to point out the potential for change through specific suggested alterations. In this sense it is an active form of critique, rather than a finger-pointing exercise.

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<sup>16</sup> The way in which Heier seeks to ‘de-artify’ her works, distinguishes her practice from early Conceptual art, which accentuated its identification as ‘art’. Heier’s approach aligns her practice with a number of historical and contemporary art movements, from the historical avant-garde’s ambition to unite art and life to current-day Relational Aesthetics.

‘A significant level in my work is the functional. This is important to me because the possibility of actual use of my interventions allows them to break out of being purely symbolic or representational, in favour of appearing as actual, concrete alternatives to existing conventions. Rather than standing as representations of ideas, I would like my works to be a realisation of those same ideas. We do not know the limits of what is possible. The pragmatic quality of my approach and of the result of my work also means that, if it is possible for me, it is equally possible for others. Change is possible and the categories with which we understand and classify the world can potentially be redefined, if we wish so.’<sup>17</sup>

One may counter this notion by arguing that Heier places the responsibility for (social) change fully on the individual. Heier and I discussed this issue, and it relates primarily to her early works, which were particular to her place of work. Heier took real, part-time jobs out of necessity, and it was by virtue of her position as an employee that she initiated concrete changes and improvements in the workplace.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, she occupied a dual professional identity to fall back on. From this position, she contended: ‘I can do it, anyone can’. The problem is not the system, but the apathy within it. I commented that I thought I could discern hint of neo-liberalism in that sentiment. Heier countered that she did not think that taking personal initiative could be attributed to neo-liberalism. It was rather human potential. Everybody has experiences that enable him or her to see the world and society from different angles at the same time, and to imagine new opportunities.

Heier’s artistic practice is unusual, but is not, of course, not unique. It is possible to compare her practice and approach with that of British artist Carey Young, who also enters into dialogue with and intervenes in social fields beyond the art world. In Young’s case, the interventions usually take place in the field of business, where she appropriates a corporate language, rhetoric and mindset. For example, in the work *I Am a Revolutionary* (2001), a video documents the artist being coached by a business skills training manager in how to repeat the work’s title in a convincing way. Another examples, is Young’s performance *Speechcraft* (2007) where she used the international public speaking club Toastmasters

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<sup>17</sup> Marianne Heier in an e-mail to Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk dated 9.6.2009

<sup>18</sup> For example, *Construction site* (2005 – 06), the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo and *Poster Project* (2000 - 03), the Blood Bank of the University Hospital, Oslo. For further information about these works, see [www.marianneheier.org](http://www.marianneheier.org).

training session as a readymade performative situation, where she asked speakers to respond to various objects taken from her studio. The speeches were then evaluated by the Toastmasters' members and the audience, in accordance with the club's traditions. What characterises Young's approach is that, like Heier, she seeks to combine acting inside a social institution or environment with observing and examining it, so as to allow an artistic intervention to expose the state of things. It is not a confrontation or direct criticism, but a strategy of insertion, with reference to Cildo Meireles's 'Insertions into Ideological Circuits'<sup>19</sup>. The difference between Heier and Young's respective approaches is the position the adopted vis-à-vis or within the social institutions they interact with. The distance and the gesture inherent in Young's approach depart from Heier's dedication, commitment and stated objective of improvement. Heier's work stems from a concrete desire to change the host institutions, a form of determination that also distinguishes her practice from another potentially relevant reference, namely the Artist Placement Group (APG), founded in London by Barbara Steveni and John Latham. APG was an artist's group, which wanted to move artistic practice out of the gallery and into different working environments. The role(s) APG allocated to artists in the various organisations and businesses were complex and somewhat unclear. One idea was that the artist's presence in the host institution would promote a form of lateral thinking and introduce aesthetic and visual means of expression, which would counter a culture dominated by conventional written and oral language. There were no predetermined outcomes to the artist's work, and the artist entered into dialogue with the host institution without any set idea or intention. Behind this pragmatic approach to situating artists in a wider social context, lay the belief that 'ideally, the direct contact between artists and people in organisations would leave both changed for the better.'<sup>20</sup> APG have been criticised for their perceived naivety, but as Susannah Silver writes: '[...] the legacy of the 'Artists Placement Group' continues to influence the philosophy and development of public art practices both in Britain and America. The structure of the placement was adopted by government arts agencies and served as a template for artist-in-residency schemes.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'Insertions into Ideological Circuits' is the collective title for a series of art works initiated by Meireles in 1970, which made it possible for him to reach a wide audience while circumventing the political censorship that permeated Brazil at the time. The project consisted of printing his own political texts and images onto different objects, which were part of an existing and comprehensive network of distribution, and that had a value in themselves, which discouraged people from destroying them such as paper currency or Coca-Cola bottles that could be exchanged for money.

<sup>20</sup> Susannah Silver, *The role of artists in the public realm: an investigation into artists' generative processes in context - A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Robert Gordon University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy* (Robert Gordon University: Open Access Institutional Repository, June 1999), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.2

**5. Matias Faldbakken, *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, intervention at Deichmanske Public Library in Oslo, 13 - 26 October 2008.**

Matias Faldbakken's artistic production primarily consists of gallery-based works, displayed in *Kunsthallen*, museums and commercial galleries, and it was my acquaintance with these earlier works that led to me invite him to take part in this research project. Much of his earlier work consisted of the appropriation of signs and artefacts derived from various sub- and countercultures, which were then displayed as conceptual art objects, thus depriving them of their original function as, for example, gang codes, rockers' props, or activists' symbols as seen in the work *Chain of Events* (2005), which consists of a 24 karat gold chain in a black bin bag. Several commentators have pointed out that by turning forms associated with sub- and countercultures into art, Faldbakken problematized the oppositional role that art has allotted to itself. This referential material included avant-garde art movements, and Faldbakken often alluded to key works from the history of Conceptualism, and recycled these motifs in works that frequently connected avant-garde counter-strategies to the phenomenon of entertainment. He sought to make the avant-garde entertaining and vice versa, both thematically and practically. The fact that commercial, mainstream culture adopts and assimilates the rhetoric of countercultures and thus incorporates transgressive expressions is a well-known phenomenon. As part of his artistic practice, Faldbakken has often sought to test how elastic this phenomenon can be. To do this, he has also entered the field of literature where the mechanisms of distribution and the media attention are far more extensive than in the arena of contemporary art, which tends to be more non-conformist.

Faldbakken's appropriations did not only refer to objects, but also to actions, such as the artistic recoupment of acts of vandalism, carried out by individuals or organised groups with or without political aims in mind. Like the counter-cultural symbols Faldbakken draws on, these acts are relocated and transferred to the art gallery. The effect is to aestheticize and depoliticize the 'original' act, which took place in a completely different context, as seen in the work *Cultural Department* (from 2006/2009). The point of departure for the work was a Scanpix photograph from 2002, which shows an office in the Palestinian Department of Culture as it looked after being occupied by Israeli soldiers. By being repeated in the gallery this action became something very different, even if it both practically and aesthetically bore

clear resemblance to the original. What had most likely been a politically motivated act of destruction had become a form of abstract expressionism.



Matias Faldbakken, *Cultural Department* (2009), the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



Palestinian Department of Culture, Scanpix photograph from 2002.

Faldbakken's artistic practice is characterised by the fact that his appropriation of cultural artefacts and actions is aimed at exhibition in the art gallery. This specialised display arena serves as a final destination and a framing device, despite the fact that what is on display has been gleaned from a range of different cultural contexts. I wanted to see Faldbakken carry out an intervention outside the gallery space, to see how it would develop and work and how it could be allied to his existing body of work. Faldbakken had previously only carried out a few art projects in the public realm. One of them was a collaboration with Gardar Eide Einarsson. The work was entitled *Whoomp - there it is* and was realized as part of the 'Where am I now? 2' project in Bjørvika for the Museum of Contemporary Art Oslo in August 2002.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>*Whoomp - there it is* consisted of an installation, which included a round, white leather sofa placed under the motorway flyover in the Oslo borough of Bjørvika, near the building site for the new opera house. The sofa had a hole in the middle that contained a free supply of the milk-based drink Litago, popular among drug addicts.





Matias Faldbakken and Gardar Eide Einarsson, *Whoomp - there it is* (2002), 'Where am I now? 2' project in Bjørvika, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo.

When I met Faldbakken in 2006, he was involved in researching entertainment as a phenomenon, and one idea we discussed at length was to sell a TV concept, which with minimal use of different devices could both expose and be entertainment at the same time.<sup>23</sup> Another possibility was destruction. Faldbakken had already created a number of works for the gallery in which the vandalism was a central motif. We discussed how this concept might be developed, and Faldbakken made several suggestions, including placing a burnt-out car in the centre of Oslo as a visual and cultural experiment. I was more attracted to a different suggestion that involved tearing books from a library shelf, and staging what looked like an act of vandalism in a public cultural institution. In my opinion, such an intervention would also serve to highlight Faldbakken's literary production and the dual role he plays as both an author and an artist. Faldbakken three published novels deal with the concept of misanthropy.<sup>24</sup> This concept is allied to the notion of misology, the hatred of knowledge,

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Every day, new cartons of Litago were placed in the sofa. The outdoor installation was supplemented by a photograph and text inside Oslo Kunsthall, which at was temporarily located in the same area. The text discussed how drug addicts were a marginal group, ignored in urban development processes, while simultaneously being sceptical to the complicit role of the artist in the process of gentrification.

<sup>23</sup> The concept was entitled 'A desire to entertain' (*Vilje til underholdning*). The idea was to unite two entities: capitalist entertainment and artistic negation. The concept entailed letting volunteers compete over who was the most entertaining, without a script. By whittling entertainment down to its bare essentials, the intention was that the participants would demonstrate the essence of entertainment. At the same time as the concept was meant to function as entertainment, it would reflect the medium of television's constant quest for entertainment. Several commercial production companies expressed their interest, but none commissioned the concept.

<sup>24</sup> Over a period of seven years, Faldbakken wrote the trilogy 'Scandinavian misanthropy' under the pseudonym Abo Rasul. *The Cocka Hola Company* (2001), *Macht und Rebel/ Power and Rebel* (2002) and *Unfun* (2008) are narratives pretty much devoid of optimistic values. Each novel depicts distinct environments and characters, but a pervasive theme is the hatred of human beings and contempt for humane values, particularly as they are



learning, language, discussion, enlightenment and logic, which Faldbakken said functioned as an inspiration for his idea to vandalize the library. We agreed to pursue this idea, and in dialogue with the artist, I investigated several possible sites for the project. Deichmanske Public Library was top of our list: it is Oslo County's main library and Norway's largest public library, visited daily by approximately 1,300 people. Moreover, the library's monumental and grand architecture supported the notion that the Deichmanske Library was an icon of the idea of a library. Our request was put to the head of the Library and Faldbakken and I met with her and one of the heads of department. We gave an introductory talk about the project and presented a photographic montage, which gave some indication of how the intervention would most likely look. We also supplied them with short written introduction, which contextualised the idea within the library's role as a social institution, which included the statements:

‘[...] the work problematizes the organisational principles of language, archaeology and history. It will also invoke the concept of power and gestures of resistance - vandalism.

The sculpture will be an unusual and somewhat unpleasant sight. Most people view the library as a pillar of society, seeing it in disarray will elicit a basic emotional response on the part of most viewers: fear of crisis and demolition. The sculpture is a simple gesture with a comprehensive effect. It is an intervention into our common universe of knowledge, which suspends existing categories of order, while highlighting their importance. Can this gesture provoke greater awareness around the

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expressed in Scandinavian welfare society. I choose to see Faldbakken's literary output as conceptual art: he is motivated by an artistic notion, and opts for the novel as his medium. As a result he makes the literary institution host an art project. In writing the novels, he follows the rules of the game sufficiently to ensure that the books are promoted *as novels* by established literary publishers, while at the same time taking the liberty to break with preconceptions of what the novel is and what belongs under the term 'literature'. Faldbakken has managed to irritate and confuse the Norwegian literary world, primarily by transferring an attitude from one art to another. As a concept artist Faldbakken cannot merely write about misanthropy, he must exercise it. Thus, the trilogy 'Scandinavian misanthropy' comes to own a strong artistic volition, while at the same time being utterly devoid of literary quality. The books are made up of an inconsistent and confusing mix of genres and text cultures, a flat and unconvincing set of characters with ridiculous names, constructed environments and actions, Google-infused text material, a range of graphic illustrations, and the manipulation of trademark logos. One might say that the novels are interesting as art, but bad literature, an observation which would be unproblematic in the visual arts, where – for example – a painting can be 'bad' in terms of skill and execution, but conceptually very strong. By transferring this attitude into literature, Faldbakken questions that field's notion of literary quality. Regardless of how you read Faldbakken's novels, there is little doubt that they are testing and challenging the norms of the institution of literature. This can be seen as a creative critique that takes effect from inside the institution. The same can be said for Faldbakken's work for *Space for Interference* where the focus was on the universe of knowledge that the library administers. As such, this work drew parallels between Faldbakken's texts and his object-based production.

library as a societal institution?’<sup>25</sup>

Initially we did not think that we would be granted access to the Library’s own collection, but would have to get books from second-hand shops and flea markets, which could be included in an artificial section added on to existing book shelves for Faldbakken to demolish. Conceptually, this solution was obviously weak. Nevertheless, we thought it was highly unlikely that the Library would allow Faldbakken to chuck their books on the floor. The danger of damaging the books was great. The first proposal we submitted to the Library, therefore, took this factor into account, but we soon found that the Library had a more straightforward and pragmatic attitude to books than we did, and they were not afraid of damage (in fact, they later suggested expanding the act of vandalism to include a much larger section of the collection, which Faldbakken rejected on artistic grounds. He was predominantly interested in the staged act of vandalism as a concentrated image, rather than a comprehensive state of affairs).

During our second meeting the revised proposal of using the Library’s own books, was presented to the head of the Library and to two heads of department, who accepted it on the proviso that the other staff did not object. The project was based on a collaboration with the Library staff, and a positive response from them was essential to bring the project to fruition. We decided to present the idea at two general meetings where the Library’s 100 or so members of staff attended. We were unsure of the response, as was the head of the Library. We adopted the same approach to both meetings. I provided the background and Faldbakken introduced himself and his practice before presenting the specific proposal. The result was overwhelmingly positive, and this reaction opened up the path ahead. We held several follow-up meetings where the practical organisation of the project was discussed.

The work was given the title *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, was staged for two weeks and took place at two locations in the main Library - more specifically in the section for travel writing, faith and philosophy. *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* consisted of a pile of books thrown onto the floor from two selected shelves. It was a simple gesture that sidelined a system of order. The Dewey decimal classification system that the Deichmanske Library uses was suspended and replaced by chaos. The Library collection was still available, but visitors had to find

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<sup>25</sup> Quotes from the project description written by Faldbakken and myself and delivered to the head of the Library, where we sketched possible negative and constructive responses to the work from anxiety and alarm on the one hand to awareness and engagement in the Library as an institution on the other. The head of the Library picked up some of these ideas and used them as part of a pre-emptive reasoning for the project. This point will be further explored later on.

alternative methods to locate the books: they had to get down on their knees to search and rummage through the piles, jump over the books, or make a detour around them.



Matias Faldbakken, *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* (2008), Deichmanske Library, Oslo. Photo: Vegard Kleven.



Faldbakken's work, therefore, functioned as an intervention into an abstract system, as well as changing the library both physically and socially as both visitors and librarians had to move and behave differently in relation to it.

*Untitled (Book Sculpture)* looked like vandalism or a system failure. Significantly, it was agreed with the City Librarian that *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* would not be promoted as a work of art, but would appear as an unexplained irregularity.<sup>26</sup> As part of the informative meetings with the library staff Faldbakken and myself made suggestions as to how to handle visitors' questions and any responses that might arise. Faldbakken formulated the following comment for the library staff to use: 'It is somewhat unclear how this happened, but we have been told by the management that it will be taken care of shortly.' Two librarians were specially instructed to help visitors search, should they require assistance. I suggested that all the librarians who came into contact with the work and who witnessed reactions to it could keep a blog, which cited the comments and responses of the audience. This was done.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of the librarians' descriptions we decided to stage typical audience reactions and recorded these using the librarians as actors. This provided the librarians with the opportunity to continue their participation and to reactivate the experiences they had made during the project. I initiated these activities and Faldbakken saw them as separate to the work itself. Conversations with the Library's staff and following up the project while it was on display was also largely my responsibility. The reactions from the audience illustrated their relationship to the institution and some came as a surprise to the people who worked there. Very few people were angered by the work; many people ignored the unusual sight and/or chose to ignore it. Some people opted to stare outright, clearly in wonder or confusion. Others seemingly found it amusing and sat down in the pile of books to find something to read, while others saw the chaos as a sign of obvious lack of resources and, in sympathy with the plight of

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<sup>26</sup> This dovetails with the opaque and inscrutable quality of Faldbakken's artistic practice. He re-programmes cultural codes, which themselves require a referential apparatus. The result is obscure objects and signs that few people would be able to read unassisted. There is no signage at the door. This approach stands in contrast to that of Heier, whose work are highly transparent and are explained to viewers by the artist herself.

