

Chapter 11

The Museum of the Future



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Abstract *The Museum of the Future*, edited by Gerhard Bott, offers new perspectives on the museum. It was time to leave behind the notion of the museum as an ivory tower of science, as a place where items in collections were merely inventoried and studied in terms of their cultural and art historical value. It was time for something new. It was time for the museum to (re)establish its relationship to society and to take on the role of an educational institution. In her book *La Fin des Musées*, Catherine Grenier, codirector of Centre Pompidou, challenges the discourse pointing to the “end of the museum”. Similar to her predecessors in the 1970s, she argues the museum needs to be understood as a current institution, whose interests do not only revolve around itself but as one that actively engages with urgent questions concerning our world and society today. What would happen if the “museum of the future” were a para-museum? What would it be like? If we conceive of the para-museum as something that is simultaneously inside and outside and in a parasitic relationship to the museum, then a form of subversion may just

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cross our minds—one that robs the museum (of its power to endow meaning and definitions and its infrastructure). Insofar that the para-museum maintains its relation to the museum with its potential for change and its relation to social struggles that disrupt logics behind hegemonic claims to power, it remains simultaneously part of the museum and part of a different order, one that is perhaps yet to come.

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The Museum of the Future

“The 19th-century museum is dead”.¹ With these words Paulgerd Jesberg begins his text where he envisions the “task, architecture, set up and management” of the museum of the future as geared toward transdisciplinarity and a “new society”. His detailed concept reveals much about the dreams and desires of the museum, which circulated in a number of contexts at the time the text was written. Jesberg’s vision, along with those of several others who sought to programmatically rethink the museum, appeared in 1970 in a compendium bearing the same name as Jesberg’s text *The Museum of the Future*. The cover of this book, published in Cologne by DuMont Schauberg, is completely bright yellow except for the black-and-white photo of the Kunsthalle Bern packaged by Christo in 1968. Stylishly dressed groups of onlookers stand in front of this temple of art talking and looking at it. A cordon separates the spectators from the street and cars, one of which is visible on the photo. In the 1970s, including automobiles in photographs of current day were par for the course, as they were the epitome of modern life. Were the people in the picture discussing the role of the museum in the future the instant Albert Winkler, the photographer from Bern, captured them?

Our contribution begins by considering conceptualizations of the museum of the future by looking at its history. In the second part, this history serves as starting point for thinking of ways to update concepts of the past. In the third part, before the backdrop of today’s neoliberal world with its imperatives of “fluidity” and “constant transformation”, we propose the concept of a para-museum. The para-museum is as much related to the institution as to the world outside it and to the museum’s potential for both permanence and change, as it is to social movements that take place outside the museum. This complicated relation that is neither against the museum nor completely defined by it can be described with the Greek prefix *para*, which means “side by side” as much as “beyond”.

¹Paul Jesberg. “Das Museum der Zukunft—Aufgabe, Bau, Einrichtung, Betrieb.” Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 138–156, here p. 138.

I. The Museum of the Future in the 1960s and 1970s

Let us begin with the history of the future of the museum. The edited volume mentioned above came out at the beginning of a period when the institution museum was undergoing a fundamental transformation. Exhibitions of the 1950s and 1960s had never grown weary of paying tribute to Christian Western culture and classical humanism of self-formation (*Bildungshumanismus*). Art and cultural products were deemed completely apolitical and presented as merely objects. At the same time, the curators responsible for these exhibitions were busy administering and internally reorganizing the museums after World War II. Challenging the visitors to see the links between the exhibited material in museums and current events was an idea that Alfred Lichtwark, among others, had already proposed at the turn of the century, but had since fallen by the wayside, which is understandable considering the fundamental challenges museums faced in the post-war era. The Museum of Art History in Vienna, for instance, decided to send part of their collection on a tour through the USA during the reconstruction of parts of the buildings destroyed in the war. For two decades following the War, securing objects was given the utmost priority within the museum.

