

"Publics are queer creatures, as you cannot point at them, count them, or look them in the eye. You also cannot easily avoid them."

Michael Warner *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York 2002, p. 7

In the modern and post-modern eras, the publication, conveyance, and with them the institutionalization of the fine arts have been characterised by a whole series of crises. Among the more well known are the cyclical fluctuations on the art market. On the other hand, to this very day, artists' critiques of the art scene and its conveyance context appear to have little significance for the reception and production of art and culture. And this is the case despite the fact that, since the advent of modernism, artistic approaches have not only referred back to their own medium in the sense of 'l'art pour l'art'. They have also concerned themselves with the respective current discourses on culture not comprised within the framework of the art scene, and with the narrowly defined conveyance structures of the institutions as well as the exclusive audiences addressed by those structures. Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealists, Marcel Broodthaers and Concept Art are as representative of this protest against the institutional framework conditions provided by the capitalist societies of the West as the American painting of the 1960s, Minimal Art, and the neo-conceptual and contextual art of the present. When artistic concepts are understood as responses to the art-conveyance complex, it becomes clear that the hegemony of the Western high culture: its power centres and rituals, as well as the division of labour and the decision-making authority that go hand in hand with that culture, are constantly being challenged by a wide and variegated range of players. In the process, the artists' conflict-laden protest has taken place, on the one hand, in the form of criticism of the selection criteria of curators, juries and art educators, on the other, as criticism of the mode of depiction, i.e. the framing of the art works by the art space itself. Moreover, to an extent, the cultures of everyday life, the contributions of the pop and sub-cultures of the post-war period have been brought back to the art space, thus serving to open that space symbolically for a new public. And the post-war era also saw the establishment of an international politicised scene of culture-makers, artists, musicians, theatre people and filmmakers who offered an alternative to the institutional discourse, represented new contents and addressed new publics in self-

diasporic contexts in the metropolises, for example, succeeded in positioning themselves primarily in such spaces, or created such spaces themselves. There, in turn, alternative art practices developed. Culture-makers from the global South and East who have stood up for individuality and modernity in their work and demanded a place in the institutions of high art have also decisively influenced the Western art system and its Richter scale.

The crisis of art's institutionalisation is therefore distinguished, on the one hand, by struggles between the producers of culture and their conveyors and institutions over importance and resources, on the other, by the issue of action spaces outside the control of the bourgeois publics and their agents. These heated conflicts found entrance into art theory and the work of artists but ultimately failed to bring about any decisive changes in the institutional framework conditions. The division of labour between curators and artists, critics and gallery owners and the related economy, for example, is amazingly constant. And the proportions of women and non-European artists have likewise been stable for twenty years, even if women work increasingly as curators and critics and even if exhibitions on feminist and post-colonial themes have come to be considered essential for good form. As we, in 2005, are able to ascertain, the hegemonic decision-making authority, the entity which ultimately dictates the discourses, has remained to a large extent in the hands of the art centres of the West and their institutions.

Yet the art conveyors have not been left untouched by the institutionalisation crises. They have learned to think contextually and to ensure that curators frequently hear the question as to 'who speaks for whom?' Because, as they know, the diversification of cultural articulation as formulated in the criticism of high culture also provoked greater specification for the representation of art and culture. The demand is for an expanded framework for reflection, encompassing the formation, constitution and articulation of knowledge and power. For the curators of today, art institutions and contemporary art events like the worldwide biennials are no longer empty containers or pure platforms for the representation of art, but specific places which open up a historical and symbolic framework, and influence or even create the cultural position of the works exhibited within them. What this means is that the place where art is conveyed to the public must be understood as much in a political sense as the content of the artistic work, that this responsibility no longer rests solely on the shoulders of the artist who takes a 'critical stance', but is also borne by the curator, who 'publicises' it in a specific context. Within this conveyance process, the curator moreover defines her/himself precisely on the basis of her/his involvement in the produc-

tion of cultural meanings. The process of collecting, classifying and exhibiting art works is not a neutral and independent method but, as I would like to show in this article, one that is integrally and centrally bound up with the production of prevailing knowledge. The curatorial position and its power to decide and to select also means that it produces cultural values, and accordingly influences the public opinion. The curatorial decision is therefore actively involved in the process of the constitution of articulations and their meanings.