<sup>27</sup> The blog entries have been included in Appendix II.

the Library took matters into their own hands and began tidying the books and placing the back on the shelves again - only to find the pile on the floor again the next day.<sup>28</sup>

The artist, the Library and I all agreed that the chaos of books could be revealed as a work of art if a situation arose that proved too uncomfortable for the staff to handle. It soon became evident that the head Librarian related Faldbakken's work to the ongoing, cultural-political debate concerning the position and duties of libraries.<sup>29</sup> In a draft press release prepared in relation to *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, in case it created heated public debate, she stated :

‘A radical attack on the library's systems can currently be seen in Matias Faldbakken's sculpture *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* where the Library shelves have been emptied and books are strewn in heaps on the floor. They are still there, the thoughts are still there, the content is still there - but the system has been demolished and we have to search in new ways. In this light, we can see Faldbakken's sculpture as a highly topical comment on the idea of a new library space.’<sup>30</sup>

Still, by leaving the intervention unannounced to the public, all the Library's staff and (unsuspecting) visitors were involved in the fiction produced by Faldbakken's work. A work that put the Library's existing ordering system temporarily out of action, thereby altering and disturbing institutionalized procedures.

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note here that the level of reactions varying according to different audience groups. The strongest reactions came from ‘the regulars’, a group of people who visit the Library on a near daily basis, and, therefore, noticed that the chaos prevailed. The blog, which cited the comments and responses initially seemed like a promising idea and was supported by all the parties. The idea was that the extraordinary situation created by Faldbakken's work would elicit reactions from visitors, which the Library could learn from. The librarians would gain insight into how audience groups experiences the Library as an institution, but the outcome was limited and was dominated by humorous, throw-away remarks.

<sup>29</sup> It should be added that the main Deichmanske Library is, as the result of a political decision, moving from its old, stately premises to a new building in Bjørvika, to become part of what is considered Norway's largest ever urban development. *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, therefore, functioned for the organization as a potential useful *tabula rasa* that could trigger a debate about a new and different library.

<sup>30</sup> Unpublished press release by Liv Sæteren, head of the Deichman Library, sent to Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk on 20 October 2008 (translated from Norwegian).

**6. Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above*, exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall and projects at various locations across the city of Bergen, 8 October - 1 November 2009.**

As was the case with both Heier and Faldbakken, I was already acquainted with Nathan Coley's work. The difference was that we had never worked together before. I was only familiar with the results, the completed work, not his working method or approach. I was, however, aware of the fact that he had, over several years, alternated between showing his work in gallery or museum settings and in urban environments or landscapes. It was a matter of different approaches, working methods and terms of production, but these factors were not isolated from one another. The works were clearly connected to each other. Sometimes a site-related work – created in response to a given place and its meanings – seemed to give rise to a new work of art intended for a traditional exhibition venue, and vice versa. I was curious about what seemed to be Coley's continuous experimentation with ideas and forms that produces these types of circulations and movements. This means that various spaces, buildings and sites can have parallel functions: as potential frames of presentation, as the subject matter and context for a work of art. Coley's work can be seen from an investigative, socially-oriented perspective. The final works are often the results of preliminary studies, archival investigations and interviews, and can be referred to as research-led. However, they also possess autonomous sculptural qualities where form, material and craft constitute essential elements of the finished work.

The third artist's project then, that of Nathan Coley, took place in a conventional viewing space, namely Bergen Kunsthall. Heier and Faldbakken's projects had taken place at sites that had no direct relation to the art world per se, but were instead interventions in state-financed cultural institutions. My intention was to allow the third and final project to take place and intervene in the specialised arena of the art institution to explore how this affected my role and position as a freelance curator.

The objective behind entering the 'mothership' was to accentuate the two other projects' relationship to Institutional Critique. Heier and Faldbakken's activities can be seen as a relocation of the interest and awareness that artists have historically shown towards their own institution and which has played itself out in the form of Institutional Critique. Through her work, Heier highlighted what she saw as a gap in Maihaugen's story of Norway. Her response was an addition, which also functioned as a kind of amendment of the collection.

Faldbakken's work represented a temporary and local destabilisation, an annulment of the Library's foundational classification system, and can be seen as staged, but also real sabotage, which triggered a heightened awareness on the part of visitors as to the value of the institution of the library to society. In both cases the artists and I, as a freelance curator, entered other social spheres and territories, and it was us as individuals that were the art institutional connection. In Coley's case my role as a freelance curator was altered by the fact that I was effectively a mediator who had to relate to and negotiate with representatives of 'my own' institution. My intention was also to perform a form of curated critique; in other words, there was an existing framework of Institutional Critique I wished to place Coley's work within, which made the point of departure very different from the two previous projects, where the artists' working methods and work facilitated the examination of the social institutions in question.

Furthermore, in Coley's project I was the one to select the location of the project and I opted for Bergen Kunsthall. For a freelance curator gaining access to an established art institution requires a great deal of mutual trust, which we had in this case based on earlier collaborations.<sup>31</sup> Another reason for selecting Bergen Kunsthall was its institutional qualities, as one of the few exhibition venues in Norway with a truly international programme, and whose staff have a great deal of experience when it comes to producing their own exhibitions.

I would like to point out that the terms that accompanied the third project were different to the two preceding ones. Both Heier and Faldbakken's works developed over time according each artist's tempo of work. In the case of Nathan Coley, I assumed a different curatorial role in that I presented him with a curatorial framework that to a greater extent took the lead and guided the artistic project. The idea was already on the table when I contacted Coley, who was invited to initiate a project that would put the Kunsthall in direct relationship with a

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<sup>31</sup> I have had close contact with Bergen Kunsthall over several years, from the mid-1990s when I ran and curated for the artist-run space Galleri Otto Plonk in Bergen. At that time the Kunsthall was an artists' association with a traditional, locally oriented programme. The Otto Plonk Gallery was characterised by contemporary exhibitions and formed a kind of opposition to the art association. Instead of pursuing an oppositional stance, we both decided to collaborate, and the group of artists who ran Otto Plonk were invited to act as artist-curators and initiated different activities in the art association. For example *Map* (1999), a combined club night and symposium, which included, among others, and Stian Grøgaard (N), Knut Ove Artnzen (N), Simon Herbert (GB) and Aasa Sonjasdottir (S) who made presentations on the topic of 'Nomad machines'. These activities could be seen as the nascent beginnings of the shift in the art association's professional profile, which led to the creation of Bergen Kunsthall in its current form.

different field, which operated with distinctly different principles and mindsets, and produced different forms of public engagement.

In short, the curatorial idea was to let an art world player swap places with a representative for commercial retail sales. In practical terms, this entailed establishing a branch of Bergen Kunsthall in a shopping centre, while a retailer normally located here would take over and set up shop in the art institution's exhibition spaces. Both parties would run their respective operations as normal. The retailer would continue to sell products and the art centre would exhibit contemporary art. Now both these activities occurred in new and foreign surroundings.

It was up to the Bergen Kunsthall and the retailer themselves to organize the borrowed premises on their own terms, within a predetermined and agreed framework. Both parties had then to take into consideration and deal with the other's architecture and spatial solutions, as well as their established business practices, such as opening hours and security measures. Both the retailer and the art centre had to operate in an alien environment and system. This might affect their business and - conversely - their presence and operations might affect the new surroundings.

The shopping centre and the art centre both represent optimal and specialized venues for their respective operations, i.e. retail sale and exhibitions. Each markets and presents objects, expressions, symbols and codes within their own economies and social spheres. One might say that they represent the extremes of a scale indicating cultural and financial capital. They irritate and fascinate one another. Appropriation and imitation continually take place in both directions. To the art system, the shopping centre, retail sales and commercial consumer products are of interest as materials, subjects and sites. The artwork imitates mass-produced merchandise and the aesthetics of consumer culture, which are recast as art inside the art system without this weakening the autonomy of art. To commercial retail sales, art is attractive because of the cultural capital it represents, its innovative and transgressive character, as well as its capacity to signal originality and identity. Commercial retail sales imitate art and employ its forms and aesthetics in advertising, marketing and product development, without the end result being deemed art. At any rate, the art system itself does not acknowledge it as such.



Commercial retail sales and fine art both share the characteristic that they are complex systems, strong in autonomy, that continually expand their borders to the surrounding world in a sensitive and self-aware way by redrawing this boundary inside their own systems: ‘Anything can be sold’ and ‘Anything can be art’.

As a consequence of the proposed exchange, the art institution and the retailer would become part of public spheres that differed from their regular environments. The idea was to challenge the type of public spheres the parties normally produced by their own accord, through retail sales or the presentation of works of art. The switch would ‘force’ them to play on a different field, which included engaging with new audiences as well as contact with a number of mechanisms that challenged their respective *modus operandi*. (Once inside the Kunsthall, the retailer ran the risk of becoming influenced by the institutional space’s aesthetic and reflexively oriented gaze, which may have slowed down and even prevented sales, while the Kunsthall became subject to the shopping centre’s purely commercial ethos, which differed from the mechanisms of contemplation associated with art. This called attention to the factors that united and divided the two entities and their respective sites.)

The intention was not primarily to present retail trade as art but rather to explore what situations and activities could arise as a consequence of this switch, as well as the ways in which the physical relocation of the retailer and the Kunsthall affected the understanding of the two.

The shopping centre in question was Lagunen – one of the largest in Norway – and typically located in the suburbs, about 10 kilometres outside Bergen City Centre. By moving the Kunsthall into suburbia and the shop into the city centre, the socio-cultural tensions between these two geographical locations would also be incorporated into the project. For Bergen Kunsthall, this kind of operation could be considered a curatorial manoeuvre that temporarily shifted their exhibition practices from traditional gallery-based displays to a more infiltrative, parasitic model operating outside the established institutional space - a form of Institutional Critique.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Thus far, Bergen Kunsthall has primarily made a name for itself through exhibition activities housed in its own facilities. Other than a few private commissions, the Kunsthall has neither been involved in projects set in a larger public arena nor investigated alternative institutional models.

Furthermore, the idea was to let the retailer's premises in the Lagunen shopping centre function both as an exhibition space and a business office for Bergen Kunsthall. The plan was to fill the space with a curated exhibition, which could also make use of the centre's communal spaces, such as the hallways, stairwells and parking garages. The shopping centre's communication channels (customer newsletter, website, etc.) were seen as potential display venues for art. This was the background and framework to which I invited Nathan Coley to make a new context/site related work for the Bergen Kunsthall, now relocated to the Lagunen shopping centre.

Coley accepted my invitation to collaborate on the project, but it soon became evident that the venture would not go as planned. Two factors were crucial. The first related to the original idea. The director of the Lagunen shopping centre was willing to provide Bergen Kunsthall with a space in the shopping centre on the proviso that I could find a suitable retailer willing to do the swap for that period of time.<sup>33</sup> The director and I contacted several storeowners, but they were all worried that the switch with the Kunsthall would entail loss of business and it was hard to find anyone willing to participate in the project. This was despite the fact that the shopping centre would guarantee a limited loss of income for the period.<sup>34</sup>

The second factor related to my invitation to the artist. Coley found the commission too tight and pre-emptively determined. The desire to intervene in the Kunsthall's space and routines was mine and part of my overall curatorial practice, subsumed under the umbrella of the *Space for Interference* project. Coley was prescribed a critical framework that he had played no part in developing. As a research-based artist this did not work for him. I took these issues into consideration and decided that the best course of action would be to start over again so that we could discuss the point of departure and foundation of the collaboration together.

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<sup>33</sup> The particular type of retailer was not without importance. It had a lot to do with the size, but also the content and profile of the shop were relevant. An exchange with a mainstream chain selling shoes or clothing might stress the distinction between different kinds of economies and the forms of identity they produce, between mass-production/consumerism and the art institution's emphasis on exclusive, original, selected items. Another option could have been a shop for video and computer games, movies and music, skateboards and street culture paraphernalia, avant-garde and extreme fashion or other types of trendy items. Such products are part of the creative and lifestyle-oriented industries to which the art world is also linked.

<sup>34</sup> The storeowners expressed concern that their customers would lose sight of their presence and forget them if they moved away from the shopping centre. Bergen Kunsthall's cultural capital was seemingly insufficient for them to take the chance of relocating, even if just for a few weeks. This problem would not arise for the Kunsthall: they would be in two places at the same time, as the shop would be interpreted as an art project. Moreover, they would also have a branch of the art institution at the shopping centre.

It turned out that Coley was open to the idea of relocating the activities of the Kunsthall, but instead of moving the art out and seemingly departing from the exhibition space, he instead wanted to reformulate the utilization of this space, which allowed us to have it both ways, as it were, by relating the Kunsthall to other social spaces, areas of operation and economies. We retained the Lagunen shopping centre as a possible site. I told Coley about the centre's somewhat unusual history. Until 1985, the building housed a furniture factory called Nordås Industrier. This factory specialised in wood plates furniture, and was part of a wider history of regional furniture factories on the west coast of Norway. All the machinery and equipment was sold when the factory ceased operating, but part of the buildings remained the same. Moreover, this 'metamorphosis' did not necessarily involve redundancies as many employees were given new jobs in retail. They, thus, became a personification of the transition from traditional industry to the service industry. The shopping centre, thus, contains a forgotten connection to industrial production. One idea that Coley and I worked on was to attempt to find the old machinery and to set up a temporary factory, which instead of producing furniture would create art works under the direction of Nathan Coley. We would then use this recuperation and conversion of the machinery, competencies and manpower for a project that connected different physical spaces, economies and productions of meaning. This idea was also abandoned as Coley could not find an artistic solution to the problem, and our ideas began to migrate in the direction of prioritising the exhibition space. Coley formulated it as following:

‘As for the project with Lagunen and the old furniture factory, I am not sure what I feel about this now. It feels a bit like I am trying to contrive a project for it, rather than the other way round. I like the idea we had of finding some previous worker to 'make' something for me, but what should they do for Nathan Coley I'm hoping that if we have a conversation about over work that we would exhibit, then what might be a good additional work could come out.’<sup>35</sup>

The project finally culminated in the exhibition ‘Thoughts from Above’, which needs to be seen as a compromise between the artist and myself as the curator. I would like to provide a short description of each work and how they developed here. (For a more complete description of the works, please see **Appendix I** that contains an excerpt of the exhibition

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<sup>35</sup> From e-mail correspondence with Coley on 10 June 2009.

catalogue.) The exhibition combined existing and new works presented in the galleries of the Kunsthall, as well as in selected locations around town.

Four existing works were displayed in Bergen Kunsthall's Gallery 2: *THERE WILL BE NO MIRACLES HERE* (2006); *HEAVEN IS A PLACE WHERE NOTHING EVER HAPPENS* (2009); *WE MUST CULTIVATE OUR GARDEN* (2007); and *TRESPASS AND LOITER* (2007).



Nathan Coley, *TRESPASS AND LOITER* (2007), *THERE WILL BE NO MIRACLES HERE* (2006), *HEAVEN IS A PLACE WHERE NOTHING EVER HAPPENS* (2009), Installation view.



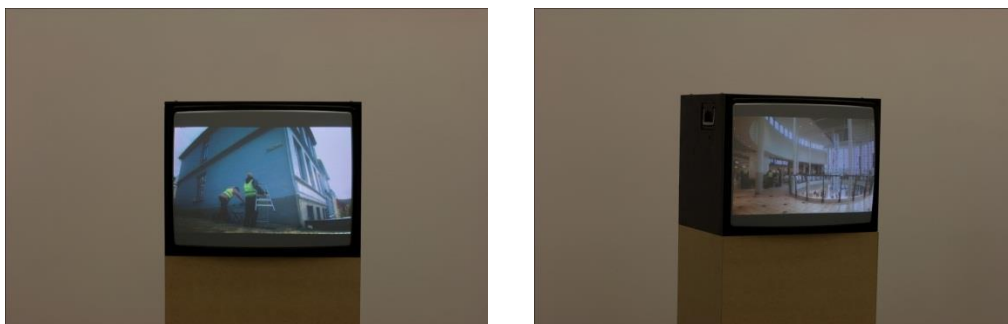
Nathan Coley, *WE MUST CULTIVATE OUR GARDEN* (2007), Installation view. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

These works were backlit metal signs that resembled the information signage typically found in the public sphere, but their understated form also called to mind exclusive office and interior designs. Obvious art-historical references could be drawn to Minimalist object art and to Conceptual text pieces, primarily of the lyrical variety, exemplified by artists such as Lawrence Weiner and Jenny Holzer.

On display in the third exhibition space was the work *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009). In this work, all the lines of text from the metal signs mentioned above reappeared in new formats at selected locations around Bergen, this time etched onto building facades and other architectural structures. The carving of the letters, done with a power drill, were documented on video and shown on monitors in the exhibition space.



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009), Installation view. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009), details. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

The font, layout and size matched the signs, but the statements were no longer part of an autonomous, portable and sellable art object inside the gallery space. They were (re) located to public buildings and temporarily integrated into the architecture of institutions, businesses, and residences. Detached from the context of a permanent and valuable art object, the statements became transitory elements in the urban landscape. As part of this repositioning, the sentences were translated into Norwegian, and in so doing their linguistic and cultural meanings were subtly altered. I felt that this translation was important and negotiated it with Coley. The context of the public realm came to colour the experience and interpretation of the work. The shift in language highlighted the impact of the move on the work, while simultaneously problematizing the autonomy that gallery-based works of art require.