The Museum of the Future, edited by Gerhard Bott, offers new perspectives on the museum. It was time to leave behind the notion of the museum as an ivory tower of science, as a place where items in collections were merely inventoried and studied in terms of their cultural and art historical value. It was time for something new. It was time for the museum to (re)establish its relationship to society and to take on the role of an educational institution. After all, in 1970, over 16 million people had visited museums in Germany.² It was not merely the desired popularity of the museum that drew critics' attention, but the work of the museum. Artists, such as Marcel Broodthaers or the artist group Zero, questioned the very foundation on which the institution "museum" was built. Now, what has actually changed since 1970? Why does it seem so important to break with the history of the museum in order to be able to look toward the future? Before the backdrop of the social changes following 1968, the museum's dusty categorizations, fossilized claims to truth and violent descriptions received an onslaught of criticism. Institution-critical artists, feminist and antiracist activists took the museums to task: "the museums and parks are the graveyards above the ground – congealed memories of the past that act as a pretext for reality",³ as US concept artist Robert Smithson writes in 1970. In an era when demonstrations, happenings and actions directed at critiquing modes of representation employed by the status quo were in full swing, calling into question the way museums had thus far operated also became a concern.

²Hermann Auer. "Zur Einführung in den Begriff Museologie." *Museologie. Symposiumsbericht*, Pustet, Cologne, 1973, pp. 10–13, here p. 10.

³Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement." <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/cultural.htm>. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Hessian State Museum, the museum's director (since 1960) Gerhard Bott, an art historian who previously headed the Historical Museum, Frankfurt, edited the above-mentioned volume. In the foreword, he writes "Discord around the institution museum emerges the moment the basic condition for its existence is not felt, which is constant change. [...] In this light, museums have always been and will continue to be a social problem."⁴ Bott names constant transformation as a basic characteristic of the museum. Drawing on Gustav Pauli's legendary essay from 1919 on the task of the art museum, Bott defines the museum in a nutshell as a democratic institution with great social relevance and importance for education. A further salient point in Bott's text, which is still relevant for discussions today, is his emphasis on linking the museum and everyday life. Bott writes, "As part of life, which is full of constant change and re-orientation, art must be present and its effects felt everywhere—that is the relationship between life and the museum. Inside and outside the museum it has be clear that not only the technical workers at the museums, but also the artists are seek to transform the people and the world around them—they have succeeded in the past, and they will continue to make people see their surroundings in new ways in the future as well".⁵

Bott viewed forging stronger connections between art and society as an urgent necessity for the museum of the future. His volume is comprised of 43 texts by authors from art, culture and science, who developed more or less innovative visions of the future of the museum.

Whose Future?

Included in the volume—in line with the practices and state of affairs of the era—was only one single woman, Doris Schmidt, who was a journalist from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. During the same time that the protests from the uprisings of 1968 were underway, the second wave of the women's movement is also gaining momentum; and although they had already begun to formulate their demands, inclusion and equal rights for women were not part of the vision of the *Museum of the Future*.

The 43 contributors did not necessarily belong to the "young wild ones" from 1968. On the contrary, they absolutely belonged to the "establishment" of the time. It thus comes as no surprise that none of the authors' biographies contain any mention of their lives or careers between 1933 or 1939 and 1945—another noticeable gap in terms of content in the volume. A blanket of silence had been laid out over the Nazi era, as none of the museum directors, artists and architects' visions of the future included shedding light on what had happened during the Nazi era. Regardless