Thus it can be said that the contextualisation and assembly of artefacts, discourses and approaches which artists once established as practices in reaction to the museum or art institution are now integrated in the art conveyance context, and the curators function almost like artists. The traditional difference between the curator's work and that of the culture-maker or the artist is that it is more or less taken for granted that the culture conveyor is paid for her/his work, which is viewed as a profession, and that the selection/production of knowledge takes place in a space that doesn't first have to prove itself as a public space (as opposed to the spaces organised by the artists themselves, which are all too happily proven guilty of being nothing but privatised family economies). For the art space and the art event operate on the assumption that they have a clear and unequivocal audience, an addressee, a public.

For me, a culture producer who represents an approach in which curatorial action was developed as a critical artistic practice in order to challenge the institutions' division of labour and power of division, the questions that arise in this context are manifold. I cannot pose and answer all of them here but would like, in this article, to propose a change of perspective which, firstly, conceives of the public as a fiction of the modern era in its genealogy, secondly, as a means of making clear that the public is created by the place and practice of exhibiting and by curatorial decisions, and, thirdly, which asks exactly what brings about this positive reference to an art public, whom this public is actually supposed to address, and who constitutes it. Then, in the second part of the text, I will introduce several examples of practice that are more closely associated with the term 'counterpublic'. The aim of these deliberations is, possibly, to develop a criterion for the criticism of exhibition work which is based on the position of the culture producer as an involved player and producer of discourses and publics, and which does not carry on the opposition between artist and curator but attempts to politicise it. By examining the relationship between public and counterpublic, I would moreover like to initiate a debate, which reacts reflexively to exhibition practices as forms of 'publicisation' and asks to what extent curatorial concepts, in dialogue with other cultural players, are capable of really generating diversified and con-

textual publics. In other words, publics which no longer merely meet the expectations of the abstract idea of a bourgeois public, publics which claim already to criticise the current exhibition concepts in their choice of themes.¹

1.

According to Michael Warner, the idea of a public as a cultural form, as a kind of practiced fiction of the type generated by the modern era on various levels, is an idea which differs radically from comparable conceptions of the public in earlier or non-Western societies. Moreover, the history of the emergence of the museum and the art space was absolutely fundamental for the constitution of this conception of the public.

The art gallery as we know it today emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe in the context of the dissolution of the feudal system and the establishment of various civil institutions and disciplines: history and natural science museums, dioramas and panoramas, national and, later, international exhibitions, arcades and department stores, which were of central significance as locations for the development and circulation of new scientific disciplines (history, biology, art history, anthropology, ethnography, political economy, etc.) and their discursive categories (past, evolution, humanism, aesthetics, etc.). They owe their existence to the project of the European Enlightenment and played an equally constitutive role for the establishment of the 'bourgeois society' and the subject status of the 'citizen'. The British cultural theorist Tony Bennett thus conceives of the practice of display chiefly as a set of cultural technologies in the Foucauldian sense, technologies which permit the organisation of a certain subjectivity: a citizen voluntarily practicing his right to educate and control himself.²

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this 'exhibitionary complex', as Bennett calls it, organised knowledge in a new way, by putting it on display for a larger number of people. To that end, not only were specific spaces created, but display technologies, ranging from glass cases, hanging methods and stagings all the way to the well-known presentations of Africans or Asians in replicated 'villages' were also developed. As shown by Bennett, who cites the example of London in the period of the expanding British Empire, the first major exhibitions directed towards the 'masses' initially served to present the progress of technological developments and juxtapose it with the spoils from the new colonies.³ The narrative shaped as a spectacle in the format of the 'public showing' structured a dichotomous, Eurocentric system and with it a large number of paradigmatic pairs of opposites with

