

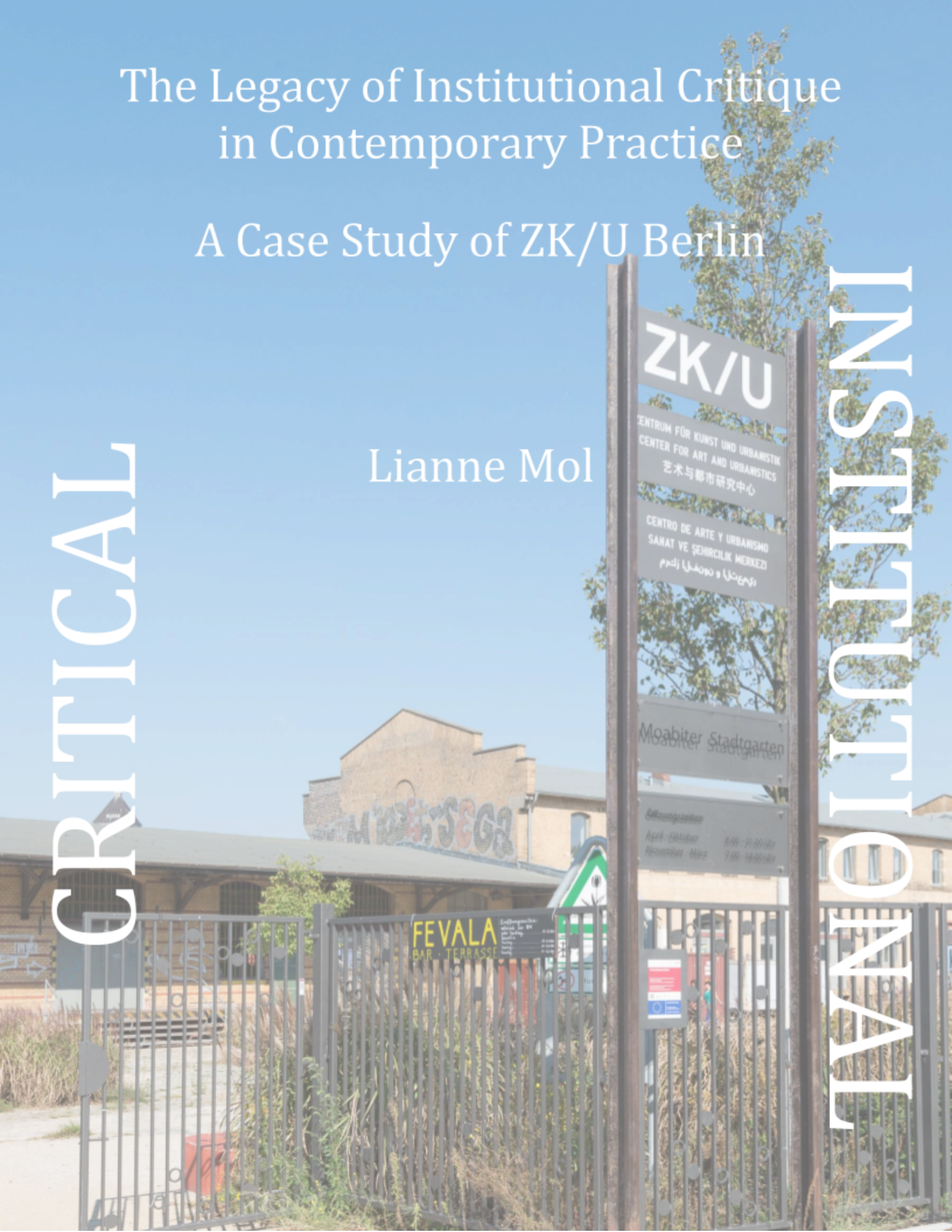
The Legacy of Institutional Critique in Contemporary Practice

A Case Study of ZK/U Berlin

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The Legacy of Institutional Critique in Contemporary Practice:
A Case Study of ZK/U Berlin

Research Master's Thesis in:
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes contemporary institutional practice at ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin through the lens of the art historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique. It aims to uncover how institutional-critical thought and practice inform the functioning of cultural organizations today. Through a literature study on the development of institutional-critical practice and discourse over more than fifty years, an analytical framework is designed, which is then applied to the case study of ZK/U through the methodology of participant observation. Focussing on the interplay of the institution's self-understanding, its social, political and economic context, and actual practice of operation, this thesis makes a claim for a practice-based, contextualized understanding of art-institutional practice. It argues that both academic research and institutional-critical practice need to have a particular sensitivity for the situatedness of artistic, curatorial and institutional practice. As an analytical tool, institutional critique can provide this sensitivity, and help to develop new forms of critical-institutional activity.

Acknowledgements

Underlying this Research Master's thesis is a long process of academic, professional and personal development. It needs to be placed somewhere between literature research and case study, between cultural theory and anthropology, between academia and artistic research, and between Nijmegen and Berlin. What started off as a theoretical, literature-based inquiry into the status of the art institution and its relation to the socio-political realm, ended up in extensive fieldwork at one of the most contemporary, innovative and exciting cultural organizations I have ever set foot in. It came to be an invaluable component in my Research Master's programme, an essential step forward on my career path, and an unforgettable opportunity. Although I might not have taken the most conventional route towards graduation, I am forever grateful for the chances and support I received on my way there.

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Introduction

Ever since the artists of the institutional critique started revolting against art institutions, most significantly museums, in the 1960s, the art world has been in the grip of an institutional-critical mentality. Contemporary institutional practice cannot be seen apart from this art historical and discursive reality. To study art institutions nowadays requires a deep understanding of the discourse and practice of institutional critique. Indeed, recent academic literature on contemporary artistic and curatorial practices displays a turn towards anti-institutional artists, projects and attitudes, and the legacy of institutional critique that they have left us. This legacy inevitably informs contemporary artistic, curatorial and institutional practice. The question then is: how?

This thesis inquires into the interrelationship between institutional critique as an artistic movement and discourse, and contemporary institutional practice in the art world. I propose an analytical framework based on the historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique, which I then develop further in relation to a specific case study, the ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics (Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik) in Berlin. As such, I aim to bring together an academic, theoretical perspective and a professional, practice-based perspective, to create a holistic understanding of art-institutional practice in the context of its everyday cultural, social, political and economic reality.

1. INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE: A WORKING DEFINITION

Institutional critique is commonly regarded as an artistic practice originating in the 1960s that aimed to lay bare the power relations, contradictions and inequalities at play in the institutions of the art world, most significantly the museum and the gallery. It has its roots in a diverse range of artistic practices, such as minimalism, conceptual art, land art and performance art. Historically, two generations of institutional critique are recognized. The first generation spread out over the 1960s and 70s, with its main advocates being Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Robert Smithson. The second generation came up in the 1980s and 90s and included artists such as Andrea Fraser, Fred Wilson, Renee Green and Christian Philipp Müller.¹ Each generation had its own distinct approaches and strategies, which will become clearer in the first chapter. As Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray point out in their introduction to *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice* (2009), institutional critique is not so much a coherent genre or movement with clearly defined methods and viewpoints.; rather, it consists of a loose nexus of artistic manifestations that took on diverse forms and themes, united only in their subversive stance towards and critical inquiry into the institutions of the art world.² This anti-institutionalist attitude

¹ Alberro (2009): 2-18; Sheikh (2009): 19-32; Stimson (2009): 20-39.

² Raunig & Ray (2009): xiv.

was a product of the larger socio-political climate around the year 1968, which was deeply characterized by a view of institutionality as “another name for received thought congealed into a social form that veils or otherwise inhibits the possibility of self-creation”, as Blake Stimson aptly puts it in his essay ‘What was institutional critique?’ (2009).³

A working definition of institutional critique is inevitably incomplete and restricted as it tries to capture the general sensibility behind a highly diverse range of artistic and discursive practices. Alexander Alberro’s interpretation of institutional critique functions as a point of departure for this thesis, and informs my inquiries throughout. In his introduction to *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings* (2009), Alberro argues that the artists of the institutional critique

juxtaposed in a number of ways **the immanent, normative (ideal) self-understanding of the art institution** with **the (material) actuality of the social relations** that currently formed it. That juxtaposition sought at once to foreground the tension between the theoretical self-understanding of the institution of art and its **actual practice of operation**, and to summon the need for a resolution of that tension or contradiction. Indeed, one of the central characteristics of institutional critique in its moment of formation was that both an analytical *and* a political position were built into the **critical interpretive strategy** - that if one problematized and critically assessed the soundness of the claims advanced (often tacitly) by art institutions, then one would be in a better position to instantiate a nonrepressive art context.⁴ [my emphasis]

Here, Alberro lays out the three (often contradicting) lines that determine institutional activity, along which art institutions thus have to be critically evaluated: self-understanding, socio-political context and actual practices. Regarded as such, institutional critique is an interpretive strategy to investigate the functioning of art institutions within their contextual specificity. Alberro’s definition exceeds that of an art historical movement, and opens up institutional critique’s potential as an analytical tool that can be actualized by contemporary artists, institutions and scholars to evaluate institutional practice.

2. STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Recent academic literature displays a renewed interest in institutional-critical practice, which often goes hand in hand with the recognition of a third generation of institutional critique in contemporary art.⁵ Raunig and Ray respond to the return of institutional critique in academic interest.⁶ They lay out three lines of inquiry that inspired the *Transform* project (2005-2008) at the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) of which the book is the result. First of all, the line of art production claims the emergence of a new phase of institutional critique, exceeding the first two generations “as a combination of social critique, institutional critique and

³ Stimson (2009): 23.

⁴ Alberro (2009): 3.

⁵ Graw (2006): 139; Marstine (2017): 12; Raunig & Ray (2009): xiii; Raunig (2009): 3; Sheikh (2009): 29; Sheikh (2012): 368-369; 369; Welchman (2006): 11; Zelevansky (2006): 178.

⁶ Raunig & Ray (2009): xiv.

self-critique”.⁷ The second line of thought, that of art institutions, inquires into critical positions taken in by contemporary cultural organizations, and looks for new forms of institutionalism in the art world. Finally, the relationship between institution and critique is addressed, investigating how to move beyond the apparent paradox of the institutionalization of institutional critique and social movements.⁸ Although Raunig and Ray display a certain susceptibility for the social, political and financial reality that arts organizations are dealing with today, such as “the pressure of economic and administrative logics bearing down on all institutions in the cultural field”⁹, they also admit that their claim for a return of institutional critique in a third generation is not so much founded in practice-based experience and investigation but rather “on a political and theoretical necessity to be found in the logic of institutional critique itself”¹⁰.

There is an inherent contradiction in this approach: exactly by shutting out the very practical considerations and limitations that constitute the functioning of cultural organizations, and focusing only on the theoretical implications of institutional critique, the discourse gets detached from practical institutional realities, with the risk of becoming purely self-referential. As a counter-approach, in this thesis I aim to activate the logic of institutional critique as a critical tool for analyzing actual institutional practices from an empirical perspective. Herein, I follow the proposition made by Simon Sheikh in his essay ‘Notes on Institutional Critique’ for the same *Transform* project. Sheikh is rather hesitant to declare a third generation but does opt for the convergence of the first two waves in a return of institutional critique. He points out how rather than artists directing their critique against the art institution, institutional critique is now mostly practiced by the very representatives of institutions (curators and directors) in an effort to transform these institutions.¹¹ Contradictory as this seems, Sheikh argues, by moving beyond the conception of institutional critique as an art historical movement practiced by artists, the legacy of institutional critique can be regarded as a critical-analytical tool for the assessment of art institutions.

At the same time, academics evaluate how half a century of institutional-critical practice has influenced the contemporary understanding and functioning of art institutions. Among the questions that underlie this debate, are: “In the aftermath of a movement that commenced nearly four decades ago, how have its leading concepts, assumptions, and tactics developed, especially as many of them can no longer be considered as radical or adversarial as they might have been in the late 1960s?”¹²; “What does it mean when the practice of institutional critique and analysis has shifted from artists to curators and critics, and when the institution has become internalized in artists and curators alike (through education, through art historical canon, through daily praxis)?”¹³; “How does Institutional Critique relate to a situation in which the institutions that make up the art world are as threatened as they are threatening?”¹⁴; and “which form of institutions and instituting

⁷ Ibid.: xiii.

⁸ Ibid.: xiii-xiv.

⁹ Ibid.: xvi.

¹⁰ Raunig (2009): 3.

¹¹ Sheikh (2009): 30.

¹² Welchman (2006): 12-13.

¹³ Sheikh (2012): 31.

¹⁴ Zelevansky (2006): 178.

do contemporary social movements need?”¹⁵. In this thesis, I start to answer the questions that direct the academic and professional debate around institutional critique and the status of the art institution both through the theoretical reflection on the development of institutional-critical thought and the analysis of an actual example of what contemporary critical-institutional practice in the art world might look like.

3. CASE STUDY

The specific example of contemporary art-institutional practice that I look at in this thesis is ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics. This is an art institution located in the area of Moabit in Berlin. It is set in a former railway depot building, the Güterbahnhof Moabit, and is surrounded by a public park. The institution was founded in August 2012 as a non-profit organization by the artists' collective KUNSTrePUBLIK. ZK/U primarily consists of an artists' residency, hosting artists, researchers and activists from all over the world in fourteen studios for two to eight month residencies. Apart from that, the institution realizes its own artistic and community projects, independently or together with other organizations, as one-time events or ongoing formats. In addition, the spaces are rented out for external events such as exhibitions, film screenings, parties, weddings, and dance events. In sum, ZK/U is a young, hybrid institution that covers a wide range of institutional activities and explicitly presents itself as being socially engaged. Especially considering that it was founded well after the proclaimed death of institutional critique in the 2000s, it is an interesting and suitable case to study how the rich legacy of institutional-critical discourse and practices still influences contemporary instituting in the art world. Located in Berlin, ZK/U can furthermore be placed in the context of a thriving and influential cultural landscape that has changed and developed considerably over the past ten to twenty years. Apart from its community of established artists, the city attracts significant amounts of upcoming international artists every year and functions as a production base for art.¹⁶ It has an extensive cultural infrastructure with a wide variety of art institutions and project spaces that tend to transcend the classic museum or gallery model, and the city's art scene is sometimes interpreted as being more diverse and less hierarchical than those of other cities.¹⁷

4. RESEARCH QUESTION, HYPOTHESIS & OBJECTIVES

Following the current state of affairs in academic and professional discourse regarding institutional-critical art practice, this thesis attempts to trace how the historical and conceptual legacy of institutional critique informs contemporary art-institutional practice in the case of ZK/U. The central objective here is to uncover the interrelationship between the institution's self-understanding, its socio-political and economic context, and its actual practices of operation, and to relate this to the ever-shifting status of the art institution in academic and professional literature. On the one hand, I depart from the assumption that the legacy of institutional critique inevitably informs contemporary institutional practice in the art world. On the other, I hold the

¹⁵ Raunig & Ray (2009): xvii.

¹⁶ Neuendorf (2016).

¹⁷ Forkert (2013): 124.

hypothesis that the institutional infrastructure of a cultural organization determines its critical (socio-political) potential. My aim is to unite an academic, theoretical perspective and a professional, practice-based perspective to come to a fuller comprehension of art-institutional practice in the context of its everyday cultural, social, political and economic reality. In response to the current return of institutional critique in academia, I set out to examine what the implications of institutional-critical discourse are for contemporary art-institutional practice, and vice versa, to what extent contemporary art-institutional practice reflects what academia claims to be a third generation of institutional critique. The research question that is at the core of this thesis is, then: *How can the legacy of the discourse and practices of three generations of institutional critique be used as an analytical framework to understand the interplay of self-understanding, social, political and economic context, and actual practice of operation in the contemporary art institution ZK/U?*

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The field research presented in this thesis was conducted through my involvement with ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin during, around and after a four-month internship in the residency department. I provide an in-depth case study of this particular cultural institution, which can be seen as an instance of a broader context or set of instances. ZK/U is taken here as the subject of study because to a great extent it is exemplary of a larger phenomenon, namely the proliferation of innovative, hybrid, socially engaged and institutional-critical art institutions, and as such, the culmination of institutional critique in artistic institutionality.¹⁸ The chosen approach thus fits into the methodology of participant observation research, where the qualitative data necessary for the case study is acquired through active participation in the phenomenon, community, or institution that is being researched for an extended period of time.¹⁹ This type of research allows one to gain a wide scope of research material, report one's observations elaborately and systematically, and to identify recurring themes and patterns through thematic and narrative analysis of the material.²⁰ The collected data is primarily derived from close observations during my work with ZK/U. I kept field notes of the most significant impressions and perceptions over the research period. Official meetings, informal conversations and collaborations with staff members and residents provided me with more in-depth information about the institutional life of ZK/U.

The relevance of this type of research here lies in the study of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the 'objective relations' of art institutions.²¹ In literature on the role and functioning of art institutions, I have noticed an implicit discrepancy between academic, theoretical perspectives and professional,

¹⁸ Forkert (2013): 124; Möntmann (2007); Raunig & Ray (2009): xiv; Rosendahl (2016).

¹⁹ Feagin, Orum & Sjöberg (1991): 4.

²⁰ Bernard (2006): 343; DeWalt & DeWalt (2011): 2.

²¹ According to Alberro (2009), the institutional-critical project aims to point out the contradictions between the ideal presentation and self-understanding of art institutions, and the actuality of objective relations that structure it. In *The Rules of Art* (1992), Bourdieu asserts that any social field, including the field of arts, consists of fixed positions with specific access to (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) capital, and which exist in relation to each other. The decisions and behaviours of the individuals filling in these positions are then informed by their own positions and the respective relations to others. As such, these objective relations invisibly bind social realities, and determine their laws of functioning. See: Alberro (2009): 4; Bourdieu (1992): 181, 214; Grenfell & Hardy (2007); Stefano (2016); Zhang (2015).

practice-based perspectives. The latter reflect an (often invisible) everyday reality of struggle for economic and political support that inevitably influences the practical and conceptual potential of art institutions.²² This reality is generally not accounted for in academic approaches, as these mostly base their conclusions on the visible products and practices of cultural organizations like artworks, exhibitions, programmes and policies, and essentially produce a conceptualized representation. By investigating the complex web of motives, intentions, considerations, and coincidences informing institutional decision-making processes, a more inclusive comprehension of institutional activity comes into being.

6. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

When it comes to analyzing organizational functioning and interrelationships within the institution, there does not seem to be a fitting analytical framework at hand. Methodologies for organizational analysis often hold the objective of improving efficiency, increasing profit, or expanding outreach, to name just a few. As such, they mostly focus on pointing out the weaknesses and blind spots within an organization, with the predefined goal of fixing them.²³ That is not the aim here. Much rather, the objective is to study an institutional reality in the art world, illustrated by but not limited to the specific case study of ZK/U, that I believe is deeply (although largely implicitly) informed by its historical, theoretical, political and economic context. To analyze how this institution could, for instance, optimize the way it employs its funding, or increase the amount of visitors to its events, would mean shutting out the very real circumstances in which it is operating; the disbelief in institutions, the funding system of the art world, the capitalist logic of the art market, the alienation of audiences, the increasingly neoliberal and populist political climate, and so on. Although it is of course impossible to investigate this reality as a whole, ZK/U's organization, agenda and practices are inevitably influenced by these circumstances. Research into cultural organizations nowadays should be susceptible to this situation that determines the everyday reality of institutional activity in the art world.

In the first part of this thesis I develop the analytical framework from which I will approach the case study in the second part. This model for analysis is based on the legacy of institutional critique. Academic and professional literature shows a shift towards understanding institutional critique as a conceptual tool and critical attitude that is still applicable today. Regarded as such, the theoretical legacy of institutional critique can be adapted as an analytical framework to study contemporary art institutions. By tracing the historical and theoretical development of institutional-critical practice and discourse over the past fifty years, I have discerned four tendencies that form the pillars of the analytical framework in this thesis, which are laid out in detail in the second chapter: 1) the institutionalization of a (self-)critical attitude; 2) a turn towards social engagement; 3) a growing awareness of the influence of funding on institutional decision-making processes; and 4) a hybridization of institutional functions. In the case study analysis in chapter four, I reflect on these four aspects in particular in order to frame ZK/U within the larger context of institutional critique and its significance for contemporary art institutions.

²² Amundsen & Morland (2015); Ciric & Yingqian Cai (2016); Rosendahl (2016).

²³ Chia (1996): 13-14.

7. THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis consists of two parts. The first part is literature-based and focuses on the historical and conceptual legacy of institutional critique as an artistic movement and critical tool. The first chapter gives a general overview of the development of institutional-critical thought and practice in the art world, and answers how the art historical and theoretical discourse of institutional critique has developed since the 1960s. The second chapter traces recurring tendencies in the discursive evolution of institutional critique and evaluates their theoretical implications for contemporary institutional practice in the art world. As such, it constructs the analytical framework for the case study that follows. The second part is practice-based and studies ZK/U as a case of contemporary art-institutional practice. It starts with a detailed description of the institution in its socio-historical context in the third chapter. The fourth chapter then provides an analysis of the interplay of ZK/U's self-understanding, its social relations, and its actual practice of operation through the lens of institutional critique, structured according to the four pillars that have been laid out in the first part of the thesis. The concluding chapter reflects on the practical consequences of institutional-critical discourse for the specific case study as well as the more general reality of art institutions today.

- PART I -

History & Discourse



Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne. Département des Aigles. Section XIXème Siècle*. (1968)

The Legacy of Institutional Critique

This chapter reflects on the development of the practices, strategies, and attitudes commonly associated with institutional critique since its inception in the 1960s. It sketches an overview of the institutional-critical discourse through recent literature that claims a return towards institutional critique, as well as examples of institutional-critical practice from the last fifty years. I do not claim to give an all-encompassing survey of anti-institutional thought and practice since the 1960s; this is simply not possible nor relevant within the scope and context of this thesis. Much rather, I aim to lay bare the continuous push and pull of, within and against institutionalization in the art world, and give an insight into the development of institutional-critical sensibilities within artistic, curatorial, institutional and academic practice. What is particularly interesting about the art field, and especially the institutional critique, is that it produces a significant amount of written discourse along with and evaluating its activities. Artists and curators practicing institutional critique have continuously reflected on their work in essays and interviews.²⁴ As such, theoretical and practice-based perspectives intertwine in the discourse on institutional critique. This first chapter lays the foundation for an analytical framework to study contemporary institutional practice in the art world, and provides the art historical and theoretical context in which the case study that is established in the following chapters has to be placed. The subquestion underlying this chapter is, then: *How has the art historical and theoretical discourse and practice of institutional critique developed since the 1960s?* This chapter is structured chronologically, starting with the origin and first generation of institutional critique in the 1960s and 70s, followed by the second generation in the 1980s and 90s. It then takes a brief detour into the anti-institutional attitude of new museology in academia. The second part of the chapter looks at the proclaimed third wave of institutional critique, which takes two distinct trajectories: as institutions of critique, in the northern and western European context also known under the banner of new institutionalism, and as a radically critical, activist art that makes its way out of the art world and into the social realm.

1. GENERATION I: HOW TO ANALYZE THE DECEPTION

Institutional critique has a long and rich history in artistic practices as well as theoretical inquiries, and has developed significantly over the course of more than four decades. Art historians commonly indicate two generations of institutional critique. Its first wave in the 1960s and 70s formed the foundation for a diverse range of practices, both within and outside of the art world.²⁵ The art of institutional critique came about in the socio-historical context of the civil rights movements in

²⁴ For example: Alberro & Stimson (2009); Kravagna (2001).

²⁵ Raunig & Ray (2009): xiv.

Europe and the United States, and its inception is usually traced back to the year 1968.²⁶ Political upheavals around this time prompted artists to take a more critical stance and investigate the relationship of art and society.²⁷ In this context, artists became more and more aware of the oppression based on ethnicity, gender, class or sexual orientation within cultural organizations and other institutions. The movement thus developed hand in hand with feminism and postcolonialism. Their artistic strategies were inspired by (post)modern artists who had exposed the illusion of neutrality maintained by museums and galleries, most notably Marcel Duchamp. Furthermore, artists of the institutional critique were influenced by postmodern thinkers writing on modern institutions; most significantly, of course, Michel Foucault. As such, the institutional critique encompassed “an understanding of what an institution is, something which is not a physical structure but a set of protocols, procedures, habits and behaviours”.²⁸

The origin of the term ‘institutional critique’ is not entirely agreed upon among scholars and artists.²⁹ Mel Ramsden of the Art & Language collective used it as early as 1975 in his essay ‘On Practice’, which critiqued the hegemonic power of the New York art system.³⁰ Second generation artist Andrea Fraser used the term offhandedly in a 1985 essay on Louise Lawler entitled ‘In and Out of Place’, and would later, in her now famous text ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’ (2005), reflect on her own fair share in institutionalizing institutional critique by using the term to categorize a diverse range of artists and practices.³¹ It would be used by students of the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Programme and the School of Visual Arts in New York during the 1980s as shorthand for ‘critique of institutions’.³² The notion of ‘institutional critique’ first gained academic ground in 1990 when art historian Benjamin Buchloh used it to describe conceptual artistic practices of the 1960s.³³

As is often the case with art historical constructs, none of the artists that are associated with the first generation of institutional critique used the term to describe their work.³⁴ What unites them, then, is an essentially critical stance towards art institutions and conventions. They specifically directed their critiques at institutions for the distribution of art and culture, most significantly the museum and the gallery.³⁵ Artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren intended to uncover the deeply rooted inequalities and contradictions in the institutionalized art world. They would question assumptions about the value and autonomy of art objects, and point out that works of art do not have an intrinsic value but are assigned meaning and significance through processes of institutionalization, canonization and commodification. They demonstrated that museums and galleries are ideological institutions that claim neutrality and expertise, and frame art works according to historically and socially constructed standards that are constantly reproduced. As such, they create an ‘inside’ and

²⁶ Stimson (2009): 20.

²⁷ Alberro (2009): 5; Marstine (2017): 6.

²⁸ Cummings (2012), as cited in: Marstine (2017): 6.

²⁹ Graw (2006): 138.

³⁰ Ramsden (2009): 170-199; first published in: *The Fox* Iss. 1. No. 1. (1975): 66-83.

³¹ Fraser (2009): 410; first published in: *Artforum*. Iss. 44. No. 1. (2005): 278-283, 332.

³² Marstine (2017): 7.

³³ Buchloh (1990).

³⁴ Fraser (2009): 409.

³⁵ Raunig & Ray (2009): xiv-xv.

'outside' for the art world, and exercise power towards both artists and audiences. In opposition to these processes, the artists of the first phase of institutional critique considered themselves 'outsiders' to the art world. Indeed, for this generation critique seemed to depend on an ideal of critical distance, from which they could intervene in the status quo and imagine actual change.³⁶ This first wave was thus characterized by a combination of radical opposition and subversion towards art institutions, and an optimistic commitment to change and transformation.³⁷ As Alberro puts it, "its aim was to intervene critically in the standing order of things, with an expectation that these interventions would produce actual change in the relations of power and lead to genuine reconciliation".³⁸

To achieve this aim, the artistic strategies they turned to often included flight or withdrawal, site-specificity, mimicry, exposure and intervention.³⁹ Their origins lie in minimalism, conceptual art, appropriation art and land art.⁴⁰ An artistic strategy that was typical of the first wave of institutional critique consists in what Gregory Sholette would later come to refer to as 'mockstitution': the mimical recreation of the space and structures of an art institution outside the art world's institutional framework.⁴¹ This approach was taken on, most significantly, by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers with his project *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968-72). Starting in 1968 in his house in Brussels, Broodthaers produced temporary 'anti-museums', as curator Johannes Cladders would say at the opening night on the 27th of September.⁴² Cleverly imitating the conventions of a museum opening, including invitation cards, a cold buffet and an inaugural speech by a guest curator, Broodthaers lured the art community into his home, only to encounter an installation of postcards of nineteenth-century paintings and some black-and-white reproductions of drawings taped to and projected on the walls - the *Section XIXe siècle* of his Museum of Modern Art.⁴³ As such, he questioned the notions of authenticity and autonomy of the artwork, and exposed the museum as a mere ideological framework that constructs these values. Ironically enough, Broodthaers was quickly invited by art institutions like Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and documenta 5 to install other sections of his mock-museum, and between the opening night and 1972 he created eleven more sections. Indeed, as the artist himself asserted about the ironic artistic success of his *Musée d'Art Moderne*: "at present every art production will be absorbed quickly into the commercial cycle that transforms not only the meaning of art but also the very nature of this art".⁴⁴ He took it even one step further when in 1970 he declared his museum bankrupt and instituted the *Section Financière* in an attempt to sell it, hereby pointing towards commercialism and the construction of economic value in the art world.⁴⁵ As Rachel Haidu asserts, Broodthaers' project was not so much an attempt to deconstruct the notion of art and the art museum altogether, but rather to reproduce and replace its institutional structures and practices in order to investigate

³⁶ Graw (2006): 147; Marstine (2017): 8.

³⁷ Alberro (2009): 3.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Raunig (2009): 5-10.

⁴⁰ Alberro & Stimson (1999); Alberro (2009); Buchloh (1990); DeRoo (2006).

⁴¹ Sholette (2011): 152-185.

⁴² Haidu (2010): 108.

⁴³ Ibid.: 107-148.

⁴⁴ Broodthaers, as cited in: Alberro & Stimson (2009): 5.

⁴⁵ Haidu (2010): 114.

them.⁴⁶ In an interview with Cladders in 1972 he would reflect on his mimic museum as “a lie, a deception”, which allowed him to talk about the museum as such, “to talk about how to analyze the deception”.⁴⁷ He furthermore stated:

The fictitious museum tries to steal from the official, the real museum, in order to lend its lies more power and credibility. What is also important is to ascertain whether the fictitious museum sheds new light on the mechanisms of art, artistic life and society. With my museum I pose the question.⁴⁸

This statement exemplifies a larger tendency among both artists and commentators of institutional critique to think of art as an analytical tool. As art critic Isabelle Graw writes: “Art is supposed to ‘deal with’ issues, to ‘investigate’, or to ‘intervene’ - and these epistemological functions are schematically projected upon it as if it were a subject that actually is able to do such things.”⁴⁹ This supposition is indeed problematic because it is never made clear how and where this investigation is actually supposed to take place. Rather than approaching art as an investigative method, I would propose, with Janet Marstine in her introduction to *Critical Practice* (2017), to regard the art of institutional critique as a discursive tool, able to open up and join in the debate around the status of the art institution, asking questions rather than formulating answers.⁵⁰ These questions could then guide analytical inquiries and investigations.

Another artistic method typical of institutional critique were 'system-theory works', most famously made by Hans Haacke, but for instance also used by eco-artists Helen and Newton Harrison.⁵¹ After the 1960s, Haacke made multiple installations in which he uncovered the economic, political and ideological powers at play in the New York art world, especially regarding patronage and sponsorship. Using documentary photographs, informative texts, charts, maps and fact sheets, he laid out the largely concealed ties between museums and corporate businesses, often regarding the specific art institution in which he was exhibiting. His *Shapolsky et. al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) is now commonly considered a landmark of institutional critique, and a turning point in the relationship between artists and museums (at least in the United States).⁵² In this installation, Haacke laid bare the unethical activities and relationships of real estate holder Harry Shapolsky, the owner of a large part of public space and properties (primarily slums) in New York, based on factual information from twenty years of public records. This work was supposed to be part of a solo exhibition in the Guggenheim Museum in New York. However, museum director Thomas Messer demanded Haacke to withdraw this work from the exhibition as he considered it inappropriate. Upon the artist's refusal to do so, he decided to cancel the exhibition altogether, and even fire the curator. As a result of this act of censorship, and in light of Haacke's previous works, the assumption arose among

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 110.

⁴⁷ Broodthaers (2009): 138; taken from an interview with Johannes Cladders, January 1972; first published in: Dickhoff, W. (1991) *Marcel Broodthaers: Interviews und Dialoge 1946-76*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch; translation from Kravagna, C. (2001).

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 139.

⁴⁹ Graw (2006): 141.

⁵⁰ Marstine (2017): 13.

⁵¹ Danto (2013): 132.

⁵² Marstine (2017): 8; Smith (2012): 108.

commentators of the controversy that Shapolsky was somehow connected to the Guggenheim's trustees, and Haacke's work thus interfered with the museum's interests, but this has never been proven.⁵³ In a way, the cancellation of the show only confirmed the necessity of institutional-critical art, as it displayed the reach of the museum's power position and the way in which it frames and constructs what belongs to the art world, and what does not. Haacke would come to reflect on this principle two years later, in his short essay 'All the "art" that's fit to show' (1974).⁵⁴ Characterizing the museum as a political institution, he pointed out that decisions made by museum officials depend to a great extent on the interests and approval of the financial supporters, whether that be a governmental agency in the case of public museums, or a corporate sponsor or individual philanthropist for private museums. Haacke claims that museum staff internalizes the thinking of the financing superior and hereby compromises artistic and critical interests in favor of political and economic ones. Obviously pointing towards the Guggenheim controversy, he writes:

[...] in order to gain some insight into the forces that elevate certain products to the level of "works of art" it is helpful - among other investigations - to look into the economic and political underpinnings of the institutions, individuals and groups who share in the control of cultural power. Strategies might be developed for performing this task in ways that its manifestations are liable to be considered "works of art" in their own right. Not surprisingly some museums do not think they have sufficient independence to exhibit such a portrait of their own structure and try to dissuade or even censor works of this nature, as has been demonstrated.⁵⁵

His text (like Broodthaers' mock-museum) displays a strong awareness of how to 'play' the arts system, by using conventions that are accepted to define and frame works of art in order to critique these very conventions and their underlying power relations. As such, Haacke seems to aim at an infiltration of museums with a critical counter-voice. According to Alberro, the essence of the first wave of institutional critique lies in the juxtaposition between the theoretical self-understanding of the art institution and the reality of its actual practices through the web of social (and economic) relations of which it is part.⁵⁶ Institutional-critical artworks, Alberro seems to suggest, make invisible relational structures in the art world visible, and demonstrate where they contradict the way in which art institutions present themselves. So when Haacke made *Shapolsky et. al.*, he laid bare the relations in the economic field of real estate business in New York, and implied the invisible connections with the art field, the Guggenheim specifically. Even more explicitly, in his essay he uncovered the relations at play between the museum director and the funding agency, and showed how they contradict the ideal self-understanding of the museum as a place free of political, economic and ideological interests (in one word, neutral).

What the first generation of institutional critique brought about most of all was a critical awareness of the conventions with which the art system constructs meaning and value around artworks, presents art institutions as objective and neutral spaces, and conceals implicit interests that intermingle in processes of selection in museums and galleries. Institutional-critical artists in

⁵³ Danto (2013): 129-133; Kester (1998):11; Miller (2015): 161.

⁵⁴ Kravagna (2001): 73-74; first published in: Joachimides & Rosenthal (1974).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alberro (2009): 3.

the 1960s and 70s placed themselves outside of this system, taking a critical distance to evaluate and comment on its processes. As such, they developed an artistic strategy and critical discourse to address issue of institutionalization in the art world.

2. GENERATION II: THE ARTIST AS INSTITUTION

The late 1980s and early 90s manifested a generation of artists who questioned the very process of institutionalization in the art world, and asked themselves: 'In which ways do artistic (and other) practices become sufficiently regular and continuous to be considered as institutions?'⁵⁷ This second wave expanded its focus to other kinds of institutions, and the methods and strategies of the first generation were employed to point out unethical relations in political, social and economic systems, with the aim of institutional change.⁵⁸ Artists of the second generation of institutional critique, like Andrea Fraser, Fred Wilson, Christian Phillip Müller, Renée Green and Fareed Armaly, departed from the notion that the critical distance that first wave artists claimed to take was an unachievable fiction. Their work displays a shift to 'post-studio work', resulting in artworks that were often conceptual, performative and participatory (drawing from the conceptual and performance arts of the 1960s).⁵⁹ These ephemeral art forms cannot be recorded, archived, bought, collected, displayed and reproduced in their original shape, the way that more traditional art works can, and thus defy institutionalization as art objects (at least on a conceptual level). Moreover, second wave institutional-critical artists addressed processes of knowledge production and distribution by institutions such as museums, and aim to foreground individual, unofficial stories and the histories of minorities in particular. An influential example is Fred Wilson's 1992 *Mining the Museum* installation at the Maryland Historical Society. Taking the museum's collection as a point of departure, Wilson questioned the historical choices made in the acquisition and display of artifacts, and brought to the fore the objects and stories that had been left out. As such, the artist deconstructed the notions of truth and objectivity underlying the narratives that museums present through their exhibitions.⁶⁰

Looking back at two decades of anti-institutional artistic practices that were being taken up in institutional policies and the art historical canon alike - in one word, institutionalized - the second generation of institutional-critical artists grew skeptical of the possibility to place oneself outside of the existing system. As such, Graw writes, "[t]heir work proposed a renegotiated notion of critique based on the admission that 'critical distance' is compromised a priori."⁶¹ Especially second wave artist Andrea Fraser proclaims that artists are essentially 'trapped' in the art world system and that they themselves embody the institutionalization of art just as much as the art institutions.⁶² Hence their critical potential wanes: "How can artists who have become art-historical institutions themselves claim to critique the institution of art?"⁶³ By 2005, Fraser had declared

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 14.