⁴Gerhard Bott, "Solange es Museen gibt, wandeln sie sich." Ibid. (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 7–9, here p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

of that, the large variety of nations and institutions represented in the volume remains impressive. The number and geographic diversity of famous contributors from various museums who Bott managed to win over for his volume are equally remarkable. The increasing professionalization of museum work—thus far performed by art historians without any formal museum-specific training, which did not exist at the time anyhow—was complimented by the work of the International Council of Museums, founded in 1946. “Museology, and with it, the specialized profession of the museologist have only emerged in the past few decades”,⁶ Jerzy Banach describes the thorough transformation of the museum sector, which had since begun to form international networks and exchanges. In his foreword, Bott also refers to the 7th Annual ICOM Conference in New York City, which he had presumably attended and met a number of the authors from his book. Twenty of the texts in the collection were penned by museum directors, eight of whom were responsible for museums outside Germany. Jerzy Banach was the director of the Polish National Museum in Krakow. Charles C. Cunningham headed the Art Institute of Chicago. Ferdinand Eckhard, who had once worked for the art education department at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, was head of the Winnipeg Art Gallery in Canada. Jean Leering, director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, and Louis J.F. Wijzenbeek, director of the State Museum of The Hague, also contributed to the volume. Hugh Wakefield, the Keeper of Circulation, represented the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. William Johan Withrow, director of the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, demanded a return of Bauhaus ideas, as he agreed that “an art museum must assume an active role in improving and shaping the way we understand our surroundings”.⁷ The only non-Western perspective was that of Masayoshi Homma, vice-director of the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, who offered a detailed treatise on the question of museum lighting.

Bott invited over 12 colleagues from around Germany to write for his book. Peter Beye had newly been appointed director of the New State Gallery in Stuttgart. Werner Haftmann was director of the National Gallery in Berlin, and Werner Hoffmann, originally from Vienna, was the head of the Kunsthalle Hamburg. Like Bott, both Karl Heinz Esser, director of the Middle Rhine State Museum in Mainz, and Harald Seiler, director of the Lower Saxony State Museum in Hannover, also represented state museums in Germany. Günter Gall, who headed the German Leather Museum in Offenbach, was one of the directors on board who had already managed to construct a new museum building and fully reorganize and change the display concept of the existing collection in 1961. Helmut Presser represented the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, which specialized in the history of lettering and in 1962 inaugurated the reconstructed parts and the new wing of the building destroyed in the war. Gerhard Wietek, director of the Altona Museum in Hamburg, also represented an art history museum. Helmut Leppien from the Kunsthalle Cologne and J.M. von Moltke from

⁶Jerzy Banach. “Aufgaben des Museums in der Zukunft” Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 10–17, here p. 10.

⁷William John Withrow. “Das Museum der Zukunft.” Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 306–308, here p. 307.

the Kunsthalle Bielefeld represented the genre “Kunsthalle”. Werner Schmalenbach, director of the North Rhine-Westphalia Art Collection, and Paul Volt, director of the Folkwang Museum in Essen, were representatives from famous art museums. Stephan Waetzoldt, general director of the State Museum of Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, was one of the most influential museum directors in Germany who Bott managed to get for his publication.

Bott also invited politicians to participate in the reflection process, which was likely also a smart move in terms of networking. Kurt Hackenberg represented the Council of Culture of the city of Cologne. Carlo Schmidt, former Minister of Justice, and Werner Stein, Senator for Science and Art, both wrote pieces for the volume. Further contributions came from authors in high positions at German universities. Bazon Brock held a Professorship for Non-Normative Aesthetics at the State University for Fine Art in Hamburg. Peter Anselm Riedl was Professor for Contemporary Art History in Heidelberg. Harald Deilmann was a tenured professor of Architectural Design at the University of Dortmund and freelance architect. Klaus Doderer, head of the Institute for Research on Books for Adolescents at the University of Frankfurt, represented the onset of discussions about how museums could reach younger audiences. Reinhold Hohl and Wieland Schmidt represented the field of art criticism. Vitus B. Dröscher, zoologist and scientific book author, provided the volume with a unique natural science perspective.

