

What is a Museum?

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What is a Museum?

THE ELEPHANT VANISHES

THE MIND AND THE BORING MACHINE, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE ART INSTITUTION, THE STATE OF BEING AND THE POLAR BEAR AND ITS CAPSULE.

MISTAKES

Since it is important for the whole essay, let me clarify the title first, just a part of it. For some of you it will be recognized as the same title of a short-stories book of the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. While writing this essay I'm reading this same book. In Murakami's stories something is always in a state of vanishing or disappearing. The title contains two important words; the noun, the animal '*elephant*' and the verb '*vanishes*'.

No other verb than that one can better describe the subject of this essay. I have thought about it for a while, but this is exactly the verb and first word of two, for this text. The closest verb in meaning, related to 'to vanish' is the verb 'to disappear'. Although disappearing¹ may be a more logical verb to use, since I've been dealing it for a while now.

1 Disappearance is a word I often used to refer to my work in the class. This essay is mainly for my classmates and teachers. The text have many references to the class. Where necessary I'll give a further detailed information in footnotes.

Vanishing is in its pronunciation and meaning and state a better fit than disappearance. In this essay I'll give some examples of disappearances of moments, or rather vanishing of moments. As if these moments are still in a state of disappearing; vanishing.

For the time being I'll leave the word '*elephant*' as it is. It will start to have a context later on. It will gradually appear and have a more visible body in this essay. I must say; it is as important as the other word. The verb and the noun are closely connected in this text.

THE TRAIN LEAVES at 2046: Just got off the train and on my way to the stairs, the exit, my bike, heading towards home. Before I even got to the stairs a number combination on the departure board on the same platform of the train that brought me there, started to fascinate me: "20:46 to Amsterdam". Standing there under that board, I stared at that number for a while. It entered my mind as an important number and/or year; 2046 and I recognized it from something, but didn't know what or from where. A magnificent combination of numbers to form that year; 0 2 4 6, the first four even numbers. The train was leaving at 20:46 and the numbers on the board disappeared. After that I had no choice then to continue my journey to the bike and headed back home, still with that number in my mind. Why? and from where do I know this number or year? I calculated my age: I'll be 63 by that time. Later, I discovered that it must be from the film '2046' by Wong Kar-Wai.

When having a closer look at this moment of the train that leaves at 20:46 to Amsterdam; coincidences play a big role and a strong intuition that made me stare at that board, which lead to being mesmerized by that moment. Connections, weak and strong, were made somehow in my head to have this happening really occurring. In a way that strong to made me really stare at the board and have myself obsessed by that moment, which itself seems to be a very non-relevant occurrence. A moment which leads to the vanishing of the train, and of the number on the board at 20:46. Later and in certain way a 'good' explanation for that number is the film '2046'. This appearing and vanishing of connections in this situation and all the references that is connected to this moment really struck me; *'that moment kills me'*, positively. Such moments I consider as a state of being, to be in that moment, absorbing the whole scenery. Moments that just appear and as part of their existence gradually vanish away and eventually replaced by new ones.



POLAR OPPOSITES

Another moment which is in a state of vanishing is embedded in the picture with the polar bears above. Let me describe the picture; It's a photo of the polar bear exhibit at the Auckland zoo in 1920. In the foreground there are two polar bears, one on a piece of land and the other polar bear in the water, swimming and half gazing at the crowd. There are about 16 visitors at the background. Some men have hats on, and several of them are leaning slightly over the fence to have a good look at the polar bears. The image is divided by three interesting parts; the background with the visitors, the water with the swimming polar bear and in the foreground the other polar bear on a piece of artificial Arctic polar bear land.

The description above shows the artificial of what we call the real; a manmade version of the real northern arctic, a wide lost landscape covered with snow, ice, grayness, a simple form to describe the 'real' Arctic. The polar bear wandering in this immense land from horizon to horizon. The opposite of what is in the picture above. As if this immense space has imploded into a small tiny capsule, where visitors can have a peek into this world. As if the zoo is their last destination, their last residence before they disappear. While looking at this picture, the gaze between the visitors and the polar bears is clearly visible, especially the gaze of the visitors. Both sides are looking at each other and have a common understanding; to be gazed at and to be in a situation to be able to have a gaze. In this situation men and animal come closer together before the animal eventually will vanish away into disappearance. This is the pure form of vanishing, it has already started while creating such artificial capsules for the polar bears, to

bring them closer to us. To exile them from the arctic and bring them there where we can preserve them from their disappearance. This is however the start of their unwilling vanishing, an inevitable process which leads in the end to disappearance.

Above were two moments of vanishing, it's time to focus more on the noun of the title. This is where the '*Elephant*' in the title starts; the elephant vanishes, as in Houdini's act 'The Vanishing Elephant' in 1920. What makes this act fascinating is the vanishing part and not to forget to make the elephant appear again. To reveal what has disappeared earlier.

This is what J.Baudrillard writes about disappearance in his last text "*Why hasn't everything already disappeared?*":

*"as a singular event and the object of a specific desire, the desire no longer to be there, which is not negative at all. Quite to the contrary, disappearance may be the desire to see what the world looks like in our absence (photography) or to see, beyond the horizon of disappearance, if there is an occurrence of the world, an un-programmed appearance of things."*²

The following scenario crossed my mind for a while now. The Rietveld Academy has vanished. The building was not burned down by a fire or destroyed by a bulldozer or any other accidents. It has just vanished

2 Baudrillard, Jean (2009) *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?*
Seagull Books Pvt. Limited

from one moment to another. You don't even know that it has existed, just gone from your memory, from your consciousness. There is only a vague thought left of this institution. A black-out that made this institution disappeared from this world. What left is a plain field, no building, no pillars, no sign whatsoever of that institution. The surrounding has taken over that place. The teachers, students, cleaners, workers; nowhere to find, just all vanished. They all have disappeared. What a scenario and alternative would this be, an institution like The Rietveld just cease to exist. There is an urge somewhere that I would like this to happen; the Rietveld academy does not exist anymore. Just for one year would be enough, preferably for longer. No activity at all for one whole year at this art institution. It's a deliberately act and from now on I'll call it instead of the vanishing of the elephant, the disappearance of the elephant. A true honest act of disappearance of this art institution.

The question rises what make me think of such act? Not that I want to destroy the institution. It is just to have a critique look at this institution, which I'm currently attending. To figure out what can be and would be an alternative for this institution. If there is any at all.

What happens if we assume this scenario has occurred? That the Rietveld is really not there anymore, there is a gap to be filled. After the completion of the disappearance, there is still a remain of what it has left behind: nothing, empty space to be filled in with its replacement.

“We must give disappearance back its prestige, its power, its impact.”

The disappearance of this institution is a thought experiment to figure out what is the substitution and to imagine an alternative for the disappeared object. Disappearance is in fact the greatest 'act' to reveal what is there, the art institution, the Rietveld academy. It is not a matter of what will be the replacement after the institution has disappeared. Whether the same institution returns or a duplication or similar replacement enters the building. Does it really matter what will return? A dance-ballroom school, an elephant factory or just the Rietveld itself?

Once the institution has vanished, it can be brought back, as in a magic show. The final part to bring back and reveal the real, the twist of the real. The magician shows the object, building up the tension, in the second part he makes the object disappear, do the trick, and in the final, bring back the vanished object or its duplicate. The latter one is interesting; the duplicate. We may assume that the replacement, which is revealed is the same object or its duplicate or its substitution. Does it really matter in this context of the disappearance of the Rietveld art institution whether the same institution will be brought back again or if something totally different will be brought back as replacement? Instead of revealing the vanished elephant, a little white rabbit appears? Yes, a white rabbit. Just bring back a white rabbit

instead and name it '*dumbo*', as the flying elephant in the Walt Disney's film.

