

Space for interference

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Abstract

The article presents and discusses an ongoing fellowship project entitled ‘Space for Interference’, conducted under the Norwegian Programme for Research Fellowships in the Arts. Two concrete site-specific art projects produced under Space for Interference serve as a point of departure for an investigation into methods of interference and the forms of address that artists use when intervening in other specialized fields in society.

The institutions that provide the site for an art project have different social functions. We ask what may be their motivation for allowing artists access to their physical environments, apparatuses, procedures, systems and discourses. The fact that the artists’ projects in these contexts function as a means of self-observation for the institutions seems obvious. Nevertheless, we seek to investigate the various economic and political factors that allow these institutions to include potentially critical activities, which aim to modify or transgress their systems, and thereby displaying how they are malleable and mobile bodies. One assertion we make is that by doing so the involved institutions prove to be modern, self-critical and flexible, thus complying with political requirements to adapt to the rapidly changing environments of the information and communication age.

The perspective from systems theory in the Luhmannian tradition has proved useful since it shows how the issues of art may also be the problems of science, business, politics and the law in the complex and decentered social universe of today. The issues of contingency, insecurity, paradox and autoreflexivity, surplus meanings and the complexity and decentering of the subject are at the heart of contemporary art. Systems theory provides a way to link such practices theoretically with scientific discourse and with the advanced problem solving and criticality of other social domains, like politics, business and the media industries.

Keywords

contingency

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site

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Space for interference

Through much of its modern history, the art world has seen itself as the island of creativity and innovation, distinction and poly-semantics, ambiguity and complexity, contingency and criticality, surrounded by unilateral discourses of instrumental reason, mechanistic causality, discipline, control, identity and unambiguousness. This romantic conception has often proved self-fulfilling, as contemporary art has been met with hostility and disbelief in the social environment. Avant-gardes have meandered between the messianic politics of a Joseph Beuys or Guy Debord and the playful cynicism of an Andy Warhol or Jeff Koons. Experiences related in this article indicate that a shift may be going on in the relations of contemporary art to its environment. This happens precisely through conscious attempts to renew the criticality associated with the anti-idealist, anti-commercial site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The article presents and discusses two interventions that took place outside the realm of the traditional art institution. Each artist worked in relation to a chosen site, but in this context the 'sites' are not physical, definable locations but rather existing institutions and systems and their respective fields of operation. The artworks seem to occupy a borderland between critique and affirmation and the artists work more or less from within and in dialogue with the relevant social institutions and systems. This is a kind of agreed intervention that can be understood as alternative forms of resistance that, by means of dialogue and negotiation, seek to modify or alter a system from the inside. This tactic can be seen in light of the changing notion of 'site' within contemporary art and the constructive shift in institutional-critical art, which may again be attributed to the influence of new institutionalism on the art field.

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The project

Eeg-Tverbakk invited two Norwegian artists, Marianne Heier and Matias Faldbakken, to make separate, site-specific works.¹ Their art projects shall serve us as a basis for reflection on methods of interference and the forms of address that artists use when intervening in other specialized areas of society. The interference-oriented practices of Heier and Falbakken will be seen as experiments in communication and non-communication, observation and blindness under conditions of social differentiation and decentring – works of art that make tangible the gap in semantics and scripts between various institutional contexts, including the art world itself.

Marianne Heier's works for Space for Interference span a number of years and are related to what appears to be a pervasive feature of her practice: to make structural and institutional conditions the material and thematic of her art projects. Specifically: wanting to change the institutions she comes into contact with through gifts that she finances herself. One example is the work *Saganatt* that comprises the installation of a tarmac road at the Maihaugen museum in Lillehammer.

The starting point for *Saganatt* 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. Like most Norwegians, Heier enjoys the benefits of the North Sea oil discoveries. Much public money is derived from this source, including government support for arrangements and grants for artists. Heier's purchase of the shares can be seen as a reinvestment in the primary source of the Norwegian economy. Her investments became a point of departure for the exhibition *Pioneer* at Gallery ROM for Art and Architecture in Oslo in November 2007. Here, Heier displayed a range of photographic and video works that drew parallels between the oil industry, Norway's image of itself as a nation, and Heier's own art practice.

Heier sold her oil and offshore shares in April 2008, thus inaugurating the next phase of the project. The money Heier made from the sale of shares was used to finance a gift to the

¹ The article describes a stage in Eeg-Tverbakk's ongoing Ph.D. project as research fellow at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. 'Space for interference' is an umbrella concept for three specific art projects that can be tied to the development of the concept of site-specific art and the shifting understanding of the term 'site'. Most quotes are translations from Norwegian. Translations are ours.

open-air museum of cultural history at Maihaugen in Lillehammer. 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 mirror different historical eras. The collection covers 500 years of Norwegian history, and for many it represents what is fundamentally 'Norwegian' in our culture.

Heier's gift comprises an asphalt sculpture entitled *Saganatt*. *Saganatt* translates as 'Saga Night' and is taken from the first verse of the Norwegian national anthem. It is an ordinary, if somewhat particularly shaped, asphalt road that creates a distinct physical division in the gravel footpath that runs through the museum's outdoor collection. The sculpture is placed in the section of the Residential Area, which consists of detached houses from the twentieth century. This section is organized chronologically along the footpath and shows a modern 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.