The text INGEN MIRAKLER HER! [There will be no miracles here] was chiselled into the wall of a residential co-op building located in the city centre of Bergen.



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009). Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

Still photo from residential co-op building located in the city centre of Bergen:

INGEN MIRAKLER HER! [There will be no miracles here]

HIMMELEN ER ET STED DER ALDRI NOE SKJER [Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens] was carved into the façade of the Bergen Central Police Station building.



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009). Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

Still photo from Bergen Central Police Station:

HIMMELEN ER ET STED DER ALDRI NOE SKJER [Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens]

VI FÅR DYRKE DEN HAGEN VI HAR [We must cultivate our garden] was drilled into the wall of a classroom at Li Elementary School.<sup>36</sup>



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above, Bergen, 2009* (2009). Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

Still photo from classroom at Li Elementary School:

VI FÅR DYRKE DEN HAGEN VI HAR [We must cultivate our garden]

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<sup>36</sup> The school is located in Åsane, a suburb around 10 kilometres [6 miles] north of the city centre, which is the local council with the largest population.



ROM FOR OVERTRAMP OG LEDIGGANG [Trespass and loiter] appeared on the premises of the Lagunen shopping centre, the site where the original and subsequent ideas mentioned above had been intended to take place. The text was power-drilled into a column in one of the central public areas of the mall



Nathan Coley, *Thoughts from Above*, Bergen, 2009 (2009). Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

Still photo from Lagunen Mall:

ROM FOR OVERTRAMP OG LEDIGGANG [Trespass and loiter]

The words stayed in place throughout the exhibition period (with the exception of Li School where the text remains). During this time, viewers could see the textual works at the different locations. Due to their settings, some reached a large and varied audience, while others were only seen by a few, and others again by certain groups only, for example, the text that was drilled into the wall in the classroom at Li School.

The main exhibition space also featured a montage of two works that had previously been shown separately. In Bergen Kunsthall, they were installed in a new way where they interlocked with each other, both physically and conceptually. The two parts could be experienced as one single installation. *Palace* (2008) was a sculpture<sup>37</sup>, while *Jerusalem Syndrome* (2005) was film-based.

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<sup>37</sup> The sculpture *Palace* may call to mind the remnants of a burnt-out house, a silhouette of a ruin against a sunset or the front of a saloon from a Western movie – a familiar stage set that here appears with an atypical addition. Five words have been integrated into the facade: LAND, BELIEF, WEALTH, LIFE, and MIND. Combined, the words form some kind of slogan that seems to fit neatly on the wall of a saloon – the very heart of the mythology of the Wild West. We can easily imagine American pioneers going west to seek new land under such a banner. And yet, the five terms do not belong to a thought system of the Western world; they are borrowed from a completely different culture and geographic region. These are the rights to which every human is entitled according to Islam (Nathan Coley found the words quoted in an online article:





Nathan Coley, *Palace* (2008), Bergen Kunsthall, Installation view. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.



Nathan Coley, *Jerusalem Syndrome* (2005), Bergen Kunsthall, Installation view. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

I have chosen not to go into further detail in relation to the film or the other sculpture, but instead to highlight the fact that *Palace*, like the other light works had its physical counterpart in the urban space. The same words engraved onto *Palace* were featured on a local building. I conducted extensive research into the matter and found ten or so buildings with facades or

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jul/01/comment.religion1>). Thus, the *Palace* sculpture serves as both a stage set and palace for ideologies and systems of thought – in the plural form, mind you.

architectural structures that resembled Coley's *Palace*. In consultation with Coley, we selected Skur 11, which was a dockside storage unit on Bryggen, the old quayside of Bergen. The building had been erected in 1905-1906, clad in corrugated plates with eight granite columns, originally decorated with wrought iron. It is both prosaic and somehow elevated at the same time. Skur 11 is an important part of the working environment of the inner part of the quayside, and is architecturally linked to the characteristic wooden trading houses at Bryggen, which date from 1901. It carries the history of Bergen's traditional trading and travel activities. Like the light works the words here were translated into Norwegian, so LAND, BELIEF, WEALTH, LIFE and MIND became JORD, TRO, RIKDOM, LIV and ÅND. In this case, the words were painted with the aid of stencils.



Skur 11, Bryggen, Bergen, 2009. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.



Nathan Coley, Skur 11, JORD [Land] / TRO [Belief], Bryggen, Bergen, 2009. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

The execution of the inscriptions/inserts was based on negotiation. In this case the artist did not participate in the negotiations. It was I – in the role of the independent curator – who argued in favour of the project on the grounds of the artwork's intrinsic value and logic. In relation to two of the scenarios – the shopping centre and the Bergen city centre police station – the Kunsthall's director Solveig Øvstebø also participated in the discussions.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the negotiations conducted by me and, in two cases, by the director of the Kunsthall, the artist gained access to public spaces and spheres. The textual works were delivered and donated to public institutions and arenas without any specific terms or conditions attached. It was up to the owners and employees to decide how to deal with the statements' potential meanings and effects.

As opposed to graffiti spray-painted onto the surface of a wall – against the interests of architects and owners – Coley's texts were physically integrated into the structures. This denotes a significant difference. Typically, texts that are part of façades and walls tend to affirm and clarify the intended purpose of the relevant edifice and enterprise: they advertise, inform or instruct the public regarding the activities taking place inside, and they are always 'on the same team' as the buildings itself. Coley's inscriptions broke this relationship. The texts' ambiguous content sought to open up new ways of seeing the material structures that surround us, by leaning on the authority behind the walls. Coley's texts can be seen as addenda or parasites with the potential to affect the ways in which the public experiences these sites.

The off-site texts could be seen as separate, context-specific works, but also functioned as satellites that orbited the main presentation inside the Kunsthall.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it was the catalogue (traditionally the curator's playground) that became the site for the intervention I had intended would be played out within the physical space of the Kunsthall. Rather than designing and printing a conventional catalogue, using the project's production funds, I bought considerable amount of advertising space in the ad-financed newspaper *Byavisen*,

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<sup>38</sup> The Kunsthall has is central to Bergen's cultural life and it was evident that the presence and commitment of the director added an institutional weight, which contributed to the acceptance by these two venues.

<sup>39</sup> Heier's exhibition for Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture, for example, had a different function. It was an independent presentation, which also alluded to a process taking place outside the exhibition format, both temporally and physically.

which is distributed across the city of Bergen. It came to nine whole pages in total, including the back, one double-page spread and the lower part of the front page. (Appendix I) The advertising space functioned as the exhibition catalogue and the text about the works ran throughout the newspapers, thus creating unpredictable and jarring meetings between the artistic material and that of the real newspaper, between different textual and image cultures. Coley participated in this aspect of the exhibition, and together we decided how the catalogue pages would look. Both the language and the visual expression of the catalogue section of the paper corresponded to the design often used in exhibition fatalities with a classical typeface set-up and considerable white spacing. An interesting detail is the use of empty space, a well-known trope in the aesthetics of art presentation. Paying for open spaces in the context of advertising, however, struck the newspaper's staff as bizarre, as these pages are normally utilised to the full. For the reader of this local newspaper, the inclusion of an exhibition catalogue would be alien, both visually and in terms of content. The catalogue became a form of intervention in another written medium and became part of a larger and different form of distribution than the Kunsthall normally has access to. Thus it reached a new and much wider public, and potentially new audience groups.

Nathan Coley's project had an unexpected outcome. It ended up, more or less, as a conventional exhibition in Bergen Kunsthall with associated satellites in the city, and with the catalogue as a site for intervention. The reasons for this are complex. However, this case was partly a result of a divergence in the artist's and my interests as a freelance curator. I wanted to experiment with the Kunsthall as an institution by moving it and letting it operate under different conditions so as to put its cultural status and function up for debate. The Kunsthall's director and permanent curator were on board, but this time the artist seemed more interested in the Kunsthall as an existing display case and, ultimately, preferred a solo exhibition in the gallery that I, as a freelance curator, wanted to evacuate. The physical gallery space of the Kunsthall was, in the final instance, more attractive and had more symbolic capital than I as a freelance curator could harness, and I lost the battle.

## **7. Contextualising the works**

What, then, characterised the works produced as part of *Space for Interference*? Though Coley's works were an exception, the satellites I mentioned at various locations across the city of Bergen have components in common with Heier and Faldbakken.

The works were all physical forms that operated in the spaces and architectures of specific institutions, businesses, and residences and that reformulated *in situ* elements associated with the central functions of the site. In Heier's case this related to the museum's collection, in Faldbakken's it was the library interior and classification system. For Coley, the work involved intervening in a number of different institutions' material structures, social expressions and disciplinary approaches; more specifically an elementary school, a police station, a shopping centre and a residential co-op.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting that both Heier and Faldbakken used the term 'sculpture' to describe their works. Faldbakken incorporated the term into the title, while Heier used the phrase 'asphalt sculpture' in both the press release and in the information material distributed. It is, therefore, possible to see these works within the context of what Rosalind E. Krauss describes as 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' as they are all demarcated three-dimensional forms.<sup>41</sup> In her text, Krauss describes how radical changes to the notion sculpture in the 1960s and 1970s complicated the definitory basis of art. The limits of sculpture were stretched to a point where it was unrecognisable, a kind of categorical no man's land which could incorporate anything from plastic strips to molten lead in the floor, stacks of wood, piles of earth or holes in the ground. Sculpture could, therefore, merely be defined according to what it was not, as Krauss put it: 'what was on or in front of a building that was not the building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape.'<sup>42</sup> Krauss was one of the writers who pointed to a development away from traditional mediums towards new and more hybrid genres such as Conceptual Art, Performance, Installation and Land Art, for example, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970).

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<sup>40</sup> With regards to Coley's work I am focusing on the works outside the Kunsthall, and I have opted not to prioritise the relationship between the 'satellites' across the city and the works in the exhibition.

<sup>41</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44.

<sup>42</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press: New edition, 1 Jan 1986), p. 282.

In her book *One place after another – site specific art and locational identity*, Miwon Kwon puts forward three paradigms for site-specific art: phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive.<sup>43</sup> The phenomenological refers to instances where artists are interested in their physical surroundings such as architecture, landscape and geological and natural environments. Dimensions, proportions and scale serve as points of departure for works of art; in some cases these spatial factors become the work itself. The phenomenological approach gradually gave way to in what Kwon calls the social/institutional paradigm, characterised by an interest in the culturally determined aspects of places, with the works of art taking a more explicitly critical stance and challenging site and space as an institution, specific from a social, ideological and cultural point of view: 'To be 'specific' to such a site [...] is to decode and/or recode the institutional conventions so as to expose their hidden yet motivated operations.'<sup>44</sup>

Kwon's next discursive paradigm is related to the fact that a number of artists deliberately operate outside gallery and museum spaces. As a consequence of operating in the reality of the everyday, artists respond to the spatial and social conventions that dominate the culture.

Kwon clarifies what she means by 'discursive site' as:

'[...] the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate. Furthermore, unlike in the previous models, this site is not defined as a *precondition*. Rather, it is generated by the work (often as 'content'), and then verified by its convergence with an existing discursive formation.'<sup>45</sup>

This involves a further abstraction of the concept of 'site', which now functions merely as a starting point or support for works of art, which, in terms of content, scope or direction, are not tied to any particular geographic or social reality. A 'site' can, thereby, be any concrete or abstract position and is more reminiscent of an (intertextual) movement rather than a (spatial)

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<sup>43</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another - Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2002)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.14.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

place. It depicts artists' continuous connections and disconnections and the way they move from place to place, partly as the result of commissions from the international art scene.<sup>46</sup>

The works for *Space for Interference* all had tactile, physical qualities, in the way that they were part of the buildings and surrounding spatial structures, at the same time as they created their own architecture: Heier's asphalt road, Faldbakken's pile of books, and Coley's texts that perforated various walls and facades. This connected them to Kwon's phenomenological paradigm. In addition, the works highlighted and questioned institutional thought patterns in relation to the idea of 'on site', which makes it possible to see them as allied to what Kwon terms the social/institutional paradigm. Finally, the same works can be seen as more or less detached from their physical location as part of the artists' existing bodies of work and their ongoing practices, as well as contributions to a wider cultural debate situated beyond the field of art.<sup>47</sup> Kwon's three paradigms are, thus, all represented and intertwined in ways that break down any clear boundary between them.

In relation to *Space for Interference* the issue related to sites that enabled a realisation of ideas in progress or, as in Coley's case, needed a specific context to respond to.<sup>48</sup> The sites had to be suitable to each artist's interests and were strategically selected with these in mind. It was, therefore, not a site-specific commission, as such, where the artist was required to find features and characteristic of any given site.

The way each work related to – and departed from – its context was very particular. The artists' use of the site and the setting was selective, individual and temporally specific. It is not expedient to introduce a discussion of all the different terms that have flourished in the

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<sup>46</sup> James Meyer, 'The functional Site' in *Platzwechsel*, exh.cat. (Zürich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1995), p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> The works became part of public discourse active during and after their presentation, which made them relate to contemporary social debates. Heier's work contributed to an on-going debate about the Norwegian oil-based economy, for example, the article 'Petrokulturen' in the journal *Ny Tid* on 12 September 2008 or 'Velstand bygget på et lykketreff' ('Prosperity based on a fluke') in the national newspaper *VG* on 30 May 2008. Faldbakken's work was referenced in a number of articles on the status and future of libraries, for example, the 'Bibliotekene er overstimulerte' ('The libraries are over-stimulated') in the national newspaper *Aftenposten* 7 March 2009. The work was also displayed on the front page of *ABM-bladet* No.2 – 2009, Vol. 6. *ABM-bladet* is a newsletter published by ABM-utvikling, the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority. The issue in question was never published as it was withdrawn by the ABM director, due to the nature of the two articles (rather than the front page image), which unfavourably addressed the intricate relationship between the public, the library as a service institution, bureaucrats and parliamentary politicians. Nathan Coley's text-based works at Skur 11 in Bergen were related to Islam in the article 'Islam på Skur 11' in *Bergens Tidende* 9 October 2009.

<sup>48</sup> In Coley's case the approach concerned a re-localization and re-contextualizing of existing text-based works, so the issue was finding sites that could serve as a physical backdrop and contexts for these works.

wake of debates around this well-worn notion of the site-specific, such as site-oriented, site-related, site-sensitive, site-responsive or context-sensitive. A common characteristic of these terms is an expanded and abstracted understanding of the concept of site and its loose connections. The redefinitions can be seen as a symptom of increasing rigidity, a need to loosen up and escape the fact that it has, over time, become a conventional genre.

The sites in *Space for Interference* consisted of institutions, public services and private business. The physical layout of social institutions and public spaces help shape our experience and understanding of reality. The normative forms proclaimed by the institutions, their normative systems, purposive reasoning and mindsets are manifested in their material structures. Architecture organizes society in the sense that it manifests and gives physical form to concepts and ideas. An intervention in physical devices, therefore, resembles interfering in processes that shape the environment both socially and culturally

An exploration of such issues could hardly avoid invoking Peter Weibel's term *Kontext Kunst*:

‘It is no longer solely about critique the art's systems but the critique of reality and the analysis and creation of social processes. During the 1990s, discourses usually considered extrinsic to art were increasingly incorporated into discussions about art. Artists are now becoming independent agents of social processes, partisans of the real. The interaction between artists and social situations, between art and extra-art contexts has led to a new form of art, where both come together: context art. The objective of the social structure of art is participation in the social structure of reality.’<sup>49</sup>

Kontext Kunst (Context Art) described a number of artistic practices in the 1990s. It became an umbrella term for works characterised by the fact that they underlined the relationship between art works, their conditions of production and the social, political and cultural reality they were part of. An exhibition entitled Kontext Kunst at the Neue Galeri, Künstlerhaus Graz (Austria) in 1993 included artists such as Clegg & Guttmann, Mark Dion, Ronald Jones, Louise Lawler, Dan Peterman, Adrian Piper and Gerwald Rockenschaub.

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Weibel, ‘Context Art: Towards a Social Construction of Art’ in ed. Claire Doherty, *Situations* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art, 2009), pp. 51.