Peter Ludwig, an entrepreneur who worked for the Leonard Monheim Company, was a collector and donor whose activity, together with his wife’s, would forever change the German and international museum scene. Art dealer Fritz Nathan from Zurich, who was exiled from Germany by the Nazis, provided a skillful description of the ways in which museums had become more active on the art market in recent years. Hungarian artist and author Victor Vasarely was also among the contributors to Bott’s collection. By the time Vasarely’s ideas for the future were published, he had shown twice at documenta (1955, 1964) and, in 1970, inaugurated his own institution called the Vasarely Foundation. Artist Fritz Wotruba was the only Austrian representative in the volume and wrote a text that critiqued modern technology while at the same time confirmed the traditional role of the museum as an institution that “ensures the survival of the aesthetic and cultural values”.⁸ Bott also won over renowned artist HAP Grieshaber who had stirred up heated debates in Germany about what art is a few years earlier when he stepped down from his chair at the university.

The entire volume is a strategic collection of the “who is who” in the German art museum scene, and, although it leaves out the future of the positions and challenges that cultural and natural history museums face, it provides a clear overview of Bott’s network.

⁸Fritz Wotruba. “Das Museum der Zukunft.” Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 309–311, here p. 310.

The Activating Museum

The currency of the Wieland Schmidt's ideas is striking. He proposes making current events part of the collection in order to "integrate lasting moments of irritation into the collection".⁹ Moreover, "the museum must include art that questions itself, thus also making the museum question itself as well. To remain fully current and contemporary, the museum needs to constantly reexamine its tasks, location and effectivity".¹⁰ Doderer takes inspiration from Berthold Brecht in considering the role of the museum. He writes "so, there is no way around it—the museum also has to find ways to encourage its audience to unlearn its passive role as recipients who merely take pleasure in the products presented. Moreover, the museum has to provoke and activate its visitors, if it is to have any social meaning at all. It can only free itself by questioning itself and, in extension, also its origins. The problematic practice of presenting values from the past can certainly no longer serve as a firm foundation for the museum—which was, once upon a time, a treasure chamber full of accomplished ideals, a showcase for history".¹¹ This same spirit is evident in the visionary contribution of Paulgerd Jesberg, lecturer at the State School of Construction Stuttgart. With detailed drawings and diagrams, he elaborates on his notion of a comprehensive museum (*Gesamtmuseum*) that is made up of "natural history", "ethnology", "art", "culture", "prehistory", "technology", "design" and "special programmes" that are all situated within a common framework. According to Jesberg, the main tasks of the comprehensive museum are "to inform, to exhibit and to educate" (pp. 138–156). The concept also entailed keeping "exhibition and depository spaces open to the public" and providing study rooms with workspaces for visitors, so that the museum would not only house knowledge but also render it productive through transnational networking and making it accessible to the general public. The museum was not meant to be a place of indoctrination, but of activation and debate. It was not simply a place of representation, but of reflection, of experience and of challenges:

"The display concept itself is to be constantly reworked. The ways in which the items from the collection are presented should be placed alongside new and altering statements, which spark debate and challenge the visitors to see the past differently. These new ideas then affect how the visitors view the present and the future. The display is not to be understood in terms of form, but experience; not in terms of objects, but events; not in terms of artworks but meaning. [...] It is not coins that are on display, but capital and power, economy and trade, transportation and politics; not clothing, but ways of living, our environment, living habits. [...] The visitor is an actor who plays a role in staging the museum. The visitor partakes in the unfamiliar, new and strange, and thus experiences reality in a totally new way [...]."¹²

⁹Wieland Schmidt. "Der Auftrag lautet Gegenwart. Gedanken zu einem erweiterten Museum." Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 248 - 255, here p. 249.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Klaus Doderer. "Das Museum von Morgen." Gerhard Bott (ed.) *Das Museum der Zukunft*, Du Mont: Cologne 1970, pp. 52-54, here p. 52ff.

¹²Ibid., p. 151.