A picturesque gravel pathway runs through the whole museum. It 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 also 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. I and every other Norwegian born in the 1970s know that it was not quite like that. However, it took a while before I realized 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. (Eeg-Tverbakk)²

In other words, the museum has created environments that were chronologically accurate, but in which the history of the oil discoveries had been left out. The rise in living standards

² Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, *Finding and eliminating irritations, interview with Marianne Heier*, (2008) <http://www.innblanding.no/>, March 19th 2009.

epitomized 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 is 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 *Saganatt* begins 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 becomes a physical, visual threshold that incorporates the North Sea oil discoveries into Maihaugen's history of Norway. 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. As a Norwegian artist, she is also part of the image of Norway as a nation that Maihaugen portrays. This experience of being implicated appears to be the factor that triggered her intervention into the museum to change the version of history it represents.

In the past, close contact with different institutions and her own daily experiences there have triggered Heier's artistic interventions. This is particularly the case in institutions that have employed her. As an employee, she often sees and experiences aspects of the various working environments that strike her as questionable. Financing gifts in the form of architectural or interior improvements becomes a method to constructively change what she perceives as dysfunctional environments for the staff.

A much-discussed example of Heier's work in this category is 'Construction Site' from 2005, produced when she was employed as an invigilator at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo. Heier discovered that the invigilators did not have access to the canteen, but had their own small and rundown room for lunch breaks. She initiated the refurbishment of this room and paid for most of the associated costs.³ As an employee, she took hold of issues that strictly belonged to the employer's area of responsibility. To external eyes, of course, this made the Museum look like it could not meet its requirements as an employer, and exposed how badly it treated its employees. One of the consequences of Construction Site was that an institutional hierarchy was revealed and was discussed, both internally in the Museum and more broadly within the media.⁴

³ Heier covered the expenses for architects and construction workers for a total amount of 128,000 Norwegian kroner (15,000 Euro). The museum provided the construction materials.

⁴ Media reports and reviews have emphasized how Heier's gift exposed critical aspects of the museum, for example Aksel Kjær Vidnes's review 'Kritisk oppussing'/'Critical Refurbishment', *Aftenposten*, 16 November 2005 and Marit Paasche's critique 'En gave som svir'/'A Gift with a Sting', *Aftenposten*, 18 November 2005.

As in Heier's other projects, with *Construction Site* she utilized the power of the gift. As theorized by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss the gift is not 'free', but requires some form of reciprocity.⁵ Only by giving something in return does the recipient avoid being seen as unworthy compared with the donor. Heier's initiatives consist, however, of more than just using a gift as a shrewd means to potentially belittle the object of her critique. In her works, there is a clear connection between art, life and work, and her practice straddles all three. When she 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:

I am interested in the liberating potential that lies in the idea of how things could be different. This idea does, of course, not only belong to artists. There is the possibility of change everywhere and my work demonstrates this, both symbolically and in real terms. (Eeg-Tverbakk)

Construction Site is a work of art that becomes 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 utility. The problem only arises if the works are given the status of pure works of art. This would prevent the integration of art, life and work, integral to Heier's practice. The work is intended to reflect Heier's 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.

Common to all Heier's works is their unusually transparent, almost instructive character, which is highlighted in her speeches that form an integral part of the presentation of her gifts. In these speeches – performed for an audience – she emphasizes that the purpose of the gift is to improve the institution that receives it. Heier assumes the role of a philanthropist or a political figurehead officially presenting a monetary gift. She mimics the formal and ceremonial aspects of this type of ritual, but replaces this typically discreet form with a

⁵ As pointed out by Mauss in the essay 'The Gift'. 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 *Annee Sociologique* in 1923–24.

personal and somewhat admonishing approach. In this way, she highlights the power dynamic that is always implicit in relationships between donors and recipients. The one who gives is always above the one who receives. It seems like Heier uses 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 explains her position 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 given role as an economically helpless activity, and rather make the artist visible as a public, responsible and serious operative [...] A marginalizing strategy produces an art that can be rejected the very second it commits or provokes. 'Eccentric' means outside the centre. Art should be central. (Hansen)⁶

To accept the gift is to admit the existence of a deficiency or wrong. The improving element in *Saganatt* consisted of inserting the 'missing link' into the museum's collection, namely the story of the Norwegian oil discoveries.

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 has accepted this, and has included the sculpture, not just physically in the collection, but as part of the canonized version of Norwegian cultural history that this institution constructs and presents. Today, it is the museum, as much as the artist, that exhibits and owns *Saganatt*.

Matias Faldbakken's work for Space for Interference is entitled *Untitled (book sculpture)*. It took place at the Deichman Library, which is the Oslo County library and Norway's largest public library. The work was staged for two weeks and took place at two locations in the main library, which is a monumental building from 1933, visited on a daily basis by 1,300 people. *Untitled (book sculpture)* consisted of a pile of books thrown onto the floor from two selected shelves. It was a simple gesture sidelining a system of order. The Dewey decimal classification system that the Deichman Library uses was suspended and replaced by chaos. The library collection was still available, but visitors had to find 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. Faldbakken's work, therefore, functioned as an intervention into an abstract system, as well as changing the

⁶Tone Hansen, 'Manifesto for An Independent Art Arena, An art project by Tone Hansen in the Norwegian newspaper', *Morgenbladet*, May 27th, 2005.

library both physically and socially as both visitors and librarians had to move and behave in relation to it.⁷

Untitled (book sculpture) looks like vandalism or a system fault. Significantly, it was agreed with the Head of the Library that *Untitled (book sculpture)* would not be promoted as a work of art, but would appear as an unexplained irregularity. Faldbakken and Eeg-Tverbakk held informative meetings with the library staff, and made suggestions as to how to handle visitors' questions and any anger that arises. 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.'