⁵⁸ Marstine (2017): 8; Sheikh (2012): 368.

⁵⁹ Marstine (2017): 9.

⁶⁰ Ginsberg (w.d.); Wilson (1994).

⁶¹ Graw (2006): 147.

⁶² Alberro (2009): 14-15.

⁶³ Fraser (2009): 408-409.

institutional critique dead, killed by its own artistic success but ideological failure.⁶⁴ The question of institutional critique's institutionalization and subsequent decline is ever so present in both academic literature and artists' writings. Indeed, as Marstine points out in her paragraph on 'the premature burial of institutional critique', Fraser's assertion that the work of her precedents and colleagues had been neutralized was exemplified all too clearly when in 2012 her own work, alongside of that of others, was displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition *Spies in the House of Art*. In this selection of video and photography works of artists commonly associated with institutional critique, Fraser's *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) received a special position, as it was not presented in the temporary exhibition space with the other works but placed in the permanent display of 19th century French painting. In this video piece, Fraser takes on the role of fictional museum educator Jane Castleton and leads the visitor through the Philadelphia Museum of Art, mockingly highlighting the toilets, cloakroom, museum shop. Not just the images but also the sound of Fraser's work disrupted the usually conventional gallery space, instrumentalizing, as some might claim, the critical potential of the work as a form of self-legitimizing autocriticism by the museum.⁶⁵

Is institutional critique really dead? Does its institutionalization indeed mean it has lost its critical potential altogether? Or is it rather a transformation into a different form of criticality in the art world? I tend rather towards the latter, and agree with Marstine when she writes that "institutional critique is more than an artistic movement representative of a particular moment in time, but is, in addition, a mode of interrogating the tangled web of ethical positions among artists, institutions and society and that maintains its contemporary relevance".⁶⁶ Regarded as a discursive practice rather than an art historical movement, the notion of institutional critique expands beyond the artistic field, and can be recognized also in curatorial, institutional and academic practice.

3. NEW MUSEOLOGY: INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE'S ACADEMIC SISTER

Institutional critique quickly found repercussion in academia, specifically in the field of museum studies. In 1989, Peter Vergo coined the term 'new museology', sometimes also called 'new' or 'critical museum theory'.⁶⁷ In *The New Museology*, Vergo proposes to move away from the study of museums as it existed until then, which in his view had focused too much on museum methods, organization and administration, and too little on the critical contemplation of the role and purposes of the museum as institution. Emanating from "a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology", Vergo's aim was to shift the field of museum studies from a purely professional domain to an academic inquiry.⁶⁸ As such, new museology is characterized by a highly critical reflection on and reformulation of the role of museums. Departing from the awareness that collections and exhibitions are essentially the product of decisions made by museum workers - "Museums are about individuals making subjective choices," as Marstine aptly puts it - one of the main arguments is that museums are fundamentally informed by ideological and subjective

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 409.

⁶⁵ Marstine (2017): 10-11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 13.

⁶⁷ Marstine (2006): 5.

⁶⁸ Vergo (1989): 3.

preferences and conceptions.⁶⁹ Consequently, and in line with the discourse of institutional critique, the new museology claims that the museum is not the neutral and objective institute that it makes itself appear to be by taking on the position of an authority and creating a seemingly neutral exhibition space: “Every museum exhibition [...] inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it.”⁷⁰

Although Vergo and other theorists of the new museology usually do not make direct reference to the artists of the institutional critique, their work clearly echoes some of their most significant arguments. In the introduction to her volume *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), Marstine is among the first to explicitly draw a theoretical and art historical line between the academic field of critical museum theory and the artistic practice of institutional critique: “Vergo and the generation of museum theorists that followed were influenced by artists who, beginning in the 1960s, proclaimed that all representation is political and who articulated through their work a critique of the museum”.⁷¹ New museology is furthermore based in the philosophical and academic legacy of poststructuralism and critical theory, most notably Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. This generation of researchers, most importantly consisting of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Tony Bennett, Donald Preziosi, Ivan Karp, Steven Lavine, Carol Duncan, and Andrea Witcomb, critically evaluated the policies and practices of modern and contemporary museums. Essentially, the field of museology as an academic discipline today is founded to a great extent on their work. Although most authors commonly associated with new museology do not define themselves directly in relation to this term, their studies all express a discontent with the existing *modus operandi* of museums, and make a claim for them to change accordingly. Indeed, theorists of the new museology “call for the transformation of the museum from a site of worship and awe to one of discourse and critical reflection that is committed to examining unsettling histories with sensitivity to all parties; they look to a museum that is transparent in its decision-making and willing to share power.”⁷² New museology is thus to a great extent about opening up the selection processes at play behind the scenes in museums, about evaluating the narratives that they construct in their collections and exhibitions, and about deconstructing the power relations implied in their practices.

From a new museological perspective, museum narratives are ideological constructs that do not only advocate a particular view on art, culture, or history, but are also, due to the selection of objects, inevitably incomplete and often contradictory.⁷³ For Hooper-Greenhill, the educational function - consisting essentially in the distribution of knowledge - is crucial to understanding museums.⁷⁴ She draws into question the taxonomies and orders that underlie museum collections and exhibitions, and points out how despite the fact that such classification systems are historically specific and socially constructed, they are usually taken as a given. The information and narrative that a museum offers, is pre-ordered by museum staff. Nevertheless, visitors enter a museum with their own agenda, their own assumptions and interests, which are quite likely not to match those of museum workers. These inevitably shape their interpretation of the narrative presented, and might

⁶⁹ Marstine (2006): 2.

⁷⁰ Karp & Lavine (1991): 1.

⁷¹ Marstine (2006): 6.

⁷² Ibid.: 5.

⁷³ Vergo (1989): 2-3.

⁷⁴ Hooper-Greenhill (1992): 2 & (1999): 3.

produce meanings different from those intended by the museum itself. What this points out is that, contrary to what they appear to do, museums cannot possibly interpret objects or construct narratives for their audiences, since it is the audiences themselves that perform the activity of interpreting. Hooper-Greenhill makes a claim for a radical transformation of the museum. What she proposes, in line with the artists and exhibition-makers of the institutional critique in the 1960s and 70s, is to discard the model of the modern museum altogether, and replace it with what she calls the 'post-museum'.⁷⁵ In this museum format, the exhibition is no longer the only and central mode of communication: it is accompanied by a variety of events and programmes. They in turn allow a multitude of perspectives and narratives to be presented. The post-museum is, in short, "an institution that has completely reinvented itself, that is no longer a 'museum' but something new, yet related to the 'museum'".⁷⁶ The concept of the post-museum is exemplary for the new museology as such, in which the question of change is of great importance.⁷⁷

What this shows is that as early as the 1980s, institutional-critical thought was transmitted to academia through the discourse of new museology. Like the artists of the institutional critique, academics of the critical museum theory examined the role and understanding of art institutions, and specifically the museum, as expert authorities in the categorization of artworks, the distribution of knowledge and the construction of art historical value. As will become clear in the next section, one might even say that something like Hooper-Greenhill's post-museum found realization in new institutional formats in the late 1990s and 2000s.

4. GENERATION III: OF CRITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND CRITICAL ARTISTS

Many scholars recognize a third generation of institutional critique.⁷⁸ Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, so even before the proclaimed 'death' of institutional critique, artists, collectives and curators started employing the discourse and methods of institutional critique in changing ways and contexts. This can be seen as a response to institutional establishment of the first two generations of institutional critique on the one hand, and increasing social, political and economic tensions on the other. The third wave developed into two seemingly opposite directions: not only did the art world face an upswing of young, self-reflexive, hybrid art institutions with an outspokenly (institutional-)critical agenda, commonly known in northern and western Europe under the denominator 'new institutionalism', it also produced a generation of radically politically engaged artists and art collectives who would use artistic strategies originating from the 1960s for activist purposes, also indicated as 'artistic activism'. The ground for these two directions in the third wave of institutional critique was laid already in the early 1990s, when institutional critique took two distinct trajectories, as artist and writer Gregg Bordowitz demonstrates in his essay 'Tactics Inside and Out' (2004).⁷⁹ On the one hand, there were those critiques that address the arts system itself and that need a platform within this system to make themselves heard and change it

⁷⁵ Hooper-Greenhill (2000).

⁷⁶ Marstine (2006): 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid.: 5-6.

⁷⁸ Graw (2006): 139; Marstine (2017): 12; Raunig & Ray (2009): xiii; Raunig (2009): 3; Sheikh (2009): 29; Sheikh (2012): 19; Welchman (2006): 11; Zelevansky(2006): 178.

⁷⁹ Bordowitz (2009):440-448; first published in: *Artforum*. Iss. 43. No. 1 (2004): 212-215, 292.

from within. Their effect is dependent on their inclusion in art institutions. This is exemplified most clearly in the work of Andrea Fraser.⁸⁰ They ask themselves: “How do we continue to make genuine art in an increasingly moribund cultural apparatus?”⁸¹ On the other hand, a range of tactical media collectives came up, like Critical Art Ensemble, which critique the corporate and political realm and its influence on and instrumentalization of social life. These collectives employ the methods and strategies of art historical institutional critique but take them far outside of the art world.⁸² At the core of their inquiry is the question: “How do we think and respond to a culture rationally organized toward irrational ends?”⁸³ Of course, these trajectories are not entirely disparate but also overlap and intersect. What they have in common is a radical awareness of the influence of social institutions and neoliberal economy on social life and subject formation. Nevertheless, what differentiates them at the same time unites them: whereas the trajectory of new institutionalism encompasses the crystallization of the *art institution as institution of critique*, the trajectory of artistic activism leaves out the institution altogether in an *art as critique*.

4.1. Trajectory I: The new art institution, an institution of critique

The institutionalization of institutional critique eventually culminated in the short-lived movement of ‘new institutionalism’, which was mostly a curatorial discourse in northern and western Europe in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A number of curators and directors as well as newly founded and already existing art institutions adopted the logic of institutional critique, incorporating an inherently self-critical and reflective stance in their curatorial, educational and administrative practices.⁸⁴ No longer were art-institutional activities confined to exhibition programmes but consisted of a wide range of formats like discursive events, film programmes, publications, reading groups, online activities, residencies, and more. The underlying idea was to expand institutional practice towards new modes of self-reflection and social engagement, combining the production, presentation, reception, criticism, collaboration and investigation of art and knowledge among artists, curators, researchers and social activists.⁸⁵

The term ‘new institutionalism’ is originally derived from the field of sociology, and was brought to the art world quite offhandedly by Jonas Ekeberg with his publication *New Institutionalism* in 2003, where it came to signify a range of art-institutional practices connected in format, agenda, practices, policies and political context.⁸⁶ Like many art-theoretical concepts, the term never actually caught on among practitioners at the time, or was even rejected by them. Only in hindsight did curators and directors start to identify their combined practices as instances of new institutionalism.⁸⁷ Among them were Charles Esche with his work at the Rooseum in Malmö, Nina Möntmann and Simon Sheikh at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA) in Helsinki, and Maria Lind at Kunstverein München. What connects the countries in which this movement

⁸⁰ Alberro (2009): 17-18; Bordowitz (2009): 445-448.

⁸¹ Bordowitz (2009): 445.

⁸² Alberro (2009): 17-18.

⁸³ Bordowitz (2009): 445.

⁸⁴ Möntmann, in: Rosendahl (2016): 27.

⁸⁵ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 6-10.

⁸⁶ Sheikh (2012): 362.

⁸⁷ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 8.

flourished is that most of them have a social-democratic welfare state system, providing these art institutions with the opportunity of public funding with little or no requirements to acquire private funding or make profit.⁸⁸ In terms of institutional format, the organizations where curators experimented with new institutionalist practices were small to medium sized in visitor numbers and general public reception. More importantly, as they do not have any responsibilities concerning collections and archiving, these spaces were no museums; rather, they were hybrid institutions focused on experiment and contemporaneity.⁸⁹ Or, as curator and museum director Charles Esche put it in an interview with Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger for *ONCurating* (2013), in order to become “an active space rather than one of passive observation” these institutions had to be “part community center, part laboratory, and part academy, with less need for the established showroom function”.⁹⁰ As such, new institutionalism brought about a conception of the art institution as space not just for the exhibition and distribution of art, but even more so for production, experiment, discussion and exchange.

There is a striking simultaneity in the evolvement of cultural spaces that fit the framework of new institutionalism. Indeed, the movement can be seen as a product of a generation of independent curators upcoming during the 1990s, who were close in age to the establishing artists of the time. Ascending into positions of institutional power as directors, these curators were able to transfer their conceptions, approaches and practices to a structural, organizational level.⁹¹ This upswing of independent curators in the 1990s was a result of what Paul O'Neill calls ‘the curatorial turn’.⁹² Ranging back to the 1960s, when the profession of curating became more and more a critical and creative practice that gained precedence over that of the art critic and even the artist, the practice of curating had come to revolve around discussion, critique and collaboration by the 1990s. Triggered also by the momentum of the artist-curator - the artists of the institutional critique curating their own or commissioned exhibitions - the 1990s gave birth to a generation of curators whose approach transcended the tasks of caretaking and facilitating and came to encompass a discursive and artistic practice of its own.⁹³ Important to note is that this was also a period in which an impressive amount of new biennials were being organized.⁹⁴ This not only required larger flexibility on the curator’s side; more importantly, it gave rise to a curatorial practice that was sensitive to local as well as global political complexities, and extended far beyond practices of exhibition-making into the epistemological act of setting up a discursive, contextualized public programme.⁹⁵

Paradoxically enough, this same generation of curators that allowed new institutionalism to take shape as a discourse and practice was also the cause for its premature demise. Indeed, as these curators became more and more established, mostly as museum directors and recurring biennial curators, and ‘new institutions’ changed directors, it became considerably complicated to uphold a

⁸⁸ Sheikh (2012): 363-364.

⁸⁹ Ibid.: 366.

⁹⁰ Kolb & Flückiger (2013b): 27.

⁹¹ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 14; Rosendahl (2016): 26-27; Sheikh (2012): 367.

⁹² O'Neill (2007).

⁹³ Ibid.: 22.

⁹⁴ Vogel (2010).

⁹⁵ O'Neill (2007): 16-18.

sustained and coherent institutional course.⁹⁶ Combined with budget cuts most of the organizations commonly associated with new institutionalism were not able to survive. State-subsidized institutions were mostly forced to close their doors (or change their policies) because their critical, leftist approach did not receive sufficient support from the more and more neoliberal, populist political climate in Europe.⁹⁷ As Möntmann puts it: “Criticality didn’t survive the ‘corporate turn’ in the institutional landscape.”⁹⁸ At the same time, however, many of the curators who used to direct new institutions still hold prominent places in museums, art spaces, academies and universities across the continent, and continue to a great extent the discourse and practice of new institutionalism in different institutional formats.⁹⁹ Since most advocates of the movement barely touch upon the legacy of institutional critique - except for Möntmann in her 2007 reflection ‘The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism’ - it is, in Sheikh’s words, “not so much the genealogy of New Institutionalism as its hidden history”.¹⁰⁰ As such, the logic of new institutionalism, and thereby also of institutional critique, informs to a great extent the institutional landscape in the contemporary arts system.

4.2. Trajectory II: Artistic activism, art as critique

The other trajectory in third generation institutional critique applied its artistic strategies and methods to critique social and political issues, and take an active stance in current debates.¹⁰¹ Again making their way out of the art world, activist artists use a mode of critique that is typical of anti-institutional artistic practices; however, their object of critique has changed. This is a significant break with the anti-institutional sensibility that has increasingly been dominating the art world since the 1960s, which shifts the focus of art outwards, breaking with its ever-expanding self-referentiality and making way for social engagement within the cultural realm. As Boris Groys puts it in his essay ‘On Art Activism’ (2004): “Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art – not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself.”¹⁰²

In his essay for *Truth is Concrete* (2014), curator Florian Malzacher links the momentum and upswing of artistic activism, and of socially engaged art in general, directly to the year 1989. More recent political and economic crises have pushed this type of artistic practice even more to the forefront. Defined very concisely, artistic activism consists in “the idea of using artistic skills, tools, tactics, and strategies to advance or achieve activist goals”.¹⁰³ However, Malzacher argues, there seems to be a conceptual paradox at the core of artistic activism: whereas activism is about direct action with a concrete goal, postponing the moment of reflection, it is exactly the reflection of complexity and ambiguity that stands at the core of artistic practice. At the same time, however,

⁹⁶ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 14; Sheikh (2012): 367.

⁹⁷ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 13.

⁹⁸ Möntmann (2007).

⁹⁹ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 14.

¹⁰⁰ Sheikh (2012): 370.

¹⁰¹ Malzacher (2014): 19.

¹⁰² Groys (2014).