In terms of aesthetics, the sketches and diagrams accompanying Jesberg's visions are reminiscent of the 1920s Bauhaus School. In this sense, his model is more a concept than a utopia. It is clearly a concept to be realized. Thus, he concludes by stating: "The future begins today".¹³

II. The Future of Today

What has changed since the 1970s? Where does the museum stand in relation to all of today's demands, rhetoric and realities? Is it a motor for gentrification, an event factory or a public space for critical engagement? Some contemporary institutions, like the Tate Modern in London, fulfill all three of these conflicting functions simultaneously. At the same time, there are also a growing number of artists interested in the museum as a medium. Let us now trace a few such tendencies and lines of conflict.

Since the 1980s, new museology has approached the museum from a reflexive point of view, making it more difficult now to envision the "comprehensive museum" than in Jesberg's time. The 1970s paradigm of activation has since been put into practice and expanded. Multifaceted discussions have emerged on the poetics and politics of exhibiting¹⁴ or the gesture of showing,¹⁵ and fundamental questions around representation have been formulated. Who is speaking? In whose name and in whose interest? Who is being spoken about? How are power relations reproduced? By which means? Who can actually become an actor, and who is still excluded? Today, we are unable to renew our dreams of a "museum of the future" without also considering a number of questions and doubts. What happens when the principles that constitute the museum in the first place are called into question, that is, its claim to nationalism, power to produce truth and value, the unwavering validity of its orders, etc.? Is this model becoming obsolete again? Is the museum of the future a zombie—alive for the sole purpose of appearing dead?

In her book *La Fin des Musées*, Catherine Grenier, codirector of Centre Pompidou, challenges the discourse pointing to the "end of the museum". Similar to her predecessors in the 1970s, she argues the museum needs to be understood as a current institution, whose interests do not only revolve around itself but as one that actively engages with urgent questions concerning our world and society today.¹⁶

¹³Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁴Cf. Henrietta Lidchi. "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures," in: *Representation. Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, Milton Keynes 1997, pp. 151–222.

¹⁵Cf. Roswitha Muttenthaler, Regina Wonisch. *Gesten des Zeigens. Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen*. Bielefeld 2006.

¹⁶"Si le musée veut pénétrer l'espace intellectuel, où il occupe pour l'instant une place mineure, et y devenir un acteur de référence, il ne peut pas se tenir à l'écart des grandes préoccupations de la société et du monde." Catherine Grenier, *La Fin des Musées*, Paris 2013, p. 125.

She imagines a museum of the future as a polymorph, as a forum that addresses present-day conflicts and questions, a dynamic social space, a “witness of our time and as a place to investigate it”.¹⁷ It seems that Grenier is not the only one to put social relevance and change on the agenda, as new discourses on education and a number of innovative approaches to the museum are also doing just that. Now, more than ever, the museum is considered a platform, an arena or a contact zone. Addressing social relevance is indeed a double-edged sword. One reason is that social relevance is increasingly becoming an important tool of measurability and applicability and, secondly, because institutions linked to the public sphere—including places of education and museums—are also recklessly appropriating current terms of debate like “social change” as buzz words for their own agendas. According to new government logics that have been shaped by neoliberal transformation processes, stability is to be left behind in favour of insecurity and flexibilization. Current discourses on transformation and processualization make the classic concept of the museum appear fossilized, a thing of the past.

Economic circumstances are another important factor. At the turn of the millennium, many museums were partly privatized throughout Europe. Economic crises and considerations have become crucial factors throughout the entire museum field and led to remarkable effects, including changes in organizational forms, conditions of production and decision-making processes. One could therefore say, as Karl Valentin once cleverly put it, “the future is no longer what it used to be”.