The artist and the library agreed that the chaos of books could be revealed as a work of art if it led to a situation that was too uncomfortable for the institution to handle. 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. In this way, they were all participants in an institutional and social experiment.

Untitled (book sculpture) can be seen in relation to Faldbakken's earlier works where misanthropy, anarchy and vandalism are recurring motifs. Much of his work consists of the appropriation of signs and artefacts derived from various sub- and countercultures. These are displayed as conceptual art objects, thus deprived their original function as, for example, gang codes, rockers' props, or activists' symbols. Several commentators have pointed out that Faldbakken, by turning forms associated with sub- and countercultures into art, is thematizing the oppositional role that art has allotted to itself.

Another aspect of Faldbakken's works is that they frequently connect avant-garde counter-strategies to the phenomenon of entertainment. He has 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 entered the field of literature where the mechanisms of distribution and the media attention are far more widespread than the arena of contemporary art, which tends to be more non-conformist. He chose the novel, which is considered both a serious art form and a widely-available commercial product. Here, Faldbakken released the most unsympathetic and hardnosed of his anti-characters: the misanthrope. Over a period of seven years, Faldbakken

⁷ Two librarians were specially instructed to help visitors search, should they require assistance.

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 how they are expressed in Scandinavian welfare society. Various essays, articles and theses have interpreted the trilogy in different ways.⁸

We choose to see Faldbakken’s literary output as conceptual art: he is motivated by an artistic notion, and selects the novel as a medium. He, thus, makes the institution of literature the host for an art project. The rules of the game are followed up to a certain point, sufficient to ensure that the books are promoted as novels by established literary publishers. At the same time, Faldbakken allows himself the freedom to break down literary preconceptions of what a novel is and what belongs under the term ‘literature’. As a literary genre, the novel has been challenged for over a century by writings that today are considered modern classics. From this perspective, Faldbakken’s contribution may seem somewhat toothless. Nevertheless, he has managed to irritate and confuse the Norwegian literary world. We would argue that this is partly a consequence of him transferring an attitude from one area of the arts to another. For example, he lets form and content blend together without regard for established disciplines: the idea is paramount, and involves thematizing while investigating the boundaries between art and entertainment, counter-culture and mass culture. Faldbakken, therefore, cannot merely write about misanthropy, he must exercise it. The novel is, as literature, a carrier of human values. Following the misanthrope’s all-encompassing contempt, the novel itself must be mangled. Thus, the trilogy ‘Scandinavian misanthropy’ comes to own a strong artistic

⁸ Examples of articles in literary journals and essay collections on contemporary literature are: Eirik Vassenden, ‘Vi må ikke like det’/‘We don’t have to like it’, in *Den store overflaten: Tekster om samtidslitteraturen* (Oslo: Damm, 2004); and Kjetil Røed, ‘Å gi det subversive en syntaks: Refleksjoner rundt Abo Rasuls *Macht und Rebel*’/‘Giving the Subversive a Syntax, Reflections on Abo Rasul’s *Macht und Rebel*’, *Vinduet*, nr. 1, 2003. Examples of MA theses in literary studies are: Nina Elisabeth Dolen, ‘Ein posisjon bortanfor: Oppgjørets muligheter i Skandinavisk misantropi’/‘A position beyond: The potential of confrontation in Scandinavian Misanthropy’ (MA thesis in Nordic Literature, Institute for Nordic Language and Literature, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology [NTNU], 2003); and Christiane Jordheim Larsen, ‘Skandinavisk misantropisk konseptualitet – Om Abo Rasuls utfordring av den litterære institusjon’/‘Scandinavian misanthropic conceptuality – On Abo Rasul’s challenge to the literary institution’ (MA thesis in General Literary Studies, the University of Oslo, 2005).

volition, while at the same time as being devoid of literary quality.⁹ This has elicited confusion and uncertainty, particularly among literary critics, whose responses have ranged from greatly approving to indignant and damning. In cases where established literary critics slated Abo Rasul's books, they tended to note somewhat strange reservations about their own reading.¹⁰ Can one say that the novels are interesting as art, but bad as literature? This question does not pose a problem within art, where – for example – a painting can be 'bad' in terms of skill and execution, but conceptually very strong. By transferring these questions into literature, Faldbakken asks whether this field continues to be trapped in old-fashioned criteria of value that continue to be interpreted as literary quality. Almost without fail, the books have been judged according to language, composition, plot and narrative. Faldbakken has commented on the criticisms he has received: 'one might suspect that literature is to written language what painting is to the visual arts. The standard self-understanding of literature is far quite removed from the conceptualised *hands off*-work in visual art' (Faldbakken).¹¹

Regardless of how you read Faldbakken's novels, there is little doubt that in form and content they are testing and challenging the norms of the institution of literature. This can be seen as a creative or constructive critique that takes effect from inside the institution it is critiquing. The same can be said for *Untitled (book sculpture)*, where the focus shifts from a literary genre's system of norms to the universe of knowledge that the library administers. As such, this work draws parallels between Faldbakken's texts and his object-based production. In the project description sent to the library prior to the realization of *Untitled (book sculpture)* he states:

⁹ This happens through language, form and content. 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, goggle-infused text material, a range of graphic illustrations, and the manipulation of trademarked logos. It is unclear whether the books are intended to be comical or whether they are involuntarily stupid, pure entertainment, satire or intended as more classical cultural critique. Even if the style of writing is very different, the French novelist Michel Houellebecq is certainly a source of inspiration. The Frenchman is in his way an interference artist in the field of literature and especially when performing the role of 'author' and 'intellectual' in the mass media.