1] The history of display and of the publics which took shape within that context, for example, raises the question as to the extent to which these publics still exist today in this sense, as a universal category. Is it this specific bourgeois public which art spaces address today, or have the present-day publics not already been long diversified and strongly associated with contexts of content and public personages? What publics, if any, are still produced by art spaces and institutions for the conveyance of art? And how do they differ; in that they receive private and public funding, in that they contribute to the historiography of the avant-garde or the alternative culture; in that they accommodate more or less well-known curators and artists? What publics do art institutions want to reach today, what does the conveyance framework of the art space accomplish today over and above the representation of the works? Can new, specific publics form in these places? And can we use the art space as a place for trying out new publics and concepts of public, in view of the fact that this space continues to be perceived by a large majority as an exclusive space for a certain elite, and the fact that it cannot be taken for granted that it is accessible to culture producers from other social classes? What are the conditions for the emergence of new publics in the global context?

2] Tony Bennett "The Exhibitionary Complex" in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson und Sandy Nairne (eds.) *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London/New York 1996, p. 80–112

3] The European culture of 'display', which formed hand in hand with the development of the exhibition space, is also described by authors of other cultures as being specifically European and something very unique. Timothy Mitchell points this out in his text "Die Welt als Ausstellung" ("The World as Exhibition"), whose title alone already indicates that the European viewing regime developed in the nineteenth century was concerned with more than a technology limited to museums and to the technology of exhibition, but also with a central discourse, by means of which the nations of Europe could define themselves in contrast to the nations of the global south. See Timothy Mitchell "The World as Exhibition" in Sebastian Conrad and Shahalini Randiera *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, p. 149–177, first published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1989, p. 217–236

which the 'civilised world' defined itself: traditional versus modern, agrarian communities versus urban and industrialised societies, subsistence economies versus accumulative economies, ritual objects and ornament versus the art work and illustrative functions, oral communication versus written and printed language.⁴

Along with other educational programmes and institutions, the exhibition space, the museum and the gallery that developed in the European metropolises of the nineteenth century as architectural forms created new formats for access as well as for exclusion. As places whose attendance was voluntary, as opposed to being dictated from above, they appear as a tricky form of disciplinary action, allowing the subjects to be judged according to their own initiative and commitment. While the new civil culture aspired towards dissemination, it also based its legitimisation on its claim to produce universally valid knowledge which, since the nineteenth century, was to be generated only for a certain specific subjectivity: that of the intellectual (male) bourgeoisie. In the staging of knowledge in the exhibition space, on the one hand, a very specific concept of knowledge was made available to 'all', which, on the other hand, made a new form of exclusion and self-regulation manifest. Moreover, the latter was further reinforced by the circumstance that the exhibition space itself was organised around the eye of an imagined, ideal beholder. The ocular-centric organisation of the exhibition space had thus perhaps not become the place where the guards or the director could observe the activities completely, themselves unobserved, as Foucault shows with Jeremy Bentham's prison designs. Rather, the exhibition space of the kind initially developing only in Europe is characterised by the fact that the act of viewing had become an activity in its own right. This development went hand in hand with a re-evaluation of vision in general, also expressed in the development of optical instruments and toys, all the way to the invention of photography as a 'reproductive medium' or of typology as a discipline.⁵

An exhibition or museum is further distinguished by the fact that a panoptical situation only comes about in the act of examining the objects, since other visitors can likewise observe us, and vice versa. In the 'exhibitionary complex', a subject is thus created which, in the act of viewing (i.e. by entering an exhibition space) can change its status as an object of knowledge production to become a subject of knowledge who studies the objects and thus enhances his/her education. At the same time, through the presence of others, he or she becomes an object of observation him or herself. This exchange cannot, however, be undertaken by everyone to equal degrees. For the universe of 'public exhibition' operates with the

tendency to grant women and non-Europeans access merely as the objects of representation, but not as the subjects of the representation or knowledge. This status of 'non-membership' applied not only to exclusion from the production of (self) depictions, but also with regard to a gender specificity of the critical faculty.