The term Kontext Kunst did not catch on beyond the German-speaking world. Instead, Relational Aesthetics became the favoured term, derived from the French *Esthétique relationnelle*, introduced by the French theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his eponymous book.<sup>50</sup> In this book, Bourriaud posits the idea that it is possible to interpret a number of works from the 1990s according to the interpersonal relations they represent, produce or launch. He argues that these artists work with social exchanges rather than representations. The result is not a finished art object that requires contemplation by a viewer, but rather a space for communication and interaction and open processes that are not easily conceived as works of art in the traditional sense. These artists' practices create meetings and relationships, which engage viewers as participants in different ways.<sup>51</sup>

The criticism levied at relational artists' practices (such as that of Liam Gillick or Rirkrit Tirvanija) includes the argument that they are frictionless and create a false idea of consensus. The community or social micro-utopias produced by these works can, therefore, not serve as democratic models in a wider sense. This is one of the points made by Claire Bishop in her widely cited article *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, which was published in *October* 110.<sup>52</sup> By drawing on artists with a more antagonistic orientation, for example Santiago Sierra, Bishop called for a discussion about the types of meetings that relational practices stage and implement. What qualities do the created relations have? Who is addressed and invited to participate, and what are the premises of their participation? Such questions, Bishop contended, can reveal the actual relationship between aesthetics and ethics at play in these relational practices. The works in *Space for Interference* can more or less be interpreted in light of Relational Aesthetics, but they cannot be fully subsumed under the term. The works did create different relations and they did open up for audience participation. However, the kind of audience group, their role and their contribution varied from work to work, and arose at different stages of the process/production. This is an important nuance of *Space for Interference*. It is possible to distinguish two main audience groups in the project. On the one hand, there was the informed and contributory audience, which included the employees of the different organisations and institutions and/or other people involved in the research and production phases of the works. This group was familiar with the backdrop of the works and the foundational ideas of the project. The people were part of the alliance that the artists and

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<sup>50</sup>Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Lyon: Presses du Réel, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> There are a number of different terms used to denote works of art that use human beings and interpersonal relationships as their medium, for example, participatory practices, dialogical aesthetics and socially engaged art.

<sup>52</sup> Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October* 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79.

curator had to build to be able to carry out the project, and in some cases they also set the premises for its completion. On the other hand, there was a far larger and more complex audience group, which encountered the works after they had been installed. This group included the employees and visitors to the relevant institutions. With the exception of Faldbakken's work, these people were predominantly put in the position of a viewer.

The way the different works distinguished between these two main audience groups differed with each artists' project. Potential participation in Heier's *Saga Night*, for example, was only offered to Maihaugen employees who were involved from the outset. Museum visitors, on the other hand, encountered a finished, permanent work of art that had been sanctioned by both the artist and the institution, and which operated as part of the Museum's permanent collection. The signage that accompanied *Saga Night* presented visitors with the same story that the artist had recounted to Maihaugen's employees. At this stage, the work made no distinction between different audience groups. Faldbakken's *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* and Coley's text-based works, on the other hand, did - in the sense that in their works the alliance between the artist and curator and the relevant institutions/sites created a sharp distinction between an informed audience, who knew that this was a work of art, and an uninformed audience, who had to interpret and decode these works which presented themselves as strange appearances in public spaces. In the case of *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* these two audience groups were brought together: an interaction was set up between the librarians – who can be seen as Faldbakken's accomplices – and the library users, who had not been informed of the arrangement. Through conversations with the users and surveillance, the Library's staff gained insight into how visitors interpreted this unusual situation, and subsequently also how they perceived the Deichmanske Library as an institution.

The dialogical aspects of the works in *Space for Interference* were clear, but it was not an aim in itself. It was not about celebrating or fetishizing this relationship, which is often the case with works that proclaim themselves to be relational. It was equally not a case of promoting debate or conflict, which is often the case with works that proclaim themselves to be antagonistic. Central to the works was, instead, a serious and purposeful set of negotiations between parties who, from their own perspective, benefitted from realizing the works. The various productions took place over time and involved different connections, collaboration and meeting places, without striving for any form of coherent or identifiable community in the process. The social processes triggered by the works of art were characterised by a form

of pragmatism, in that different interests and conceptions could coexist without this becoming a foregrounded issue.

Since the works in the *Space for Interference* project intervened or intruded in other institutions, it could be possible to view them in light of so-called Interventionist art practices. The term ‘intervention’ is derived from the Latin *intervenire* (to come between) and has the ability to highlight conflicts of interest, enabling one to see the existence of deviating wills and mindsets. An intervention is by nature antagonistic and conflicting: one will intervenes in another with the aim of influencing and changing a situation or relationship. Interventionist Art is usually used to denote artistic activities that directly or indirectly relate to historical avant-garde practices and their view of art as a tool for social and political change, for example, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian avant-garde or the Situationists.<sup>53</sup>

Today, the term is often used in reference to art that – through uncertainty and confusion – tries to trigger public debate around politically loaded issues, such as social injustice or identity politics. It concerns artists’ collectives that sympathize with social and political movements and create links with political activism and protest movements. Examples include US-based Critical Art Ensemble who have, since 1987, been producing art, performances,

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<sup>53</sup> The Russian avant-garde originated at a time of extreme social and economic upheaval in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was an artistically fruitful and influential movement, which incorporated film, art and architecture and referred to a number of different artistic developments across the Russian empire and subsequent Soviet Union in the period 1890 to 1930. The Russian avant-garde became an umbrella term that included Neo-Primitivism, Suprematism and Constructivism. It reached a peak in the period between the Russian revolution of 1917 and 1932, when investigative and critical approach of artists came into conflict with state-sponsored Socialist Realism. The Russian avant-garde included artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, who greatly influenced the development of painting. New approaches to film were evident in the work of Sergej Eisenstein, and the Stenberg brothers were influential in the development of poster art and graphic design. Situationism was a political and artistic movement, which was active in several countries in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The movement developed from the Situationist International (SI), which was founded in 1957 and included a small group of political and artistic radicals. The SI wanted to achieve social and political change in Europe based on uniting Marxist theory and early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde ideas. The Situationists pursued an emancipatory, leftist social critique based on the notion that Western culture was fully dominated by capital. Capitalism had become total commodity fetishism, which had given birth to a society of the spectacle in which people became passive spectators, robbed of the ability to change their own reality, as described by Guy Debord in his book *La Société du spectacle*, published in 1967. The Situationists promoted artistic approaches and methods such as *détournement* in which images and ideas produced by the society of the spectacle were altered and undermined, or its polar opposite of *récupération* which transformed radical ideas into commodities. *Détournement* is still used by contemporary ‘culture jammers’ and ‘adbusters’. Another method was *dérive*, which consisted of letting oneself aimlessly drift around the city without being influenced by the will. The idea was that the urban environment affected one’s mood (psycho geography) and during *dérive* one could discuss how one experienced different things. In other words, it was an instrument of self-analysis. The urban landscape became a vehicle for understanding of the self, rather than a mere backdrop for consuming, which the SI contended that modernist urban planning and architecture contributed to.

actions, and texts that explore the connections between research, politics, media and other factors that affect the balance of power and social realities.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the examples include collaborative art practices and/or anonymous or concealed producers, who operate on false premises, such as The Yes Men consisting of Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum. The Yes Men have specialised in directing attention to inequalities caused by the strategies employed by multinational corporations. They use false identities and deliberately spread false information. For example, Andy Bichlbaum appeared live on the BBC and claimed to be a spokesman for Dow Chemicals. He stated that the company would be offering the victims of the Bhopal disaster in India several million in compensation. As a result of Bichlbaum's performance, Dow Chemicals lost millions of US dollars on the stock exchange. He was also criticised for giving the people of Bhopal false hope.<sup>55</sup>

Unannounced actions are often used as a method to destabilize the ruling order. Interventionist Art can commonly be synonymous with civil disobedience using surprise, unpredictable advances and improvisation as means to an end, for example the Yomango movement, which carries out politically motivated shoplifting. It originated in Barcelona in 2002, and the movement has spread to South America and the rest of Europe.<sup>56</sup>

It may be a generalization, but it can be said that many of the practitioners associated with Interventionist Art have relatively weak links to the art institution.<sup>57</sup> They derive their legitimacy from a wider art field where the aim is to reach a bigger audience and to interact with different social and cultural movements. Such movements place little emphasis on the individual artistic practice, and subsequently equally little weight on the signature, which has traditionally characterised a work of art.

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<sup>54</sup> See the website <http://www.critical-art.net/> for further information.

<sup>55</sup> The Bhopal disaster was the result of an industrial catastrophe at a chemical factory in the Indian city of Bhopal in 1984. 42 tons of gas was leaked and thousands died. The number of casualties varies: the official tally is 2.259, but other government sources put the number at 15.000. The industrial plant was owned and run by the American corporation Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dow Chemical Company.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.yomangoteam.com/>.

<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, not wholly applicable as many artists operate in the border areas between the art institution and 'off-site'. The exhibition *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere* in MASS MoCA in 2004, curated by Nato Thompson, presented a range of socially engaged and activist practices side by side, where few had any connection to the art world, including the Biotic Baking Brigade (a loosely connected group of activists famous for throwing pies in the faces of people in power) and Yomango (a Spanish anarchist collective that promotes shoplifting as a form of social disobedience).

This brief and schematic representation is intended to show that works in the *Space for Interference* project in many ways departed from the activities that are usually denoted by the term Interventionist Art. It is true that they involved an entrance into other territories with the aim of disturbing and influencing the status quo, but they entered through the front door as the result of negotiation. The works were intended as works of art from the outset, created by individual artists. It was not an unannounced or hostile form of intrusion; instead it was an arranged form of friction and exchange between the respective institutions functioning as sites, and a micro-version of an art institution (the artists and myself as the curator). The works could occupy the spaces on their own terms because they were authorized interventions.

Matias Faldbakken's *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* and Marianne Heier's *Saga Night* intervened in and changed institutional practices for a short and a longer periods, respectively. Even though this element was less pronounced in the case of Coley's work, one could still argue that the texts, engraved onto physical structures in the various sites, thus seemingly incorporated into mindset and mandate of the site, altered the way in which they operated publicly. The ambiguity of the textual works, created by the combination of poetry, sound and content that related to the control over physical territories and abstract, metaphysical spaces – was transferred to the institutions and businesses that housed them, for example the police station and the shopping centre. This was the case with all the inscriptions that were not mediated 'as art'. Audiences were on their own in dealing with questions that arose in the wake of these peculiar announcements. An obvious potential criticism was related to the fact that the texts did not make any substantial changes to the different sites, which all remained the same. The exception was Li School, where the text remains on the walls in the classroom.<sup>58</sup> This work affected a real change at those times when the text was incorporated into the teaching and, as such, it functioned as an addition to the school day. In an e-mail to me, the dean of the school underlined the fact that the text still has a role to play:

'The writing on the wall remains. The staff did not want it removed. It is there to remind us, among other things, of cultural diversity and the opportunities that offers us at this school, our strong characteristics and the less so, and what we can develop

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<sup>58</sup> Li School also represented another exception in Coley's project. It was in this case that the origin of the text was revealed, which we both agreed on. We took into consideration the school as an institution and how they could use the text in their teaching. 'We must cultivate our garden' are the final words in Voltaire's satire *Candide, ou l'Optimisme*, first published in 1759.

together. We created a new vision for the school this winter, in which one of the suggestions was ‘we must cultivate our garden: diversity + opportunity = capability’.<sup>59</sup>

One of the common features of the works was that they introduced or suggested changes to what can be referred to as institutional procedures or practices. It is, therefore, possible to see them in light of Institutional Critique.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in an e-mail to me from Eva-Siri Holmvik, on 24 May 2011, as a response to my question of whether Coley’s work was still on display.

### **The term Institutional Critique.**

As an art practice Institutional Critique can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. A number of artists, theorists, critics and curators have, through practice and text production over time, contributed to adapting and nuancing the notion of the term, and there is little consensus around how to evaluate, categorize and define it.<sup>60</sup> Artists such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Hans Haacke used their own practices as points of departure for investigating the premises of museum spaces, their ordering and connections to economic and political power structures. These artists are part of what had been referred to as the ‘first wave’ of Institutional Critique that included a number of different approaches, but with a common goal to raise awareness concerning the material and ideological conditions that were part of the production, presentation and distribution of art. The result was an investigative and analytically-based practice that pointed out power relations and deficiencies in the institution of art.

In what has been named as the ‘second wave’ of Institutional Critique the methods and analytical strategies used by artists in the 1960s were developed to include interdisciplinary means of expression, interactive and performative strategies. The critical perspectives, launched by the previous generation of artists, were carried on by seeing the art institution as part of a wider field, which included the media, design, life style, advertising and branding. It also included sociological and ethnographic investigations: artists became interested in the construction of history, museology and ethnography and the notion of the universal viewer was gradually undermined through works that cast both the institution and the audience as political entities and carriers of specific social and cultural views. Examples of such practitioners include Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson and Renée Green. The basis of the critique was redefined and came to include an examination of the artists’ own roles, so that the (self) institutionalized subject was conducting the critique. This provided the background for Andrea Fraser’s article ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’ in *Artforum* in 2005.<sup>61</sup> Here, she argued that institutional critique was carried out by individuals that were themselves ‘institutionalized’, so that self-questioning and self-reflection became fundamental parts of the critique. The institutions of art were viewed in a wider perspective and in relation to the complex social system that they formed part of.

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<sup>60</sup> Its theoretical grounding lies in critical cultural theory with Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Peter Bürger as important points of reference. A number of critics, among them Benjamin Buchloh and Lucy Lippard, have discussed Institutional Critique in relation to Conceptual Art and the ‘dematerialization of the art object’.

Institutional Critique was gradually established as its own genre and – as a consequence – became institutionalised. The internalisation of critique has provoked some critics and artists to state that institutional critique was ‘dead’. Andrea Fraser summed it up in her above-mentioned text: ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’:

‘Today, the argument goes, there no longer is an outside. How, then, can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification? Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against.<sup>62</sup> With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape.’<sup>63</sup>

One may contend that Fraser, through these statements, presents art as a closed system, resistant to emancipation or radical transformation. The critical impulse becomes self-referential and internal, irrelevant in wider public perspective. It, thus, becomes difficult to see art as having the potential to influence society.

Despite the differences in methodology, focus and approach it is possible to see the phenomenon and genre of Institutional Critique as a concerted effort by artists to save their own institution from its inherent paradoxes and operations. By constant corrections artists have safe-guarded the principles of democracy and the public sphere against the influences of political, economic and social forces that have emerged inside the institution of art, and which threaten to corrupt it. As Alexander Alberro wrote in his text ‘Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique:

‘The underlying belief of these interventions is that the injustices that presently characterize the institution of art can be altered and corrected if the institution’s internal contradictions – the discrepancy between its ideal self-understanding and presentation and the current reality – are exposed for all to see. In other words, the

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<sup>62</sup> Andrea Fraser: ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’, *Artforum* (September 2005), p. 278.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 282.



work does not maintain that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the institution itself, but rather that the problems are located in the conventions that currently manage and configure it.’<sup>64</sup>

The aim has been to highlight problems without leaving the institution. The self-reflexive and auto-critical impulse of Institutional Critique has, thus, shaped the art institution for over four decades. Artists have actively engaged in the institution and sought to improve it. They have done this by using ‘the voice’ over the strategy of ‘exit’.<sup>65</sup> I have borrowed the voice/exit terminology from the economist Albert O. Hirschman’s thesis and book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* from 1970.<sup>66</sup> Here, he contrasts the three concepts by showing them to be different active approaches within the spheres of economics, politics and civil society. Hirschman contends that the members of any organization or institution, in practice, only have two active choices when they find that the institution does not meet their needs. They can withdraw (exit) or try to influence and improve the situation through communication (voice), by expressing their discontent in the form of complaints or suggested changes. I will not go into detail here, but will use one of Hirschmann’s points, which relates to the example of an institution that has channels and methods for registering the worries and problems of its members, and, thus, will better equipped to prevent decline. The stronger the culture of voice is, the more resourceful the institution will be as a whole; it will be able to hold onto its critics and to learn from them. It is important to add at this stage that to see the art system as merely one institution or organisation is clearly problematic. The Norwegian art-sociologist Dag Solhjell uses the term ‘circuit’ to describe these different sectors. Clearly inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s theories about the cultural field, Solhjell point out three different circuits, which a

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.): *Institutional Critique: an anthology of artists' writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2009), pp. 13–14.

<sup>65</sup> What does it mean to seek to exit the art field? To liberate oneself from any connection to economics, society or culture, which makes the art institution complete? Would not any dealings with the economy of the art world, regardless of how remote or slight it is, provide a link that precludes any sense of exit? The degree of disassociation required to deem something an exit strategy has not been agreed. In the chapter on ‘Exit Strategies’ in the text ‘institutions, critique, and institutional critique’, Alexander Alberro refers to artist collectives such as WochenKlausus, RepoHistory, the Yes Men, subRosa and Electronic Disturbances Theater, contending that they: ‘[...] develop tactical media strategies to intervene effectively in an array of fields that are far removed from the institution of art. [...] For these artists, institutional critique is primarily defined neither by its relationship to traditional exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries, nor by the way it addresses issues of primary concern to the art world. Rather, institutional critique entails finding ways to get out of the frame altogether, evading the official art world and the attendant professions and institutions that legitimate it, and developing practices capable of operating outside of the confines of the museum and art market. Art is in these cases connected to a much larger political and ideological project—it is more of a means than an end.’ (ibid. pp. 15–16.)

<sup>66</sup> Albert O. Hirschman: *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

number of participants relate to and operate in. Solhjell's circuits and the distinction between them are debatable, but I choose to use them as an example of how one can define several parallel sectors within the art system, which operate according to different conceptions and norms.