¹⁰ Øystein Rottem, one of Norway's more established literary critics wrote on *Macht und Rebel* in his review in *Dagbladet*, 15 November 2002: 'As perceptive readers may have gathered, I do not know quite how to approach this work [...] Maybe I am out of touch with the times, but I have difficulty in seeing the point of a book like this one.'

¹¹ Matias Faldbakken, 'Unpopular', *UKS Forum for Contemporary Art*, nr.1/2, 2001, pp. 3–4.

The inspiration for this work of art is the notion of misology: the hatred of language, discussion, information and logic. Socrates compared misanthropy with misology, which I find interesting in relation to my own work, both by way of my (misanthropic) text production, and my image production which often deals with the suppression of language and logic.¹²

Untitled (book sculpture) puts the library's existing ordering system temporarily out of action, thereby altering and disturbing institutionalized procedures. Unlike Heier's practice, this work is not based on any commitment to social progress. Faldbakken is not really interested in changing the library or making it more effective. It functions 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*.

What unites Heier and Faldbakken's practices is that they both operate outside the traditional spaces of art institutions, more specifically in another, functioning institution. Both Heier and Faldbakken use the institutions' physical environments, apparatus, procedures, systems, and discourses as material for their art practices. Their works are art, at the same time as they become part of the institutions' systems and production of meaning. This can also be interpreted as an attempt to modify or transgress these institutions' procedures and systems.

The institution as a site

To understand Heier's and Faldbakken's artistic approaches it is helpful to look at the development of site-specific art and increasingly abstracted notions of site. Site-specific art is a complex and somewhat diffuse phenomenon, whose origins can be traced back to the 1960s when artists began to incorporate the display context into their works. It is in the American minimalists' revolt against the placeless and timeless character of modernist art that site-specific art can be said to have its roots.¹³ Minimalist objects, often produced industrially, were devoid of personal expression and removed the illusionist, symbolic and metaphoric properties that were traditionally associated with artistic content. The content was instead

¹² Faldbakken in email to Eeg-Tverbakk.

¹³ Early radical art movements such as the Russian constructivists and the French situationists, which operated outside the traditional exhibition spaces and actively used public places and situations, were not referred to as site-specific, nor were they later added to the genre.

situated in the act of viewing, at the meeting point between object and audience. The complex experience of the work came into focus, and both the space and the role of the viewer became incorporated as relevant parts of the work of art.¹⁴ It is against this backdrop that one can detect the development of a site-specific approach that does not see space, architecture or institutions as existing, ready-made venues for exhibiting art, but as artistic material per se. What started as a phenomenological approach was expanded to include institutional and cultural perspectives.

Institutional critique can be seen as a subsection of conceptual art, and it makes up one of the phases in the paradigms for site-specific art described in Kwon.¹⁵ Institutional critique as a genre can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. There is little consensus around how to evaluate, categorize and define this movement, which came to include a number of different approaches, and various ideas on how and from what position critique is possible.¹⁶ The first wave of institutional critique included a number of different approaches, but a common goal was to raise awareness concerning the material and ideological conditions that are 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. Artists conventionally associated with this first wave included Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke.

¹⁴ This approach was famously heavily criticized by the American critic Michael Fried, who argued that minimalism led to art losing its specific meaning. In his essay 'Art and Objecthood' in *Artforum*, 5, 1967, pp. 12–23) he characterized minimalist art objects' dependency on the viewer as 'theatrical'.

¹⁵ M. Kwon, *One Place After Another – Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

¹⁶ A number of artists, theorists, critics and curators have, through practice and text production over time, contributed to adapting and nuancing the notion of institutional critique. 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. Artists such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Hans Haacke used their own practice as a point of departure for investigating the premises of museum spaces, their ordering and connections to economic and political powers. Institutional critique was gradually established as its own genre and – as a consequence – became institutionalized. This provided the background for Andrea Fraser's article 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique' in *Artforum* in 2005. Here she argued that institutional critique is carried out by individuals that are themselves 'institutionalized', so that self-questioning and self-reflection become fundamental parts of the critique. This links the art field to discussions around other societal institutions and the need for self-reflexivity.

The second wave of institutional critique took place in the 1980s, when artists redefined the basis of critique and widened the perspective to include an examination of their own roles, so that the (self) institutionalized subject was conducting the critique (Fraser, pp. 278–283, 2005; Fraser, pp. 305–309, 2006).¹⁷ The institutions of art were viewed in a wider perspective and in relation to the complex social system that they form part of. Artists became interested in the construction of history, museology and ethnography. The methods and analytical strategies used by artists in the 1960s were developed to include interdisciplinary means of expression, interactive, and performative strategies. Examples of artists include: Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson and Renée Green.

There has been some discussion over whether institutional critique should be seen as a historical genre, or if it is still alive and relevant. If we can talk about a third wave of institutional critique (Sheikh),¹⁸ it differs from the preceding stages in a number of ways. Firstly, the initiative no longer seems to belong to artists. Art institutions are themselves taking charge. Curators and directors are developing and commissioning works of art and concepts that analyze and critique their own practices. The internalization of critique has provoked some critics and artists to state that the genre is ‘dead’.¹⁹ Behind such statements lies the implication that previous institutional critique movements were ‘pure’ and not part of the structure of the object of critique. In response, one could argue that institutional critique has always been an ‘inside job’, which has given the institution of art the adaptable and self-reflexive character it has today.