These circumstances are illustrated in a caricature by Honoré Daumier, showing a man and a woman viewing a sculpture, a female nude, in an 'exhibition salon'. In the situation of the spectator, the man is capable of achieving not only the physical distance but also the reflective distance, i.e. of performing the intellectual feat of identifying the object as art. 'She', on the other hand, is not capable of the same accomplishment, as is made evident by her remark that 'she' can interpret the figure only as a naked woman, but not as art. Daumier thus not only points to a class-specific exclusion (she is not a lady of the upper classes), but also to a gender-specific one, communicated by the drawing in threefold manner. First of all, 'she' is not capable of performing the act of reflection necessary in order to encounter art: rather, the drawing portrays her as a signifier of that group of the population which is incapable of distinguishing art from the objects and acts of everyday life. Secondly, she is not only incapable of making this distinction because she lacks the necessary background knowledge, but for the very reason that 'she' identifies with the figure, with the figure's nakedness. That which is being 're-presented' concerns her, she cannot distance herself, but, in the terms of bourgeois culture, she 'reads' sculpture 'incorrectly' since she cannot abstract what she sees from herself and from reality. She thus acts in opposition to a fundamental prerequisite for the ability of understanding art. Thirdly, it is her identification, triggered by the figure depicted, which bars her from achieving the status of a 'suitable viewer'. For whereas 'he' knows to judge depictions of women as pure art and according to aesthetic criteria, she is deprived of the role of interpretation by virtue of her gender affiliation. In the regimen of male artist geniuses she is not conceived as a producer; and accordingly cannot counter the prevailing representations with one of her own. What is more, the caricature suggests, and derives its humour from the suggestion, that she is also incapable of being a suitable viewer for the 'art works', (i.e., ultimately, of being a subject of knowledge). It is 'her' place to be depicted. 'She and it' can only be objects, and not subjects of knowledge, as opposed to her male escort. The non-membership in the public of knowledge subjects would appear to derive from the apparent impossibility of a 'self-representation', through the fact of the object status created by the depiction.

Pictorial production and the spatial contexts in which it is conveyed, as well as the symbolic arrangement of the space itself, can therefore never be viewed in isolation. Pictorial

4) Valentine Mudimbe *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1988

5) The constitutive element of viewership is psychologised not foremost as a cultural practice but as voyeurism, as curiosity, and thus naturalised. This is particularly evident in the texts and works of artists of the modern period. For a study of this issue which reaches further back in history, see Linda Hentschel *Pornotopische Techniken des Betrachtens*, Marburg: Jonas Verlag 2001

and spatial production are not only social processes as such, they also create social relationships. For that reason, they must be understood within the context of the social conditions in which they circulate and the production conditions from which they emerge. 'Objects' and their representation in pictures are not simply sign systems which are exhibited, but they also produce social interrelationships in their reception, consumption and the various means of using and interacting with them. In this interaction they join the public to create identification communities and specific publics. At the same time, pictures and their meanings emerge from social contexts and develop an evidence of social circumstances by means of the way they are made visible or invisible. According to Irit Rogoff, the exhibition of pictures plays a major role in determining our perceptions and our thoughts, since its manifestations always communicate certain standpoints and hierarchies.⁶ Museums and exhibitions thus produce not only new kinds of knowledge spaces, but also a specific mode of viewing: They teach the viewers to view and grant them access to specifically selected knowledge, or even refuse them that 'competence'.