Each circuit in Solhjell's system operates according to its own system of values. The exclusive circuit makes use of a number of strict exclusionary criteria based on an understanding of artistic actuality, relevancy and quality. The stricter the criteria of admittance, the greater the status and the more symbolic capital generated in the form of recognition from like-minded people. The inclusive circuit, which, according to Solhjell, is a particular feature of Norwegian mediation of art, is characterised by seeking to include as many artists and viewers as possible according to ideals formulated by Norwegian cultural policies, such as solidarity, egalitarianism, public education and decentralisation. The commercial circuit, on the other hand, is oriented around economic capital, where art traded and assessed primarily according to economic criteria. According to Solhjell, a competitive relationship exists between the participants in the different circuits, as well as between the circuits themselves, where the aim is to constantly advance to a better position. Within each circuit, on the other hand, there exists a form of structured interplay, which can be described according to Hirschmann's notion of exit/voice. In the exclusive circuit institutional critique, expressed through works of art, has continuously been taken in and become part of institutional memory and art education, which Julia Bryan-Wilson has termed 'the curriculum of institutional critique'.<sup>67</sup>

How can we see the works under the *Space for Interference* project as Institutional Critique? The fact that all three were the result of negotiation alludes to what Swedish curator Maria Lind refers to as 'constructive institutional critique' in her text 'Models of Criticality'.<sup>68</sup> Lind's conception relates an alliance where the parties – the artist and the host institution – have full insight and understanding of each other's objectives and concerns. In her text, Lind draws on the works of Apolonija Šušteršič and Liesbeth Bik & Jos van der Pol as examples of 'constructive critique'. These artists were commissioned by Lind when she ran Moderna Museet Projekt. The approach can be seen as a shared understanding on the part of the artists

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<sup>67</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'A Curriculum of Institutional Critique', in Jonas Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism* (Oslo: OCA/verksted, 2003), pp. 89–109.

<sup>68</sup> Maria Lind, 'Models of Criticality' in Brian Kuan Wood (ed.), *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 85–96.

and the curator of the need to open up the art institution for discussion. The specific art projects were not passive critiques of the status quo, but functioned as supplements to the Moderna Museet's institutionalised practices. Apolonija Šušteršič's work was entitled *Light Therapy* (1999) and consisted of a fully functioning centre for light therapy installed in Prästgården, the adjacent building to the Museum, where Moderna Museet Projekt was housed. Lind contextualised the work as part of the Museum's existing 'side attractions':

'But in contrast to the other 'side attractions', this one was free. While enjoying their light therapy session, people could borrow a book from the small library at the back of the room and follow one of the instructions on the wall, such as: do not look straight into the lights but look down and read.'<sup>69</sup>

The work of Liesbeth Bik & Jos van der Pol was entitled *Absolut Stockholm, Label or Life: City on a Platform* (2000-01) and consisted of two main parts: an installation at Prästgården, which referenced existing marketing campaigns for IKEA and Absolut Vodka (two of Sweden's most internationally renowned products) and a second part in the form of discussions, talks and guided tours, which took place in Stockholm city centre and the suburbs. This work related Moderna Museet to the politics and economic powers that provided the basis for the Museum's existence. 'The museum was carefully, yet provocatively, contextualized in relation to the social and political circumstances of its origin, while its current practice was simultaneously placed into question. How should a museum of modern art be used today?'<sup>70</sup>

Heier, Faldbakken and Coley's works do not fit so neatly with Lind's notion of constructive critique. It is true that they avoided the classic counter-position and instead formulated something new inside and in dialogue with the institutions. They produced new external interfaces that generated different experiences and interpretations of the Museum and the Library. And, through manipulation, reorganization and expansion, the institutions' activities were altered in ways that their own employees would not have thought of. However, the artists and I (as guests) and the respective institutions (as hosts) were not united in their understanding of the works and their potential effects. The project concerned artistic practices that the host institution could not fully comprehend, because their focus and competence lay

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<sup>69</sup> Maria Lind, 'Models of Criticality', p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

in other social fields. For the artists the respective institutions were advantageous primarily because they allowed them to experiment with their artistic practices and took on the role of test sites. It was a meeting between different fields of operation and mindsets, which could benefit from close contact and create new experiences for audiences that both parties were interested in communicating with. Before I recount the features of the works from an artistic perspective, I would like to present some of the possible motivations – on the part of the host institutions – for letting artists loose on their turf.

In the cases of Faldbakken and Heier state-financed cultural institutions and their activities were turned into sites for artistic projects. The fact that they both worked in public, cultural institutions was symptomatic of the way in which institutional critique proceeds in a social democratic society like Norway, where most social institutions are administered by the state. It has to be added here that the ideals of social democracy and the welfare system have been and still are under pressure, partly as a result of increasing cultural differentiation and more demands for individual room for manoeuvre. The problem relates to attempting to uphold egalitarian ideals and provide a welfare structure that includes ‘everybody’, while simultaneously maintaining the right for individuals to be different. Nevertheless, social democracy is still – without question – the strongest and most important political force in Norway. It is possible to claim that ‘the state is everywhere’, not just as a controlling body, but as much as a service provider and support structure.

The art system’s own cultural power and status are sure to have contributed to the institutional acceptance of these artists’ proposals. There is also another plausible explanation connected to the fact that Maihaugen and the Deichmanske Library both are publicly funded, cultural institutions. Let us first see what how they themselves described the artists’ interventions. The Director of Maihaugen stated in a newspaper interview about Saga Night: ‘This work fits in well at Maihaugen [...] It is exactly these types of reflections on modern-day Norway that we want to show. And I am particularly pleased with the fact that the asphalt is placed in the Residential Area.’<sup>71</sup> The Head of the Deichmanske Library related Faldbakken’s work to the on-going, cultural-political debate concerning the position and duties of libraries. In a draft press release – which I quoted from above – she stated:

‘The libraries, particularly the public ones, are periodically pronounced dead by the media. They warn of the imminent demise of the book, as easy access to great

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<sup>71</sup> From ‘Here Norway became rich’, article in *Klassekampen*, 23 May 2008 (Translated from Norwegian).

amounts of information renders the institution of the library is surplus to requirements [...] In this complex media reality, however, libraries are increasingly being visited and used; they are developing and adapting their services; politicians are deciding to expand and develop social institutions that facilitate access to information and cultural expression, so that it becomes a real option for everyone, rather than a theoretical possibility [...] To change the perception of an institution with such strong conventions as the Library has will require a radical break with its traditional structure and systems. A radical attack on the Library's systems can currently be seen in Matias Faldbakken's sculpture *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* where the library shelves have been emptied and books are strewn in heaps on the floor. They are still there, the thoughts are still there, the content is still there – but the system has been demolished and we have to search in new ways. In this light, we can see Faldbakken's sculpture as a highly topical comment on the idea of a new library space.'<sup>72</sup>

Both Maihaugen and the Deichmanske Library were compelled to adapt to changes in society in relation to information and communications. New information technologies, the effects of globalization, and post-modern ways of thinking that incorporate hybridity and diversity, have created a new competitive scenario where cultural institutions such as Maihaugen and Deichmanske Library risk losing their legitimacy as their conservators of national culture and values. From being steeped in the past with the aim of securing the Norwegian national heritage, these cultural institutions now have to compete to present themselves as digitally cutting edge within a new field of cultural industry. They had to respond to the political requirements set out in parliamentary propositions, funding allocation correspondence, and the parliamentary report on archives, libraries and museums (*ABM-meldingen*) from 1999. The 2007 funding allocation letter to Maihaugen stated: 'Museums should be arenas for critical reflection and creative insights. The aim is for museums to function as modern societal institutions.'<sup>73</sup> A telephone enquiry to The Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs as to what they mean by 'modern societal institutions' established that it means to increase contact with audiences, to become more visible as a participant in society, to follow trends, and to adapt to the times. The political requirement that the institutions

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<sup>72</sup> From the draft press release the head of Deichmanske Library prepared in case *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* created public debate (translated from Norwegian).

<sup>73</sup> The quote is taken from the 2007 funding allocation letter to Maihaugen from KKD (The Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs) (translated from Norwegian).

must see their role in a wider societal perspective, where they reflect and respond to their surrounding social field, can be seen as equivalent to self-critique.<sup>74</sup>

Self-observation is of peculiar importance in a complex, decentred society where institutions cannot simply define their identity or even reality with reference to a central authority. In discovering that there are competing cognitive logics the observer is driven to self-observation. And self-observation requires help from outside. From this point of view it is possible to see how the artists' interventions allowed the institutions to see and experience their own self-produced cognitive limits, and to realize that they, as institutions, do not merely administer a social reality, but also produce it.

This was one aspect of the works seen from a non-art perspective. The works had other features – seen from an artistic discourse – that both divided and united them.

Heier's *Saga Night* functioned as a permanent addition to the existing collection of cultural history, almost as a refinement of it. Heier wanted the work to be presented and explained in the best possible way. The temporary *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, however, was more destabilizing. For Faldbakken the point was not to explain, but upset a governing principle of order and replace it with chaos. Coley's textual images aimed to add an ambiguous element to the architecture, arenas and institutions that formed a familiar framework around social expression and disciplining. Different intentions were at play: from wanting to improve, to sabotage, to sowing doubt, which also reflected different artist roles or 'missions'. Heier's transparent, rational, service-based method, on the other hand, contrasted with Falbakken's opaque, cynical and humorous approach. Heier's work reflected her social engagement and real desire to change her surrounding social institutions, which she felt a certain ownership towards. In line with such an approach, *Saga Night* has become a permanent part of Maihaugen's collection. *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* was radically different, it was a mere moment in time and not an intervention into the structure of the Library beyond being an event in its history, which illustrates how Faldbakken's work was not based on any commitment to social progress. Faldbakken was not really interested in changing the Library

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<sup>74</sup> The Norwegian parliamentary resolution no. 1 (2008–2009) under chapter 325 'Collective measures for archives, libraries and museums' under the headline 'Promoting learning, the presentation of culture and knowledge' states: 'We have emphasised projects that raise relevant contemporary questions and controversial topics, complex and marginal histories, problem-oriented and critical presentations. The challenge has been to make archive, library and museum institutions more topical and relevant, active and critical.'

or making it more effective. It functioned more as a test site for his ideas-based practice, which can partly be linked to Conceptual Art's analytical approach to institutional frameworks, and partly to a fascination with the historical avant-garde's strategies of negation, but also to the way in which resistances can be made manifest as *image*.

A common feature of all the three art projects in *Space for Interference* was that they involved a mutual lending and use of institutional authority and power: the artists utilised the respective institutions' mandate and authority to move their works into the social reality produced and maintained by these institutions. In return the artists lent their presumed innovative artistic thinking, which, particularly in the cases of Heier and Faldbakken, could be allied to the institutions' need to observe themselves as participants in a complex and decentralised economy and culture. The same can be applied to Coley's works, but here there were different elements at play, for example, the school's pedagogical motivations and the shopping centre's desire for visibility and attention that could boost their turnover.

A common feature for all the art projects was that they functioned as irregularities in the context in which they were situated. It was largely their aesthetic features that made them seem so different, such as Heier's (too) thick and almost brutal strip of asphalt, which broke with the idyllic gravel pathway; Faldbakken's pile of unsorted books with their covers exposed, an assault on the orderly spines of the Library's shelves; and Coley's formally speaking tight, but ambiguous textual images drilled and integrated into the architecture of renowned social institutions. In relation to Heier's *Saga Night* it is important to note that the term 'irregular' is debatable, as the idea was to make the art part of the collection. I would, nevertheless, contend that the strip of asphalt's three qualities – functioning as an actual road, a self-proclaimed cultural-historical artefact and a sculpture – makes it an anomaly compared with the rest of the museum's objects on display. Its relative difference is highlighted by the information plaque that cites Heier as the donor, while simultaneously using the opportunity to set out the purpose of the gift.<sup>75</sup> One could see this as an atypical way of mediating a museum piece.

The works under *Space for Interference* were all physically limited and created a border with the environments they became part of. In this way, the artists created their own 'protectorates'

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<sup>75</sup> As stated by the text on the sign at Maihaugen Museum.

within territories that belonged to someone else. In these confined spaces, they could take change and enforce the formal and conceptual solutions required by the works, which gave them an identity as works of art, while simultaneously separating them out from their respective environments. It is possible to assign a double ontology to the works, seen as both works of art and as a social reality within their respective environments. These two experiences of the works existed in parallel, and did come into conflict.

The works' separateness was both a strength and a weakness. They resisted a becoming fully incorporated or embedded<sup>76</sup> and, thus, were never fully part of the social institutions they were directed towards. They were simultaneously part of and independent of the respective institutions' forms of communication and logic. It is, nevertheless, possible to contend that the works' aesthetic features were contagious and it was possible for audiences to see of the institutions in new ways. It is possible that it was not so much the institutions that were challenged and questioned, but audiences' (institutionalised) impressions of them and what they represented. The works altered the institutions' recognizable form and behaviour to greater or lesser degree, and they tended to become more open and indefinable.

One could argue that the works in *Space for Interference* changed the respective institutions' appearances and practices, and hence demonstrated their variable characters. *Saga Night* and *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, for example, were not just models that showed the possibility for change, but real interventions in how other systems functioned. This makes it relevant to

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<sup>76</sup> The term 'embedded art practices' is taken up in Marisa Jahn (ed), *Byproduct: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practice* (YYZBOOKS, 2010). The introduction states '[...] This play in that very tension between assimilation and distinction describes a strategy of contemporary art production some has referred to as 'embedded art practices'. Some embedded art practices seek to completely assimilate, surfacing or showing themselves at critical junctures; others foreground their difference as the very means of activating their surrounds. Sometimes it is beyond the control of the artist to remain indistinct, and circumstances pronounce his/her difference. Embedded art practices are cousins of other process-based (as opposed to object-based) practices, known by term such as 'service-aesthetics,' 'post-studio practices,' 'post-mimetic practices' 'relational aesthetics,' 'interventionist works' 'site-specific practices,' and 'contextualist artworks.' As its key distinction however, embedded art practices are ones in which the artist become parasitically reliant on its institutional 'host' to produce a 'byproduct' of the system – this is the artwork.' (pp.11-12) I have opted not to explore the validity of this term any further. It seems to subsume a number of different art practices under the same heading. At the same time it denotes a form of artistic opposition, characterised by agonism, rather than antagonism. This issue is also discussed in the Introduction with reference to Michel Foucault's contention: 'Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of 'agonism' – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation' (Michel Foucault, 'Subject and Power' in James D. Faubion (ed.) *Power - Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: the New Press, 1994), p. 342). The relationship described here can be applied to the projects within *Space for Interference*. However, I maintain that by using the term 'by-product', the work of art subordinates it within the system it is interacting in.



consider Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems.<sup>77</sup> As asserted in the article 'Space for Interference'<sup>78</sup> written by Kjetil A. Jakobsen and myself, this theory starts from the premise that differentiated social areas like politics, economics, science and art function as systems with a logic of their own. However, these functions always take place within a framework of a 'self-initiated insecurity' wherein current practices are only applicable in a preliminary manner. According to Luhmann, art in the modern world is a system that operates with a particularly high degree of 'self-initiated insecurity'. Art is an extremely loose and uncoordinated system of communication, which specializes in observing the media and forms that produce reality, thus reactivating the unused observational possibilities of the present and making apparent the contingency of reality.<sup>79</sup> It is in the nature of art to be constantly exploring new mediums and approaches. Inside the boundaries that it has drawn for itself, it challenges the given meaning of any manifestation. The system of art, therefore, handles contingency as a matter of course, where nothing is necessary or impossible. Luhmann argues that the way in which art makes visible and handles its own form of 'self-initiated insecurity' contributes to raising other systems' awareness of their own contingencies. According to this claim art shows how society's various systems and functions operate depending on which set of rules they decide to follow, and thus that all social systems and arrangements are resting on a set of variable foundations. Creating this awareness and, thereby, alerting and engaging people in the institutions involved can be seen as a common feature of all the works, despite the range of expressions and artistic intentions involved. It can be seen in Heier's constructive intervention in Maihaugen's collection in which she supplemented the collection at the same time as updating the Museum's presentation of the nation; in Faldbakken's temporarily staged breakdown in the Library; and in Coley's text-based works placed in various social institutions and thereby assigning to them a form of ambiguity that they do not normally possess.

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<sup>77</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984).

<sup>78</sup> Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk & Kjetil A. Jakobsen (2011). 'Space for Interference'. *Empedocles* 2 (1), pp.19-39.

<sup>79</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a social system*, trans. by E. M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); *Institut für soziale Gegenwartsfragen, Freiburg i. Br./Kunstraum Wien (Hg.)*, *Art & Language and Luhmann* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1997); *Schriften zu Kunst und Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008).

## **8. The role of the curator**

What was then my role in this? How can we see curatorial practice in relation to the realization of these works?

In this case I was operating as a freelance curator within a research fellowship, which saw me temporarily employed by the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. My research project *Space for Interference* explored the relationship between the artist and the curator outside traditional exhibition spaces. Moreover, it was an investigation of the role and practices of the freelance curator and the relationship with artists, in other words, an examination of the art institution on a micro-level. A relevant question at this stage is whether the working relationships as they played out between the individuals concerned in *Space for Interference* can be transferred to a wider discussion regarding the relationship between the artist and the institution.