A further feature that distinguishes contemporary institutional critique from earlier versions is that it is productive, with an emphasis on constructive proposals.²⁰ Earlier institutional critique had an analytical, but often also judgemental approach. It sought to identify problems based on an assumed conflict between artists and institutions. The aim was

¹⁷ A. Fraser, ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’, *Artforum*, 44, 1, (2005); ‘What is Institutional Critique?’, in *Institutional Critique and After* (SoCCAS Symposium Vol. II), ed. by John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2006).

¹⁸ S. Sheikh, *Notes on Institutional Critique* (2006) <<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/sheikh/en>>, March 19th 2009.

¹⁹ ‘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’ (Fraser, p. 278, 2005).

²⁰ The curator Maria Lind has introduced the term ‘constructive institutional critique’ (Lind, p. 150).

to highlight problems, not necessarily to contribute to change. For the younger generation of artists associated with institutional critique, for example Apolonija Sustersic and Liesbeth Bik & Jos van der Pol, greater emphasis is placed on suggesting alternative or parallel ways of exercising influence, which also open up the institution for discussion. The fact that their approach involves more dialogue and cooperation can be seen in relation to so-called relational aesthetics²¹ and its emphasis on social exchange as a value in itself, but it is also related to the room for manoeuvre that museums and *kunsthallen* offer. They open their doors to artists who are seemingly free to explore and experiment with the institution. This is an approach that falls under the term ‘new institutionalism’; a term the art world has borrowed from the social sciences (Ekeberg, p. 10).²² The so-called ‘new’ art institutions are characterized by their attempts to create a self-critical and open institutional space, often through participatory activities so as to reformulate the traditional, high culture white cube, and open it up to new audiences. An example of such an approach is Rooseum in Malmö, which, under Charles Esche, defined itself as ‘part community center, part laboratory and part academy’ (Nifca).²³ This shows an approach that clearly lies outside the traditional view of what the role and duties of art institutions are. Differences include a shift of focus onto the social surroundings and the context the art institution operates in. Moreover, the concept of exhibitions 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. It may be worth noting that, in the field of art, the term ‘new institutionalism’ is associated with an experimental and progressive institutional practice, while, in organizational theory, it indicates a development that may involve loss of individuality and less scope for self determination on the part of organizations. This point will be elaborated on later on in the

²¹ The term ‘relational aesthetics’ was introduced by the theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud. In his book, *Esthétique Relationnelle* (1998) he points out that several central artists in the 1990s, among them Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno and Angela Bulloch, can be seen as working with social exchange rather than representation in their practices. Bourriaud promotes a reading of works of art based on the interpersonal relations they represent or give rise to. Bourriaud argues that art can function as a meeting place or type of social setting that creates convivial spaces for the development of heterogeneous modes of interaction. Social exchange becomes a central element, and audiences shift from being viewers to becoming conversation partners and participants.

²² J. Ekeberg, *Verksted #1, New Institutionalism* (Oslo, Norway: Office for Contemporary Art, 2003).

²³ Nifca, Sweden – Rooseum in Malmö (2006)

<http://www.nifca.org/2006/residencies/programs/locations/rooseum.html>, March 19th 2009.

text. The existence of ‘new institutionalism’ in the art world is typical for Northern Europe and Scandinavia. The background for this is structurally determined and too complex to be elaborated on here.

It is possible to see institutional critique as something more than a historical era or genre. Simon Sheikh describes it as: ‘an analytic tool, a method of spatial and political criticism and articulation that can be applied not only to the art world, but to disciplinary spaces and institutions in general’ (Sheikh). Arguably, this is what Heier and Faldbakken do with *Saganatt* and *Untitled (book sculpture)*. On their own initiative – as self-invited guests – they intervene in the affairs of a public museum and library, their spaces and systems. It makes sense to call their works interventions. The field of art usually defines ‘interventions’ as unannounced and uninvited actions, carried out with the aim of disturbing (and changing) the existing order. These artists’ works, however, have been set up through negotiation and agreement; their interventions are both welcome, despite their difference in character and effect. Heier’s *Saganatt* functions as a permanent addition to the existing collection of cultural history, almost as a refinement of it. Heier wants the work to be presented and explained in the best possible way, and has delegated this responsibility to the museum. The temporary *Untitled (book sculpture)*, however, is more destabilizing. It upsets a governing principle of order and replaces it with chaos. For Faldbakken the point is not to explain. The library accepts this, and thus the visitors are seemingly subjected to an internal conspiracy between the artist and the institution. It may seem like the form of intervention in these cases coincides with a constructive type of institutional critique. As the above description suggests, we are not talking about a conflict of interest, rather a form of cooperation. Following initial talks and negotiations, both the museum and the library accept and authorize the artists’ works. The role of consigner is split and this ensures that the artists have enough room for manoeuvre for the next stage when *Saganatt* or *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* create their own rules for the interaction with staff and audiences, without prior negotiation. One could say that the artistic and institutional authorities are on the same side – depending on each other – as is the case when a work of art is shown in a renowned gallery or museum. The difference lies in the fact that, in these cases, the cultural institutions are the ‘sites’ that verify the works’ relevancy and meaning.