In the records of the British Museum and elsewhere, descriptions can moreover be found of the behavioural norms to be enforced by the guards with regard to the visitors of an exhibition. In addition to the physical distance to the exhibited object, a regulation to which the visitors are subject to this very day, the public is expected to practice a calm and quiet manner of movement and communication if it wants to look at an exhibition. When introduced, these norms were new and not infrequently cases were recorded in which the public did not 'behave' properly, usually uneducated members of the proletariat who 'had to be shown the door'. To this day, museums are places in which we 'behave' accordingly. We speak in hushed tones, we walk slowly, conduct ourselves in a respectable and 'civilised' fashion, having internalised the panoptic situation. In conjunction with the 'exhibitionary complex', 'behaviour' and 'appearance' also became decisive criteria which allowed access to be controlled and restricted. Exclusion from this new form of knowledge conveyance can therefore not be explained solely by the specific effect of the new lordly architecture or of the knowledge placed on show. Historical records provide insight into the fact that women and men of the proletariat were not too awestruck, too stupid, or simply too disinterested to take part in the new formations. Rather, as recipients of knowledge distribution they were only recognised if they behaved according to the new bourgeois norms: a paradox, in view of their social status. This subtle form of exclusion, as well as the supposed freedom to acquire new competencies, reproduced already existing social hierarchies on a wide range of social levels. The positive reference framework of the 'public' envisioned by the 'exhibitionary complex' comprises discrimination in its manner of addressing its recipi-

6] According to Irit Rogoff, images determine a large proportion of our perception and our thought. What is more, since they appear in advertising, the media and art, they reproduce certain viewpoints and hierarchies, for example the image of the white Central European male as the rule. Despite the significance of her effort to identify the absences and deficits in the discourse of the visual, Rogoff attempts to claim a counter-position to the usual demand for inclusion by speaking out against a purely additive model, which merely incorporates "others" (women, minorities, homosexuals, etc.) into the visual canon. She not only fails to question the fact that these groups are thus re-established as minorities, but also the place and method of representation as a determining and controlling structure. In this connection, also see Irit Rogoff "Hit and Run - Museums and Cultural Difference" in *Art Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 3, Fall 2002, p. 63-78

ents, as well as categorisations and designation practices which ascribe different people different social statuses. This definition of the public thus encompasses the idea of the counter-public, which serves to create means of self-assertion and self-representation against the assignments of status implied by the visualisation practices and related discourses.

2.

The fiction of an art institution public and its conditions was historically created on a wide range of societal levels, in the design of the spaces, the exhibition technologies and the institutional discourses, even if the latter varied widely from institution to institution and developed into the widely differing approaches of the present day. In my opinion, even if the theoretical discourse today operates on the assumption of a large number of different publics, it still does not signify a denial of the consensus of the traditional concept of the public and its above-mentioned exclusions, nor even a more precise examination of that consensus. Because to speak of a multitude of publics still does not mean to ask exactly what kind of a thing a public is, and above all, what constitutes an art public. Is it a place where we meet or which we walk through coincidentally, to see and hear something, does a community thus emerge within it, is it therefore already a political place, a place of participation and articulation? How, and with what methods, Michael Warner asks accordingly, can we examine a public? How do we know where the one begins and the other ends; to what degree can publics be multiplied and divided, and what does this diversification mean for the object negotiated within it and for the people addressed by it, or even participating in it or producing it, and how is it perceived differently by different people?⁷ In the analysis of the concept of public, the American queer theoretician Michael Warner is interested in pointing out that publics evolve in practice and in context, and do not satisfy universal expectations but identification-related ones. In other words, the production of a public always goes hand in hand with specific subject positions, which are brought about in the process. With regard to gay and lesbian counterpublics, he asks to what extent they are capable of opening up new subject positions which reject the normativeness of attributions as lesbian or gay (i.e. as category of identification) and create new worlds corresponding to a singular in the plural.