Now It's time for me to get back and finish the Murakami book '*The elephant vanishes*'. There is only one short-story left in this collection, you can guess; it is entitled with the same name...

The story starts with the following sentence: "*When the elephant disappeared from our town's elephant house, I read about it in the newspaper.*"

And it ends brilliantly with: "*The elephant and keeper have vanished completely. They will never be back.*"

Introduction: "What is A Museum?"

"What is a Museum?", "What is Art?" This thesis contains texts circulation around these questions. The texts inhere explores those subjects related to the positions of the museum, the art-world and the artist. Starting from the Art Workers Coalition in the 1969, a conversation between Robert Smithson and Alan Kaprow, to Marcel Broodthaers, Lee Lozano, Jeff Geys, Jackson Pollock, Asger Jorn and others.

DOES MONEY MANIPULATE ART?

Does money manipulate galleries?
Do galleries manipulate artists?
Do artists manipulate art?

Why do artists allow themselves to be manipulated?
Why do artists allow their work to be translated into money values?
Why can't artists be independent of gallery-fabricated trends?
Because the gallery provides their only means of subsistence from their work?

What does the artist want besides subsistence?
Is the artist's final goal money?
If not, what is it?
Love? Fame (i.e. temporary notoriety)? Immortality?

Does the artist care what anybody thinks about his work?
Does the artist care if anybody understands his work?
Who is the artist's public?
Other artists?
Critics? Curators? Dealers? Collectors?
Everybody else?

How much fame does an artist need? one year? ten years? the top 10?
the top 40?

How much fame can an artist take?
How much of an artist can fame take?
Is fame limited to salesability?
Is fame better than immortality?
Can immortality be a valid goal in a material age?
Can immortality be bought? simulated?

What are the steps to immortality?
Studio-gallery-publicly-reproduction-private collection-public museum?
Which of these steps are really necessary?
Is being in museums enough for an artist?
Is being in galleries enough for an artist?
Is the gallery with its monetary basis a natural vehicle for art?

Do artists love their dealers because they do their dealing?
Do dealers love their artists or do they love the money they make from art and artists?
Is art making love to oneself, to another, to others?

Is art a career (career=highway, a running from or to, carrying, carrying?) ?
Is a career carousing
Are galleries pimps for carousing artists carousing immortality ?

Are galleries selling art or selling artists?
Are collectors buying art or buying artists?
Are collectors collecting art or collecting commodities?
Is art an investment? a social status symbol? decoration? fashion?

Art artists in galleries making art or commodities?
If there were no art market would artists make art?
Should art look valuable, cheap, or priceless?
Is art that's worth money commercial art?
Is commercial art fine art?
Does commercial art aspire to immortality?

Is art that's worth a lot of money worth more than other art?
Is it worth a lot of money because it's better than other art?
Should art be sold? should art be given away?
Should society support artists so they can give away their art?
Should all human beings support all human beings?

Should art be free?
Can artists be free?

FROM THE ART WORKERS COALITION JUNE 1969
Box 553 Old Chelsea Station N.Y.C. 10011

This is a list of questions created by the Art Worker's Coalition in 1969 to summarize art related questions, as something crucial for the reforms at MoMA. I warn to not to go and read the list, it's mind blowing and will make you dizzy.

Further, read this thesis as you like, as a collection of thoughts and fragmented texts about and on Art.

-- happy readings --

Chapter 1: Art Workers' Coalition

As part of describing this Art Workers' Coalition, this chapter will be a summary of events based on the published documents of the Art Workers' Coalition³.

On January 3rd 1969 sculptor Vassilakis Takis walks in the Museum of Modern Art with several of his companions and removed his sculpture from the *'The Machine at the End of the mechanical Age'* exhibition and placed the work in the garden of the MoMA. The sculpture was placed in the show without the permission of Takis. During the dismantling of the sculpture and the moving of the sculpture to the garden, the group handed out pamphlets to the guards and visitors of the MoMA. It was a well-thought operation by the group. On one of the handbills, which was handed-out by Takis, was written: *"Let's hope that our unanimous decision January 1st 1969 to remove my work from the Machine exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art will be just the first in a series of acts against the stagnant policies of art museums all over the world. Let us unite, artists with the scientists, students with workers, to change these anachronistic situations into the information centers for all artistic activities, and in this way create a time when art can be enjoyed freely by each individual."*

Earlier that day art-critique John Perrealt received the following phone call: *"This is Takis... At four o'clock I'm going to remove my sculpture from the Machine Show at the Museum of*

3 <http://www.primaryinformation.org/projects/art-workers-coalition/>

Modern Art... They are exhibiting it against my wishes. I would appreciate it if you would please come." Perrealt described the upcoming action by Takis in detail in his article '*ART. Whose art?*'⁴

On that same day of what Takis called to be an symbolic act, the group had a meetup with Bates Lowry, the director of the Museum. The director of the MoMA reacts that this action had raised interesting problems "between any institution, artists, and the public" and he was seeking to have an open dialogue with the artists. After the meeting both sides agreed to place Takis' sculpture back in the storage and continue to have a dialogue for this issue.⁵

This was a start of a revolution, something bigger. From here on the Art Workers' Coalition started to form. A coalition with artists, writers, directors whom embraced political engagement and artists' rights. Was this the start of a revolution by artists? And what rights where they proclaiming? It quickly became a major impact on the New York art scene and many events and other gatherings were followed and the Art Worker's Coalition (AWC) gained a pivot role in the New York art scene. One of those events was the '*Open Hearing*' in which artists, filmmakers, writers and members of the AWC expressed there thoughts about the situation that was ignited by Takis's action to remove his work from the show in the MoMA. What was exactly the position of the museum in this matter? The coalition addresses questions as; are museums allowed to exhibit art as how they want it and what about the role of the artists in this matter. Where lies the

4 Perrealt J., *ART, whose art?*, the village voice, January 9th 1969

5 'Sculptor takes work out of the Modern Museum show', New York Times, Janary 4th 1969

ownership of the artwork? Entangled in the Art Workers' Coalition were also the political, social events during that time as the Vietnam war, woman-rights and minority groups – also artists as a group --. In 1960s and 1970s many social issues demonstrations were taking place during a time with an unstable situation between the Soviet Union and the United States, there was a war in Vietnam ongoing, worldwide social protests was not seldom. And the AWC fits into this time with all its social and political tensions and started its counter version for artists. In January 1969 the coalition demanded for the cancellation of another show in the MoMA; *Harlem on My Mind*. An exhibition about photography without any black representative artists.

“WE DEMAND

- 1) The immediate cancellation of the 'HARLEM ON MY MIND' show, scheduled to open officially Saturday, January 18.*
- 2) That the Metropolitan Museum appoints blacks to policy-making and curatorial positions.*
- 3) That the Metropolitan Museum seek a more viable relationship with the TOTAL BLACK COMMUNITY!!!*

*JOIN OUR PROTECT DEMONSTRATION AND BRING A FRIEND
THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, AT 6 P.M. -- METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM, 5TH AVE. & 82ND ST.”*

[documents, page 6]

One of many manifests of the AWC stated questions as: *"Does money manipulate art? Does money manipulate galleries?... Should art be free. Are artists free?"*.⁶ All these questions relates to the artists existing and their rights. Where does art belong? -- *again 'what is art?'* -- What is the position of the Museum in this matter? And what is the position of the artist?

In order to reform the Museum of Modern Art the coalition formalized 13 demands and sent it to Bates Lowry, the director of the museum:

--- 13 demands , original proposal january 28th 1969 ---

"13 DEMANDS

submitted to Mr. Bates Lowry, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, by a group of artist and critics on January 28, 1969.