¹⁰³ Malzacher (2014): 14.

most political actions are not as spontaneous as they are made to look; like a piece of performance art, they require precise planning, rehearsal and staging.¹⁰⁴ What artistic activism performs, according to Malzacher, is a “space for radical imagination”.¹⁰⁵ Whether that be the imagination of fundamental social change, or of “a short moment of normality in a permanent state of exception”, artistic activism combines the concrete goals of activism with the reflectivity of art to produce active, critical awareness of our socio-political realities.¹⁰⁶

The risk of this is, as Groys argues, that by framing artistic activist projects as art, their political effect is neutralized in favor of its aesthetic quality, especially in the process of reception. This diverts attention away from the message and goals of the political protest. Using artistic strategies for the purpose of activism thus dooms the protest to be ineffective from the start. As such, inherent to artistic activism, writes Groys, is the prediction of its neutralization, and therefore its failure. Echoing the second generation of institutional critique, the notion of artistic activism necessitates a radical awareness of the inevitability that eventually the artistic product will be taken up into the system (institutionalized), whether this be the art world or the political status quo.¹⁰⁷

Some artists deal with this inevitability by reproducing unethical realities in their work, actively participating in the system in order to ridicule and critique it. The most notable practitioner of this method is Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, who regularly hired laborers (immigrants) for minimum wages to complete simple, meaningless and often humiliating tasks. Among his most well-known works is *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People* (1999), for which he tattooed a line on the backs of six young Cuban men for thirty dollars each (their expected daily income as migrant laborers). As such, Sierra reproduced the neoliberal logic of the exploitation of immigrant workers who are paid low wages to do simple work. Precisely by repeating a real economic and political mechanism in the context of an artwork, the artist points out the immoralities at the core of today’s capitalist reality, and makes his audience and art world colleagues part of the dilemma.¹⁰⁸

Another method that is increasingly being used by socially engaged and activist artists and collectives is the establishment of institutions. This gives artistic projects a sense of stability and direction, implies a will to last, and provides a ground for the collaboration and collectivity that are essential for social work. Often adopting titles like ‘center’ or ‘institute’, more and more initiatives emerge that assume an experimental institutional form in their practices while at the same time claiming a certain permissiveness under the label of ‘art’.¹⁰⁹ What distinguishes them significantly from ‘traditional’ art institutions, however, is their primary goal: these institutions come into being not for the distribution of works of art but for the enactment of social change and exchange of political ideas through art. In that sense they draw on the heritage of Joseph Beuys and his *Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research* founded in 1973. Beuys’ University embodied an alternative educational institution outside of the academic system that would admit all students. Imagined as a form of ‘social sculpture’, it is something in between artwork and social organization. It was specifically imagined to be carried on by different people

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.: 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: 17.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 16.

¹⁰⁷ Groys (2004).

¹⁰⁸ Kim (2015); Malzacher (2014): 18.

¹⁰⁹ Malzacher (2014): 21-22.

and in different contexts.¹¹⁰ Similarly, *The Silent University* initiated by Turkish artist Ahmet Öğüt in 2012 is a nomadic, solidarity based knowledge exchange platform for and by refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. Initiatives like these adopt the facade of an artistic or educational institution as pseudo- or counter-institutions, and make clever use of existing institutional infrastructures as a platform and network for their practices.¹¹¹ *The Silent University* has for instance worked closely together with international art institutions like Tate, Tensta Konsthall, Impulse Theater Festival and other cultural organizations. Some claim that in this case the institution can be seen as a piece of art in itself, or that they instrumentalize artistic strategies to function on the level of propaganda, but this reduces the transformative potential of such organizations.¹¹² To understand the full scope of these ‘artist’ organizations, they have to be placed somewhere between artistic project, political movement and social institution.

The proliferation of this trajectory of the third wave of institutional critique since the 1990s is a product of what Claire Bishop calls ‘the social turn’ in the art world.¹¹³ This term indicates the shift towards mostly non-institution-based art that is collaborative, often participatory, and actively engages with a specific social situation. She links the upswing of this type of artistic practice to the enormous expansion of biennials in the 1990s, as this exhibition form usually comes with an elaborate public programme that concerns itself directly with local realities.¹¹⁴ It is mostly an umbrella term to indicate artistic practices that are socially collaborative in one way or the other, and that includes but is definitely not limited to artistic activism.¹¹⁵ Depending on geographical and cultural context, one could also encounter the terms ‘socially engaged art’, ‘community-based art’, ‘participatory art’, etc. - all indicating different but similar practices with a common aim: to imagine and enact alternative social realities through artistic practice.

5. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

In this first chapter I have attempted to trace the art historical and theoretical development of the discourse and practice of institutional critique since its inception in the 1960s, with the aim to lay a foundation for an analytical framework to study contemporary art-institutional practice. The first generation of institutional critique in the 1960s and 70s made clever use of the conventions of the art world in order to lay bare the concealed power relations that determine the meaning and value of art works. These artists worked according to a logic of opposition, implying a position outside of the art institution from which they could perform their critiques. Their artworks and writings furthermore display an optimistic belief in the possibility and necessity of transformation in the institutions of art, most prominently the museum. As their work slowly but surely became institutionalized, this optimism shifted into skepticism among second generation artists. The sensibility of being trapped in art’s institutional system dominated this phase of institutional critique, and presented the artist as embodiment of the very system. Instead of negating the art institution, the

¹¹⁰ Beuys & Böll (1974).

¹¹¹ Malzacher (2014): 21-24.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Bishop (2006).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: 178.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.: 179.

second wave of institutional critique mostly produced post-studio work that subverted institutionalization through its ephemerality. The institutional-critical attitude also found its way into academia through the new museology. In line with the art historical institutional critique, this theory examined the power relations at play in processes of collection, selection, exhibition and knowledge production in the museum. It deconstructed the notion of the museum as a neutral and authoritative institution and exposed the subjective, political and ideological decisions at the heart of its activities. What followed in the 1990s and 2000s was what some academics now recognize as a third wave of institutional critique, which manifests itself in two distinct trajectories. On the one hand, curators coming of age in this period incorporated the discourse of institutional critique into their curatorial practice and institutional logic. On the other hand, a generation of socially engaged and politically activist artists made their way out of the institutions and onto the streets. After this curatorial and social turn in the art world, the discourse of institutional critique has evolved significantly, and inevitably left its mark on contemporary artistic, curatorial and institutional practice.

The overview I gave here poses two problems. On the one hand, it complicates the notions of theory and discourse. As many of the practitioners of institutional critique have reflected on their practices in essays and interviews, they have produced a vast amount of written discourse on institutional-critical thought themselves. In writing about their artistic and curatorial activities, they contributed to the discourse of institutional critique directly. At the same time, rather theoretical and academic literature on institutional-critical thought and practice in the art world has been added to the debate, producing a different type of theory than these practice-based accounts. Even academic discourse often displays a schism between descriptive literature that interprets institutional critique through specific examples of its practices, and prescriptive literature that talks about the relationship between institutions and critique, and art and society, from a more conceptual perspective. In the latter case, the ties to actual artistic, curatorial and institutional practice tend to be thin. Here I have aimed to focus mostly on descriptive academic accounts and writings by practitioners of institutional critique, in order to study the discursive legacy that this art historical movement has left us. In the following chapter, I will draw on this legacy to design an analytical framework that lays out conceptual threads yet stays close to the practical reality of institutional and institutional-critical practice in the art world.

On the other hand, the given overview obscures the definition of 'institution'. For the first generation of institutional critique, art institutions still primarily encompassed museums and galleries. However, not only have institutional-critical artists shifted their focus towards institutions outside of the art world, institutions within the art world have also become increasingly diverse and transdisciplinary. It has become more and more problematic to define what an institution is without excluding certain practices or organizations. Essentially, institutional critique is about understanding what it means to be institutional, as much as it is about critiquing the institutions it directs itself at. Both the practice and the study of art institutions today are without doubt deeply informed by its legacy.

What can we learn from three generations of institutional critique? What conclusions can we draw from its transformations; its life, its death, and its revival? How can we predict the push and pull of institutionalization still to come? What have the rise and fall of institutions of critique taught us? How will the turn towards social engagement in the arts affect contemporary cultural

organizations? In sum, what does it mean to be institutional in 2017? In the following chapter I provide an analytical framework based on the legacy of institutional critique that I have attempted to outline here, which will inform the case study in the second part of this thesis.

Institutional Critique as Analytical Framework

The historical and theoretical development of institutional critique displays several recurrent tendencies that indubitably influence art-institutional practice today. Looking back at over fifty years of institutional-critical discourse and practice in the art world, I recognize various threads that allow me to distinguish certain characteristics, activities and conceptions, which can be anticipated in contemporary cultural organizations. These threads form the pillars of the analytical framework of this thesis, and guide the case study that follows in part two. In this chapter I answer the subquestion: *What are the expected implications of the art historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique for contemporary institutional practice in the art world?*

1. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A SELF-CRITICAL ATTITUDE

A key thread in the development of institutional critique (and a major source of debate) has been the institutionalization of institutional-critical works, artists and attitudes.¹¹⁶ Already the first generation of institutional critique displayed a certain level of institutionalization. When Marcel Broodthaers was invited by established art institutions to install his *Musée d'Art Moderne* there, essentially an anti-institutional attitude was welcomed into the institution. There are many examples of artists in the 1960s and 70s who were outspokenly institutional-critical and yet received commissions for works and exhibitions by museum directors and curators. This sparked the awareness among second generation artists in the 1980s and 90s that it was not possible to place oneself outside of the institutional system. Artists became increasingly aware of the role they played in the institutionalization of institutional critique. Departing from a notion of the artist as embodiment of the institution, every act of institutional critique is essentially self-critical. As artistic and curatorial practice started to intertwine, the figure of the artist-as-curator gradually brought an 'outer-institutional' and critical perspective and approach into institutional policy and practice. This eventually culminated in the curatorial turn, a shift towards curatorial practice as an essentially critical and creative activity. The generation of independent curators born out of this turn established themselves in positions of institutional power in the 1990s and 2000s, hereby transferring their institutional-critical views to a structural, organizational level. At the same time, the art spaces they directed took up a socially critical agenda, in line with the increasingly activist and socially engaged attitude in contemporary art. Although most of the institutions that employed a new institutionalist agenda and practice have already closed or re-organized, some of these curators still hold prominent institutional positions from which they exercise their self-reflective, institutional-critical and socially engaged practice. Self-criticality has by now become an inherent part of the auto-narrative of many institutions. What this historical development demonstrates is

¹¹⁶ Alberro(2009): 12-14; Fraser (2009); Marstine (2017): 10-11; Raunig & Ray (2009): xv; Sheikh (2009).

that the critical attitude of institutional critique spread like an oil stain across the art world, culminating in institutional self-criticality.

Some argue that through this process, institutional critique has been neutralized and instrumentalized for the sake of institutional self-legitimization.¹¹⁷ In itself, this is a paradoxical proposition: How would institutions legitimize their existence by questioning and criticizing the very core of this existence? Although self-reflectivity has become an indispensable part of institutional practice in the art world, it should not be a goal in itself, otherwise it turns into mere self-referentiality. Rather, self-reflectivity could be a tool for *institutional awareness*. Three generations of institutional critique have uncovered the pitfalls of art-institutional practice; its arbitrary conventions, its power relations, its selective and subjective decision-making processes, its fetishization of the art object, and, essentially, its insatiable urge to take everything up into its system. Self-reflectivity as institutional awareness could direct the policies, activities and discourses of cultural organizations towards inclusion, transparency and democracy. As new directors and curators who no longer descend from the artists of institutional critique have taken position in contemporary art institutions, I expect to find a form of self-reflectivity that transcends the sole questioning and criticizing of their own existence but employs it as a tool for institutional awareness and, consequently, change.

2. TURN TOWARDS SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Coupled with the institutionalization of a self-critical attitude is a gradual turn towards social engagement in artistic and curatorial practice. This is not to say that susceptibility towards societal matters has not always been an important locus in the art world; rather, the historical development of institutional critique seems to go hand in hand with an increasing urge amongst artists to involve themselves with the socio-political realm through their practices. Already in the 1960s, Hans Haacke employed his method of system-theory works to analyze economic and social institutions like housing and real estate corporations. This critical attitude towards social organizations other than art institutions continued throughout the second wave of institutional critique. In line with Foucault, the art institution, and particularly the museum, would come to be seen as an authority that reflects and shapes the power relations in the society of which it is at the same time part, along with other institutions such as the university, the prison, the hospital, etc. Regarded as such, institutional critique came to be about questioning and subverting the unethical social relations that art institutions reproduce and confirm. Consequently, the engagement with these social relations came more and more to the foreground in critical artistic practice. It seems that almost in direct response to this, in the 1990s and 2000s the curatorial discourse of new institutionalism and its associated institutional practices put social engagement at the core of the art institution's agenda and self-understanding. This was also a result of the biennial boom in the 1990s, as the format of the biennial allowed or even forced curators to work on current, global issues within a local context. Simultaneously, the contemporary arts display a remarkably strong tendency towards social engagement, with artists dedicating themselves to activism and community work through their artistic practices.¹¹⁸ So whereas new institutionalism brought the social into the artistic realm,

¹¹⁷ Marstine (2017): 10.

¹¹⁸ For an overview of such artistic practices since the 1990s, see for instance: Thompson (2012).

artistic activism took the artistic out into the social realm. These two trajectories even intersect in the establishment of (pseudo-)institutions by activist artists with the goal of social change through artistic practice.

This constant push and pull between the art institution and its 'outside', and the question whether there is an outside to the art world at all, is at the core of institutional critique. To a certain extent, this can be traced back to the origin of institutional critique: by opposing and subverting the art institution, anti-institutional artists constituted an outside to the institution. Although the belief that it would be possible to place oneself, as an artist, outside of the arts system has been diminished again by the second generation of institutional critique, it might still be valuable to stop at this idea of the 'outside' for a moment and consider its conceptual implications. Indeed, the act of subversion inevitably places the one that subverts outside of the phenomenon that is being subverted. An artist that subverts the art world thus positions him- or herself outside of the art world. The paradox here is that by using artistic strategies, whether sincerely or mockingly, the subversion is still a form of art, and therefore part of the artistic realm. Institutional critique thus constitutes a grey zone that is neither inside nor outside the arts system. It is in this grey zone that the borders between the artistic and the social realm begin to blur, and social engagement is made possible.

The reality is nevertheless that artists and art institutions alike experience pressure to be socially engaged for reasons of economic justification. Especially in Europe, where public art institutions are largely funded by the state, with visitor numbers dropping and financial budgets shrinking, the societal value of what they provide their audiences with is being questioned.¹¹⁹ As a consequence, the notion of social engagement has come to revolve in the arts discourse, and is more than likely to appear in the policies, mission statements and agendas of contemporary cultural organizations. The risk of this tendency is that the term 'social engagement' slowly becomes instrumentalized, an empty vessel used for the purpose of self-legitimization, appearing in discourse much rather than in practice.¹²⁰ Moreover, social engagement can take innumerable forms, and the ways in which it manifests itself will presumably differ significantly from institution to institution and from context to context. It is therefore especially interesting to pay attention to the specific institutional practices that might be regarded as socially engaged, and reflect them against the auto-narrative of the organization. I assume I will find an incongruence between the two, caused by political and economic pressure as well as confusion as to what social engagement actually entails.

3. GROWING AWARENESS OF THE INFLUENCE OF FUNDING

This immediately brings me to another important thread in the legacy of institutional critique: the growing awareness of the ways in which funding influences decision-making processes in art institutions, resulting even in distrust towards financial authorities. Hans Haacke cleverly drew this matter to the forefront with his *Shapolsky et. al.* and related works, by making explicit the hidden ties between established New York museums on the one hand and corporate businesses and political authorities on the other. Hereby he pointed out that decisions made by museum officials

¹¹⁹ Carrigan (2017).

¹²⁰ Keidan (2008).

are inevitably informed by the interests and approval of financial supporters, and as such, art institutions internalize the thinking of their funding agencies. The importance of funding sources was further pointed out by the upswing of cultural spaces employing a new institutionalist agenda and practice in the 1990s and 2000s, in geographical-political contexts with a social-democratic welfare state system that provided funding for experimental, critical, leftist art institutions with little to no requirements. Their subsequent demise in the late 2000s was caused to a great extent by financial crises and the turn towards more neoliberal and populist cultural policies, i.e. the overturn of the very economic-political system that allowed them to come into being in the first place.

Cultural organizations nowadays still struggle with this reality and are pressured to legitimize their right for public funding against the background of a predominantly corporate, capitalist, profit-oriented climate.¹²¹ This is a reality that cannot be left out when analyzing contemporary institutional practice in the art world, and the influence of (the source of) funding on decision-making processes has to be taken into account. I assume that cultural organizations adapt their agendas and policies in such a way as to increase their funding opportunities and meet requirements of subsidizers, and might 'play it safe' so as to not interfere with funders' interests. The question is how contemporary art institutions can ethically combine their critical and creative objectives with the need of financing. My aim here is to uncover where and how the struggle for funding influences institutional decision-making, and to create transparency for this everyday reality that tends to be pushed to the background in favor of the illusion of the art institution as a space free of the logic of capitalism. I anticipate that in the current socio-political climate, art institutions take on a rather pragmatic attitude towards funding, combining a strategic approach towards the financial infrastructure in the art world with an ethical awareness of where the money comes from and how this influences their practices.

4. HYBRIDIZATION OF INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONS

Finally, I recognize a hybridization of institutional functions at play in the contemporary art world that can be traced back to the institutional critique. Since the 1960s, existing notions of what an art institution is and is supposed to do have been deconstructed by institutional-critical artists. Through approaches of reproduction and ridiculing, as can be perceived in the works of for instance Broodthaers and Fraser, the arbitrariness of art-institutional conventions has been made clear, which opened them up for questioning and transformation. Subsequently, the momentum of the artist-as-curator gave way to a succession of radically interactive exhibitions. Furthermore, institutional-critical practices, and most significantly the academic movement of the new museology, did away with the notion of the art institution, in particular the museum, as a neutral expert authority. Above all, new museologists drew attention to the epistemological function of the museum, i.e. its role in the production and distribution of knowledge. Its main activities, collecting and exhibiting, supported this function. Following the awareness that these activities are essentially subjective, selective and ideologically driven, Hooper-Greenhill proposed a different institutional format that she named the 'post-museum', where the exhibition would no longer be the primary mode of communication but would be accompanied by various kinds of events and programmes.

¹²¹ Möntmann (2006); Rasmussen (2012).

The 1990s saw this ideal image of the art institution realized not in the museum but in the proliferation of biennials, which were commonly supplemented by a public programme and series of discursive events. New institutionalism took this desire for institutional hybridity even further. This curatorial discourse held a conception of the art institution as a multiplicity of formats that were adaptable and open to change. Indeed, the 1990s and 2000s saw an uprise of cultural organizations that conceived of themselves as hybrid institutions, at once studio, project space, laboratory, academy and community center. As such, the functions of production, research, education, experiment, debate and collaboration were added to the institutional equation. In this view, the art institution is no longer a space confined to artistic and curatorial practice but also accommodates collaboration with researchers, activists, social workers and citizens. In contemporary art institutions, I expect to find a self-understanding as space for production, collaboration and community representation. I am mainly interested to examine how this auto-perception translates into actual practice, so in what ways cultural organizations enact their newly acquired institutional functions, and if the hybridization of these functions has fully developed into a sustainable approach to institutional practice in the art world.

5. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

In his essay 'Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming' (2009), Raunig claims that what is needed in contemporary art institutions

are practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet which do not fancy themselves in an imagined distance to institutions; at the same time, practices that are self-critical and yet do not cling to their own involvement, their complicity, their imprisoned existence in the art field, their fixation on institutions and the institution, their own being institution. 'Instituent practices' that conjoin the advantages of both 'generations' of institutional critique [...] will impel a linking of social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism.¹²²

In line with Raunig's approach, this chapter took the legacy of over fifty years of institutional-critical discourse and practice as a source to learn about processes of institutionalization in the art world. The evolution of institutional-critical practices in the art world since the 1960s displays certain tendencies that can help to anticipate and contextualize art-institutional behaviour now and in the near future. Four key threads have been laid out here. First of all, following the institutionalization of a self-critical attitude, and with a new generation of artists, curators and directors taking in institutional positions, I anticipate contemporary cultural organizations to surpass the purely self-referential attitude of institutional critique and employ self-reflectivity as a tool for institutional awareness and change. Secondly, the current turn towards social engagement in the art world indubitably affects art institutions but is also likely to confront them with the problematic of how to define, contextualize and enact social engagement in their specific situation. Thirdly, institutional critique has raised an enhanced awareness of the influence of funding on institutional decision-making and practice. I expect to find in contemporary institutions a pragmatic attitude towards financial authorities combined with an ethical consciousness of their interests. Finally, I

¹²² Raunig (2009): 10-11.

assume the hybridization of art institutions still continues, and I am particularly interested to see how contemporary cultural organizations will execute newly acquired functions such as artistic production, collaboration and community engagement. The aim of this chapter was to develop an analytical framework based on the art historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique to investigate contemporary art institutions. In the second part of this thesis, I will employ this analytical framework in a case study of ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin.

- PART II -

Case Study



Art between Harbour and Housing Blocks

The central case study of this thesis focuses on ZK/U Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Center for Art and Urbanistics). ZK/U is an art institution located in the area of Moabit in Berlin. It is set in a former railway depot building, the Güterbahnhof Moabit, and is surrounded by a public park. The institution was founded in August 2012 as a non-profit organization by the artists' collective KUNSTrePUBLIK. ZK/U primarily consists of an artists' residency, hosting artists, researchers and activists from all over the world in thirteen studios for two to eight month residencies. Apart from that, the institution realizes its own artistic and community projects, independently or together with other organizations, as one-off events or ongoing formats. In addition, the spaces are rented out for external events like exhibitions, film screenings, parties, weddings, and dance events. This chapter gives a detailed description of ZK/U in its social-historical context, so as to provide an introduction and background to the case study analysis that follows in the next chapter.

1. HISTORY

To fully understand the role of ZK/U in its specific locality, it is necessary to first look at the rich historical background of the building and the district in which it is set. The structure of this area originates from the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1846 the Berlin-Hamburg railway company first started building tracks there, with the end station in the Invalidenstraße - nowadays museum for contemporary art the Hamburger Bahnhof.¹²³ The railway expanded significantly over the following decades, changing the urban landscape considerably. This included the establishment of a railway network for passenger transport, most importantly the still existing Ringbahn that encircles the city center.¹²⁴ From 1892 onwards, the Güterbahnhof Moabit was built up, in response to the enormous expansion of both industrial and passenger transport, forcing the city to separate them into different stations.¹²⁵ This railway depot acquired an important position in supplying the surrounding industrial districts of Moabit and Charlottenburg. The adjacent harbour Westhafen came into being in the early twentieth century, marking the landscape even more. The residential area with its rental houses south of ZK/U was established after the founding of the German Empire in 1871 to house the labourers of the factories around the Huttenstraße and on the river Spree in Alt-Moabit, as well as the craftsmen, officials and officers of the barracks in the Rathenowerstraße and Invalidenstraße. This neighbourhood expanded quickly, resulting in the tightly built housing blocks that still characterize the district.¹²⁶

¹²³ Hoh-Slodczyk & Tomisch (2008): 1-2.

¹²⁴ Ibid.: 4-6.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 9-10.

¹²⁶ Ibid.: 3.

The immense industrial development in the area was unprecedented. As a consequence, Güterbahnhof Moabit grew out to be a highly advanced railway depot with separate departments for general cargo and truckload. The architectural structures that now house ZK/U were built as offices, warehouses and loading tracks to handle the cargo traffic smoothly.¹²⁷ Extensions were made in the early 20th century but these have been taken down again in 2008. During the First World War, Güterbahnhof Moabit acquired an important role in military transport, like many of the other stations in Berlin.¹²⁸ The building was damaged during this time but rebuilt into its original state afterwards.¹²⁹ World War II meant a much harsher fate for the cargo station: Güterbahnhof Moabit was the most important among the three stations in Berlin from which Jews were deported (the other two being Berlin-Grunewald and Anhalter Bahnhof). Recent investigations have shown that over 30.000 people were transported towards their death from this station.¹³⁰ Last year, as a result of a competition issued by the city, a memorial was designed and constructed by the artists collective Raumlabor, in the space where platforms 69, 81 and 82, from which the Jews were transported, used to be.¹³¹

After the war, the freight depot was quickly used again to provide the citizens of Berlin with supplies. However, Germany's subsequent division and the Berlin-Blockade from June 24th 1948 until May 12th 1949 stopped all transport between east and west, and led the Güterbahnhof to lose its function as cargo station. It was used still as a train composition station, and came to house a potato trading company.¹³² After the reunification, the entire industrial infrastructure of Berlin was redefined and smaller railway depots, including the one in Moabit, got out of use.¹³³ Large parts of the surrounding region were incorporated in urban planning and transformed significantly but the abandoned terrain of the Güterbahnhof was left untouched for long.¹³⁴

This changed in 2008, when the city of Berlin launched an open invitation to repurpose the former railway depot and its surroundings. In line with the objectives expressed in the 2004 urban planning policy of the district of Mitte (of which Moabit is part), the fallow terrain was supposed to be transformed into a public park with a 'social infrastructure'. The visual 'historical traces' of the place, like ramps, windows and brick lining, were supposed to be preserved.¹³⁵ The conglomerate of infrastructural facilities of which the Güterbahnhof Moabit was part, including the railway, the Berlin-Spandau canal and the harbour with the Westhafen canal, divide the neighbouring residential areas and form a rupture in the urban landscape.¹³⁶ In an attempt to reunite these two parts of the neighbourhood, the city launched an open call for proposals to find a new function for the space.

The users of the railway depot were supposed to find an independent, long-term, economical solution for the maintenance of the building and the surrounding park. The ground would remain property of the city, which the users of the building would get a leasehold of forty

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: 16.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 14.

¹³⁰ Ibid.: 19.

¹³¹ 'Güterbahnhof Moabit', 'Hintergrund' & 'Kunstwettbewerb "Gedenkort Güterbahnhof Moabit"', in: *Berlin.de*.

¹³² Hoh-Slodczyk & Tomisch (2008): 21-22.

¹³³ Ibid.: 23.

¹³⁴ Ibid.: 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.: 29.

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 1.

years on. Aspiring users were expected to propose a concept fitting to the specificity of the location, bridging the industrial-residential urban divide, and the requirements of the Moabit neighbourhood. Moabit's population is characterized by a relatively high proportion of citizens with a migration background, and the proposal had to take all segments of the local population into account. The institution to be established in the former Güterbahnhof had to provide the neighbourhood with recreational activities such as sports, culture and gastronomy. The public park was furthermore meant to reduce the deficit of green spaces in the area. All in all, the new usage of the space was supposed to improve the image and value of this part of Berlin.¹³⁷

2. THE BIRTH OF ZK/U

Matthias Einhoff, Philip Horst and Harry Sachs of the artists' collective KUNSTrePUBLIK were able to convince the urban planning department of the Berlin-Mitte district with their concept and proposal for the ZK/U. Before they could actually acquire ownership over the building, they had to secure the funding for the elaborate reconstruction works (estimated at a cost of approximately 1.9 million euros), since the building was in a state of ruin and the surrounding ground was polluted. Eventually they acquired funding for 1.2 million euros in total, through sponsorship from the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin (the German Lotto foundation) for 950.000 euros, from the JobCenter for 147.000 euros and from the district Mitte for 130.000 euros. KUNSTrePUBLIK then 'bought' the building for a symbolic price of one euro and signed a forty year lease for the ground. In return for this low price, the users of the building are expected to take care of all the labour intensive work in the park. The Güterbahnhof was then turned into a living and work space by the architect collective Karhard Architektur.

The east part of the building that used to host the offices of the cargo company was turned into a residency space, with six studio apartments with private bathrooms and a communal kitchen on the ground floor, and seven more studios, shared bathrooms and a small communal landing on the top floor. The west side of the building, what used to be the warehouse, is now the public project space consisting of an upstairs office, a large exhibition hall and a conference room. The basement is partly used as storage, partly as event space. On the north side, where the railway depot's train platforms used to be, the building is flanked by a half private, half public roofed terrace with an outdoor bar. This year, a fourteenth studio was added to ZK/U's residency, built by a collaboration of the experimental architecture and design collectives ConstructLab, REFUNC and StudioC. This studio is located hovering above the private terrace on the residency side, and is meant as a work space for two-month residencies by Berlin-based artists, researchers and collectives.

3. INSTITUTIONAL CONCEPT, FORMATS AND ORGANIZATION

The main themes as formulated by the city of Berlin in their open invitation to repurpose the Güterbahnhof space certainly inform ZK/U's agenda. As an art institution, its aim is to produce and facilitate interdisciplinary artistic work and urban research centred around the phenomenon of the city and urban living. It concerns itself with the impact of global ecological, economic and social issues on a local scale. ZK/U aspires to be a platform for exchange, debate, collaboration and

¹³⁷ Land Berlin & Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin (2008).

engagement with and by artists as well as the community. Its agenda is currently structured around four conceptual pillars: The first, entitled 'SELF-EMPOWERMENT: Practical Guides and Solidarity in Urban Learning', questions existing systems of education and knowledge-production, and is aimed at creating spaces for alternative learning and urban pedagogy as a way to self-empowerment for citizens. The second pillar, 'RESETTING: Urban Infrastructure Revisited', critically investigates the urban landscape and public services, with the goal of restructuring processes of decision-making within the city. The third, 'BRIDGING Global Discourse and Local Practice', focuses on making global processes and complexities comprehensible on a local and personal scale, and examines the widespread impact of globalization on urban life. The last pillar, 'RE-THINKING: Resilient Cities in Post-Migrant Societies', responds to popular views on migration and the refugee crisis as being a threat, by rethinking the notion of community and local belonging as inclusive of diverse national and social backgrounds. These four conceptual pillars inform both the projects organized by ZK/U itself as well as the selection of residents.

ZK/U organizes a diversity of ongoing formats with which they aim to achieve their conceptual objectives and establish a connection with the local community of Moabit. Among them is Speisekino (Food & Footage): this weekly open-air cinema night runs from May until September, and screens feature films, documentaries, and short movies centered around a specific topic that differs each time. Alongside the movie, a meal fitting to the topic of the night is served. Artists, curators and collectives associated with ZK/U or with the neighbourhood are invited to curate these evenings. Another ongoing format is the Gütermarkt: a monthly community market where people and collectives from the neighbourhood can sell their handmade or second-hand products, and share their knowledge or specific skills. The market furthermore features local food and live music, and attracts a diverse public from Moabit.

The organization of ZK/U is divided into three departments: residency, projects and events. The events department is a legally separate entity, as ZK/U as a non-profit organization is not allowed to make their own income and would otherwise not be able to receive funding. The NGO is registered under the name of KUNSTrePUBLIK; ZK/U itself does thus not exist as a legal entity. Maintenance of the building is financed by the rent that residents pay for the use of the studios (usually with personal funding). Projects are financed with individual project funds. The institution does not receive any long-term funding, state subsidies or private sponsorship. Final decision-making essentially lies with the directors, the three members of KUNSTrePUBLIK, but responsibilities are spread out across the organization. The team is small and both people within and across departments work closely together. The residency department consists of only one permanent staff member, complemented by three or four alternating interns that together organize the entire residency programme.

4. THE RESIDENCY

There are five types of residency at ZK/U. Aspiring fellows can apply for a residency directly over a half-yearly Open Call, where they submit a proposal for the project they wish to do during their stay at ZK/U. The final residents are selected through an internal evaluation process. Studios cost five hundred to eight hundred euros a month, and residents are encouraged to pay for them through funding from their own network. ZK/U reserves one funded studio for artists and researchers who

come from a context where the funding system is limited or does not exist at all, so that they still get the opportunity to do a residency in Berlin. Here, ZK/U has the freedom to decide exactly who will do a residency and when. Apart from this, around one third of the residencies is institutional, meaning that ZK/U has an agreement with a different institution, like for instance the Goethe Institute, that they provide residents from abroad, who usually have a specific focus that fits in with ZK/U's agenda. Within the special Artist Dis-Placement programme, an artist is assigned a (usually non-profit or volunteering) organization with which they are supposed to work during the period of their residency (usually six months). They join this organization in all of their tasks as a participant-observer, reflect on the work that is being done there, and create their own project out of this. The aim is to create visibility for the often 'invisible' communal services that a city provides. The newly built studio on the private terrace, finally, hosts Berlin-based artists and researchers as part of the Ständige Vertretung (Permanent Representation) programme, and is meant to provide a bridge for regular residents to connect with the art scene of Berlin.

ZK/U's residency programme is focused on exchange among residents, between residents and the local neighbourhood, and between residents and Berlin's arts community. Several regular formats are organized to facilitate this exchange. Within the residency, weekly Thursday Dinners allow artists and researchers in residence the opportunity to present their work and practice. For each dinner, a team of two residents cooks a meal for the other residents, the team and personal guests. Two other residents then present to the group who they are, what their practices have been so far, and what they are currently working on. This allows both the residents and the team to get to know each other and have discussions about their work. More in-depth discussions are facilitated by the weekly Discourse Group, an active-collaborative format for the residency where participants talk about their work with each other and try to find mutual topics and questions of interest. The Discourse Group is geared at exchange and collaboration between the residents, and provides a point of momentum for collaborative projects. ZK/U's artists and researchers in residence then get the chance to share their work-in-progress with the wider public during the monthly OPENHAUS. This is an open-studio format where the residency opens its doors for people from the neighbourhood and the arts community to engage with the residents. The OPENHAUS usually involves a guided tour by the residency coordinator or one of the residency staff members through the works presented by the residents, where each of them talks for two to three minutes about their project. They also get the opportunity to organize a performance, film screening, workshop, or the like during this evening. Finally, in monthly Curator Visits, a Berlin-based professional from ZK/U's network - whether that be an actual curator, an artist, a researcher, an activist, or someone else - is invited into the residency for a day to reflect with the artists and researchers in residence on their work, in the form of individual studio visits and/or collective discussions. Besides these regular formats facilitated by ZK/U's residency department, residents are encouraged to organize their own formats for exchange.

5. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

ZK/U is a young, hybrid art institution with a diverse range of practices and an explicitly socially engaged agenda. This agenda is partly informed by the rich history and specific location of the space, partly by the particular views of the artist collective that founded the institution. The main themes in this agenda can be recognized as: artistic exchange, community engagement, knowledge production and global political awareness. Already at this point the apparent influences of institutional critique, and especially its core pillars as formulated in the previous chapter, may be clear. The aim of the case study following in the next chapter is to move from the conceptual to the practical, and to analyze the actual practices of ZK/U through the theoretical lens of institutional critique. These practices consist in a rich diversity of formats and activities, ranging from internal discursive events to public community markets. The questions that arise here, are: To what extent do the actual practices of ZK/U help the institution achieve its conceptual objectives? How does ZK/U translate its agenda into specific formats and activities? What are the incongruences between mission and practice? How does the institution view and present itself, and how does its auto-narrative inform what it produces? Viewed through the legacy of institutional critique, ZK/U lends itself as an adequate case study into contemporary institutional practice in the art world.

ZK/U: Contemporary Critical-Institutional Practice

In the previous chapter I outlined the historical and conceptual background of ZK/U. In this final chapter, I will report the findings of my four-month field research at this institution, and analyze ZK/U's practices through the theoretical lens of institutional critique. The case study analysis is structured according to the four main pillars of institutional critique as formulated in the analytical framework in chapter 2: institutionalization of a self-critical attitude, turn towards social engagement, growing awareness of the influence of funding, and hybridization of institutional functions. It is furthermore guided by the working definition of institutional critique given by Alberro. In his understanding of institutional critique, "the immanent, normative (ideal) self-understanding of the art institution", "the (material) actuality of the social relations", and "its actual practice of operation" direct institutional activity.¹³⁸ Throughout this chapter, I will thus continuously pay attention to ZK/U's auto-narrative, its socio-political context, and its actual activities. Following the questions laid out at the end of the previous chapter, the central question to this chapter is: *How does the conceptual legacy of institutional critique inform the interplay of ZK/U's self-understanding, its social relations, and its actual practice of operation, and in which ways does the institution move beyond institutional critique's logic?*

1. FROM INSTITUTIONAL-CRITICALITY TO CRITICAL-INSTITUTIONALITY

As I have demonstrated in the first part of this thesis, the artists of the institutional critique have played a significant role in the appropriation of an institutional-critical, and therefore self-critical attitude in cultural organizations. Artists and curators descending from the first and second generation of institutional critique established themselves in positions of institutional power in the 1990s and 2000s. As initiators of project spaces (under the flag of 'new institutionalism') or directors of cultural organizations, they brought an inherently critical and self-reflective approach into the institutional structure of the art world. After these newly established art organizations were forced to close their doors for political and economic reasons by the late 2000s, their organizers continued to exercise their self-reflective practices in more prominent institutions. This 'trickle up' effect can still be recognized, for example, in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, where director Charles Esche sets forth (parts of) his agenda during his directorship from 2000 to 2004 at the Rooseum (now closed) in Malmö, Sweden, which was one of the major examples of new institutionalism.¹³⁹ What this shows is that, while it has by now become impossible to imagine an art world in which institutional self-criticality is not the default, this very self-criticality is at the same time a product of its time and generation. Consequently, new generations of artists, curators

¹³⁸ Alberro (2009): 3.