At the same time, a critical discourse drawing on governmentality studies has emerged that take a look at power relations and the logic of exploitation that go hand in hand with the economization of public institutions. While a great number of institution-critical artistic practices and texts came out in the 1990s, in the meantime some critically minded institutions have also begun to explore possibilities for organizational change. It is within this context that Andrea Phillips writes in a publication edited by the institutional network *Cluster*,¹⁸ “But rather than what I would call content-driven critique, what I am interested in is managerial and organizational change that embeds political equality within the organization itself. This necessitates a more humble and messy approach in which the aesthetic is placed on lateral terms with the more mundane opening up of facilities and capacities”.¹⁹ In light of the growing dematerialization and economization, if we are to take these concerns seriously, it may be interesting to return to the question of the permanence of the museum.²⁰ If things are supposed to be under constant transformation, the point to consider is not *that* change is taking place, but *which* change is taking place and by what means society and its institutions are affected by these changes. In connection

¹⁷Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁸www.clusternetwork.eu/index.php?id=4. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

¹⁹Andrea Phillips, “Remaking the Arts Centre.” *Cluster Dialectionary*, Utrecht 2014, p. 214.

²⁰Cf. Pascal Gielen. “Institutional Imagination. Instituting Contemporary Art Minus the ‘Contemporary’.” Ibid. (ed.) *Institutional Attitudes. Instituting Art in a Flat World*. Amsterdam, 2013, p. 11–34.

with this, it can also be interesting to examine why artists are now increasingly employing the museum as a medium.

“Is the museum a battlefield?”²¹ Hito Steyerl asks in a lecture performance at the Istanbul Biennale in 2013. Here, she identifies multiple facets of the museum as a battlefield. For one, since the French Revolution, the museum has been a site of counter-hegemonic struggle and a field of contestation. Additionally, the museum is an established branch of the dominant hegemony and, as such, is also intricately involved in the economies of the military-industrial complex.

In 2012, at documenta 13, the installation *The Repair*²² by Kader Attia showed faces and objects that were destroyed in war. This installation made a remarkable intervention in the common ethnographic modes of presentation and, in doing so, disrupted the binary colonial logic of representation. As part of the public programme at Manifesta 14, Ilya Orlov and Natasha Kraevskaya opened up a *Revolutionary Museum After Ideology* on the history of the Soviet Union and included criticism of current events in Russia.²³ Lisl Ponger presented the project *The Vanishing Middle Class* at the Secession in Vienna where she placed exhibits from an imagined ethnographic museum she named the “Museum of Foreign and Familiar Cultures”.²⁴ In 2015, the Göteborg Biennale also presented two artistic projects that challenged both the notion and the history of the museum, *Museum of Forgetting*²⁵ and *Museum of Nothing*.²⁶

The above-mentioned projects encourage us to explore why artists are currently frequently and skillfully employing curatorial methods in their work. What is it about the museum as a topic and medium that makes it so interesting for contemporary artists? Perhaps artists have begun to develop an interest in the canon, because it has become so difficult to establish meaning, in an era when meaning is understood more and more as fluid and contingent; or perhaps the museum peaked their interest, because it is a space where it is still possible to negotiate meaning and take on the “value-coding apparatus”. While artistic projects on the museum are persistently self-willed, autonomous and critical, they also insist on their heteronomous potential—on the possibility of intervening in a place that the power of definition resides. Regarding this, the artist’s text on the *Museum of Nothing* writes: “The Museum of Nothing is a para-institution, in the sense that it exists provisionally and parasitically inside and alongside other institutions. Operating as both a mental and a physical space, it presents its collection of absences within the familiar context of institutional collections, display furniture, classification criteria, departmental

²¹ Hito Steyerl, *Is the Museum a Battlefield*, Istanbul Biennale 2013, <http://vimeo.com/76011774>. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

²² http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/documenta/2012/photo_tour/fridericianum/22_kader_attia. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

²³ Cf. Ilya Orlov, *A Revolutionary Museum after Ideology*, CuMMA papers nr. 14, <https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/cumma-papers-14.pdf>. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

²⁴ <http://www.secession.at/exhibition/lisl-ponger>. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

²⁵ <http://www.museetforlomska.se/Om-About>. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