The freelance curator has the opportunity to move between different institutions and is not tied to a particular organisation's history, exhibitionary practices or working culture. It would, nevertheless, be fallacious to contend that he or she is independent; it is instead a form of 'co-dependency', as Paul O'Neill pointed out in the article 'The Co-dependent Curator'.<sup>80</sup> It is concerned with guest performances and short-term contracts. These create a set of premises and a climate, which contributes to defining the relationship between the freelance curator and the institution that has commissioned her/him. As a temporary project worker, the freelance curator has a visibility, network, tempo and workload that often supersedes that of permanent employees, and which pumps the institution up, as it were, by enhancing its (expressed) power output. The freelance curator's psyche, on the other hand, is characterized by conflict: the expectation of complete presence in the moment combined with a need to be thinking of the next project. This may lead to a potential distraction that detracts from the extra effort that the freelance curator represents. Before I discuss my own role in the *Space for Interference* research project, it is necessary to provide some background material on the changes to the role of the curator that have taken place, not least the rise of the freelance curator.

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<sup>80</sup> *Art Monthly* 291 (November 2005), pp. 7-10.

In the text ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a singular position’ Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak<sup>81</sup> argue that the role of the curator has shifted from being a regular position of employment with associated tasks and responsibilities, such as safeguarding the heritage, enriching, collection, research and display to becoming a more individualised commission primarily related to presenting art for an audience. Tasks such as safeguarding and enriching are allied to the Latin etymology of curating, from *curare*, which means to take care of or look after.<sup>82</sup> The title ‘curator’ has been used and is still used across a range of different disciplines. Historically, the title of curator was used to denote public employees who took care of social values, such as the ancient Roman *curatores annonae*, who were responsible for the supply of water and grain. Later such responsibilities were expanded to include spiritual and inter-human matters. Today, the title of curator is primarily concerned with the social services sector. The art world’s use of the term is not universally known, but confined to a professional field and a specialised audience, as exemplified by the case of Norway. The social worker or curator (*sosialkuratoren*)<sup>83</sup> and the art curator are perhaps not so different, in that they both function in the dual capacity of helper and as an authority that exerts control. They mediate and operate at the intersection between the private individual, the institution and society as a whole.

Heinich and Pollak point out in the above-mentioned article that the role of the curator has shifted from being an institutionalized set of tasks, embedded within a professional system, to what we may refer to as a border between the art institution and the audience. The cause of this relocation, according to the authors, can be linked to the increase in the number of exhibitions and museums. The ensuing competitive relationship between different art institutions – not least in relation to visibility and funding – has created a need for greater contact with audiences, an active link between the art and its viewers. This situation has created an expansion of the tasks of the curator, which now include:

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<sup>81</sup> Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a singular position’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 231-250.

<sup>82</sup> In Norway, until recently, there was a misunderstanding related to art curating, which was described as ‘curing’ (*kurering*), in the medical sense. One can still find exhibition catalogues and invitations that use the phrase ‘cured by’ (*kuratert av*). This is perhaps not so strange when one considers how similar the terminology and tasks are. This point is explored in more detail later in the text.

<sup>83</sup> The protected title in Norwegian is ‘*sosionom*’ meaning social worker.

‘[...] an enlarged administrative role, determining a conceptual framework, selecting specialized collaborators from various disciplines, directing work crews, consulting with an architect, assuming a formal position in terms presentations, organizing the publishing of an encyclopaedic catalogue, etc.’<sup>84</sup>

The expanded mandate has also led to a personification of the role of the curator and its allied authority. Heinich and Pollak use the term *auteur* to denote this new figure of the curator. *Auteur* was originally used to describe a new kind of film director, who gave the film an identifiably personal touch both in terms of form and content, using it to express their own particular vision.<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that the personality or charisma of the *auteur* is detached from what this person created, and can be seen as a cultural product in its own right, a star status that can be marketed and sold.<sup>86</sup> As in the world of film, the curatorial *auteur* is a freelancer who is hired on short or longer-term contracts with an extensive mandate in terms of selecting artists, budgetary control and hiring personnel. Within the field of art, this control and planning authority has made it possible to create exhibitions that challenge the display practices of specific institutions. In some cases this has taken the form of a curated critique. Obvious examples of this include Charles Esche, when he was director of the Rooseum in Malmö (2000 to 2004) and in his current position as director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (since 2004), and Maria Lind’s series of projects for Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1997-2001) and in her position as director of the Munich Kunstverein (2001 and 2004).

When exemplifying the *auteur* curator it is impossible to ignore Harald Szeemann, who can be said to be the inventor of the freelance curatorial practice. Szeemann took charge of the Bern Kunsthalle in 1961 at the age of 28. By juxtaposing different styles, challenging the boundaries of the institution, and showing younger artists exploring new ways of working, he quickly gained a reputation as an innovative curator, exemplified by his exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head* (1969). This was the first exhibition of American post-Minimalist and Conceptual artists in Europe and displayed the work of artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, Richard Serra and Joseph Beuys in what Szeemann characterised as ‘structured chaos’. This entailed turning the Kunsthall into a site

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 236

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 238

<sup>86</sup> See Iben Thorving Laursen: ‘Auteuren som kulturelt fænomen’ in *Kontour: Tidsskrift for Kulturstudier* no. 3 (Århus: Universitetet i Århus, 2001), pp. 24 – 37.

for uncompromising testing of new ideas and new forms of presentation. The consequence was that the Kunsthall board intervened to make Szeemann subordinate to the administration, and he left that same year.

Szeemann's active curatorial approach ushered in a potentially conflicting production of meaning derived from the interrelationship between and contextualisation of works of art that command the space that individual works of art are experienced in and through. Both the individual works of art and the exhibition as a whole – the domain and concern of the curator – is predicated on the need to command the space to enable communication with the audience. The space is not only a physical premise, but also creates meaning. Some times this parallel need for (significant) space results in a conflict. This is particularly the case when the work of art uses the space as a medium, as in Installation Art.

*Documenta 5* (1972) for which Szeemann was the main curator is an example of how the individualised authority and command over the space can conflict with the interests and needs of the artists. Szeemann was in charge of a curatorial team whose point of departure was *Questions of reality: The Image-World Today*. The exhibition consisted of 15 different sections with different subtitles that mixed the presentation of high art and different forms of cultural artefacts and means of expression. It was a framing that dictated the reading and experience of the individual works by including them within different histories and mythologies. This created a negative response from a number of the artists. A group of ten of the central artists in the exhibition published a letter in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* where they asserted the artist's right to decide over their own works in an exhibition. Two of the artists, among them Daniel Buren, also wrote essays for the catalogue. Buren's point was that when curator took on the role of an *auteur*, artists lost their autonomy, or as Claire Bishop put it in 'What is a Curator?': 'The secondary or meta-authorship of the curator displaced the primary authorship of the artist.'<sup>87</sup>

The task of the curator is derived from pre-existing authorships and largely concerns speaking 'on behalf of' the work of art and artistic practices, which adds an ethical dimension. Particularly in relation to collaborations with living artists, the extent to which curating involves inter-human communication processes is striking. It is worth noting that the notion

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<sup>87</sup> Claire Bishop, 'What is a Curator' <http://idea.ro/revista/?q=en/node/41&articol=468> (last accessed on 2 January 2012),

of the curator as an *auteur*, someone engrossed in highlighting their own personal vision, openly conflicts with the idea of the curator as a person who promotes, rather than performs, the work of others and, as such, creates relationships and connections between art and audiences.

As a consequence of the dematerialization and conceptualization of art that took place in the 1970s, a number of artists have departed from a pure production of objects in favour of practices that are characterised by formulation, administration and distribution of information, and which involve recycling, reorganising and editing of existing material. Such approaches include directing physical and social spaces. The result is art that is reminiscent of and corresponds to the work of the curator. A mutual contamination has arisen where artists and curators inspire each other and intervene in what were previously clearly separate areas of operation. Not least, the curator has adopted a position from which he or she can carry out Institutional Critique and has expanded their mandate from being exhibitions makers to becoming a form of institution makers where they launch new models in opposition to the hegemonic conception of the art institution. Some so-called critical art institutions have, via profiled curatorial practices, turned a self-reflexive form of institutional critique into a model of governance. These are characterized by their attempts to create an auto-critical, experimental and open institutional space, often through participatory activities designed reformulate the traditional, high culture, white cube, and open it up to new audiences. An example of such an approach is above-mentioned Rooseum in Malmö, which, under Charles Esche (2000-04) defined itself as ‘part community center, part laboratory and part academy.’<sup>88</sup> This illustrates an approach that lies outside the traditional view of what the role and duties of art institutions are. Differences include a shift in focus onto the social surroundings and the context the art institution operates in. Moreover, the concept of exhibition is expanded to include activities such as discussion programmes, lectures, seminars and workshops. The art institutions do not only present artistic content, they also produce it. Several terms have been applied to such institutional models. Esche used the term ‘experimental institutionalism’ to describe the projects he curated for the Rooseum; curator at MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona) Jorge Ribalta has used the term ‘New

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<sup>88</sup> Nifca, Sweden – Rooseum in Malmö (2006)  
<http://www.nifca.org/2006/residencies/programs/locations/rooseum.html> (last accessed on 23 December 2011).

Institutionality'<sup>89</sup>; and Jonas Ekeberg introduced the term 'New Institutionalism' in 2003, which he had borrowed from the social science (while he was working for the Office for Contemporary Art (OCA) in Norway).<sup>90</sup>

The model Esche developed for the Rooseum was abandoned after five years. This was also the case with other art spaces and exhibition programmes, which pursued experimental and critically-oriented practices with a reflexive form of Institutional Critique, such as NIFCA – Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (1997 – 2006), the Nordic Council of Ministers' expert organ for visual culture: visual art, architecture and design, based in Helsinki.<sup>91</sup> On the website, which is still up, NIFCA describes itself as follows: 'NIFCA was a laboratory for developing: experimental exhibition forms, curatorial practices, public activity, artist-in-residency programs, and critical discourse.' Both the Rooseum and NIFCA lost its public funding. These two examples indicate that also in state-funded art and cultural institutions in the Nordic social-democracies it is difficult to run radical and experimental programmes, which transcend the traditional exhibition of art, and which oppose economic and political pressures towards popularisation and commercialisation.

Gerald Raunig, Jorge Ribalta and Nina Möntmann are some of the art theorists who have been central to discussions on whether there is a political-economic climate that can allow progressive art institutions to operate without steamrolling art's own critical approaches.

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<sup>89</sup> Jorge Ribalta, 'Experiments in a New Institutionality' in *Relational Objects*, MACBA Collections 2002-2007, (Barcelona: MACBA Publications, 2010), pp.225 -265.

<sup>90</sup> Jonas Ekeberg (ed.) *Verksted#1: New Institutionalism*. (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003), p. 10. Claire Doherty's description of 'new institutionalism' from the article 'The institution is dead, long live the institution! Contemporary art and new institutionalism' in *Engage* Issue 15, (Summer, 2004) goes: 'New institutionalism is [...] a term poached from social science, it classifies effectively a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within. New institutionalism is characterised by the rhetoric of the temporary - transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness. It embraces a dominant strand of contemporary art practice - namely that which employs dialogue and participation to produce event or process-based works rather than objects for passive consumption. New institutionalism responds to (some might even say assimilates) the working methods of artistic practice and furthermore, artist-run initiatives, whilst maintaining a belief in the gallery, museum or arts centre (and by association their buildings) as a necessary locus of (or platform for) art.'

<sup>91</sup> NIFCA (Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art) was established in 1978 as the Nordic Arts Centre, and went through significant changes during the time it was active. In 1996, it changed its name to NIFCA, and during its final period (2000-2006) the organisation produced a number of critically oriented and important projects and publications such as *Capital – It Fails Us Now*, *Populism* and *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*. The closure of NIFCA in 2006 was a political decision made by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In his article ‘Instituent Practices - Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming’<sup>92</sup> Gerald Raunig draws on Foucault’s notion of ‘parrhesia’ which refers to speaking the truth. He imagines an art institution that makes double use of parrhesia by drawing attention to and criticising power as well as its *own* position. This approach unites social activism with an art historical awareness that incorporates earlier phases of Institutional Critique:

‘Instituent practices [...] conjoin the advantages of both ‘generations’ of institutional critique, thus exercising both forms of parrhesia, [...] linking [...] social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism.’<sup>93</sup>

Jorge Ribalta also sees direct contact with social movements and radical external forces as important for the art institution. In ‘Experiments in a New Institutionality’<sup>94</sup> he refers to the various collaborations that MACBA has carried out with various activist groups.

‘It was possible to see an incipient new institutional space that broke with the traditional geometries of the social contract by means of new forms of alliance and asymmetrical collaboration between anti-institutional movements and the Museum. Rather than social processes being given an aesthetic makeover or deactivated, this generated a newly created collaborative space in which the Museum began to form part of social struggles. This took institutional critique to a new dimension.’<sup>95</sup>

Nina Möntmann goes further than Raunig and Ribalta in her article ‘The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future’<sup>96</sup> She does not believe in the potential for resistance can be formulated by the institution itself, as suggested by Raunig, not that they can change existing and hegemonic institutional frameworks. Möntmann identifies a connection between the on-going dissolution of social democratic models in which the principles of neo-liberalism and new public management intervene and guide established institutions. The solution is not to try to save these institutions, but to leave these and to operate outside them in alliance with radical groups and social movements.

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<sup>92</sup> <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Jorge Ribalta, ‘Experiments in a New Institutionality’ in *Relational Objects*, MACBA Collections 2002-2007 (Barcelona: MACBA Publications, 2010), pp. 225-265.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 239.

<sup>96</sup> Nina Möntmann ‘The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future’ in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds.), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice - Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), pp. 157-158.



‘In the face of this dilemma, what is therefore required is the establishment of transgressive institutions that question and break with the current developments of privatization and simultaneously orient themselves towards other disciplines and areas besides the corporative business of globalized capitalism. [...] a conceivable new institution of critique would be one that maintains and expands its participation in (semi-) public space, and at the same time creates free unbranded spaces and negates dependencies.’<sup>97</sup>

We can discern a sense of resignation vis-a-vis established institutional frameworks and their incapability to host contemporary critically oriented art practices. What about the curator’s potential options and tasks that exist beyond the gallery or the museum? One possibility is to expand the art institution’s space and sphere of influence by redefining its parametres. Another option is to operate as a freelance curator without a permanent position or access to exhibition spaces. In this case, the challenge is to raise sufficient funds to support art projects without the financing bringing with it forms of representation and instrumentalism that could hamper an independent production.

For the freelance curator another task involves finding and entering into dialogue with different artists and practices, and participating in the production of specific works of art. This involves taking part in processes that lead to a finished work of art, which brings the curator close to the artistic production itself, something that the role of the curator does not necessarily require per se.

Placing art in what we can call the mainstream of the everyday entails, among other things, close contact with a wider public. But no sites beyond the art institutions are waiting to be ‘completed’ by art; they are already functioning and are occupied by other interests. Entering these sites, therefore, entails negotiation or else takes place as part of an unauthorised operation. Like that of the artists, the freelance curator’s motivation for working under such conditions can be traced back to parts of the avant-garde movement and their quest to create other and greater interfaces with the public and society as a whole. Moving beyond the gallery has been part of investigative and progressive art practices, which have, among other things,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. pp. 157 -158.

criticised the Modernist idea of art as universal, mobile, and sellable objects, independent of a history or context. Over time, many of the contemporary art projects manifested in urban spaces and in environments and contexts beyond the traditional arenas for the display of art, have become made-to-order, which has radically altered the artist's workings conditions. It is important to add here that artists' original interest in concrete and abstract spaces and positions outside the traditional display arenas for art were allied to an exploratory and progressive turn. They were concerned with deliberately subjecting themselves to the overarching social structure that art is part of by leaving the protective space of the art institution. Confronted by reality and put in direct contact with a larger and more complex public arena, the art world could see itself and become aware of its own possibilities and restrictions. Today, however, most works of art in the public realm have not been initiated by the artists themselves, as a result of their own experimental approach. Instead, they are responding to commissions, often with specific requirements published by cities, local councils, county councils or the state. Site in this context is usually understood as something geographically delineated, or related to political priorities or administrative duties. Corporate and private parties also commission work, often related to business or property development. The underlying intention of such ventures is often to provide an identity for a given site, to promote it or, in some cases, to construct characteristics that make it more attractive, for example, to tourists. By seeking to locate and display aspects of the site that enhance its uniqueness, art commissions risk contributing to simplifying and idealising different areas and environments. This current approach contrasts with previous ones, which took place on artists' own terms, and were more independent of political or corporate interests. What can be termed made-to-order art in public spaces often is caught between social-political and bureaucratic interests, on the one hand, and artistic considerations and requirements, on the other. This happens as a result of the routines and procedures of commissioning, which anticipate or refuse to allow room for the particular process inherent in an artistic practice.