1. The Museum should hold a public hearing during February on the topic 'The Museum's Relationship to Artists and Society', which should conform to the recognized rules of procedure for public hearings.
2. A section of the Museum, under the direction of black artists, should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of black artists.
3. The Museum's activities should be extended into the Black, Spanish and other communities. It should also

6 Art Workers' Coalition, *"Artist questions"*, June 1969

encourage exhibits with which these groups can identify.

4. A committee of artists with curatorial responsibilities should be set up annually to arrange exhibits.
5. The Museum should be open on two evenings until midnight and admission should be free at all times.
6. Artists should be paid a rental fee for the exhibition of their works.
7. The Museum should recognize an artists's right to refuse showing a work owned by the Museum in any exhibition other than one of the Museum's permanent collection.
8. The Museum should declare its position on copyright legislation and the proposed arts proceeds act. It should also take active steps to inform artists of their legal rights.
9. A registry of artists should be instituted at the Museum. Artists who wish to be registered should supply the Museum with documentation of their work, in the form of photographs, news clippings, etc., and the material should be added to the existing artists's files.
10. The Museum should exhibit experimental works requiring unique environmental conditions at locations outside the Museum.
11. A section of the Museum should be permanently

devoted to showing the works of artists without galleries.

12. The Museum should include among its staff persons qualified to handle the installation and maintenance of technological works.
13. The Museum should appoint a responsible person to handle any grievances arising from its dealings with artists."

[document 13]

In the following section I'll continue to recap the events that have occurred after Takis' incident as from January till April 1969. The documents were archived and made public by the Art Workers' Coalition containing of articles, documents, newspaper items.

[documents, page 21]

In reply Bates Lowry, the director of the MoMA responded in a letter:

"In response to the proposal by you and your colleagues that The Museum of Modern Art hold a 'public hearing' on the relationship between the Museum and artists, it is our conviction that a more thorough and systematic approach is essential if we are to find answers to the questions, raised by you and others, man of which we have been studying for some time."

In the same letter the director also proposed to form a special committee on Artist Relations. This committee can hold as many open

meetings as they wanted and reports of the meetings are made public for anyone. It can be said that the effort by the AWC made the museum “move” and it started a dialogue with the artists, but not satisfactory, as Perreault wrote that the museum just waved the discussion away with a simple act of creating a committee and ignoring all the other demands.

In response to the manifestations by the Art Workers Coalition, Perreault wrote: “If the above kind of art is the wave of the future one wonders why Takis and his supporters (including myself) are spending so much time trying to get the Museum of Modern Art to shape up. Who needs the museums?” [\[documents, page 27\]](#)

“What has to change is the attitude most institutions have toward artists.”

March 8th 1969, the coalition starts to organize an 'Open Hearing' on their own, as a sit-in in the museum. This decision was made after a non-satisfying response by the MoMA. The topic of the hearing as originally stated in demand 1: “The Museum's relationship to Artists and Society”.[\[documents, page 30\]](#)

The museum proposed series of open hearings, while the Art Workers' Coalition wants one 'open hearing' with as many artists, followers as possible to address the need for the drastic changes that has to be made at the museums.

“We insist that a proper public hearing cannot be held under conditions imposed by The Museum of Modern Art. Before the

many relevant problems can be discussed in detail, there must be a free and open public hearing. At such a hearing, The Museum of Modern Art will be welcome to present its point of view under the same conditions as other participants.”
[documents, page 31]

“The fact that you have made no concrete reply to any of our 13 demands forces us to believe that you are unwilling to deal with us. Since the structure and policy of The Museum of Modern Art are the matters immediately at issue, a committee appointed by the Museum would be useless.”

This letter was sent by the group with a larger list of artists that are presenting and have joined the Art Workers' Coalition, including Carl Andre, Joseph Kosuth, Lucy Lippard.

The museum is being accused to not be that educational institution as they should be and that there are doubt whether they are willing to reform to better benefits to Society and Artists. [documents, page 32]

[documents, page 36-38]

March 18, 1969: interesting letter from Bates to the staff, about the ongoing situations about the discussion with the Art Workers' Coalition.

The Art Workers' Coalition's call to protest:

“architects, choreographers, composers, critics&writers, designers, film-makers, museum workers, painters,

photographs, printers, sculptors, taxidermists, etc.

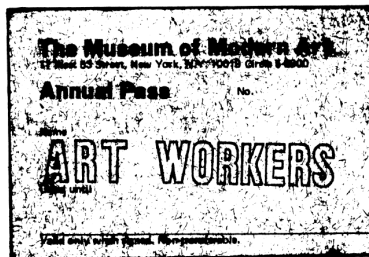
*ARE ASKED TO COME TO THE MUSEUM OF MODERN
ART GARDEN. 21 WEST 53RD STREET AT 3:00 ON SUNDAY,
MARCH 30TH.*

*AMONG THE REASONS THIS ACTION IS BEING CALLED
ARE THESE:*

- 1) TO DEMONSTRATE THE RIGHT OF ART WORKERS TO
USE ALL MUSEUM FACILITIES;*
- 2) TO SUPPORT THE DEMANDS OF BLACK ARTISTS;*
- 3) TO DEMAND THAT ALL THE MUSEUMS EXPAND THEIR
ACTIVITIES INTO ALL AREAS AND COMMUNITIES OF
THE CITY;*
- 4) TO DEMAND FREE ADMISSION ON BEHALF OF
ANYONE WISHING IT;*
- 5) TO DEMAND ACCESS TO MUSEUM POLICY-MAKING
ON BEHALF OF ART WORKERS.*

DEMONSTRATE OUR STRENGHT AT MOMA! "

[documents, page 41]



That Sunday around 30 artists show up for the demonstration and tried to enter the MoMA with modified entrance cards. The group also handed out the cards to other visitors for the purpose of entering the museum on their own. As a reply by the Museum, a counter-leaflet was handed out to visitors and the artists; the group finally found out after a month that the Museum cannot give in to demand 5, not even for an one-day free entrance, because the Museum cannot afford it. The museum was taken in doubt by their argument, because they have one of the largest fundings of all art institutions.

An occurrence describing the hectic and chaotic of that Sunday's demonstration:

"The critic Gregory Battcock had worse luck—entering the museum with a valid press pass, he began to take photographs of the demonstration from inside when he was accosted by a guard, manhandled, and thrown out into the lobby. Although both the museum's chief curator and its press officer identified him as a bona fide critic, neither of these personages was able to overrule the guard and allow Battcock to return."

[documents 44]

A response by another group of artists under Minority Report #1, defining a larger problem than only the MOMA:

"----We as artists support only in part the action and demands being made today against the Museum of Modern Art.

Furthermore, we recognize that the Museum of Modern Art and the galleries are inseparable. Today museums serve as galleries and galleries serve as museums. They both represent the same interests.”

[document 45]

The reaction of the accused gallery:

“They feel, I sense, that there is a sort of symbiosis between the artist and the Museum. That the artists need the museum for their existence, and the Museum needs the artist in order to remain alive.”

[document 46]

On March 30 1969, a statement has been made by Bates Lowry, the director of the museum to open the garden for a demonstration for the artists, the demonstration that was announced earlier by the Art Workers' Coalition.

[document 49]

“In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.”

[document 51]

Minority Report #2:

"MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES ARE MUTUAL DEPENDENT"

"Although we gonna support the artists' protest against the MOMA, we will also continue to object to both the existence of commercial galleries and their connection with museums."

[document 53]

A day after the demonstration an article appeared in the New York Times:

"MODERN MUSEUM PROTEST TARGET -- About 300 demonstrators gathered in the courtyard of the Museum of Modern Art yesterday afternoon, protesting what they called the museum's inadequate showing of black art and demanding that admission is free."

"Yesterday's demonstrators carried signs ('Bury the Mausoleum of Modern Art.' 'Retrospective for Romane Bearden Now.' 'Dump Dada and Moma')..."