Although the artists use similar strategies of intervention and institutional critique, they have different motivations: improvement versus destabilization, permanent versus temporary. They also make different demands on the institutions’ own contribution to each project. The potential for criticism and the uncertainty that each work carries with it do not

appear to be problematic; rather, it is as if both the museum and the library have found that by appropriating the artists' interventions they can strengthen their own position. As the Director of Maihaugen stated about *Saganatt* in a newspaper interview:

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 Area²⁴.

The Head of the Deichman Library related Faldbakken's work to the ongoing, cultural-political debate concerning the position and duties of libraries. In a draft press release prepared in case *Untitled (book sculpture)* created 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.²⁵

Untitled (book sculpture) therefore functions for the organization as a useful *tabula rasa* that can trigger a debate about a new and different library.²⁶

The fact that both Faldbakken and Heier are currently working in public, cultural institutions is partly a coincidence.²⁷ It is, however, symptomatic of the way in which

²⁴ in *Klassekampen*, May 23rd 2008.

²⁵ Unpublished press release by Liv Sæteren; The Head of the Deichman Library, sent to Eeg-Tverbakk on October 20th 2008.

²⁶ It should be added that the main Deichman Library is, as the result of a political decision, moving from its old, stately premises to a new building in Bjørvika, which is Norway's largest ever urban development.

²⁷ Heier and Faldbakken have both chosen to turn to state-financed cultural institutions and their activities into a site for an artistic project. Faldbakken initially wanted to make a project on and for a commercial TV channel. The concept was entitled 'Vilje til underholdning'/'A will to entertain'. 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. Their responses reveal a fear that the concept will not be entertaining enough. Entertainment that reflects on entertainment is not seen as interesting unless it is maximum entertainment in itself. The effect of reflection has no intrinsic value in

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 supporter.

The perspective from systems theory

Heier and Faldbakken were, through negotiations, given the opportunity of turning an institution's activities and systems into material for art. This makes it relevant to consider Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems (Luhmann).²⁸ 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 an especially high degree of 'self-initiated insecurity'. Art is an extremely loose and uncoordinated system of communications, which specializes in observing the media and forms that produce reality, thus reactivating the unused observational possibilities of the

the commercially minded world of television. In Norway a well known interference artist, musician etc., by the name of Kristopher Schau has, however, succeeded in realizing several shows in mainstream TV and radio media that explore limits of what it is possible to do notably with the human body in such media. Thus in *Forfall/Decay* from 2001 Schau devoted an entire week to living as unhealthily as possible. He had himself locked up for a week in a showcase on Oslo mainstream, unable to go out or to wash and given only junk food and cigarettes to consume. Medical tests were taken and the work was streamed on the internet and shown as a 'Reality show' on NRK2, one of the state run television channels, where it was marketed as an experiment with the body and soul of a human being. Schau later joined forces with a group of TV entertainers working in a surrealist Monty Python like tradition, producing the NRK TV show *Team Antonsen* (2004). The show was both immensely popular and a very skilful deconstruction of the conventions of the TV medium. In these examples, however, the logic of para-sital art is drawn towards the limit where the artist identities with the hosting discourse to the point of effacing all artistic identity.

²⁸ Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984).

present and making apparent the contingency of reality.²⁹ 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. The purpose of art is, therefore, not to imitate or to criticize society, but to serve as a model, which in turn 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.

Saganatt and *Untitled (book sculpture)* are not just models that show the possibility for change, but real interventions in how other systems function. They change the respective institution’s practices, and demonstrate its variable character. The question is why publicly funded, cultural institutions are interested in letting artists loose on their turf, displaying how they are malleable and mobile bodies. Here, we must not forget that the art systems own cultural power and status are sure to have contributed to the institutional acceptance of these artists’ proposals. This might be a fertile ground for future research. There is also another plausible explanation. Both Maihaugen and the Deichman Library are compelled to adapt to changes in society in relation to information and communications, as a political requirement; this is 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 states that: ‘Museums should be arenas for critical reflection and creative insights. The aim is for museums to function as modern societal institutions.’³⁰ 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 must see their role in a wider societal perspective, where they reflect and respond to their surrounding social field,

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ The quote is taken from the 2007 funding allocation letter to Maihaugen from KKD (The Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs).

can be seen as equivalent to self-critique.³¹ Self-observation is of peculiar importance in a complex, decentered 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. My perspective is only one among many, but who am I? As we know, self-observation requires help from outside. Using Luhmann's terminology, one could perhaps say that the artists behind *Saganatt* and *Untitled (book sculpture)* allow 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 produce it.

The perspective from systems theory in the Luhmannian tradition is useful since it shows how the issues of art may also be the problems of science, business, politics and the law in the complex and decentered social universe of today. The issues of contingency, insecurity, paradox and autoreflexivity, surplus meanings and the complexity and decentering of the subject are at the heart of contemporary art, but often with the implicit assumption that such issues are somehow specific for art. Thus the romantic conception wherein art is an island of creativity and complexity in a world of instrumentality, is continued. Systems theory, however, provides a way to link such practices theoretically with scientific discourse and with the advanced problem solving and criticality of other social domains, like politics, business and the media industries. This non-romantic approach should make it possible to trace out spaces of interferences in a pertinent and realistic manner. It fits well with the 'fellow sufferer' attitude which we see exemplified by the works in question.