¹³⁹ Deiana (2017).

and directors presumably produce new ways of relating to their practices, shifting to different attitudes and approaches in contemporary art institutions. As I argued in chapter two of this thesis, with a new generation of artists, curators and directors establishing themselves in institutional positions, I expect to find a form of self-reflectivity that transcends the sole questioning and criticizing of their own existence but employs it as a tool for institutional awareness and, consequently, change.

ZK/U was established by the artists' collective KUNSTrePUBLIK. The group was founded by Matthias Einhoff, Philip Horst, Harry Sachs, Markus Lohmann, and Daniel Seiple in 2006 with their initial project *Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum*. *Skulpturenpark* appropriated a wasteland of approximately five hectares in the center of Berlin, where the 'death strip' of the Berlin Wall used to be. It hosted various artistic and cultural activities, exhibitions and interventions, and was one of the main venues of the fifth Berlin Biennale in 2008. Its objective was to confront and transform the complicated history and social significance of this public non-space, and replace traditional notions of art objects, sculpture and exhibitions with a processual, time-based and contextualized understanding of cultural activity.¹⁴⁰ Since its foundation, KUNSTrePUBLIK has continued to organize various international artistic, community-based and educational formats in public space. In 2012, Einhoff, Horst and Sachs established ZK/U and have been the directors of the institution to this day.

What this brief overview of KUNSTrePUBLIK's background and activities shows is that ZK/U clearly is the product of a different generation of artists, no longer descending directly from the adherents of institutional critique. That is not to say there are no relations to institutional-critical art at all; certainly the tendency to move out of the institutions and into public space, and the increased emphasis on social topics link back to critical artistic practices of the 1960s. However, KUNSTrePUBLIK fits into a generation of artists that no longer defines itself in immediate relation to the arts system and its institutions. Artists from the institutional critique such as Marcel Broodthaers and Andrea Fraser built their artistic practice and identity on their very relationship with the art institution. This was, indeed, a relationship of commentary and subversion but precisely by critiquing the institution they kept the ties intact. KUNSTrePUBLIK, on the other hand, construct their approach much rather around their relationship to their surrounding social reality. They descend from an international generation of artists that use public space as their main arena and social relations as their material; most prominently Joseph Beuys but also artists like Suzanne Lacy, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Rick Lowe as early as the 1970s, followed later onwards by Tania Bruguera, Pedro Reyes and Paul Ramírez Jonas, among others.¹⁴¹ This generation seems to have its origin in the second trajectory of third wave institutional critique, and comprises contemporaries of the artists and curators that followed the biennial boom and the curatorial and social turn in the 1990s. Rather than following the institutional path, this generation went into the direction of social engagement and artistic activism that is also closely linked to this particular historical momentum. Whereas the first trajectory took in established institutional positions, the second trajectory focused much rather on site-specific, contextualized work outside of the art world's frame.

¹⁴⁰ See also: Schröder (2010).

¹⁴¹ Pasternak (2012): 7-9; Thompson (2012): 18-33.

ZK/U can thus be seen as a product of the second trajectory of third generation institutional critique, and is reminiscent in that sense of the centers and institutes established by socially engaged and activist artists in the 2000s. As Malzacher writes, “organizations are living organisms and stress the collective aspect of many contemporary artistic works, however hierarchically or horizontally they might actually function.”¹⁴² However, unlike most of the institutions that came out of the artistic-activist generation, ZK/U is located in one specific place, has its own spaces and organizes its activities there. Most of the centers and institutes that Malzacher writes about in relation to artistic activism either depend on existing, established institutions for their existence, or manifest themselves in the form of a team or collective that organizes site-specific, critical manifestations in public space without having a particular place where they reside and organize themselves (or a combination of the two). Indeed, as Malzacher puts it, they often take on the facade of an institution, without necessarily having the stable and sustainable structure of one, thereby lingering on the level of art project.¹⁴³ ZK/U’s auto-narrative echoes the desire for long-term stability combined with an emphasis on process and change that is typical of these kinds of activist art institutions; for instance when they write: “ZK/U as an institution is a long term project that in every sense keeps evolving in time”.¹⁴⁴ Defining themselves in one sentence as both institution and project, ZK/U claims for itself a processual, changing and collaborative character as well as a sense of stability and sustainability. This becomes even clearer in the following phrase:

Coming from **non-institutional** backgrounds, the founders aspire to continue exploring ways of **collaborating, researching and creating**, that go **beyond the lines of existing structures** and preconceptions. As part of their artistic practice, KUNSTrePUBLIK considers the development of ZK/U a **long-term process** that will evolve through the contributions and **critical feedback** expressed by its participants, partners and a diverse audience.¹⁴⁵ [my emphasis]

How, then, does ZK/U involve feedback from its audience in the process of self-reflection? For the occasion of its five-year existence last summer, the ZK/U directors had contributed an interactive installation with an open discussion in the main hall during the OPENHAUS on the 14th of September. It consisted of three ‘Discourse Tables’ that invited the visitors to reflect on ZK/U as an institution. The installation asked questions about the usage of the space, the engagement with the local neighbourhood and communities, the formats that are hosted, the problems and challenges the organization is faced with, and potential future lines of practice. Visitors could write their questions, critiques and suggestions on a piece of paper and leave them on one of the tables. In return, they were required to answer a question or come up with a solution to a problem that was proposed. Monitors on each table showed pictures of ZK/U’s development over time, from the construction works on the abandoned cargo station to the most recent edition of Speisekino, and from the first generation of residents to its current collaborative projects. The directors briefly presented the institution and the Discourse Tables, and then sat down to talk with the visitors directly. As such, ZK/U sparked an open conversation about its own institutional practice and identity with its

¹⁴² Malzacher (2014): 21.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Residency’, in : *ZKU-Berlin.org*.

¹⁴⁵ ‘About’, in: *ZKU-Berlin.org*.

broader public. The Discourse Tables facilitated an open-ended reflection rather than a self-critical statement.

This act of public self-reflection by investigating the institution's own history to come to an understanding of artistic and curatorial practice in an institutional context was common among the advocates of new institutionalism. In 2003 for example, curators Maria Lind, Søren Grammel and Katharina Schlieben, in collaboration with artists Mabe Bethônico and Liam Gillick, organized the project *Telling History: An Archive and Three Case Studies* at the Kunstverein München. They critically examined the institutional history by looking at the archival material of three noteworthy, controversial exhibitions.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, new institutionalist discourse and curatorial practice brought about a range of exhibitions, projects and conferences that attempted to redefine the role and functioning of the art institution through a critical evaluation of the history and practice of the specific institution at which they were organized.¹⁴⁷ More often than not, such inquiries aimed to steer art-institutional practice towards social engagement and political activism. However, they seemed to still employ a rather universal understanding of the art institution as a space for democracy and critical practice, without consideration for the specific local context in which they function. This differs significantly in the case of ZK/U, which with its Discourse Tables particularly reflected on its position and meaning in the neighbourhood and community of Moabit, and therefore asked feedback from the local public.

Nevertheless, most of the time self-reflection at ZK/U is not such an explicit, public activity but rather a continuous evolvement of the institution in reaction to internal and external developments. One of the first major tasks I took on me when I started working with ZK/U was the preparation, launch and evaluation of the Open Call. Every half a year, ZK/U launches an open invitation for aspiring residents to apply for a residency. This time, the Conceptual Framework in which the Investigation Leads for applications are laid out, needed to be updated according to current local and global developments, as well as new projects that ZK/U was pursuing. In my task of rewriting the Investigation Leads for the Open Call, I talked with the directors of ZK/U directly to get a grasp of their vision. Being only a week into my fieldwork, I was quite unsure of my position: Who was I to formulate the conceptual ideas of the directors of an art institution? It was both a necessity in terms of staff shortage and lack of time on the side of the directors, and a sign of ZK/U's rather horizontally structured organization. The act of rethinking and rewriting the theoretical backbone around which the institution shapes its activities can in itself be seen as an instance of self-reflection. It forced the directors to ask themselves: 'What are we actually doing, and why?'

Most significantly, the topic of migration was given a more prominent place in ZK/U's Conceptual Framework as a separate Investigation Lead. This was of course sparked by ongoing global migratory processes and the political tensions they cause, evoking a stronger awareness of

¹⁴⁶ Kolb & Flückiger (2013a): 6.

¹⁴⁷ Other examples include Jorge Ribalta's project *Las Agencias* at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) (2001), Jens Hoffmann's exhibition and seminar *Institution 2* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki (2003), Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt's *Spaces of Conflict* at seven institutions in Berlin, Oslo, Copenhagen, Vilnius, Malmö and Helsinki (2004), the conference *Public Art Policies. Progressive Art Institutions in the Age of Dissolving Welfare States* organized by the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) at the Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna (2004), and Nina Möntmann's *Opacity. Current Considerations on Art Institutions and the Economy of Desire* at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA) (2005). See also: Kolb & Flückiger (2013a).

the influence that these global movements have on the urban landscape and demographics of Berlin. In that sense, ZK/U's material reality of social relations impacted its self-understanding and auto-narrative. Moreover, in the period prior to the Open Call, ZK/U had been working together with the Raumlabor collective, AbBa and the Berlin Atelierbeauftragte on the initiative Haus der Statistik (House of Statistics). This ongoing project aims to repurpose an abandoned GDR-building in the center of Berlin as a living space for refugees and a co-working space for the arts, culture and education.¹⁴⁸ It responds directly to the lack of affordable housing and studio space in the city, and the pressure to find a long-term solution to accommodate newly arrived citizens.¹⁴⁹ Haus der Statistik is part of the larger ZUSAMMENKUNFT project in which ZK/U takes part; an ongoing collaboration that aims to strengthen the ties between existing and new Berliners through social and cultural activities.¹⁵⁰ When the Conceptual Framework was being written, the ZK/U directors were in the middle of negotiations with the city about the use of the Haus der Statistik building, which fed back into the institution's auto-narrative. In that sense, the institution's actual practice of operation also informs the way it understands and presents itself. The auto-narrative that ZK/U creates in the Conceptual Framework is thus both looking back at what the institution is doing and has already done (descriptive), and forward at how its past and present practices can inform its future activities (prescriptive). Self-reflection at ZK/U thus constitutes a continuous feedback loop between activities and agenda, between actual practice of operation and self-understanding. Both are then again influenced by external factors and developments, i.e. the net of social relations of which the institution is part.

What I have observed most of all during my fieldwork at ZK/U is that self-reflection is not a conscious, explicit and prominent activity. Much rather, it is a continuous, implicit process that takes shape through the institution's practices and projects. Institutional critique is no longer a priority on its own, as it was for the advocates of new institutionalism; it is directed at a desire for institutional evolvment and social engagement. A comparison with other institutions, particularly those descending from new institutionalism, as well as museums (as the very first targets of institutional critique) would be in order to see how institutional format and agenda inform the type and scale of self-reflectivity in the organization. I assume that methods of self-reflection in an organization such as ZK/U differ significantly from those in art museums, which are through their collection and exhibition practices much more defined by their own institutional history, and therefore necessitate a different mode of self-reflection. For ZK/U, self-reflection constitutes a feedback loop between the institution's auto-narrative and its actual practices, influenced again by the local as well as the global social reality in which it is set. The institution turns its critical attitude outwards rather than inwards, shifting from an institutional-critical to a critical-institutional approach. Combined with the institution's origin in a generation of practitioners of socially engaged public art, this leads to an increased potential for institutional social engagement.

¹⁴⁸ <https://hausderstatistik.org/>.

¹⁴⁹ Schöningh & Wöhr (2016).

¹⁵⁰ 'ZUSAMMENKUNFT', in: *ZKU-Berlin.org*.

2. THE SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART INSTITUTION

The historical and theoretical development of institutional critique has (indirectly) sparked an increase of social awareness and engagement among artists, curators and art institutions. Especially since the curatorial discourse of new institutionalism and the biennial boom in the 1990s and 2000s, the tackling of urgent global issues within a local context has become an almost inherent part of artistic production and exhibition. This culminates in the more recent movement of artistic activism, which adapts artistic strategies of the institutional critique for social purposes by leaving the gallery space and using tactics from conceptual and performance art. Indubitably, art institutions have been affected by this turn towards social engagement as well. Cultural organizations experience more and more pressure to involve themselves with local communities, conflicts and social issues, coming both from artists, policy makers and the public.¹⁵¹ At the same time, such organizations seem to display an intrinsic urge to do so, and actively present themselves as being socially engaged. I assume that this might lead to an incongruence between institutional self-understanding and the actual activities they undertake, caused by political and economic pressure as well as confusion as to what social engagement actually entails.

The notion of socially engaged art is quickly gaining ground in contemporary arts discourse. Both academics and practitioners use this term to talk about art that aims to make a change in society by involving the people. It has a lot to do with art that works with specific groups of people, art that involves audiences in the making of an artwork and art that criticizes certain aspects of society. Generally, socially engaged artistic practice indicates creative strategies that bring (usually non-art) people or communities together in dialogue and collaboration. The aim is often to create stronger, more socially just relationships between the people involved. Socially engaged art manifests itself in many different forms and methods. What unites all of these approaches is the overarching idea that socially engaged art takes people, relationships and 'life itself' as its medium.¹⁵² Audience participation is thus a crucial element in this form of art. A number of other terms closely related to socially engaged art have been introduced by art theorists and practitioners, such as relational aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud), dialogical aesthetics (Grant Kester), participatory art (Claire Bishop), social practice (Tom Finkelpearl), community art (Paul de Bruyne & Pascal Gielen), new genre public art (Suzanne Lacy) and critical practice (Janet Marstine).¹⁵³ Especially now that so many researchers and theoreticians are writing about the term socially engaged art, it is becoming more and more unclear whether it is being used descriptively (to explain an existing phenomenon) or prescriptively (to impose a perceived purpose onto art). Socially engaged art is thus an incredibly diffuse term.¹⁵⁴

Art institutions are likely to be affected directly by their local social realities. However, structural, qualitative engagement with communities in the neighbourhood has not yet become a prominent agenda point for most institutions. This rather takes the shape of one-off events, exhibitions, projects or programmes, which do not have a long-term legacy. How can art institutions,

¹⁵¹ Keidan (2008); Kester (2011): 5-10; Sholette (2012).

¹⁵² Thompson (2012): 18-33.

¹⁵³ Bishop (2012); Bourriaud (2002); Bruyne & Gielen (2011); Finkelpearl (2013); Kester (2004); Lacy (1995); Marstine (2017).

¹⁵⁴ Helguera (2011): 1.

especially when they understand themselves as being socially engaged, be so detached from their surrounding social realities? The focus is generally much rather on large-scale, global social issues. These do inevitably trickle down to the local level as well but this is not regularly accounted for. On their website, ZK/U typically claims to address urgent global problematics in relation to their local, contextualized impact, “in the light of what is happening in one’s own backyard”.¹⁵⁵ In reality, as I have found during my fieldwork, there are still very real local issues that the institution somehow does not manage to tackle, even if they affect the organization directly and solutions lie within their power.

Before ZK/U was first established in 2012, the former railway depot in which it is set was abandoned and in a state of ruin. The premises were not being controlled by authorities and did not have an official use. However, the area was used informally by young people from the neighbourhood. They had a sense of ownership and power over the space. Then, all of a sudden, a group of artists arrived and appropriated the space for a specific, official use, excluding the young people. After ZK/U had opened its doors as an art institution, the local youth population continued to hang out in the surrounding public park and on the semi-public terrace adjacent to the building. This in itself does not form a problem. What is nevertheless problematic, is that tensions arose between these young inhabitants and the ZK/U itself. During my fieldwork at ZK/U, three major incidents occurred. Over the weekend, a group of young people started a fire on the residency terrace, the roofed structure next to the part of the building where ZK/U’s artists and researchers in residence live and work, which is not supposed to be open to the public. This incident happened during the time that the fourteenth studio for the Ständige Vertretung programme, hovering over the residency terrace, was being built. Construction materials were stored outside and provided the offenders with the material to start a fire. It damaged the roof, walls and floor of the residency terrace. Some of the artists in residence noticed the fire and called the police. However, as the ZK/U is used by international artists, none of the people on site spoke German and communication both with the young people and the officials was complicated. Another incident occurred during an OPENHAUS event, when the residency area was open for the public and residents were presenting their work there. The storage area of the basement, which is reachable through the residency side of the building, had not been closed off properly when the event started. Although the space was being monitored by staff, some visitors managed to make their way into the storage cellar and steal valuable tools from there, which was only discovered afterwards. Similarly, during a different OPENHAUS evening, personal belongings of the residents were stolen from their studios, where they were exhibiting their work. Again, the space was being monitored, and a group of young people had been noticed showing suspicious behaviour. One of the staff members knew these people from informal talks around the ZK/U building, and approached them. He managed to get the stolen goods back in the end. These incidents increased tensions between the institution and this part of the local population significantly.

Underlying these tensions is presumably a sense of discontent among the young inhabitants who used to ‘own’ the space informally before ZK/U was founded. Through aggressive and rebellious acts, they reclaim the space that once felt as their own but has been taken from them. They act within their perceived categories as ‘youth’ against ‘the Institution’ (with capital I), and

¹⁵⁵ ‘Concept’, in: *ZKU-Berlin.org*.

through these acts increase the stereotypical image the other has of them. This is even more problematic considering that, although these people were all born and raised in Germany (most of them even in the neighbourhood of Moabit in Berlin), they are largely from an immigrant background.¹⁵⁶

During my fieldwork, I have also witnessed positive encounters between ZK/U and the local youth population. For example, during the preparations for a public event, some of the interns were cleaning the public side of the terrace, where a group of young people was sitting on one of the benches. One of them offered his help and asked for an extra broom to sweep the terrace, and his friends followed his example. Together, they assisted the team. Another positive encounter was during the preparations for an OPENHAUS event. As one of the artists in residence went out onto the public terrace to spray paint a part of her installation, a couple of young people was sitting outside. As the local youth population is generally interested in graffiti art, they were intrigued by what the artist was doing, and asked her if they could help. Even though the artist in question did not speak any German at all, and the group did not speak English, they managed to communicate and work together.