[document 55]

"FUCK THE MOMA

Dear Rat:

The Museum of Modern Art presents art as art history. It presents art as a totalitarian pig-orderly labyrinth of charming and meaningless styles. Museums are granted non-profit tax-deductible status on the premise that they are educational institutions. The Museum of Modern Art's educational policy is the handmaiden of the its art historical view

– namely it teaches reverence of and envy for property. 'You too can be an object.' 'Look at an Eames chair, but don't sit in it.' When the Museum asked Gertrude Stein for her art collection, she replied no, a thing can't be modern and a museum at the same time.

On Sunday March 30TH at 3:00, a large number of art workers are going to assemble in the Museum of Modern Art garden to demonstrate their right to use all museum facilities. Other purposes of this demonstration are to support the demands of black and other minority art workers to demand free admission to all museums on behalf of anyone wishing it and to demand access to museum policy-making on behalf of all art workers. -- Gustav Courbet” -- THE NEW YORK TIMES FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 1969

[document 55]

“Black art – tech art – prick art” by Alex Gross

“... But it is ultimately also the thirteen points and their corollaries which will make or break the Museum and the entire art world – they will not empty go away tomorrow, even if all of Sunday's demonstrators were to disappear, as they are living evidence of an art world undergoing changes far deeper than even those it has thus far been able to make articulate, evidence of the changes all of society is now undergoing and of the changing role of art within it. Black Art, Tech Art, Prick Art – all of these are essential to the future of the art world, as is the struggle for artists' rights and the need for art to be accessible to all segments of society. These demands will not disappear overnight, whatever the fate of the present demonstrations may be.

Anyone interested in the attending a public hearing on these questions (and any of his own choosing) should come to the Auditorium of the School of Visual Arts, 209 East 23RD Street, in Thursday April 10TH from six to ten in the evening.”

[Document 56]

“The relevancy of the Museum of Modern Art's program to the black and Puerto Rican communities will be researched and evaluated in the form of a questionnaire to be distributed to the staff of the Museum and to all art-loving, community-conscious people.

On April 13TH, 1969, 200 black and Puerto Rican students will begin the evaluation with a walking tour of the Museum of Modern Art. We shall meet at 12.00 noon that day in the Museum's auditorium. Come to that meeting. Bring your interested friends. Join us. Ask questions of the speakers. Write to the Museum --

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

21 West 53RD Street

New York, New York 10019

or call the Public Information Department

245-3200

Help us evaluate!”

...

BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN STUDENTS

AND ARTISTS FOR A BLACK WING IN

MEMORY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

[document 62]

“The Museum of Modern Art seems to have been playing a delaying game with those artists and writers who, sparked by the Takis incident, have become concerned enough and socially conscious enough to demand museum reforms. These reforms, I believe, would not only aid artists, but aid in increasing the museum's relevance and perhaps insure its very survival. But the longer MOMA delays, contrary to expectations, the stronger and the larger the group of concerned artists grows.”

... “Why do art officials still think that artists can be placated by a little wine and a little bread? The view that artists are children is not only romantic, it is also childish itself. It is also convenient. To grant artists any autonomy, wisdom, or intelligence might mean that their demands would have to be taken seriously. Perish the thought.”

[document 68]

The open hearing organized by the Coalition themselves on april 10, 1969 encourage the attendances to bring their views on writing.

“Artists can no longer be treated like children and second-class citizens, and the wishes of a living artist in regard to his own work must be respected. The time has now come when in order to insure a healthy “gate”, MOMA needs the artists much more than the artists need MOMA.”

Rumors and accusations addressing to the museum in New York Times:

“The Museum is also having difficulty finding members to serve on the closed committee they had proposed as an alternative to the open hearing—at least one person who was approached has refused to serve and the committee so far exists only on paper. The Museum is coming under additional fire for having smuggled thirty policemen into its basement for last Sunday's demonstration—it appears there was no clear line of command to send them into action, so that any one at the museum (or anyone outside with a telephone) could have ordered them to act at any time and set them to battering demonstrators and works of art alike.”

[document 71]

As a Labour Union

The Art Workers' Coalition started to perform as a labor union similar to a labor union for professional as the merchants, carpenters, etc, but instead now a labor union for artists: *“WHY NOT! As a member of Society's most imposed upon minority of professional people – artists – I applaud The 13 demands of Takis & his supporters made on museums. Artists by nature are loners and are loth to gang up – except for fun & games. But changes are ringing and I'm all for ringing someone like this. 13 points it might take a couple of sit-ins but why not!”* -- Len Lye

[documents, page 20]

The Art Workers' Coalition is quite a rare group of a collaboration of

artists, as the letter above described as *“artists by nature are loners and are loth to gang up – except for fun & games”*. -- was this collaboration for fun and a game? --

In the 1970s the AWC collapsed into smaller groups. Nevertheless the actions undertaken by the Art Worker's Coalition did had effect on the MoMA and the museum started to made changes in their policies under these big pressure of the artists.

Chapter 2: Alan Kaprow and Robert Smithson

The following fragment is a dialogue between Alan Kaprow and Robert Smithson with the museum as the subject. Both artists have strong opinions about the position of the museum. Both artists have art practices that somehow includes an aversion, an reaction towards the museum. Kaprow's *Happenings* are not ideally to be placed in a museum and Smithson's land-pieces, non-sites, are remote, located outside of the museum's realm.

There is one fragment in this dialogue that fascinates me the most, and that is the following notion by Kaprow: *"What disturbs me is. the lack of extremity in either of our positions. For instance, I must often make social compromises in my Happenings, while, similarly, you and others who might object to museums nevertheless go on showing in them."* In reply Smithson responds that extremity can lives in a vain context too. Is this rather indifference perspective or is he referring to the acceptance of the museum and the irrevocable part of the museum within Art.

Another interesting passage is that Smithson mentioned the museum as a nullifying structure. A structure that erase all life-forcing objects and place it in a neutral space in which works of art can be observed. In here he refers to McLuhanism. McLuhan who is famous for his work related to Social Media and the globalization of the world. In this view I can really relate to Smithson and his works in the field, as placed in the world, outside of the museum, far remote from the

context of art, to make art 'global' and place it in the world than rather in a defined space as a museum. Is he trying to bring in, or more embracing a life approach? As Kaprow is creating with his Happenings, a more life approach than Smithson's, but still Smithson is exploring the world with his remote landpieces. And the ones that are shown in the museum are *non-sites* or are referring to the remote sites outside of the museum. In another passage Smithson mentioned that the uncanny of his work is also the distance, that it is so remote, and to have as much distance as possible to life. A deliberate creation of that distance from society to art and vice versa. In here he's stressing life as a social context,. He rather wants to stay as far away to the social aspect as possible. Does Smithson intends to say that a Museum is similar to the remote sites he's placing his works within? As the museum is as remote as a desert or a snowy mountain in Alaska? It is this interesting aspect of the museum that is so evident and that has been evolving in my eyes, as a remote site, although it's foundation is within the civilized world, in the city, in and amongst the social world. And nevertheless it's far too remote from the people.

'What is a museum?', a dialogue 1969

Alan Kaprow and Robert Smithson⁷

Kaprow: *There was once an art which was conceived for the museums, and the fact that the museums look like mausolea may actually reveal to us the attitude we've had to art in the past. It was a form of paying*

7 Kaprow A., Smithson R., *What is a museum?* 1967

respect to the dead. Now, I don't know how much more work there is available from the past that has to be displayed or respected. But if we're going to talk about the works being produced in the last few years, and which are to be produced in the near future, then the concept of the museum is completely irrelevant. I should like to pursue the question of the environment of the work of art; what kind of work is being done now; where it is best displayed, apart from the museum, or its miniature counterpart, the gallery.