²⁶ http://www.benandsebastian.com/?portfolio_item=museum-of-nothing. Accessed 5 Feb 2016.

structures, exhibition signage and curatorial texts. The Museum of Nothing excavates, and occasionally undermines, other museum and institutional structures, employing absences to call their authority into question. By focusing on the gaps between artwork, frame, description and representation, its endeavour is to activate the myriad relationships between things and nudge the physical and linguistic mechanisms used to fix them in place”.²⁷

III. Para-Museum

What would happen if the “museum of the future” were a para-museum? What would it be like? If we conceive of the para-museum as something that is simultaneously inside and outside and in a parasitic relationship to the museum, then a form of subversion may just cross our minds—one that robs the museum (of its power to endow meaning and definitions and its infrastructure). Marcel Broodthaers writes about his Musée d’art Moderne Département des Aigles: “the fictive museum tries to rob the official, real museum in order to endow its lie with even more power and validity”.²⁸ In actuality, numerous kinds of subversive theft are not only taking place in art museums but also in the educational belly of the para-museum—mostly in the shadows when the educators, guards and front desk clerks are busy with the visitors for hours at a time—on the weekends when no journalists, curators or directors are present. Within such moments and in-between spaces, so many things are risked, said, taken and used in unintended ways. The authors of *The Undercommons*,²⁹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, name this subversive, criminal relation to the institution the “resistance of the undercommons”, who find their place within the institutions and act on their future, insofar as they have one, in ways they were not invited or hired to do.

They call acts that disrupt the institutional logic of normativization and utility “fugitive practices”. For Harney and Moten, critique is deeply embroiled in the neoliberal and (neo)colonial conditions, and they do not consider it a workable tool for radically democratizing an institution. As they put it, “The undercommons might by contrast be understood as wary of critique, weary of it, and at the same time dedicated to the collectivity of its future, the collectivity that may come to be its future. The undercommons in some ways tries to escape from critique and its degradation as university-consciousness and self-consciousness about university-consciousness, retreating, as Adrian Piper says, into the external world”.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marcel Broodthaers im Interview mit Johannes Cladders 1972, in: Wilfried Dickhoff (ed.), Marcel Broodthaers. Interviews & Dialogue (*Kunst Heute* 12), Cologne 1994, p. 95.

²⁹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons. Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson 2013.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

What is lost in this mode of refusal is the possibility of establishing any kind of permanence. In contrast to this, we propose a para-institutional practice that seeks to do more than such a subversive position is capable of, because it does not believe that it must refrain from the radical-democratic necessity of countering hegemony. Seen from the perspective of the undercommons, what would it mean to take these institutions by their word? This complex relationship, which is neither fully against nor determined by the museum, can be described using the prefix “*para*”. This Greek prefix literally means from ... to, beside and next to; temporally, it means during and at the same time; and figuratively it means in comparison, in contrast, contra and against.

Although *para* refers more to a deviation than an opposition, it is often translated using the Latin term *contra*. We propose that the museum of the future assume a para-institutional position, one that can and must simultaneously inhabit as many contradictions as the institution itself. Conceiving of the para-museum as a radical-democratic institution activates the explosive power of the museum in relation to itself. It entails envisioning another kind of institution, one with more equality, freedom and solidarity, in another kind of society—one with more equality, freedom and solidarity. It questions the power of the museum by looking at it from the perspective of its own potential for emancipation, the range of which includes practices, such as the transvaluation of values, public assembly and critical education. It makes the museum its own and, as such, utilizes its own means and power to do what the museum has indeed always done: to challenge archives, appropriate spaces, organize counter-publics and encourage undisciplined knowledge production and radical education. Insofar that the para-museum maintains its relation to the museum with its potential for change and its relation to social struggles that disrupt logics behind hegemonic claims to power, it remains simultaneously part of the museum and part of a different order, one that is perhaps yet to come. And as such, we imagine it in the truest sense, as a museum of another possible future.