Even for ZK/U, long-term, structural, constructive engagement with the local community seems difficult to build up and sustain. Considering that the institution's official agenda is explicitly focused on the inclusion of and engagement with the population of the neighbourhood in all its diversity, this is remarkable. If one looks at its origin as an institution, it came into being for the main purpose of social cohesion and community engagement. Indeed, when launching an open invitation to repurpose the former railway depot building in Moabit, the city of Berlin imagined a 'social infrastructure' that would reunite the neighbourhood. The organization was supposed to attend to the specific needs of the local population in its entirety. Of course, with the background story in mind (abandoned building without any form of legal or social control), the city's implied, unspoken goal was a decrease of 'nuisance' by the 'youth' and an increase of social cohesion, so the neighbourhood becomes more attractive to other layers of the population. This could of course not be expressed as such explicitly. It is part of the larger effort by the city to improve the district, which is characterized by unemployment and poverty. In the invitation, they write:

Der Stadtteil ist jedoch auch geprägt durch Arbeitslosigkeit und Armut, insbesondere bei Kindern. Dies führt seit Jahren zu einer vermehrten Anstrengung des Bezirks und des Senats, den Stadtteil durch spezielle Programme (Quartiersmanagement, Stadtumbau West) zu stärken.¹⁵⁷

[This urban area is nevertheless also shaped by unemployment and poverty, particularly among children. For years now, this has led the city district and senate to make an increased effort to strengthen the neighbourhood through special programmes.]

This touches upon the larger debate on the role of artists and cultural organizations in urban gentrification.¹⁵⁸ Gentrification is a common 'side effect' of the flourishing of the artistic scene in a

¹⁵⁶ I would like to thank Melanie Garland, Myriam Perrot and Julia Widdig for collectively reflecting on this topic during the seventh session of the ZK/U discussion series ART as/is SOCIAL on the 13th of September 2017. See also: Mol (04/10/2017).

¹⁵⁷ Land Berlin & Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin (2008).

¹⁵⁸ See for example: Bolton (2013); Moskowitz (2017); O'Brien (2017).

city or neighbourhood, and the arrival of artists and art institutions generally results in the increase of rents and prices followed by displacement of working-class urban population in favor of the middle class.¹⁵⁹ Local citizens in gentrifying areas usually do not feel like there is any benefit for themselves or the general neighbourhood, which creates discontent. On a less tangible level, the arrival of 'outsiders' taking over the agency of a space can feel threatening and alienating to local inhabitants who get the sense that they are losing ownership over their direct surroundings.¹⁶⁰ Or, less intrusively but still significantly, citizens may simply wonder what the artists that have arrived with their initiative are doing there. A meaningful anecdote can be derived from the art collective Group Material. When they were setting up their Group Material Gallery in New York in 1981, a local resident came up to them and asked: "You know, like I don't want to be nosy, and we all got our reasons for doing what we do with our lives, but I wonder - everybody here on the block wonders - why are you here?"¹⁶¹ It is not unlikely that the inhabitants of Moabit asked themselves that very same question when ZK/U arrived five years ago.

In a sense, ZK/U is complicit in the gentrification process going on in the neighbourhood of Moabit. This is not necessarily a negative thing but it impacts the local population significantly, especially those with a lower income who will eventually not be able to keep up with rent increases. Gentrification is a sensitive topic as it is in Berlin, still a relatively affordable city for a European capital.¹⁶² In a recent interview for *Assemble*, director Matthias Einhoff expresses an awareness of the institution's complicity in gentrification, and recognizes the privileged position they have, as an artists' collective, to have a large, affordable space from which they can execute their artistic and curatorial practices and offer international artists a space to live and work. "It's not, like - a normal thing!" he admits, "We're fully aware of this, and therefore we have to give something back."¹⁶³

So what does ZK/U give back to their local communities? A successful format is Speisekino. From May until September, every Friday evening, a free thematic open-air film combined with an affordable two-course meal is organized at ZK/U.¹⁶⁴ The Speisekino events are curated by ZK/U's artists in residence, associated collectives, local inhabitants, staff members, or acquaintances. They address specific themes to do with living in the city (or even Moabit itself) and making a change in one's own social environment. The events are promoted with posters and postcards in the direct surroundings of ZK/U. The format is accessible and attracts a mixed crowd of artists and people from the neighbourhood, which creates a vibrant atmosphere. Speisekino is a rather easy way for the local community to get acquainted with ZK/U. Some young people from Moabit have even been involved in one of the events this year, where they were given the chance to perform their own music during the break. In this moment, the institution became a platform for active community representation, which is an essential aspect of social engagement. However, this was a one-time instance initiated mostly by members of nomadicArt, a partner-collective of ZK/U. Long-term

¹⁵⁹ Bolton (2013).

¹⁶⁰ Moskowitz (2017).

¹⁶¹ Kester (2004): 124.

¹⁶² Especially gentrification through the arts is on the agenda at the moment, with Chris Dercon, former director of Tate Modern, replacing Frank Castorf as director of the Volksbühne. See: Batycka (2017).

¹⁶³ Perkovic (2017).

¹⁶⁴ 'Speisekino', in: *ZKU-Berlin.org*.

engagement would require more accessibility, transparency and openness on the institution's side, inviting communities in to use ZK/U as a platform for representation and exchange.

What are the discrepancies between the institution's proclaimed objective to be socially engaged and its actual activities caused by? It is to a great extent a matter of prioritization, to do with money and staff. I will elaborate on the issue of funding in the next section; it suffices to say here that because ZK/U does not receive any permanent funding, it does not have sufficient resources to set up long-term, structural strategies and formats for sustainable, active community engagement. In relation to this, the institution does not have a staff member that can dedicate his or her time to get to know the local communities and steer the institution's practices towards their needs; someone like a community organizer or engagement curator. The Queens Museum in New York, for example, has an on-staff community organizer employed, which makes structural commitment to community engagement and local social change possible. As Nato Thompson argues in 'Socially Engaged Contemporary Art' (2011)

These community organizers are multi-lingual and operate as emissaries to local populations, identifying specific cultural, political, and social concerns; essentially, the job is to talk to members of local communities and get to know the different organizations. [...] the goal is to listen, learn, and act as a bridge to the complex arrangement of people in the complex matrix that is Flushing and Corona Queens.¹⁶⁵

Rebecca Beinart, who was a resident at ZK/U during my fieldwork, fulfills a comparable position at the arts center Primary in Nottingham. As an engagement curator, she focuses specifically on the organization of a public, engaged and participatory programme of events around current local issues geared at Nottingham's communities.¹⁶⁶ Primary has an institutional profile similar to ZK/U, facilitating a residency programme, artistic projects and community events, yet appears to offer a more developed and diverse public programme. One might argue that an institution like ZK/U has a definite need for a staff member like this. This could help to work towards structural strategies for social engagement with the local communities, and create a contextualized social awareness for establishing sustainable and reciprocal relations and practices.

3. FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY AS INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCY

In chapter two I argued that the development of institutional critique went hand in hand with a growing awareness of the influence of funding on decision-making in art institutions and distrust towards financial authorities. One of institutional critique's main arguments is that cultural organizations internalize the thinking of their sponsors. Especially in Europe, art institutions funded by the state are confronted with pressure to legitimize their function towards society in a political climate that is becoming increasingly corporate, populist and neoliberal. Following the legacy of institutional critique, I posed the assumption that contemporary cultural organizations adapt their agendas and policies to strengthen their chances of receiving funding for their projects and practices. By focusing on the influence of funding on institutional decision-making in ZK/U, I

¹⁶⁵ Thompson (2011): 7.

¹⁶⁶ 'Rebecca Beinart - Engagement Curator', in: *WeArePrimary.org*.

aim to bring to the forefront this practical everyday reality that art institutions struggle with and that inevitably informs their practice of operation.

What distinguishes ZK/U economically is that it does not receive permanent funding. Considering that the organization came into being as a commission by the city to improve the urban area in the neighbourhood of Moabit through a public park with a social infrastructure, and thus to provide a public service, it is remarkable that it does not receive any financial support from public resources to do so. The assignment was specifically that the institution would be economically self-sufficient and had to secure its own funding for construction works. In return, ZK/U received ownership of the building only for the symbolic price of one euro, and pays a relatively low wage for the lease of the ground. So how then does the institution sustain itself financially?

Maintenance of the building is essentially paid for by its primary users: the residents. Artists and researchers in residence pay a rent of 550 to 850 euros for their studio-apartment and usage of the communal facilities. Income made from rent is largely used to care for and improve the building, and therefore benefits the residents. Aspiring residents are strongly encouraged to secure a scholarship from their own infrastructure before applying for a residency, and the ZK/U staff offers to provide help in finding the right funding sources. Whether they have done so plays in on the selection process for the residency. The selection of upcoming residents is first of all based on the artistic quality and thematics of their work, their professional experience as well as their proposal for a project at ZK/U. Based on this, applicants are given an evaluation and grade by the Advisory Board in a first review round, and by the directors and the residency coordinator in a second review round. This provides one pool of applicants that are accepted immediately and as much as possible for their preferred time periods, one pool of applicants that are rejected, and one larger pool of 'average' applicants of which only some can be accepted and that will have to be divided over the time periods still available. The selection of this last pool of residents is mostly guided by pragmatic considerations. The ones that are available in the periods that there are still empty studios, and the ones that already have their scholarship secured receive preference over anyone else, even if their work or proposal does not exactly meet the standards. The reason for this is simply that studios need to be filled up all year round, otherwise the institution does not receive enough money to pay its bills and maintain its space. Its financial self-sufficiency is based on this very principle. What this demonstrates is that in a selection process that is supposed to be about creative and critical value and judgement, ZK/U is forced to make practical decisions for the sake of economic security, sometimes at the expense of its artistic and conceptual objectives. In other words, the combination of social and economic relations and actual practice of operation necessitates the institution to compromise its self-understanding.

The residency department runs largely on unpaid interns, who are only hired if they receive a scholarship for their work at ZK/U, like an Erasmus+ fund or a university fund, and ZK/U provides support in securing such a scholarship. The institution simply does not have the money to pay interns or hire new staff members. During my time at ZK/U there was word of one of my fellow interns being hired after his internship for a part-time position to support the residency but even this turned out to not be possible. At the same time, workload at ZK/U is clearly growing. The residency coordinator often worked overtime on tasks outside of her official job description, which eventually trickled down to the interns taking over her work and responsibilities. The events department was struggling with more and larger requests for the rental of spaces, causing the

workload to become unmanageable for its one-person-staff. Especially the projects department experienced an unforeseen increase of work during my four-month involvement with ZK/U. As the institution does not receive permanent funding, it is largely dependent on project subsidies to finance its activities. What this implies in reality is that a significant amount of time is spent on applying for funding over various sources. At the same time, if all of the submitted applications are granted funding, the projects department finds itself overloaded with work to set these new projects up.

When I first started working with ZK/U, they had fairly recently been admitted (quite unexpectedly) five different project subsidies for roughly the same timeframe. Among them is the CityToolBox (CTB) project, a large international collaboration on an online exchange platform for urban interventions. CTB is funded by 'Actors of Urban Change', a programme of the Robert Bosch foundation in cooperation with MitOst e.V., and the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The Robert Bosch foundation provides grants for the implementation of local projects for sustainable and participatory urban development through cultural activities. It requires a three-year involvement with the programme and attendance of five international meetings with other partners.¹⁶⁷ As a cultural organization working with a local team on international as well as neighbourhood projects in an interdisciplinary, collaborative and participatory manner, ZK/U fits the foundation's requirements well. The Erasmus+ fund is focused on initiatives that distribute knowledge about the EU and specific European issues among a broader public. Especially open educational resources and activities geared at a younger public are supported by Erasmus+.¹⁶⁸ It is difficult to tell to what extent the CTB project initially fit the funding framework before funding applications had been sent out, and to what extent it has been adapted to meet funding requirements. Looking at the narrative that ZK/U has built around the CTB project, some elements from the Robert Bosch foundation and the Erasmus+ programme explicitly return, such as the focus on participatory urban development, European issues, and the education of young people. It is of course likely that these were specifically geared at receiving funding, and that ZK/U in that sense internalized the thinking of its financial authorities. However, at the same time none of this contradicts ZK/U's self-understanding and usual practice of operation. Rather, the institution has managed to find financial resources that are in line with its agenda, and therefore ethically combines its objectives with its economical dependency on funders.

The absence of permanent funding grants ZK/U a sense of freedom and independence to adjust their course and implement new projects quickly, i.e. to be flexible and reactive to change. Although the financial uncertainty and institutional instability this carries along put pressure on the institution to continuously look for project funding, this does not withhold them from setting up long-term, international, collaborative initiatives. ZK/U seems to have successfully embraced and adapted to the financial situation for cultural organizations in Europe, and turned around the ongoing struggle for financial stability that the European creative sector faces. Of course, ZK/U's decision-making processes and institutional functioning are still inevitably influenced by its inescapable economic dependence on sponsors. This is a reality that is not accounted for in the logic of institutional critique, which still largely informs the contemporary discourse on art institutions.

¹⁶⁷ 'Actors of Urban Change', in: *Bosch-Stiftung.de*.

¹⁶⁸ 'What is Erasmus+?', in: *EC.Europa.eu*.

What institutional-critical artists seemed to strive for is an art space that is free of the logic of capitalism.

With the residency being the only steady source of income for ZK/U, it forms the financial foundation of the institution. Indeed, it directly meets the demand of the city that the organization would be self-sufficient enough to maintain the building and surrounding park. However, strikingly enough, the residency does not seem to be the main priority within ZK/U. Informal conversations with various artists and researchers in residence brought to the fore a sense of discontent about the extent to which the institution meets their requirements and wishes. A major incident occurred in April, when the studio for the Ständige Vertretung was being built on the residency terrace. The month-long construction works generated major noise disturbances for the residents, especially those staying in the studios on the north side of the building. Furthermore, the available outdoor space for the residents suddenly shrunk significantly, leaving fairly little communal space left to work and relax. Considering that ZK/U is a living and work space that hosts its artists and researchers full time, this severely problematizes its main purpose as a residency center. Worst of all, no one from the staff had remembered to communicate this situation to the residents beforehand. This led to major frustrations and confrontations between the residents and the team for weeks to months after. This instance is typical of a more general (although largely implicit) attitude towards the residency within ZK/U. Multiple residents admitted that they felt like they were not being informed about significant things happening on the premises that affected them directly, like events attracting large crowds and leading to disturbances. Moreover, residents' requests for information, material, resources, usage of space, or meetings were often postponed, forgotten or simply not answered by the team. It is problematic enough that the residency department consists of one permanent staff member, who is often too busy to prioritize work in the residency, assisted by a group of continuously alternating interns who do not have the sufficient knowledge nor responsibility to make important decisions regarding the organization of the residency.

What this essentially illustrates is that the priority that is given within ZK/U to the residency programme does not match its financial importance for the institution, i.e. there is a significant discrepancy between its self-understanding and its actual practice of operation caused by economic pressure. In the previous section I argued that the institution is in need of a staff member who prioritizes community engagement; the same could be argued for the residency programme. Unfortunately, ZK/U's institutional reality seems to be that it does not have sufficient resources to hire additional staff for these positions. Rather, then, they might want to consider evaluating and re-organizing work within the institution in such a way that priorities become clear, practical possibilities and limitations are formulated, and institutional objectives are met. It is in this respect that processes of self-reflection and institutional change at ZK/U can still be significantly improved.

4. INSTITUTIONAL HYBRIDITY: THE RESIDENCY FORMAT

Under the influence of institutional critique, and most significantly the curatorial discourse of new institutionalism, art institutions nowadays have become increasingly more hybrid. That is to say, they have taken on functions and activities that were not traditionally associated with cultural organizations such as museums and galleries. Most significantly, the functions of production,

research, education, experiment, debate and collaboration were added to the institutional equation. The hybridization of institutional functions, and especially the increased facilitation of artistic production and interdisciplinary collaboration, finds clear realization in the institutional format of an artists' residency such as ZK/U.

ZK/U's artist-in-residence programme is geared towards interdisciplinary, collective artistic research and production. Therefore the residency department organizes several active-collaborative platforms to facilitate exchange between the residents. The Discourse Group is a weekly recurring format where the artists and researchers in residence come together to talk about their work, find mutual topics and questions of interest, and initiate collective undertakings. It can take on diverse forms, ranging from informally moderated discussions to collective exhibition and event visits, depending on the wishes and needs of the current residents. The role of the residency staff in this is to moderate discussions, prepare formats for collaboration and connect the residents with the people and places of their interest. The Discourse Group came into being as a fixed programme element by the end of 2016, and during my fieldwork I was actively involved in its development.

The first Discourse Group meetings I attended displayed a relatively large turnout and active participation on the side of the residents. Quickly, two (temporary) collectives of residents, called FASSY and Et Cetera, came into being. These collectives worked together for an extended period of time, researching a common interest, producing objects and enacting interventions. For FASSY this entailed the inquiry into urban space and public services. They examined the borders among public, private and commercial spaces by inserting a tangible presence and by so claiming the space for an individual.¹⁶⁹ Their interventions consisted in the installation of a blank market stand in a public space, which they also realized during the OPENHAUS event at ZK/U in January. Their work aligned with ZK/U's second Investigation Lead, 'RESETTING: Urban Infrastructure Revisited', as they questioned and reclaimed ownership of public space. Et Cetera worked on the topic of categorization of knowledge, drawing on the theoretical work of Foucault, Calvino and Foer. For the OPENHAUS in February they would cast a series of objects in concrete, playfully exploring the fallacy of categories and the illusion of order that society creates. They hereby engaged with the first Investigation Lead in ZK/U's Conceptual Framework, 'SELF-EMPOWERMENT: Practical Guides and Solidarity in Urban Learning', by problematizing the hierarchy of knowledge and offering an alternative approach. Although these artists' collectives also stopped collaborating again after a while, mostly because the residency periods of their members ended, they illustrate how successful exchange and collaboration can come into being within ZK/U's residency programme.