Smithson: *Well, it seems to me that there is an attitude that tends toward McLuhanism, and this attitude would tend to see the museum as a null structure. But I think the nullity implied in the museum is actually one of its major assets, and that this should be realized and accentuated. The museum tends to exclude any kind of life-forcing position. But it seems that now there's a tendency to try to liven things up in the museums, and that the whole idea of the museum seems to be tending more toward a kind of specialized entertainment. It's taking on more and more the aspects of a discotheque and less and less the aspects of art. So, I think that the best thing you can say about museums is that they really are nullifying in regard to action, and I think that this is one of their major virtues. It seems that your position is one that is concerned with what's happening. I'm interested for the most part in what's not happening, that area between events which could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings that we never look at. A museum devoted to different kinds of emptiness could be developed. The emptiness could be defined by the*

actual installation of art. Installations should empty rooms, not fill them.

Kaprow: *Museums tend to make increasing concessions to the idea of art and life as being related. What's wrong with their version of this is that they provide canned life, an aestheticized illustration of life. 'Life' in the museum is like making love in a cemetery. I am attracted to the idea of clearing out the museums and letting better designed ones like the Guggenheim exist as sculptures, as works, as such, almost closed to people. It would be positive commitment to their function as mausolea. Yet, such an act would put so many artists out of business.... I wonder if there isn't an alternative on the fringes of life and art, in that marginal or penumbral zone which you've spoken so eloquently of, at the edges of cities, along vast highways with their out-croppings of supermarkets and shopping centers, endless lumberyards, discount houses, whether that. isn't the world that's for you at least. I mean, can you imagine yourself working in that kind of environment?*

Smithson: *I'm so remote from that world that it seems uncanny to me when I go out there; so not being directly involved in the life there, it fascinates me, because I'm sure of a distance from it, and I'm all for fabricating as much distance as possible. It seems that I like to think and look at those suburbs and those fringes, but at the same time, I'm not interested in living there. It's more of an aspect of time. It is the future-the Martian landscape. By a distance, I mean a consciousness devoid of self-projection. I think that some of the symptoms as to*

what's going on in the area of museum building are reflected somewhat in Philip Johnson's underground museum, which in a sense buries abstract kinds of art in another kind of abstraction, so that it really becomes a negation of a negation. I am all for a perpetuation of this kind of distancing and removal, and I think Johnson's project for Ellis Island is interesting in that he's going to gut this nineteenth-century building and turn it into a ruin, and he says that he's going to stabilize the ruins, and he's also building this circular building which is really nothing but a stabilized void. And it seems that you find this tendency everywhere, but everybody is still a bit reluctant to give up their life-forcing attitudes. They would like to balance the both. But, I think, what's interesting is the lack of balance. When you have a Happening you can't have an absence of happening. There has to be this dualism which I'm afraid upsets a lot of ideas of humanism and unity. I think that the two views unity and dualism will never be reconciled and that both of them are valid, but at the same time, I prefer the latter in multiplicity.

Kaprow: *There is another alternative. You mentioned building your own monument, up in Alaska, perhaps, or Canada. The more remote it would be, the more inaccessible, perhaps the more satisfactory. Is that true?*

Smithson: *Well, I think ultimately it would be disappointing for everybody including myself. Yet the very disappointment seems to have possibilities.*

Kaprow: *What disturbs me is. the lack of extremity in either of our positions. For instance, I must often make social compromises in my Happenings, while, similarly, you and others who might object to museums nevertheless go on showing in them.*

Smithson: *Extremity can exist in a vain context too, and I find what's vain more acceptable than what's pure. It seems to me that any tendency toward purity also supposes that there's something to be achieved, and it means that art has some sort of point. I think I agree with Flaubert's idea that art is the pursuit of the useless, and the more vain things are the better I like it, because I'm not burdened by purity. I actually value indifference. I think it's some-thing that has aesthetic possibilities. But most artists are anything but indifferent; they're trying to get with everything, switch on, turn on.*

Kaprow: *Do you like wax works?*

Smithson: *No, I don't like wax works. They are actually too lively. A wax-work thing relates back to life, so that actually there's too much life there, and it also suggests death, you know. I think the new tombs will have to avoid any reference to life or death.*

Kaprow: *Like Forest Lawn?*

Smithson: *Yes, it's an American tradition.*

Kaprow: Realistically speaking, you'll never get anybody to put up the dough for a mausoleum-a mausoleum to emptiness, to nothing-though it might be the most poetic statement of your position. You'll never get anyone to pay for the Guggenheim to stay empty all year, though to me that would be a marvelous idea.

Smithson: I think that's true. I think basically it's an empty proposal. But... eventually there'll be a renaissance in funeral art. Actually, our older museums are full of fragments, bits and pieces of European art. They were ripped out of total artistic structures, given a whole new classification and then categorized. The categorizing of art into painting, architecture and sculpture seems to be one of the most unfortunate things that took place. Now all these categories are splintering into more and more categories, and it's like an interminable avalanche of categories. You have about forty different kinds of formalism and about a hundred different kinds of expressionism. The museums are being driven into a kind of paralyzed position, and I don't think they want to accept it, so they've made a myth out of action; they've made a myth out of excitement; and there's even a lot of talk about interesting spaces. They're creating exciting spaces and things like that. I never saw an exciting space. I don't know what a space is. Yet, I like the uselessness of the museum.

Kaprow: But on the one side you see it moving away from uselessness toward usefulness.

Smithson: *Utility and art don't mix.*

Kaprow: *Toward education, for example. On the other side, paradoxically. I see it moving away from real fullness to a burlesque of fullness. As its sense of life is always aesthetic (cosmetic), its sense of fullness is aristocratic: it tries to assemble all 'good' objects and ideas under one roof lest they dissipate and degenerate out in the street. It implies an enrichment of the mind. Now, high class (and the high-class come-on) is implicit in the very concept of a museum, whether museum administrators wish it or not, and this is simply unrelated to current issues. I wrote once that this is a country of more or less sophisticated mongrels. My fullness and your nullity have no status attached to them.*

Smithson: *I think you touched on an interesting area. It seems that all art is in some way a questioning of what value is, and it seems that there's a great need for people to attribute value, to find a significant value. But this leads to many categories of value or no value. I think this shows all sorts of disorders and fractures and irrationalities. But I don't really care about setting them right or making things in some ideal fashion. I think it's all there-independent of any kind of good or bad. The categories of 'good art' and 'bad art' belong to a commodity value system.*

Kaprow: *As, I said before, you face a social pressure which is hard to*

reconcile with your ideas. At present, galleries and museums are still the primary agency or 'market' for what artists do. As the universities and federal education programs finance culture by building even more museums, you see the developing picture of contemporary patronage. Therefore, your involvement with 'exhibition people,' however well-meant they are, is bound to defeat whatever position you take regarding the non-value of your activity. If you say it's neither good nor bad, the dealers and curators who appropriate it, who support you personally, will say or imply the opposite by what they do with it.