Nevertheless, art that is presented outside specialised institutional spaces highlights the links between prescriptive societal structures, which art itself is part of. I have seen the potential in collaborating with extra-artistic institutions because such an approach has opened up for experimental practices and production models that Norwegian art institutions do not offer.

In my experience, public and private organisations and institutions, which are not directly concerned with art, are open to new approaches to the production and presentation of art,

precisely because they are unfamiliar with conventional practices and traditional ways of thinking. However, when working with such partners other challenges arise such as the established hierarchies and communications procedures of large, formal organisations or the notion that art has a utility value and is assigned requirements it is in no position to meet.

This has been applicable to the cases where I have been given the opportunity to initiate an idea and/or formulate the curatorial superstructure and production framework. An example of this was *Artistic Interruptions*, and international art project initiated by Nordland County Council in the period 2005–2009. I was the project manager and main curator, and could develop the framework for the project and invite artists to participate.<sup>98</sup> In the capacity of project manager I was responsible for the conceptualisation and delivery of the project as a whole. This enabled me to create a structure with an investigative and critical approach to the project as a whole.<sup>99</sup> I could also shape the invitation so as to safeguard freedom to operate for the artists. The commissioning body Nordland County Council saw *Artistic Interruptions* and the specific works produced under it as a potential tool of social development. Several questions arose as a result. Where does one draw the line between faith in art's power to influence society and instrumentalization? Today, the ability to point to an artwork's social function is essential to legitimate it, as much within the art world as outside it. Is it naive to believe that investments in art are not ultimately controlled by concrete political and/or

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<sup>98</sup> I was in a curatorial group, which consisted of Eivind Furnesvik, Sanne Kofod Olsen and Inger M Renberg. Anne Hilde Neset and Rob Young – co-editors of the magazine the Wire – joined us as guest curators on one of the projects.

<sup>99</sup> The point of departure for *Artistic Interruptions* was the production of new site-related works for small communities in the county of Nordland, in the north of Norway. The project involved dialogues with local organisations, associations, groups and individuals leading to collaborations with Norwegian and international artists. The local culture, history, politics and society functioned as possible thematic points of departure, but the artists were, of course, free to choose and could draw on ideas and topics that concerned them at the time. The communication and points of friction, which arose between the invited artists and the local communities, functioned as fulcrum for the project. One of the objectives behind *Artistic Interruptions* was to challenge a conventional view of cultural identity and to focus in the unfixed and open aspects of each site. It aimed to take up relevant social and political changes that characterised each site, for example, issues associated with globalisation, inherited cultural connections and traditional trading routes, tourism, immigration and minority rights, or other factors such as geography, landscape and mythology. A further objective was to highlight and discuss site-specific art production and the issue of authenticity. What do local particularities consist of and can an artist invited in from the outside gain access to it? Does this kind of artistic production offer the opportunity to comment and communicate any real knowledge of a site or does the artist remain a privileged tourist? These latter questions were included in the letter of invitation and brief to the artists. The following artists participated in *Artistic Interruptions*: GM Salong (N), Markus Renvall (FIN), Terje Nicolaisen (N), Olav Ringdal (N), Sade Kahra (FIN), Vesa Vehviläinen (Pink Twin) (FIN), Matti Kokkonen (FIN), Tuulia Susiaho (FIN), Tiina Mielov (FIN), Nurse with Wound /Steven Stapleton, Colin Potter (GB), Baktruppen (N), Rirkrit Tiravanija (TH), Kamin Lertchaiprasert (TH), Geir Tore Holm (N), Søsja Jørgensen (N), Aleksandra Mir (S), Elmgreen & Dragset (DK/N), Maria Bustnes (N), Jeppe Hein (DK), Wolfgang Winter & Berthold Hörbelt (D), Svein F. Johansen (N) Simon Starling (GB), and Carsten Höller (D).

economic objectives? And is it problematic that art interfaces with society in a direct way? Are these ties that prohibit art from maintaining its independence – or is it possible to preserve a space where art is free to experiment, while simultaneously being part of social relations and being assigned functions by external forces? One thing that is certain is that cultural policymakers and politicians do not see art as an isolated phenomenon. To justify public funding, art is placed in a social, political and economic context. The social ties that motivate public commissions, nevertheless, cannot come into direct conflict with the art world's own approaches, or collaboration would be impossible. In the case of *Artistic Interruptions* the project was politically and bureaucratically legitimised by reference to the ability of art to create discussions, which could enable society to see itself. In other words, art is the public arena contributes to a society that can engage in self-reflexive debates. Through artistic involvement, commentary and debate late modernist society can experience and acknowledge that it is decentred and is made up of different views of reality. In this way, art promotes self-reflection and can strengthen democratic participation. Most art professionals see such a form of instrumentalisation as unproblematic. However, a different form of instrumentalisation is perhaps less palatable for the art world, namely art as branding or tourist attraction. It became clear that this was an expectation in *Artistic Interruptions*, but as most of the works were process-based and did not lead to a permanent sculptural form, this never became a real issue. One (harmless) exception was Elmgreen & Dragset's conceptual sculpture *Tid til mer – plass til fler* (*Time for more, room for more*), 2006, which was a made-up public parking sign in the village of Tranøy, decided by a local referendum. The title of the work was appropriated by the village as their slogan, with the permission of the artists.



Michael Elmgreen og Ingar Dragset, *Tid til mer – plass til fler*, 2006, Tranøy, Nordland, Norway.

I use *Artistic Interruptions* as an example to point out that being commissioned as a freelance curator has often included the role of producer, which has involved intervening in the production apparatus that enables the delivery of the project. This entails entering into dialogue with funders and, in some cases, shielding the artists from interference from these public or private commissioners or interested parties.

What does it mean to be a producer in the field of fine art? There is evidently not the space for independent, creative producers, like the ones found in music or film, which are both collective forms of artistic expression.<sup>100</sup> Within the realm of fine art, the term ‘producer’ denotes an aspect of the role of the curator or of the artist, where artists themselves take care of the tasks related to their works’ interaction with audiences or the market. This often entails ownership of production facilities or exhibition spaces or the use/infiltration of existing media and means of communication that reach beyond a specialised audience, rendering superfluous figures such as the curator or the gallerist. What they produce often exists completely outside the (mercantile orientation of) commercial markets, which demand signatures and identifiable artist subjects. I believe that it is possible to use this term in relation to artist collectives such as 16BEAVER, who have – for a decade – used the premises they rent in 16 Beaver Street as a site for the presentation, production, and discussion of a variety of artistic/cultural/economic/political projects.<sup>101</sup> 16BEAVER is supported by donations and receive funding from Fractured Atlas, a national non-profit artist service organization providing a range of support services for the independent arts community. Another example, from a completely different context, is Sørfinnset skole / the nord land, which was initiated by the artists Søsja Jørgensen, Geir Tore Holm and Kamin Lertchaiprasert in collaboration with Sørfinnset Residents' Association. The Sørfinnset project, which is still active, was established under the umbrella of Artistic Interruptions in 2004. It was inspired by the Land Foundation and The Land developed by the artists Kamin Lertchaiprasert and Rirkrit Tiravanija, and established outside Chiang Mai in northern Thailand in 1998.<sup>102</sup> The Sørfinnset project took place in the Norwegian hamlet of Sørfinnset in Gildeskål, a few miles

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<sup>100</sup> Within film and music, the role of the producer has become professionalised and established as its own creative part of the chain of production, with a great deal of influence over the finished product. On the one hand, this is a professional who supports the artists, on the other the producer disposes of the production funds on behalf of the owners/financial backers, for example the record label or the film company. The producer, in this way, looks after the investment and, particularly in the realm of film, which deals with big budgets, enjoys considerable power, most notably in relation to commercially motivated ventures.

<sup>101</sup> <http://16beavergroup.org>

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.thelandfoundation.org>

south of Bodø, which is the county capital of Nordland. The project was situated in an abandoned school building, which gathered international artists and knowledge producers around one agenda: to investigate and highlight the possibilities for self-expression in a small village in northern Norway. The aim was to realize ideas, visions and perspectives across different fields of expertise. The project was based on a set of recurring gatherings, meetings, courses, and workshops, including sessions on organic plant conservation, the reestablishment of traditional cuisines, and the building of traditional dwellings such as the Sami buegamme, Thai houses on stilts and cellars with natural refrigeration. The activities saw both locals and visitors come together. Sørfinnset skole / the nord land project received funding from different sources, but was mainly based on volunteering. The project has been highly productive and has included contributions from a range of international visiting artists. Unlike its sister project in Thailand, it has been carried out with very little attention from the international art world.<sup>103</sup>

The fact that the production of art is based on the use (or recycling) of existing knowledge, support from different professions, or collective action, is something the field of art often ignores or, at best, fails to fully communicate. The recognition of the contribution of others and crediting them, in reality, threatens the illusion that there is one identifiable, individual creator behind the work, which, in turn, undermines its originality and subsequently its market value. The artist-subject who sells works of art has got competition from a curator-subject who sells art exhibitions and projects. The identification and recognition of the contributions of yet another player – a separate creative producer – will serve to further undermine the preconditions for an art trade that is based on the display of a validated individuality, through the signature. Neither the artist nor the institution of art can benefit from the addition of such a role. Once disassociated from the role of the artist or the curator, the producer can, therefore, be seen as equivalent to an assistant.

What characterised my role as a producer in the *Space for Interference* project? It was part of my role as curator and it included active intervention in the creative processes that led to the

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<sup>103</sup> There have been a small number of articles in English about the Sørfinnset skole / the nord land project, including Jennifer Allen's 'Skole du Monde' <http://www.nfk.no/artikkel.aspx?MIId1=133&MIId2=2438&AIId=4548&Back=1&Print=1> and Boel Christensen Scheel's 'The Three Ecologies' <http://www.solbrig.de/sme/img/The%20Three%20Ecologies%20by%20Boel%20Christensen-Scheel.pdf>.

individual works. Together with the artists, I took care of the commissioning and coordination and, as such, I contributed to highlighting the aspect of collaboration with other fields of knowledge, competencies and economies that led to the finished result. As part of my mandate as project manager and the ‘owner’ of the project, I also allocated of the production funds. In that sense, I was also a producer in the Marxist understanding of the term.

According to Marxist economic and political theories, a capitalist society arises as the result of a separation of the producer from the means of production. The bourgeoisie annexes the means of production, appropriates the surplus of production, and lets this become the basis for new investments, where private property enables the exploitation of the proletariat. This situation can only be changed by the proletariat taking ownership and control of the means of production and putting them under communal ownership. In the text, ‘The Author as Producer’ from 1934 Walter Benjamin points out how this relationship plays out in the creation of a work of art.<sup>104</sup> Benjamin contends that there is a separation between what a work of art ‘says’ and the devices it utilises. If a work of art can hope to change social reality, it has to engage with it. It is not sufficient to merely depict reality, to turn it into a motif. Artists must be actively involved and manage the means and apparatuses of production that are available in society and that enable distribution to a mass audience, not delivering goods that merely circulate in a system they cannot influence or co-determine.

By adopting the role of producer-curator I gained a financial production apparatus that allowed for the creation of investigative and critical works of art outside the gallery space. The project *Artistic Interruptions*, which I mentioned above, is one example. Where the curator is placed between the artist and the audience, the curator-producer stands between the artist and the source of funding, a figure that takes care of the funders’ investment and their objectives. My aim has been to carry out the tasks of the curator-producer in a way that combines the management of the commissioning body’s motivations and expectations, which primarily concerns social and cultural-political affairs, while standing firmly on the side of investigative and critical art practices. This entails close contact with other fields of interests, while seeking to maintain the necessary room to manoeuvre that enables experimentation and the creation of new formats and conditions for the production and display of art.

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<sup>104</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer’ in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London, Verso, 1983), pp. 85-103.

In the case of the *Space for Interference* project, the programme was predominantly concerned with artistic practices. Apart from the requirement for transparency, there were no other ulterior motives attached to the production funds. In this case, I instead focused on how I could try out different types of collaboration and approaches to creating independent spheres of operation.

### **A summary of the role of the curator as it manifested itself in the three projects**

For *Space for Interference* I was involved with the artists at every step of the process: from the initial development of the idea, via the production phase, to the projects' completion and public presentation. During the process, I encouraged particular developments and suggested formal and conceptual solutions, while also supporting the artists and helping with the coordination of the production. This included commissioning services and purchasing materials, as well as communicating with the different host institutions. I will set out the details of this later on.

In relation to the three artists, I adopted different roles in each individual case. Heier's working method involves integrating project management and organisational aspects such as dialogue and negotiation into the artistic process. In this case, my role became a combination of a sounding board and supporter, which lent the project both legitimacy and weight. This entailed assisting her in ways that would produce the best possible result. One part of this collaboration involved engaging in a specialised dialogue, where I was cast in the role of a constructive critic.

Behind the scenes, as it were, and during the development of *Saga Night* I aimed to uphold the original concept and ensure that the necessary alterations were adopted, according to my understanding of the project. In some cases I provided input in relation to specific details. I was, for example, active in the decision to make the asphalt road extra thick with unusually defined borders, distinguishing it from an ordinary road. This underlined it as a profound threshold to the 'oil age', which the work reflected. It also gave the work a more independent and distinctive form, separating it out from its surroundings and underlining its allusions to Land Art and early site-specific art practices.

Heier describes the introductory phases of the project as follows:



‘The dialogue meant that I had to express myself in words in the early stages of the project, which are often silent, particularly when working alone. This gave the process a particular form and structure, both in relation to the development of the idea and the actual completion of the project, which I am delighted with. Aspects of the work were discussed in-depth, and the shape, content, strategy and communication all functioned as part of the same process. In one way, this entailed that the finished work of art did not have a seamy side, and was more ‘solid’ than many of my other works. The fact that the curator knows the whole story behind the finished work of art, every detail, every detour, also means that the work is maintained in a more comprehensive way, not just as part of a larger argument in support of a curatorial thesis beyond the work itself. In my opinion, this is the most serious and respectful way in which a curator can approach a work of art and get close to it. Moreover, it gives the curator an ownership of the work, which is generally unthinkable. This must be important from a curatorial perspective, mustn’t it? While I wish that I could work like this more often, I’m pretty sure that it would not always work. The artist needs to trust the curator; you have to know that your counter-part is as committed to the project as you are. This is frequently not the case. You cannot expect others to approach your artistic practice with the same level of enthusiasm and energy as your do. In addition to this, both parties need to have a similar understanding of a basic framework of terminology, which is intrinsic to the production. Mutual professional respects and sympathy is paramount.

The drawbacks of this kind of collaboration are perhaps equally evident: it is quite laborious and time-consuming, and when you start out you don’t know where it will end. It may be that the project just doesn’t work out at all. This kind of risk is usually left to the artists as the institution usually arrives on the scene at a much later stage, when the work is already completed. When you look at how the art institution functions today, it seems clear that most exhibitions are curated in a far more superficial and effective way.’<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Marianne Heier in an e-mail to Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk dated 9.6.2009.

Heier's point here is that the curator who participates in the production of art and who invests both professionally and financially in a process without a 'guaranteed' outcome, is taking a risk and gains a form of ownership of the work, which is different from cases which merely involve the selection of a finished work of art. It creates an alliance between the parties derived from a shared investment of time, a relationship that challenges the dominating mechanisms of the art scene, which force the freelance curator to be constantly moving onto new connections (and disconnections) associated new projects. It may be that this type of collaboration only could happen in a situation where both curator and artist speak the same language and operate in the same context. Perhaps this kind of long-term den type production demands localism rather than the nomad model? I *Space for Interference* the collaboration between the artists and myself worked best in the cases of Heier og Faldbakken, which were carried out over a longer period of time and was also based on past, professional contact.

In relation to Heier's work, it must be added that my participation added an institutional weight, because the national research fellowship was highly relevant to all the representatives of the institutions that became involved in the artistic projects. It was evident that being part of a research programme gave the project as much legitimacy as my professional background in the art world. Regardless, the combination of the artist and me created an institutional counterpart to museum in the case of Maihaugen, which again established a one-on-one conversation in which we carried greater weight and approval. This effect was also discernable in relation to the negotiations with respect to Faldbakken's work.

In relation to Faldbakken's project, my role was extended to include pushing on with the process. I encouraged him to work outside the gallery space, and – almost as an experiment – to test the potential of his artists practice, using his appropriation of objects and expressions derived from various sub-cultures as a point of departure. What would happen when the material did not enter the gallery, but remained 'on site'?

In relation to my role in the project, Faldbakken noted:

'You set the actual framework for the project, and the idea would probably not have been hatched nor the work completed without your initiative. You backed the idea up in its early phases of development and later pulled the strings to make it happen. You were the one who both initiated and followed up the

communication and meetings with the Deichmanske Library. I would say that your curatorial involvement was crucial to the work.’<sup>106</sup>

*Untitled (Book Sculpture)* was ‘silent’ and did not provide audiences with any information, unlike *Saga Night*. The information plaque that accompanied *Saga Night* was typically a part of the work and was created as a result of the artist’s initiative. In relation to past works, Faldbakken had never drawn on informative devices or made attempts to enter into dialogue with the audience. This was also the case with *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*. This created a potential space for me to operate in, and I took the opportunity to suggest and carry out the idea of a blog that recorded the audience’s reaction to the work. This offered the Library’s staff greater ownership of the work, predominantly those who came into direct contact with it. One of the weaknesses of this idea was that it was not conceived as anything more than noting people’s reactions. How this material should be developed was not discussed. It did not lead to any wider conversation or summary of the project, even if the audience’s reactions invited this, since they provided insight into how visitors related to the Library as an institution. The Library itself did not take any initiative in this regard, and I did not take the opportunity either.