The Italian theoretician Paolo Virno likewise regards the chief challenge of the present to be the establishment of new forms of publics. In his book *Grammatica della Moltitudine* he describes the necessity of inventing publics, proposing that this is one of the central issues of politicisation under post-Fordist conditions: "The shifting-to-the-foreground of

7] Michael Warner *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York 2002

fundamental abilities of human existence (thought, language, self-reflection, the ability to learn) can take on a disconcerting and oppressive character, or it can result in a new form of public, a *private public*, which establishes itself in a place far removed from the myths and rites of statehood.”⁸

Historically speaking, since the beginnings of the conveyance complex of bourgeois art, there has also been, over and above the familiar artistic strategies, a tactical utilisation of institutionalised spaces by artist groups, left-wing, antiracist and feminist collectives and consumers themselves. These tactics: for example the use of an art space for debates, meetings, workshops, film programmes, community projects, etc., have become active in the shadow of the public art market, its power of distribution and the bourgeois public, and, in terms of the concept proposed by Michel de Certeau, can be viewed as an attempt to appropriate hegemonic structures and reinterpret them, in the knowledge that they won't simply 'disappear.' This practice of alternative utilisation in the sense of a counter-public has been observable since the early days of the modern era.

The debates of the social movements, of feminism for example, were also conducted in the fine arts. In the late 1960s, for example, women discussed the issue of exclusion from, and inclusion in, art institutions and took a range of varying stances on the art-space context, its claims and antagonisms, its inclusions and exclusions and its power to constitute society. The feminist art movements of the 1960s and 1970s were known for their utilisation of spaces for the establishment of new publics: publics outside the boundaries of dichotomous sexuality and capable of developing new forms of collaboration and cooperation. These activities came about partly because female artists were even more forcefully excluded from the official spaces of art than they are today, and partly because the underlying conditions of production and representation were recognised as being patriarchal and Eurocentric. In feminist organisations, spaces were established outside the art system and used for performances, installations and lectures. Another important aspect was group formation, an aspect dominated in the modern age by white men. The feminist groups tried out new working methods and concepts of public which contrasted with the abstract public of the exhibition space, for example in *The Woman's House* or the *A.I.R. Gallery* in New York and comparable projects. Artistic works took place as actions in the urban space, involving a new public, for example the performances by VALIE EXPORT or Adrian Piper. At the same time, female artists continued to use the exhibition in the 'white cube' as a form of communication and, in the course of the seventies and into the eighties, began to open it increasingly for everyday cultural and experimental practices.⁹ The focus on specifically

women-related subjects became central in the 1970s, but, like the feminist discourse in general, underwent a process of change. Feminist artists stressed not only identity issues ('we women'), but also macro-political discourses and non-identity-related issues. What was feminist about these non-women-related projects was their method: their emphasis on informal networks, on the formation of new publics and a collectively developed, embodied knowledge.

Against this background, the 'project exhibition' of the mid-1980s united several of the above-described debates and attempted to integrate the experience of alternative artistic practices into the exhibition work: the opening up of the art space for a non-art public, the collective production of new 'knowledge spaces', the self-assertion of social groups as opposed to their representation in a product, the use of the art space for theme-related discussions, and the establishment of transdisciplinary networks which could be active and productive in other areas of society as well, beyond the pure exhibition context.

The exhibition *If You Lived Here*, initiated and organised by the American artist Martha Rosler and presented at the Dia Arts Foundation in New York in 1989, can be cited as a paradigmatic example of this socio-spatial artistic practice. The relationship between public and private, between depiction and representability, were a central concern of Rosler's work. In the exhibition she examined processes of gentrification and homelessness, not because that was a particularly scandalous topic but because the gallery was located in a certain area of Manhattan in which an expulsion policy had been undertaken in conjunction with the upgrading of the district. The project thus addressed the neighbourhood itself and, with the means of exhibition, sought to intervene in a social process. The public was likewise assigned a new role, for, within the framework of a wide variety of accompanying events, it was involved in the process, whether as the new middle class attempting to move into the neighbourhood or as artists who had their studios there and were requested to take a stance on the social conflicts. Rosler used the gallery specifically not to produce new representations of homelessness in the tradition of art forms such as socio-critical photography, opening it instead for self-help groups, critical urban planners and artistic projects, which intervened in the politics and production of homelessness. With these groups, three successive exhibitions on the subject of 'urban planning and exclusion' were collaboratively developed.