Smithson: *Contemporary patronage is getting more public and less private. Good and bad are moral values. What we need are aesthetic values.*

Kaprow: *How can your position then be anything but ironic, forcing upon you at least a skepticism. How can you become anything except a kind of sly philosopher-a man with a smile of amusement on your face, whose every act is italicized?*

Smithson: *Well, I think humor is an interesting area. The varieties of humor are pretty foreign to the American temperament. It seems that the American temperament doesn't associate art with humor. Humor is not considered serious. Many structural works really are almost hilarious. You know, the dumber, more stupid ones are really verging on a kind of concrete humor, and actually I find the whole idea of the mausoleum very humorous.*

Kaprow: *Our comparison of the Guggenheim, as an intestinal metaphor, to what you've called a 'waste system' seems quite to the point. But this of course is nothing more than another justification for the museum man, for the museum publicist, for the museum critic. Instead of high seriousness it's high humor.*

Smithson: *High seriousness and high humor are the same thing.*

Kaprow: *Nevertheless, the minute you start operating within a cultural context, whether it's the context of a group of artists and critics or whether it's the physical context of the museum or gallery, you automatically associate this uncertain identity with something certain. Someone assigns to it a new categorical name, usually a variant of some old one, and thus he continues his lineage or family system which makes it all credible. The standard fate of novelty is to be justified by history. Your position is thus ironic.*

Smithson: *I would say that it has a contradictory view of things. It's basically a pointless position. But I think to try to make some kind of point right away stops any kind of possibility. I think the more points the better, you know, just an endless amount of points of view.*

Kaprow: *Well, this article itself is ironic in that it functions within a cultural context, within the context of a fine-arts publication, for instance, and makes its points only within that context. My opinion has*

been, lately, that there are only two outs: one implying a maximum of inertia, which I call 'idea' art, art which is usually only dis-cussed now and then and never executed; and the other existing in a maximum of continuous activity, activity which is of uncertain aesthetic value and which locates itself apart from cultural institutions. The minute we operate in between these extremes we get hung up (in a museum).

Chapter 3: As a Mausoleum

The museum as a Mausoleum; Adorno wrote the following about the museum and its mausoleum-like aspect: *“The German word, 'museal' [museum-like], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. They testify to the neutralization of culture. Art treasures are hoarded in them and their market value leaves no room for the pleasure of looking at them. Nevertheless, that pleasure is dependent on the existence of museums.”*⁸

During the protests by the Art Workers' Coalition Alex Gross was publishing an article referring once again to the museum as a mausoleum: *“The real question is whether museums are still as necessary at least in their present form. Those who imagine that museums are eternal and unchanging both as concept and institution would do well to note that the museum as we know it is rather recent in its origins. Like the concert hall, the opera house, and (to an extent) the proscenium theatre with unmoveable seats, the museum is largely a product of the nineteenth century and the upper middle class audience which patronized all these institutions. Basically the art museum was (and remains) a place one visits to commune with what are supposed to be truly meaningful values of life and society, as*

8 Adorno T.W., *prisms: Valery Proust Museum*, The MIT press, 1967

distinguished from the imperfect poverty-stricken, money-grubbing world outside its walls. The museum was (and is) a place to avoid life rather than to encounter it, a place to congratulate oneself on one's value rather than to doubt them and move on to something better."

[AWC: document 72]

Cabinets of Curiosities

Tracing back to the Cabinets of Curiosities, as the precedents of the museum. The Cabinets of Curiosities were private-owned collections of artifacts, from all kind of curiosities. The first western collection of curiosities that was made available for the public was by the University of Oxford⁹. An actual building was created to house a collection; the Ashmolean Museum. It was then that the modern museum was 'born', as a collection with its own building in 1683. And this transformation from the private domain to the public is crucial, especially that a building is created with the purpose to show a collection of objects. Curiously this is exactly where the relation of the museum to a mausoleum becomes so evidence and clear.

In John Berger's texts appearing in "*About looking*"¹⁰, a vital link is made between animals and man and the upcoming of the zoo. Adorno on the other hand, he relates the Museum with a mausoleum, in which objects, art is in a dying mode. If we look closer to Berger's assertion, animals are kept in the Zoo in the same manner, to be preserved. Art in the museum is in that sense, has the similar function,

9 Lewis G., *The history of museums*, Encyclopaedia Britannica)

10 Berger J., *About looking*, Vintage, 1992

as the Zoo with its animals. In earlier days, kings collected rare, exotic animals as valued objects. Nowadays, has Art taken over that position? The museum as a mausoleum, and the preserver of Art. Everything that enters the museum will be dead, preserved for the history of Art. Any artwork in that sense would become rigid. It won't be fluid anymore, it's frozen in time to be observed in its past. Any present interpretation seems to impossible. The comparison of John Berger's zoo and Adorno's museum is interesting; animals and art, the zoo and the museum. The zoo and the museum as the mausoleum, zoo as the elderly place for animals, but above all the place for disappearance! Once revealed in the museum, it will disappear, it starts its historical process of being kept, preserved as historical event, value, the dead object.

It is that view on the museum, to which Robert Smithson also corresponds to is the preservation modus of Art in the museum, as a void space to place Art in. Robert Smithson has this same tendency towards the museum, the void, the immobilization factor of this institute:

“Visiting a museum is a matter from going from void to void.”

“The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and become an untitled collections of generalizations that immobilize the eyes.”¹¹

And getting back to the dialogue with Kaprow, both were referring to this state of the museum. Kaprow happenings were situated far from

11 Smithson R., *Some Void Thoughts on Museums*, 1969

the museum. Although, nowadays it has also taken as accepted into the walls of the museum. And this is very striking example of how the museum spreads it surfaces everywhere, and by doing so, it brought the *Happenings* to its own mausoleum. It has been buried in the walls of the museum.

Marcel Broodthaers' fictive museum

While the Art Workers' Coalition was protesting against the Museum of Modern Art in New York, simultaneously on the other the side of the ocean, in Europe a protests were also going on against museums during that time. Marcel Broodthaers began his own fictive museum *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* in 1968.

“Marcel Broodthaers's Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles was a conceptual museum created in Brussels in 1968. It had neither permanent collection nor permanent location, and manifested itself in 'sections' appearing at various locations between 1968 and 1971. These sections typically consisted of reproductions of works of art, fine-art crates, wall inscriptions, and film elements. In 1970, Broodthaers conceived of the Financial Section, which encompassed an attempt to sell the museum 'on account of bankruptcy.' The sale was announced on the cover of the Cologne Art Fair catalogue in 1971, but no buyers were found. As part of the Financial Section, Broodthaers also produced an unlimited edition of gold ingots stamped with the museum's emblem, an eagle, a symbol associated with power and victory. The ingots

were sold to raise money for the museum, at a price calculated by doubling the market value of gold, the surcharge representing the bar's value as art. Broodthaers's museum represents a pioneering effort to dispute traditional museum practices by appropriating and altering them."¹²

The curious aspect of Marcel Broodthaers' museum is that the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* is also the art work itself. In here the function of the museum does also functions as art.

[museum <--> art]

In an occasion Broodthaers mentioned to nullify the museum with its own means. Broodthaers' museums contains artifacts, a collection of eagles as a projection of power within a system, as the power of art and politics.

"It is only logical that it will now model itself on boredom."

Artist Hans Haacke commented on this power symbol of the eagle in an interview:

"Contrary to popular belief, eagles are really not courageous birds, they are even afraid of bicycles, as Broodthaers wrote. Their power is due to projection. The same is true for art- and political power. They need the red carpet, the gold frame, the aura of the office/museum – the paraphernalia of a seeming immortality and divine origin."¹³

12 Tate description of Marcel Broodthaers, website [url]

13 Yve-Alain Bois, Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss and Hans Haacke, *A conversation with Hans Haacke*

Here Haacke mentioned that the power of this symbol is projected within the system, and that it needs the system. Does this also apply to the museum? As a power system for art?

The museum seems to be having the function to categorize:

“With collecting it is decisive that the object is released from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest possible relationship with its equivalents. This is the diametric opposite of use, and stands under the curious category of completeness. What is this 'completeness'? It is grandiose attempt to transcend the totally irrational quality of a mere being there into a new, specifically created historical system – the collection.”¹⁴ -- Benjamin

Broodthaers' realization of *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* simultaneously shows a relation between the Museum, as an institution and the objects within the museum. Another curious aspect is that the artifacts in the museum were labelled as “*This is not a work of art*”. This self-reference is curious since it will nullify itself. A total denial or maybe even better the nullifying aspect of the works and its container the museum. Here not only the Museum functions as the Mausoleum, but its own content of artifacts, hereby the art pieces are questioned of its own functions. If the dead are still wondering if they are still alive.