One objection needs to be addressed. Luhmann and his school describe societal subsystems like art or science as self-referentially closed in their communicative logics, unable to conceive of other cognitive contexts than their own. Surely one system may interfere with the workings of another. But not only does it have no way to control the results of such interference, whatever it does will not be understood, but will be ignored or conceived as noise in the foreign semantic context. If so, one may ask if interference art is at all possible. To understand why interference is possible on such premises one must note first of all that

³¹ 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.'

there are different types of social systems. A ‘societal’ system is defined by the code which marks out its observational territory. However, Luhmann describes two other types of social systems that are not defined by a unique cognitive code. An ‘organizational’ system, like a union, is defined by membership. An ‘interactional’ system, like a salon, is defined by place. The observational and communicational codes that define societal systems are *universal* but not *general*. The economy can put a price tag on anyone and everything. In this sense the economic perspective is universal. But it is not a general perspective. There are others that are equally valid. As seen from law everything is either lawful or illegal while science constructs a world where everything is either true or false. Art also, can draw anything and everything into the domain of playful contingency, where perceptions communicate.³² The universality of the societal code of art was proved by Marcel Duchamp in the early twentieth century when he signed industrial objects like urinals and bottle racks and exposed them as artworks.³³ Once the audience gets over the shock, the found object or readymade takes its place in the realm of standard aesthetic objects. The universality of the art code is actually a problem for art when it comes to making ruptures tangible. On the societal level, art is a flat world. Anything can be brought into art’s domain of playful contingency, where perceptions communicate. Thus the readymade cannot fulfill the ambition of providing an analysis of the formal and cultural limits within which art exists and struggles. Since Duchamp contemporary art has therefore moved from the production of objects to practice; from works of art to art as process, relation and action.

Societal codes, like that of art, are local and universal. From the perspective of systems theory, interference art can be seen to exploit possibilities that arise due to the fact that the organizational and interactional codes are not only local but also non-universal, while

³² On the art code see Jakobsen, this volume.

³³ The fact that found objects serve as works of art is often taken as proof that there is strictly speaking no art code, but that the line between art and non-art is conceptually and institutionally defined. Notably the US-American philosopher Arthur Danto argued that the readymades of Duchamp, Warhol and other avant-gardists as proof that contemporary art is about ideas and institutional sanction rather than perception, since found objects have no perceivable difference from non-art objects. In *Art as a social system*, Luhmann convincingly shows that this is a mistake. What matters, he writes ‘is not what a thing is in it self but what it makes visible’ (Luhmann, p. 34, 2000). Even if there is no perceivable difference from a non-art object, the fact that something is perceived as an art object may make one see the world differently. A readymade may very well make forms of perception visible: ‘If an artist were to create two identical (indistinguishable) objects without marking one as the copy of the other, such a program could communicate only one thing: that this is the program’ (Luhmann, p. 370, 2000).

systemic differentiation on the organizational or interactional level often *contradicts* societal differentiation.³⁴ The interactional and organizational codes of art are *not* universal. Take as proof Santiago Sierra's work *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond* at the Venice biennial festival in 2001, as recounted by Claire Bishop. Immigrants making their living as illegal street vendors were paid 60 euros to have their hair dyed blonde. Some of them were given Sierras exhibition space in the Arsenale to sell their fake designer handbags. Both contexts were disrupted (Bishop, p. 73).³⁵ The vendors did not aggressively and enthusiastically hail passers-by with their trade, as they do in the street, but were subdued. The interactional system of the biennale was disrupted as the tacit racial and class exclusions that constitute it were made visible along with the unspoken veiling of blatant commerce. Thus important political fractions and tensions appeared.

In the two projects we have described, the conflict between interactional systems is not so sharp as in Sierra's work where the comfortable universe of the middle class art *flâneur* is confronted with the precarious existence of the street vending illegal immigrant. Both projects remain within middle class contexts. Conflict is mediated also by the fact that Faldbakken and Heier seek 'de-artification' of their works. This is something which distinguishes their practice from early conceptual art, which accentuated its identification as 'art'. Both Heier's and Faldbakken's work have a para-sital (Serres) character, in which the artist closely identifies with the hosting discourse, drawing on its inherent criticality.³⁶ It is not clear whether Falbakken's texts are novels or conceptual art. Heier emphasizes that her work does *not* have to be seen as art.

I am both an artist and a work colleague, and my projects are both works of art and functional everyday objects. Like me, they function in a number of contexts and can be understood in different ways. It depends on your point of view. (Eeg-Tverbakk)

³⁴ Thus a syndicate of creative writers may organize writers that work within the framework of the art system as well as genre writers, plus writers (often the most interesting!) that try to negotiate the two logics. A famous cafe may be a meeting point both for artists and for people from the media industries. This causes a lot of irritation which offers fascinating material for sociological analysis.

³⁵ Bishop, Claire, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October 110, Fall 2004, pp 51-79.*

³⁶ Serres, Michel, *Le Parasite*, (Paris, Grasset, 1980) .

The key problem in this form of art is how the relation between artist and public is to be defined. In the United States, the 'Culture in action' program commissioned some of the most influential site specific art in the 1990s. The project was based on the insight that 'what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* be the artwork.'³⁷ Working with communities and institutions the project sought to rehabilitate the criticality associated with the anti-idealist, anti-commercial site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s, without falling prey to the aggressively utopian and somewhat paranoid mood which has often characterized the relations of the avant-garde with the non-art world. The art created in the context of the culture in action program has, however, been criticized, by Kwon (2002) and others for falling into the trap of *progressivism*, wherein a paternalizing relation is established to 'communities' that are at the same time tacitly essentialized. Progressivism is a world view which is typically held by middle class professionals, notably journalists and academe. In progressivism the world is divided into, on the one hand, the powerful (corporations, politicians etc.) and, on the other, the community or the people. It becomes the task of journalists, the academe or the artist to empower the community and assist it in the identity politics of the contemporary.