In the case of Coley, the result can be seen as a product of how the collaboration began and the relative freedom I gave Coley at the outset. Unlike the cases of Heier and Faldbakken, Coley and I lacked an open, common point of departure. My approach to him resembled a commission and included a critical perspective, which, more or less, pre-empted the artist’s input. It could be argued that I, in this case, intervened in the artist’s research process and the allied decisions that would normally belong to an introductory phase of a project, which is really the domain of the artist. I had already found a site for Coley, justified according to my own curated critique, which was dependent on the work of art as a prop, as it were, to be completed. As the experienced artist that Coley is, he saw this and quickly recuperated directorial control, including insisting on the gallery as the main arena and on the inclusion of existing works. The offsite works we produced, which have been described above, were also granted a far more modest role than initially envisaged and functioned primarily as commentaries to the existing works in the gallery. With the white cube as the active site, my

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<sup>106</sup> Matias Faldbakken in an e-mail to Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk dated 2.5. 2011

flexibility as a freelance curator/producer was curtailed and consisted largely of assisting Coley with the layout of the works in the gallery and their presentation.

## **10. Conclusion**

In the earlier project *Artistic Interruptions*, mentioned above, I could, as project manager, participate in the creation of the conceptual, organisational and economic framework of the project together with the commissioning body, which, in turn, affected the artists' room to manoeuvre in their respective projects. This was not the case with the research project. When I invited Marianne Heier, Matias Faldbakken and Nathan Coley to create new works as part of *Space for interference*, there was already an overarching framework in place that we had to adhere to. However, it was not a problem as long as the art works were at the centre of the project. Any instrumentalism was, instead, expressed through the demand for transparency in relation to the project's working methods and critical reflections, the impacts of which were confined to my work (as described above).

Initiative is central to my work as a freelance curator. In this sense, to initiate means to start something I do not know the outcome of. It is an introductive approach that opens up opportunities, but also potential challenges and problems. The moment something is initiated, it cannot be owned or controlled by one person; it is dependent on the collaboration of others to be realised. This again is indicative of the position and practices of a curator.

Curatorial practice can be conducted from different positions and with different approaches. The curator is often criticised for selecting finished works of art and for taking swift and strategic decisions that do not match the investment the artist has made in the work.<sup>107</sup> When a curator adopts the role of producer and takes part in the creative process, such a notion is challenged. The risks are more evenly distributed and the parties invest a more balanced amount of time and effort. Departing from exhibition curators, who contextualise and

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<sup>107</sup> A populist criticism relates to the fact that a work of art could take years to complete, whereas curating, in principle, could only take a couple of minutes. This criticism implies that the act of selecting is the only task of the curator. Most professional curators, of course, escape such a characterisation. They put a great deal of work into the exhibition including preparatory research, the development of the concept, meetings and discussions with the artists, installation of the exhibition, and the development of publication and press materials. The freelance curator's fee rarely matches the work that carried out.

interpret existing works of art, and who, in principle, can carry out their work independently, the curatorial approach in *Space for interference* required close contact with the artists over time because the central pivoting point was the process of producing art.

In the initial phases of the project I brought the artists' ideas to fruition. An appropriate analogy of this stage might be that of the dramaturge in the theatre, who functions as a kind of literary advisor to the director and head of the theatre; the person who contributes contextual analyses of the script. From a position that combines participation with constructive critical observation, the dramaturge takes part in the development of the concept. He or she functions as an insider critic, who engages in dialogue with the people involved in the production stage, prior to the realisation of the project. My working method also combined involvement with a critical, analytic – as well as exploratory – approach. Together with the artists I maintained and tested the artistic concepts. This approach was also infused with a desire to see what would happen, to make the idea a reality and see how it could be realised in practice.

My freelance curatorial practice has brought with it continuous discussion with a range of different artists, many of whom I also participated with in the production stages. This can, as I mentioned earlier, have a negative effect in that it can produce restlessness and can lead to a lack of presence because the focus is always on the future, on new projects. However, it also creates a continuous flow of ideas where concepts, formal solutions and completed works are seen in context. It creates a form of seepage of ideas and impulses, which the artists also utilise, but that I, to a greater degree, can facilitate. I become involved in the production of art without being governed by the artist's individual psyche and subjective force, and without authorship of the works in questions. This form of part-ownership provides a more free and loose connection to the specific work of art. As a consequence, I am not part of the potential financial gain in the selling of the work, the kind of business based on proclaimed originality in the form of an identifiable signature.

In relation to both Heier and Faldbakken, I was involved in the development of the concept. This took the form of constructive, but nevertheless, critical questioning of the initial ideas, as well as suggestions of alternative solutions and additions, which I have explained above. In relation to Heier's work, my role was that of sounding board, while in Faldbakken's case, my role was to be a source of enthusiasm and inspiration, which took his practice in a direction that he himself did not prioritise: out of the gallery space. In relation to Coley's project, I

exceeded my mandate by pre-emptively seeking to incorporate his work into a creative curatorial framework with strict limitations. The fragility of our collaboration reflects this. The initiative had to be adapted and shifted as the project progressed. In my role as curator I had the first move, as it were, but my move elicited a response from the artist in the next round, which affected my position from then on in. Vis-a-vis Heier and Faldbakken, it became a case of keeping up, in parallel or on the heels of the artists, but not ahead of them, as had been the case with Coley in the initial stages, and which he reacted to.

The relative distribution of the mandate and control over the space is a factor that often comes into play in the interaction between curators and artists. When the end product is a ‘traditional’ exhibition, the curator has a space that he or she controls and saturates with meaning. The distribution of tasks seems clear: the artist creates the works and the curator makes the exhibition. The complex relationship between the work and its display does not preclude a separate reading of the artworks and the exhibition, as unique cultural means of expressions by different authors.

In site- and context specific projects the end product is not a cohesive, spatial installation in a specific exhibition venue. The works are, instead, geographically and temporally dispersed in such a way that viewers cannot experience them as one, united work. Such works shape and are, in turn, shaped by different spaces and publics. Each work often carries with it its own specific process and mode of production, which can relate to a range of publics at different stages of the process. The exhibition concept or thematic that unites them is less concrete than the immediate experiences offered by the gallery space. This applies to the examples I have cited above: *Artistic Interruptions* and *Space for Interference*. The contextualisation of the works under these two umbrellas can be mediated intellectually and textually, but their geographic and temporal diffusion means that they cannot be experienced as a cohesive, perceivable whole. Such an attentive view would require a rather extreme investment from viewers in the terms of travel and time. To a greater degree than works in a curated exhibition, art projects outside the gallery space are experienced as separate and independent narratives, as *Space for Intervention* shows. Only a very small, informed audience was aware of the links between the works. Most visitors experienced them as individual works set in their specific contexts.

All the works in the research project carried with them a strong curatorial presence. I participated from start to finish, from the ideas stage, via the production stage to the works' completion and public presentation, where I mediated them to the media and to visitors.

In the initial phases, the development of the works was a joint, main objective. My closeness to the art production created a less visible and distinct curatorial role. I supported and functioned as a co-pilot for the artists in a creative process that, by definition, belonged to them. What was missing was the exhibition space that traditionally is the curator's domain, and which facilitates the creation of links between works or locates them within specific themes or contexts. As mentioned above, the field of fine art has no tradition of – or room for – a separate creative producer role because this creates uncertainty around the central notion of individual authorship. As a curator I, nevertheless, chose in this case – as I had also done previously – to work closely with the artists and to take part in the production process leading to the finished work. It was a case of investing time and participating in something that was not sure to be a success or even to have any outcome at all. It involved leaving the controlled space traditionally awarded to the curator and moving away from the (mere) selection and contextualisation of existing works. As a consequence, I got to know the works from their inception. This created a different basis from which to mediate the works to audiences, as my position was so close to the domain of the artists. My role was characterised by constant change, where I was required to mediate between different interests and authorities: the specific projects, the artists, the non-art institutions involved, and the commissioning body in the form of the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme. In this complex nexus, I found that I remained closest to the concrete art projects and it was here my loyalties lay.

The dematerialisation of art and the emphasis on ideas and contexts contributes to mutual mirroring between artists and curators.<sup>108</sup> This happens regardless of the different commissioning bodies, mandates and economic contexts that distinguish them from each other. However, the curator cannot, for example, ignore the audience, irrespective of the form and method employed. The artist, on the other hand, can. The boundaries between curatorial and artistic practices are, nevertheless, not normatively set. My experience from this research project is that, by adding the role of producer to curatorial practice, a more complex and richer collaboration between artist and curator can be created. This creates room for a shared

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<sup>108</sup> Paul O'Neil, 'The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse' in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.) *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance* (Chicago: Intellect Ltd, 1997), p. 22.

exploration of the project's possibilities, in the initial ideas stage and the realisation of the work (traditionally the domain of the artist), in the setting and contextualisation (often domains that concern both), in its mediation (usually the domain of the curator), and in the funding and budgeting for the project (often the domain of the curator). If all these phases are up for discussion, it is possible to find new ways of producing art. Moreover, the potential of art and its position in society can be renegotiated.

Providing mutual access is dependent on the artist and the curator being willing to cede some control over their respective territories. This alludes to Jacques Derrida's radical notion of hospitality as interruption - an interruption of the self.<sup>109</sup> Further exploration of this aspect would give this text an affected philosophical character, so I merely include Derrida's notion of hospitality to as a reference to the need for complete ownership of one's own area before one can go on to cede it to one's guest. The amount of ground surrendered is dependent on the character of the meeting. In *Space for Interference* situations arose in which the artists and I assumed a curious and expectant position towards each other. The attention was, thus, shifted onto the space between us and the process as it was unfolding. A form of productive uncertainty in relation to who the initiative and the creative process belonged to. This created a dynamic process.

A similar uncertainty arose in relation to the works displayed within the spaces and domains of other social institutions. The artists occupied spaces within spaces, and established an extraordinary and relatively autonomous zone with a porous border vis-à-vis the host institution in question. The artists and I were initially guests, but the moment the work materialised, a separate space was created in which the artists and I held the authority – as originators and specialists – where both visitors and the institution's own employees had the status of audience members. This was clear in both Heier and Faldbakken's work. Both the Museum and the Library were very attentive to the autonomous position of art, even if, in both cases, they were assimilated into the institutions' activities.

The artists and I tested art's room to manoeuvre in non-art spaces, as well as the limits of the demands we could make by virtue of being identified as representatives of our own

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<sup>109</sup> Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Stanford University Press, 2000).



professional fields.<sup>110</sup> The situations the works created did not provide a finished solution, but one that had to be negotiated. There were artistic needs, on the one hand, and the institutions' own interests and procedures, on the other. In this way, we created a kind of micro-version of an art institution, with the benefit that it gave us a form of legitimacy in the environments we were in, at the same time as the institution was mainly limited to us as individuals. This status provided us with the opportunity to change the governing rules of the institution, to nuance its procedures, and to find new institutional approaches attuned to artistic requirements.

In the case of Coley's presentation in Bergen Kunsthall, the nature of this established exhibition venue created a more regulated and predictable interplay between myself and the artist, with the effect of limiting my room to manoeuvre as a freelance curator.

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<sup>110</sup> As mentioned previously, Heier, Faldbakken and Coley were all initially presented as artists. My role was also communicated. This information opened up access to the Maihaugen Museum, the Deichmanske Library and several other venues used in relation to Coley's satellite works.

**Visitors' reactions to *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* as noted by the librarians at Deichman Main Library in the period 13 October – 25 October 2008.**

Date unknown, week 42

Reported by librarian Asgeir R.

Comment/question:

“Terrible about those piles of books lying around up at the library, it’s probably a work of art or something” (overheard on the street)

Monday 13 October

Reported by librarian Eva A:

Episode: A young boy asks what has happened. He laughs and thinks it is a bit of fun. Accepts the explanation, but does not seem to believe it. “Has someone just pulled everything off the shelves, or something?” A young girl wonders the same an hour later. Accepts the explanation.

Reported by librarian Geir Q.:

Episode: Two people took pictures.

Comment/question:

(1): Question as to whether there had been a “local earthquake”.

(2): “What has happened?”

(3): “Has somebody spent the night here and done this?” (Question from an employee.)

Reported by librarian Kirsti M.:

Comment/question:

“Is this a work of art?” (Boy 16-17 years old)

Tuesday 14 October

Reported by librarian Anne Karine S.:

Comment/question:

(1): “What the f\*\*\* has happened here [not angrily], strange that nobody could really give an answer as to why there was so much mess.”

- (2): "Excuse me, may I ask what has happened here?" (I say: "I don't know.") The visitor says she thought we might be trying to signal something to the users.  
(3): "Have you had children visiting?"

#### Thursday 16 October

Reported by librarian Anne Karine S.:

Episode: A young lady turned to me after she had spoken to others. She was irritated over the fact that nobody could give her a proper explanation as to what had happened. She concluded sourly that it was a secret, and that she did not need any help in finding books.

Comment/question:

- (1): "Did somebody break into the library over the weekend and do this?"  
(2): "Did this happen during opening hours or when it was closed?"  
(3): "I hope this will be tidied up by Monday!!"  
(4): "Has there been an earthquake? Fantastic :-)!!"  
(5): "Have the books fallen off the shelves?"  
(6): "If the book is in that pile over there, I haven't got time for this now. But I'll come back later."  
(7): "Do you think it could be an installation?" (Overheard a young couple discussing while they stood studying the piles)  
(8): "I was afraid to ask, but I need a book in that pile."

Reported by librarian Anne Karine S.:

Comment/question:

- (1): "Just like home!"  
(2): "My god!" (Elderly lady)

#### Friday 17 October

Reported by librarian Rolf A.:

Episode: A young lady sidled up to me and asked: "do you have ghosts here?" I answered (hesitantly): "Don't rule it out". She nodded thoughtfully and moved on...I'm not 100% sure whether she was referring to the vandal piles or just to the general spooky atmosphere of the building.

Reported by librarian Berit U.:

Episode: In the Boat (the title of one of the reading rooms). A woman on the back row said to me: "It wasn't me" and pointed over her shoulder. Then she smiled and said conspiratorially: "And nobody knows who did it!"

Reported by librarian Barbro B.:

Comment/question:

(1): "Have the books fallen off the shelves". (I allowed myself to answer "yes" at this stage)

(2): "What has happened? (...) How ironic that it's the psychology books!"

(3): "Moreover, it's interesting to observe that the piles are growing and spilling outwards; - the mess/vandalism (the moral decay) is spreading from librarian to user."

Saturday 18 October

Reported by librarian Silje N.:

Episode: Lady in her fifties: "What happened to the books? I'm a psychiatrist and it looks like one of my patients has been here...(Takes photographs of the books on her mobile phone, comments that one of the books on top of the pile is entitled 'Loneliness' and that is "very interesting". Also said something about not expecting "such chaos" at the library on a Saturday morning.

Comment/question:

(1): Elderly man: "It looks like somebody's gone berserk here! The staff must be aware of this (to me)...oh, you're the staff..."

(2): Man in his twenties/thirties: "What has happened here? This isn't quite following Dewey's principles...has somebody just lost it, or what?"

Reported by librarian Liv Marit P.:

Comment/question:

(1): "Oh, has there been an accident?" (Concerned lady in her forties)

(2): "Are you doing a big clear-up? There's so much on the floor here." (Lady in her forties)

(3): Man in his thirties: "Has there been an earthquake?"

Reported by librarian Geir Q.:

Comment/question:

(1): "I hadn't expected this at Deichman!"

(2): "Strange that it hasn't been tidied up yet. This can't be art?"

Reported by librarian Anette J.B.:

Comment/question:

(1): "What's happened over there? I was thinking to look at/borrow some of those books, but now that's a bit difficult."

(2): "Look over there! Has somebody gone bananas? Or is it perhaps a new image?"

(3): "Have you had an abrupt visit over there? Nevertheless, I still got some of the books I was after."

### Monday 20 October

Reported by librarian Anette J.B.:

Episode: "What has happened? But somebody must have put them there? Then it's even more interesting since you can't give an answer." (After a trip to the specialist section.)

"The whole department is mad, yes, the whole library is mad."

Comment/question:

"All the travel books are on the floor."

Reported by librarian Kari F.:

Comment/question:

Today there was a lady who wondered whether it was a project...because it had been like that last week, too...hmm.

### Wednesday 22 October

Reported by librarian Kirsti M.:

Episode: Reaction from a grumpy borrower: "Has there been an explosion here? No, it's probably just a dissatisfied customer!" He was very sour beforehand as he couldn't find the pile of newspapers he had seen two weeks ago. He also alleged that somebody had confiscated his copy card, which had, however, since been returned to him. He felt that we were 'proper A4 people'.