October Vol. 30, (Autumn, 1984), pp. 23-48, MIT Press,
URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778298>

14 Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, vol. 1, 1982 p271 (see Crimp)

The blow-up of the museum

In 1970 Jef Geys propose to blow up the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, which asked him to create an exhibition there. This is quite something to relate it with the Mausoleum aspect of the museum, to destroy the beholder of the destroyer.

[...]

Both Geys and Broodthaers are criticizing the museum as an institution, as in a way the Art Workers' Coalition criticizing and try to reform the Museum of Modern Art.

Chapter 4: Why Jackson Pollock's Paintings Shouldn't be Hanged on the Wall

It has been occupying me for several weeks [november 2012], it's intriguing me, the paintings by Jackson Pollock. The intriguing part is that I do not really *like* them. When I see one of his paintings or read about how he painted, it disturbs me. His canvases with the dripped drops of paint, the indifference painted lines, smashed on the canvas.



Pollocks's two statements:

1) "I intend to paint large movable pictures which will function between easel and mural. I have set a precedent in this genre in a large painting for Miss Peggy Guggenheim which was installed in her house and was later shown in the 'Large Scale Paintings' show at the Museum of Modern Art. It is at present on loan at Yale University.

I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural. I believe the time is not yet ripe for a full transition

from easel to mural. The pictures I contemplate painting would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely."

2) "My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.

I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.

When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, and ease give and take, and the painting comes out well.

The source of my painting is the unconscious. I approach painting the same way I approach drawing. That is direct –

with no preliminary studies. The drawings I do are relative to my painting but not for it.”¹⁵

By the statements above I found out that Jackson Pollock was inspired by the native american tribes who created art works on the floor, on the ground with sand and colored pigments: *“On the floor I feel more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk round it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the methods of the Indian Sand painters of the West.”*

Pollock seems to love to have the space of moving around its paintings, to be able to *attack* the painting from all four sides of the painting and to be *in* the paintings. This method brought him very close to his paintings, he walks over the paintings, splashed paint over the canvas, drips on it, a full experience, and it seems to me as a method with a lot of fun to create his paintings. It is the space that he creates around the canvases, the free movement around his paintings, as they are placed on the floor. It does starts intriguing me even more now.

If the paintings were originated from the inspiration of the American Native art as he described it and the way he *attacks* the canvases, why in *god sake* are his paintings on the wall? That's what disturbed me the most of his paintings. The paintings themselves doesn't disturbs me, it's that *hanging* on the wall. It doesn't come across that his paintings should be on the wall.

When we think/talk about painting than it's not strange to

15 Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) Two Statements, 1947/8
<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/visualarts/Pollock-ArtStatements-1943-1947.pdf>

picture a painting on the wall. That's cultivated and certainly embedded in the medium painting. But for the sake of all paintings; why should this also be applied to Jackson Pollocks's paintings? They seem to be more made for the floor and a notion that it's a painting and a painting should be hanged on a wall, it seems to be not satisfactory. That is not a valid reason to hang a painting on a wall, especially Pollocks' paintings.

In his first statement he also mentioned that the time is not ripe yet. What is not ripe yet? Was the public not ready yet for what he called the transformation? Is this the transformation from and away the easel? And his pictures he's contemplate to paint would be a halfway state, and not completely there yet. I'm curious how he would look at this paintings today?

Kaprow mentioned that Pollock work was not there yet. Not that the works are bad works, but potentially it is not there yet, as Pollock mentioned it in the first statement. As if his works are in a not completed state yet, only giving a direction to what will be there in the future. I wonder what would be Pollock's view now, if he is still alive.

Asger Jorn's modifications

In 1959 the following striking text by Asger Jorn appeared in an exhibition catalogue:

"Be modern, collectors, museums. If you have old paintings, do not despair. Retain your memories but détourn them so that they correspond with your era. Why reject the old if one can modernize it with a few strokes of the brush? This casts a bit

of contemporaneity on your old culture. Be up to date, and distinguished at the same time. Painting is over. You might as well finish it off. Détourn. Long live painting."¹⁶

It is Jorn's view on art, the collective value of artworks or the object-like character of such, and in his practice of his medium paintings. He applied, what he called '*détournement*' or modifications on existing paintings, not on his own, but on found and rather kitsch paintings, and modified it into his own objects of art. Those objects are in his means not ends but as tools for the spectators and viewers:

*"ALL WORKS of art are objects and should be treated as such, but these objects are not ends in themselves: They are tools with which to influence spectators. The artistic object, despite its seemingly object-like character, therefore presents itself as a link between two subject, the creating and provoking subject on the one hand, and the receiving subject on the other. The latter does not perceive the work of art as a pure object, but as the sign of a human presence."*¹⁷

Art as a sign of human presence, wouldn't this be the perfect answer on "What is Art?" -- I shouldn't continue with this --- Asger Jorn's modifications are interesting as it implies the work of art in a relation towards a certain *moment* that it can change over time. When compared with Jackson Pollock's work I do always have a feeling that his painting is stuck in a time and was put away in a historical time-frame. It's that reason I would like to have Pollocks's paintings to be

16 Jorn. A, *Détourned paintings*, Exhibition catalogue, Rive Gauche Gallery, May 1959

17 Ibid.

placed on the floor, to shake off the stiffness. Can Pollocks' painting become a détourned painting / floor piece?

--> I rather say no, because the market will not allow that to happen. Pollock's paintings has become a too big commodity with money value attached to it.

The possibilities / the disappearance 'as aesthetic quality'

In my view objects are not that important, in contrary the possibilities of objects are more intriguing and within these possibilities lies the qualities of the objects. Possibilities is where the transformations/movement of merging, assemblages, disassembling, disappearance occurs. It's the movements of those possibilities of objects in which I'm interested. If we look at the Duchamp's artworks, the found-objects. What it is revealed are the possibility of those objects, in a sense it has been transformed to an object of art. An ordinary object, quite daily, and transformed into what can perceived to be an art object, in the art context. In the same aspect is also the quality of indifference, it's the possibility of indifference that give the found-objects the essential quality. Indifference, because it can be interchanged by any other objects. The possibility to be replaced by another object, make the found-objects *indifference*. In here lies the possibilities of Duchamp's found objects, so common and ordinary but so powerful in it simplest form, it's just one of the objects, and interchangeable by any other. And due to this indifference it simply start to disappear, to fade away. And above all it makes space for possibilities!

With the above the perceptions of possibilities of objects, it struck me that a Museum is not that fluid in the aspect of possibilities, it is frozen in how art can be displayed and experienced. Commodity is taken over the pure experience. Commodity that gets into the museum and that it will be buried there when its forgotten. And that is why I can strongly relate to the Museum to be a Mausoleum. It's a place for the death, a place for the death art.

The Symbiosis of Art and the Museum

The Museum as an art piece, in which the museum is attributed the same quality as the art within the building, the institution. The Symbiosis of the art within and as the institution, one and the other can't be disconnected. If the Museum will ceased to exist, will there be Art? In a letter correspondence during the Art Workers' Coalition the following symbiosis was addressed:

“They – artists of the Art Workers' Coalition - feel, I sense, that there is a sort of *symbiosis* between the artist and the Museum. That the artists need the museum for their existence, and the Museum needs the artist in order to remain alive.”

[document 46]

In what extend should this symbiosis hold? As an equilibrium between on one hand the artist and the other the museum and this so called symbiosis; is this still valid today? The counter version of the Museum are the galleries. And what influence do galleries have on artists? Are the Museum and galleries dependent on artists? And are artists really

dependent on the Museum and galleries? There is a difference between the Museum and galleries, although they may have a similar role. Their role to exhibit work of art, to sell, to educate. The latter criteria is more linked to the Museum. The critical note by a group not belonging to the Art Workers' Coalition that was made as a reaction to the demonstrations of the Art Workers' Coalition to the MoMA was:

“We as artists support only in part the action and demands being made today against the Museum of Modern Art. Furthermore, we recognize that the Museum of Modern Art and the galleries are inseparable. Today museums serve as galleries and galleries serve as museums. They both represent the same interests.”