The Discourse Group did not always bear fruit. Occasions where none of the residents would attend the meetings appeared more and more often towards the end of my research period. Indeed, artists and researchers in residence seemed to be focused more on their individual projects and therefore did not feel the need to work together with the others. This is exemplary of a larger problematic that artists' residencies tend to be confronted with: the two key objectives of artists' residencies are on the one hand to provide a space for artists to work on a specific project in a focussed and solitary manner, while on the other hand to facilitate artistic and often interdisciplinary collaboration. What artists' residencies tend to struggle with, as research has shown, is to unite these contradictory aims.

¹⁶⁹ www.wemewe.me.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) working group by the European Union has done extensive research into the objectives and functioning of artists' residencies, which is reported in their *Policy Handbook on Artists' Residencies* (2014). They define the residency phenomenon as such: "Artists' residencies provide artists and other creative professionals with time, space and resources to work, individually or collectively, on areas of their practice that reward heightened reflection or focus."¹⁷⁰ They recognize an increase of artist-in-residence programmes over the past years. OMC identifies the residency phenomenon as being specific to the art world; apart from study leaves and sabbaticals in academia, it cannot be found in other sectors. An important reason for this, they claim, is that artists often struggle to sustain a living off of their artistry, and are forced to do secondary, often non-artistic work, in order to earn enough money. This usually takes time and focus away from their art. Residencies offer artists the focus they would otherwise lack.¹⁷¹

OMC categorizes types of residency programmes as follows. The 'classic' residency model is focussed on the development of the artist and their work, and usually offers studio visits by art world professionals and an extensive public programme directed at the residency. There is the model of the artists' residency connected to an art institution or festival, which benefits from an existing professional infrastructure and exchange with the public. The model of the artist-led residency center revolves around the visions of the founder(s) and therefore tends to have a clearly defined profile. Research-based residencies are process-oriented and often site- and context-specific. They are closely related to thematic residencies, which extend beyond artistic production in order to work with a common theme. The production-based model aims at the development and realization of a particular idea or work, and is often discipline-specific. Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral residencies, finally, bring together artists working with different media in order to establish an integrative collaboration.¹⁷² Although the authors make it appear as though these are clearly defined and demarcated categories, in reality they are likely to overlap and shift.

Looking at ZK/U, it has characteristics of several of these models. Clearly, it is an artist-run residency center, founded on the views and priorities of the KUNSTrePUBLIK collective, which inform the selection of residents and the direction of their work. It is also a thematic residency, as it focuses specifically on the phenomenon of the city, and invites predominantly residents that work with related themes such as urban society, public space, mapping and navigating, citizen emancipation, street furniture, local identity and learning in the city. As the residency is strongly process-oriented, encouraging its residents to invite their peers and publics into their working methods and developments, ZK/U can also be said to have a research-based residency programme, as opposed to production-based centers. What is furthermore typical of these kinds of residencies is their site- and context-specificity, which is ingrained in ZK/U's origin as a bridge between the industrial and residential areas of Moabit and its engagement with the local neighbourhood. Finally, ZK/U aims at interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration by bringing together artists from different backgrounds, as well as researchers, activists and social workers.

The fairly recent upswing of artist-in-residence centers and programmes can be linked to the legacy of institutional critique, in particular new institutionalism, as well as to the biennial

¹⁷⁰ OMC (2014): 9.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 15.

¹⁷² Ibid.: 17-24.

boom in the 1990s. In her essay 'Reflexivity and Residency Programmes' (2016), Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez touches upon the awareness among art world professionals that what they produce will automatically be assimilated by financial, political and administrative agents. As such, she argues, "[m]any initiatives no longer think of a residency as physical studio work, but as collective research and production that contributes to a constant undermining, re-questioning and self-examination of the art world."¹⁷³ In that sense, the hybridization of art institutions embodies a continuation of the institutional-critical project, undermining the institutionalization of the art system even further. At the same time, this awareness goes hand in hand with the inevitability of institutionalization, echoing the second generation of institutional critique:

We could call these structures or initiatives [artists' residencies] reflexive, since they acknowledge their role as one of the agents of the art world and put forward key questions such as who does an artist- or curator-in-residence relate to? With whom does s/he exchange, speak and work, and why? To which public space does an artist-in-residence belong?¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, Petrešin-Bachelez pays attention to the notion of artistic research, which is often at the core of residency programmes, and argues that this type of inquiry is only meaningful when it takes into consideration the specificity of the local context in which it is done.¹⁷⁵ What artists' residencies, biennials and socially engaged art projects tend to have in common is a contextual, situated and site-specific approach. However, the problematic about artists' residencies, as I have observed at ZK/U, is that artists and researchers in residence arrive from an often very different context into the environment of the residency programme, with little time to get acquainted with the local situation due to the relatively short period of their stay. Most of the residents at ZK/U do for instance not speak German, and ZK/U does not offer any language courses or assistance to its residents, which significantly limits their potential to actually engage with the local community and build alliances in the surrounding neighbourhood. Therefore, I would not agree with OMC's claim that "[a]rtists' residencies [...] permit artists to develop a deeper understanding of their host societies and cultures".¹⁷⁶ An interesting contradiction in ZK/U's self-understanding comes to the fore here: historically, it came into being as a bridge between the industrial and various residential areas of Moabit; conceptually, it claims to be a space for the gathering of and exchange between local communities and international artists; but practically, its residents do not know anything about the local context, without sharing any knowledge or skills with them. To resolve this paradox that is at the heart of many artists' residencies, if not of the very notion of the residency itself, Petrešin-Bachelez writes: "the context and the situatedness of an activity should be fully apprehended by the actors involved in the phenomenon of a residency (the hosts and the guests) in order to begin imagining a new hybrid public and political space, where the guest resident plays a crucial role".¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Petrešin-Bachelez (2016).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ OMC (2014): 9.

¹⁷⁷ Petrešin-Bachelez (2016).

As the case of ZK/U demonstrates, the artists' residency format demonstrates a contradiction between the self-understanding of the institution as a space for artistic and social exchange, the socio-economic reality of the art world that necessitates artists to do a residency to focus on their individual projects, and the actual practice of operation that does not yet manage to bridge these two conflicting objectives and offer artists and researchers in residence the tools for successful collaboration and community engagement. In line with the OMC Working Group, I would argue that this has to do with a certain unclarity about the personal and shared goals at play in such an institution.¹⁷⁸ However, what this case study also shows is that the hybridization of art-institutional functions that was imagined by the advocates of new institutionalism has undoubtedly found materialization in the institutional format of the residency center. As a space for production, research, collaboration and engagement, it seems to answer Esche's call for an art institution that is "part community center, part laboratory, and part academy", while at the same time letting go off traditional notions of artistic production and display.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, as Hito Steyerl and Boris Buden point to in their essay 'The Artist as Res(iden)t' (2007), "the type of production within artist residencies has been radically altered. This type of production is very contemporary in the sense that its results are not primarily products or objects but in fact relations between people."

¹⁸⁰ Their statement is reminiscent of Petrešin-Bachelez's comment that artists' residencies tend to produce post-studio work in an attempt to undermine the arts system, which again echoes second generation institutional critique's turn to ephemeral artwork to divert commodification, fetishization and canonization.¹⁸¹ Moreover, similarly to the 'new institutionalist' organizations and the biennials of the 1990s alike, the residency format allows for the organization of a diverse, elaborate range of discursive events and programmes. During my time at ZK/U, I have seen several projects, conferences, workshops and reading groups come into being, short-term as well as ongoing, organized by residents, that were sparked by informal conversations, growing collaborations and spontaneous impulses. If production is among the core functions of the institution, it is the production of ideas much rather than actual artworks.

5. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have attempted to uncover the ways in which the legacy of institutional critique informs contemporary institutional practice in the specific case of ZK/U Berlin. In terms of the institutionalization of a self-critical attitude, the institution seems to display a shift from self-reflection as a conscious, performative act to a more subtle, ongoing process. More importantly, the critical attitude that was inherited from institutional critique has been turned outwards, towards the socio-political reality in which the institution is set. ZK/U has an outspoken tendency towards social critique and community engagement, yet struggles to actively build sustainable ties with the communities in the local neighbourhood, resulting in ongoing tensions. This discrepancy is remarkable, especially considering the organization's purpose as a catalyser of social cohesion in the urban area of Moabit. In part, this has to do with prioritization of time and resources. What

¹⁷⁸ OMC (2014): 66.

¹⁷⁹ Kolb & Flückiger (2013b): 27.

¹⁸⁰ Steyerl & Buden (2007).

¹⁸¹ Marstine (2007): 9.

might help ZK/U generate a sense of structural community engagement is to have an on-staff community organizer or engagement curator, as some institutions already do. The awareness that institutional critique has generated for the influence of funding on institutional decision-making and practices can still be recognized in the absence of permanent funding at ZK/U, which provides a sense of freedom and independency. This also comes with a rather pragmatic attitude towards the selection of residents, and a constant pressure to apply for project subsidies to fund additional activities. Remarkably enough, the residency, ZK/U's main source of income and financial backbone, does not seem to be the main priority in its overall operations, leading to a major discrepancy in the organization's institutional profile. More contradictions can be noticed within the residency format; the functions of artistic exchange and individual work conflict each other, and seem to be a common struggle in artist-in-residence centers. In sum, I have attempted to sketch the constant push and pull of institutional self-understanding, the context of social, political and economic relations in which the institution is set, and the actual practices of operation according to which it functions, that are all part of the institutional reality with which this contemporary, hybrid art institution has to deal.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed contemporary institutional practice at ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin through the lens of the art historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique, so as to uncover how institutional-critical thought informs the functioning of cultural organizations today. I aimed to bridge the gap between an academic, theoretical perspective on the one hand and a professional, practice-based perspective on the other. Therefore I combined a literature study on the development of institutional-critical practice and discourse over more than fifty years in the first part of this thesis, with a case study of ZK/U through the methodology of participant observation in the second part. The central question underlying this inquiry was: *How can the legacy of the discourse and practices of three generations of institutional critique be used as an analytical framework to understand the interplay of self-understanding, social, political and economic context, and actual practice of operation in the contemporary art institution ZK/U?* In this final chapter, I attempt to bring together my findings in a set of concluding reflections, propose recommendations for further research as well as art-institutional practice, and provide a discussion of the approach that I took in this thesis.

Talking about the upswing of institutional-critical curatorial discourse and practice in the 1990s and 2000s, Esche stated:

It is absolutely necessary now to write a historiography of that time and to understand what happened in order to build on it and experiment anew. [...] Perhaps we need to be historicized by another generation, by you who weren't involved and who need to come along and validate (or not) through your own experiences.¹⁸²

The first part of this thesis can be regarded as the start of such a historiography, tracing the art historical and conceptual lines between the discourse of new institutionalism and the larger artistic and discursive evolvement of institutional critique, and connect them to the contemporary art world. However, what did not fit into the scope and objective of this thesis is a more elaborate and nuanced account of the historical, socio-political situation in which institutional critique developed. Indeed, to fully comprehend the meaning and implication of its legacy for contemporary artistic, curatorial and institutional practice, its changing context needs to be taken into consideration. As Stimson aptly puts it: "As with any bit of history, we will really only understand what institutional critique was by seeing the ways in which it was bound up deeply with the larger contradictions of its time, and we can only fully understand its historical meaning now by appreciating the legacy of

¹⁸² Esche, in: Kolb & Flückiger (2013b): 27-28.

those contradictions in the world we find ourselves in today.”¹⁸³ I am aware that significant parts of the historical context in which institutional critique came into being have been left out here in favor of the larger picture. The same goes for the specificity of institutional-critical artistic practices, which manifested in highly diverse forms.

In contrast, the case study in the second part of this thesis paid special attention to the details of ZK/U’s historical, socio-political context as well as to the particularities in its auto-narrative and practice of operation. This detailed study of a specific institution was made possible by the methodology of participant observation, which provided me with an ‘insider’s view’ on the institution, including the specific processes that would otherwise not be visible to the public eye. The challenge in this type of research was turning the collected observations into meaningful data. Especially since I participated actively in the work within the institution, I gathered an immense amount of input during my fieldwork period, not all of which was necessarily important for my research. This is exactly why I needed a framework to categorize and interpret my observations. Transferring the art historical and discursive legacy of institutional critique into an analytical framework forced me to look at the grand overview of institutional-critical thought and practice rather than its specificities, and inevitably left out a significant amount of information and detail. However, this allowed me to design an operationalizable approach to the question how the legacy of institutional critique informs contemporary art-institutional practice. This is in line with the larger tendency in academia to regard institutional critique not as an art historical genre but as an analytical tool. For example, Raunig claims that “if institutional critique is not to be fixed and paralyzed as something established in the field of art and remaining constrained by its rules, then it must continue to change and develop in a changing society.”¹⁸⁴

At this point, I cannot adequately judge if the analytical framework based on the legacy of institutional critique that I have proposed in the first half of this thesis actually functions. In order to find out, it would have to be applied and compared to other case studies. Certainly, it has to be adapted to become more like a methodological strategy with a clear procedure, to make it more operationalizable for a wider range of case studies. A major pitfall of this approach is the risk that one only looks for instances that confirm the assumption that institutional critique informs contemporary art-institutional practice, and filters out anything that might contravene it. However, the instances in which the case study actually diverts from the institutional-critical framework and reveals unexpected patterns are especially interesting, as they point to a shift or transformation in the discourse and practice, and possibly even a larger tendency or phenomenon. Sheikh similarly argues:

One can then see institutional critique not as a historical period and/or genre within art history, but rather as an analytical 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. An institutional critique of institutional critique, what can be termed ‘institutionalized critique’, has then to question the role of education, historicization and how institutional auto-critique not only leads to

¹⁸³ Stimson (2009): 36.

¹⁸⁴ Raunig (2009): 3.

a questioning of the institution and what it institutes, but also becomes a mechanism of control within new modes of governmentality, precisely through its very act of internalization.¹⁸⁵

In the case of ZK/U, I would like to bring the attention to several particularly notable findings. First of all, in terms of the institutionalization of a self-critical attitude, it seems ZK/U has surpassed the act of self-reflection and auto-critique as a conscious, performative activity in favor of a rather implicit, ongoing process of evaluating and redirecting. Institutional critique is no longer a goal in itself. Indeed, for ZK/U, self-reflection constitutes a feedback loop between the institution's auto-narrative and its actual practices, influenced again by the local as well as the global social reality in which it is set. The institution turns its critical attitude outwards rather than inwards, shifting from an institutional-critical to a critical-institutional approach. A further comparison with other contemporary institutions would be helpful to indicate if this is exemplary of a larger shift in institutional self-reflection. I assume that comparable processes can be recognized in other cases, and have observed this already in cultural organizations like Primary in Nottingham and Casco in Utrecht:

As for Casco, they seem to have a feedback loop: their practices are informed by their conceptual framework, and what they learn from them leads to an evaluation of their ideological and institutional backbone, feeding back into their agenda, which then causes a re-assessment of their praxis. This model facilitates constant constructive institutional reflection and change.¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, there still seem to be some major discrepancies between ZK/U's auto-narrative and its actual practice of operation. With social engagement rising quickly on the institutional agenda, the question how to build positive and sustainable ties with local communities becomes more and more important. In some respects, especially with its recurrent community gathering formats, ZK/U successfully manages to be an open platform for local inhabitants to get together. However, as multiple occasions have shown, the organization has not yet managed to resolve all tensions with populations in the neighbourhood, especially with the youth. Caused partly by the socio-political context in which the institution is set, partly by the decisions they do and do not make, the relationship between ZK/U and this part of the community remains troublesome, resulting in an obvious contradiction between the institution's official objective and its material reality. A comparison with other cultural organizations in neighbourhoods that have a similar profile could be fruitful to find practical solutions for reconciliation and community engagement. One potential option would be the employment of an on-staff community organizer or engagement curator, which can already be found in institutions such as the Queens Museum and Primary.

Another notable contradiction in ZK/U's institutional policy and behaviour is the disbalance between the importance of the residency for its financial sustainability and the attention and priority that is actually being dedicated to the artist-in-residence programme, as numerous instances during my fieldwork demonstrated. Undoubtedly, this is caused by the economic pressure to sustain the institution on the long run while constantly applying for short-term project subsidies, which touches upon the larger reality in which art institutions nowadays find themselves. To come

¹⁸⁵ Sheikh (2009): 32.

¹⁸⁶ Mol (21/08/2017).

to a full understanding of this problematic, one would need to elaborate on the increasingly neoliberal, populist political and economic context that European art institutions struggle with, and that inevitably informs their decision-making processes. A corner of the veil has already been lifted, for instance, in 'The time for mobilisation and alliances' (2016), a group conversation between Lisa Rosendahl and curators Maria Lind, Nina Möntmann, Eva González-Sancho and Ellen Blumenstein. Here, Rosendahl points to the interrelationship between artistic and curatorial production on the one hand and state policies on the other, i.e. institutional practice and socio-political relations, when she asks how the increase of bureaucratisation/administration affects how institutions, curators and artists are producing, and what they are producing in terms of programming and content?¹⁸⁷ Within my fieldwork I have unfortunately not had the opportunity to gain a detailed insight into ZK/U's entire financial situation and the ways in which this affects the decisions that are being made. This would be particularly interesting for a follow-up research, which could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the practical reality of contemporary art-institutional practice and a set of recommendations on how to improve ZK/U's institutional functioning.

Finally, as an artists' residency center, ZK/U exemplifies a type of art institution that is particularly typical of today's globalized society, and that has come to play a more and more important role in artists' careers. However, as I have also observed at ZK/U, this institutional format is complicated by a set of inherently contradictory goals. On the one hand, residency programmes claim to facilitate artistic exchange and collaboration while at the same time offering their residents the opportunity to work focussed and in solitude on individual programmes. On the other hand, they tend to emphasize local context, social practice and community engagement but residency periods are usually too short for residents to learn the local language and get acquainted with the host culture. It would be interesting to compare ZK/U to other residency institutions, to learn more about their different approaches, the influence of their local context, and the ways in which they tap into local and global infrastructures.

Rather than coming to one coherent conclusion, I have aimed to build a practice-based, contextualized understanding of art-institutional practice. What becomes clear is that the study of contemporary cultural organizations is essentially deeply informed by the cultural, social, political and economic contexts in which they are set. Both academic research and institutional-critical practice need to have a particular sensitivity for the situatedness of artistic, curatorial and institutional practice. As an analytical tool, institutional critique can provide this sensitivity, and help to develop new forms of critical-institutional activity.

¹⁸⁷ Rosendahl (2016): 39.

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