In the art experiences described in this article, however, the artists claim no privileged positions. Instead artists appear as 'fellow sufferers' in a social life pervaded with contingency, insecurity and coincidence. As we have seen, Heier stresses that even the liberating potential in the idea of how things could be different is in no way specific to artists. Art offers no solutions of its own, but is a para-site on the problem solving capacities and criticality of other domains.

Conclusion

The distinction between societal, organizational and interactional systems could be useful in sorting out the confusing mix of heteronomy and autonomy in contemporary art. Interference art maintains autonomy on the level of the societal or cognitive code. The gaze or perspective which it communicates is specifically artistic. Art cannot negotiate away the cognitive code which defines it as a societal system. The interference artist remains an artist, that is an actor in the communicative system which observes the media and forms that produce social reality, thus activating unused observational possibilities in the present and making apparent the

³⁷ Suzanne Lacy quoted in Kwon (p. 105, 2002).

contingency of reality. All organizational and interactional codes are, however, open to negotiation.

We asked what may motivate institutions to allow interference artists access to their physical environments, apparatuses, procedures, systems and discourses, that is to interfere with their organizational and interactional systems. The expectation that state cultural institutions should function as outward-looking, societal institutions brings us back to the notion of ‘new institutionalism’ or ‘neo-institutionalism’. Like Luhmannian systems theory, new institutionalism observes how organizational and interactional systems behave in decentred and complex social environments, studying how organizations are influenced over time and adapt in relation to internal and external pressure. A focus on the organization’s actual and concrete tasks is replaced by an interest in the surrounding environments that influence and shape them. This also includes the organization’s own members, other organizations, cultural expectations, the political climate and specific government requirements.³⁸

We can see Heier and Faldbakken’s projects as contributions to this task. They help the institutions follow political directions, while at the same time teaching the institutions the investigative and critical methods of contemporary art. Thus shifts in institutional critique from the 1970s to the present decade goes hand in hand with the changing identity of the archive, library and museum institutions: from being custodians of common cultural foundations to becoming producers of a new culture with a more creative and critical approach that reflects the attitudes of contemporary art. However, this situation of mutually-advantageous consensus is not without its problems. Art no longer seems to have critical force when the objects of its critique embrace it with open arms. When artists and state institutions share the same approach, is that not just a soft form of totalitarianism? This relates to state sponsored cultural institutions that are required to be active and engaged participants in an increasingly complex culture. On the one hand, this involves a certain openness, on the other, such incessant acceptance and inclusion of oppositional ways of thinking can become a way for the already institutionalized to inoculate themselves against any resistance. Change can

³⁸ The new-institutional directions within organizational theory points out that effectiveness in pure technical-economic terms are not enough to survive. Legitimacy from the surrounding and leading organizational milieu is also necessary. This leads to the development of identical forms of organizations, and thus the risk of standardization. The term isomorphism is used to refer to the homogenizing process that forces structural similarities between entities within the same field (DiMaggio & Powell, pp. 147–60).

then merely take the form of adjustments without any greater, structural upheavals. For artists that work against and with unusually tolerant institutions, the question arises: how do you transgress where institutions actually request transgression?

We can view this in two ways. Either with melancholy, as the end of radical critique in art, or positively, as a mature approach to constructive change. The point is perhaps no longer to doubt the institutions' existence and legitimacy, and from an imagined outsider position to proclaim great changes; but rather, as a sort of 'fellow sufferer' to move and adjust them. A common feature of Heier and Faldbakken's art projects is that they imitate the original functions of the sites, but modify and reorganize them in their own ways. Their actions are situated somewhere between acceptance and rejection, thus avoiding the classic counter-position. The artists are instead formulating something new inside of and in dialogue with the institutions. Through manipulation, reorganization and expansion the institutions' activities are altered in ways that their own employees would not have thought of. The works are similar in the way that they touch on the institutions' relationship with their audiences. They produce new external interfaces that generate different experiences and interpretations of the museum and the library. It is possible in both cases that it is not so much the institutions that are challenged and questioned, but audiences' (institutionalized) impression of them and what they represent. Heier characterizes her relationship to Maihaugen as follows:

this collaboration offers the opportunity for a much more powerful piece of work. Instead of making the work about Maihaugen's failings and blind spots, I can, in collaboration with the institution, highlight a much bigger issue: our common notion of Norway's national identity, our image of ourselves. (Eeg-Tverbakk)

Despite close connections between the artists' works and the host institutions, *Saganatt* and *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, like other contemporary works of art, speak for themselves. The discussions these works of art potentially trigger cannot be controlled, and they would create a different public space than the one that usually surrounds the respective institutions. Herein lies the potential risk for Maihaugen and the Deichman Library. Due to the artists' interference they may become involved in debates that are beyond their control. Whether, and in what ways, the works will influence these institutions remains to be seen. This will become part of a later stage in this research project.

The perspective from systems theory allows us to see that the engagement of art with contingency and auto-reflexivity is closely related to the problems of science, business,

politics and the law in the complex and decentered social universe of today. Giving up the romantic idea that the issues and insights of art are specific to it, may be unpleasant to artists and critics. But it also offers exciting new possibilities. Art becomes relevant in a new way. Indeed this relevance explains the growing demand for contemporary art in today's complex environments.

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