[document 45]

This is so crucial that artists themselves are pointing out here that galleries and museums does have the same interests and by addressing problems to one, the other should also be addressed.

Daniel Buren wrote the following about cohesion of the museum, galleries and the studio:

“The museum and gallery on the one hand and the studio on the other are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and the same system. To question one while leaving the other intact accomplishes nothing. Analysis of the art system must inevitable be undertaken in terms of the studio as the *unique space* of production and the museum and galleries as the *unique space* of reception.”¹⁸

18 Buren D, the function of the studio, October no.42 1987 p.35

Fiction: Broodthaers' Museum and Geys' museum 'blow up' proposal

Marcel Broodthaers famous quote to start with his art career is as follows:

"I, too, wondered whether I could not sell something and succeed in life. For some time I had been no good at anything. I am forty years old... Finally the idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work straightaway. At the end of three months I showed what I had produced to Philippe Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie St Laurent. 'But it is art' he said 'and I will willingly exhibit all of it.' 'Agreed' I replied. If I sell something, he takes 30%. It seems these are the usual conditions, some galleries take 75%. What is it? In fact it is objects." ¹⁹

Interesting is that he mentioned objects here, and in the same quote he mentioned '*inventing something insincere*' in the same line as producing art and becoming an artist. Being an artist, and making art as being *insincere*?

In 1970 Jef Geys propose to blow up the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, which asked him to create an exhibition there. Is the proposal made by Jef Geys sincere? And what about Broodthaers' assertion to become an artist and his 'mock' museum are they both sincere or are they *not genuine*? I think it is both point of departure which is interesting, as Broodthaers is starting from '*insincere*' and Geys from '*sincere*'. The proposal made by Geys seems to have a

¹⁹ Broodthaers M, text of exhibition announcement, Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels, 1964

different outcome, the destruction of the museum has never happened but the initiation made by his proposal has an impact which is more powerful. As it is bringing up the *possibility* of the destruction of a museum [the Royal Museum of Fine Arts].

The essence of Geys' proposal is this *possible possibility* of the event. It is crucial that the Geys proposal is *fiction* and that it stays fiction; that the destruction of the museum was and is never realized. In contrary to Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, this fictive museum had moved from the fiction to the real. Both scenarios, whether it stays fiction or not, it does questioned the role of the institution of the museum.

This symbiosis of the artist and the museum; can that also be applied to Geys and Broodthaers? Although both are criticizing the museum as an institution, it seems they can't avoid it. Broodthaers made his own 'mock' museum and later he tried to sell his whole museum but not succeeding in that. Jef Geys on the other hand proposed to 'blow up' a museum, in which his work of art were going to be shown. There seems to be an equilibrium between the artist's practice and the museum. An exchange from both sides and they need each other, even if the artist is refusing. Both artists, Geys and Broodthaers, seems to understand the system very well, and use it within their own practice. They are criticizing the museum as an institution, as in a way the Art Workers' Coalition criticizing and try to reform the Museum of Modern Art. The interrelationships between art and the museum are inhere the subjects – and coherent. This kind of art practice was later coined as *institutional critique*. It is the practice of

art in which the power systems are revealed. Simultaneously within this practice, not only it criticizes those systems, it also criticizes the artists themselves, the artist's own practice. And that is also the case here with Geys and Broodthaers, even if they are addressing their critique on the systems of the museum, they are inherently also criticizing on their own - art practice.

Chapter 5: The Disappearance of Art

The Museum and artists seems to be living in a back and forth game of re-inventing themselves. It's very 'plausible' to link the Museum to the Mausoleum, not only that it does have those functions as preserving art works – the dead --. some examples:

- 1) A protest sign of the Art Worker's Coalition: *"Bury the Mausoleum of Modern Art."*
- 2) Robert Smithson's *"Museum of the Void"*
- 3) The Museum as a Mausoleum by Adorno

The Museum does have the function to educate as well. You will enter the museum to be educated. You may wonder what is the education within the contemporary arts? In here contemporary arts and the contemporary museum seems to be have making the gap bigger and bigger towards the audience, the public. It is widely becoming more distanced, and works of art are far, and detached from the public. It has become a specialized, a disciplined world on its own.

The following argument fits well into this thought in relation to art education and defining art:

"It is precisely because many of the art world norms and standards that define what an art professional should be or do fail to be fully applied within the academy that experimental work can at times be realized within the confined space of the institution – work, which wouldn't be possible outside of it. We all know that one motivating force behind the need to take a position and define your identity as an artist is in fact the

pressure of a competitive art market. So what is commonly treated as 'mature' work is often quite simply the readily defined, instantly recognizable and therefore efficiently marketable form of art that the gallery economy elicits and thrives on. Since the pressure to serve up such finished products is at least partially suspended within the academy, it does effectively offer more space for risking new and unwarranted forms of art production."²⁰

In here the 'mature' work as described by Verwoert is the already defined, instantly recognizable works. It is this assertion which is interesting, the academy tends to be that open space for experiments, but when it comes to 'expose' Art, it is already in its defined state.

There was one argument I realized this may change this whole perspective. Are those museums not only for the artists only? That these institutions become so distanced that it would only functions as an artist's institution rather than a public institution?

This is the reason why Art is disappearing. It's getting into its own empty void space. I do not blame artists for this, art-production is a struggle on its own and it has results into wonderful works of art. It's the Museum and the institutions of Art that should act upon this process of what I call the disappearance of art. One big note: although artists shouldn't be blamed, they should always be critical what they

²⁰ Verwoert, J., <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2006-no4/lessen-in-bescheidenheid/english>

are producing (!). The fact that Art is created, there is also a responsibility.

Lee Lozano: withdrawal to life, as a total revolution;

“For me there can be no art revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, and education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution or a personal revolution. I cannot consider a program of museum reforms without equal attention to gallery reforms and art magazine reforms which would aim to eliminate stables of artists and writers. I will not call myself an art worker but rather an art dreamer and I will participate only in a total revolution simultaneously personal and public.”²¹

This was Lee Lozano's contribution to the Open Hearing of the Art Worker's Coalition, just one artist I cannot forget, her action to “boycott / withdraw from” the New York art-scene. It was her well-known *General Strike Piece*, in which she gradually left the art world after spending a decade as a high-prolific figure in the New York art scene. Her *General Strike Piece* eventually melted together with her other piece; to boycott her own sex; never to talk to woman again. It ended with her death in 1999, 30-years after she started the piece in 1969. It was her simultaneously personal and revolutionary strike towards the art world.

Lee Lozano's simultaneous personal and public revolution is

²¹ April 10 1969, Lee Lozano's statement for open public hearing Art Workers' Coalition (AWC).

embodied in her General Strike Piece, and was essential in her whole art practice. Besides her personal revolution it's rather speculation if her action was also a revolution towards the museum, but it probably was in a certain extend, or at least to the art world. She did carry her work to a point that it was in-revertible, her action and the execution was the work and simultaneously her revolution. Both the personal – and public revolution have blended together. And there she left, and moved on (into life).

In my thesis the elephant vanishes, I already did make a proposal, as a hypothetical, thought experiment; to have the Art Academy²² to disappear. To start with just for a few years. And to extend this; it won't be bad if this happen for the museum as well. The academy and the museum cease to exists, just vanished from all our thoughts. And awkwardly contemporary art is already doing that, it is already that void, that one big Mausoleum.

Let's execute it.

Let's vanish that elephant/void.

22Note: referring to the Gerrit Rietveld Art academy

(to be continued)