Projects like *If You Lived Here* opened up the art space for debates, groups and themes that had previously had no access to that space, and cooperatively shaped the content with

8] See Paolo Virno "Das Öffentlichsein des Intellekts. Nichtstaatliche Öffentlichkeit und Multitude" in Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.) *Publicum. Theorien der Öffentlichkeit*, Vienna 2005

9] The term 'White Cube' was comprehensively theorised by Brian O'Doherty in *Inside the White Cube*, San Francisco, 1986 (German edition: Berlin: Merve Verlag 1996). O'Doherty is a member of the post-war generation and lives in the U.S. He is a poet, artist, publisher, critic and political activist.

them. But the art space's potential to be assigned alternative utilisation for the purposes of social intervention is rooted in its own origins. Critical topics were/are not introduced into the art space at random. Rather, its constitutive character for a certain form of knowledge and subjectivity is what is reflected in the criticism of the art space, and what made it so decisive for feminist cultural practices. The opening up of the art space for other groups of society and the involvement of widely differing players from the fields of culture, politics and science not only serve to reshuffle the disciplines with regard to hierarchy but also permit a new mode of knowledge production, an aspect which was always of central importance to other feminist contexts as well. At the same time, for the very reason that the 'white cube' is artificial and has a 'public' character, the project exhibition creates a forum for these alternative ways of working.

The project exhibition as an artistic practice thus takes its place within the art discourses of the modern and post-modern eras as well as within the context of political and theoretical debates and struggles. To the same degree, it responds to the demands of feminist standpoints and gender-theoretical debates, as concerns the establishment and empowerment of non-dichotomously based subject positions, and to methodological issues regarding working conditions and collective authorship. As opposed to the practice of selecting artistic works for a group exhibition in an art space, the project exhibition takes an unambiguous stance and, rather than developing an illustration of a theme, develops its own theses, methods and formats. It establishes a discourse, a practice, which radically challenges the neutrality of the art space and of the related representation regime.¹⁰

Exhibition projects in which I have been involved myself since the early nineties, or which I have organised (e.g. *when tekno turns to sound of poetry*) went beyond linear communication structures, primarily in order to establish new forms of collaboration pointing beyond the actual site of the exhibition. On the one hand, these projects reflected the knowledge and body policies of the exhibitionary complex and reinterpreted its paradigms of depiction. On the other hand, a different process, usually dissociated from representation, took on central significance: the 'development' of the content within a framework of collective authorship. Even the spheres of private, everyday life, such as the reading of texts, discussions and group work sessions were themselves transferred into the public space, an approach carried out above all against the background of the feminist criticism of the normative concept of work and the criticism of the division of public and private.

From 1996 to 1998 I worked in a changing team (Sylvia Kafhesy, Renate Lorenz, Rachel Mader, Brigitta Kuster, Pauline Boudry, Justin Hoffmann and Ursula Biemann) as an ex-

10] As a format of artistic practice, the project exhibition also developed a new mode of presentation through the collaboration with various players from different disciplines. At the Museum für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zürich I worked with students, lecturers, artists and scholars to explore this mode of presentation in all comprehensiveness for the first time. In this context, artistic, design-related and scholarly traditions of 'exhibition' paved the way for a new mode of conveyance and intervention.

hibition curator at the Shedhalle in Zürich, a venue that can be considered a paradigmatic space for this type of practice. It was no coincidence that, during that period, we were involved in major conflicts with the institution and the sponsors. The constantly recurring arguments included the viewpoint that the exhibitions were not concerned with art, but with an alternative university or a socio-cultural meeting place, or that the visiting public did not correspond to the image of an art public. In other words, assumptions informed by precisely the 'concept of public and art' upheld by bourgeois institutions. The social conflicts to which groups are subjected who have no means of representation and no access to the established knowledge spaces were simply ignored. The empowering function, which can ensue within the context of joint work on an exhibition project and events in which new subject positions and practices can become established, was not recognised as a value.

In contrast to the classical curatorial or scholarly manner of proceeding, project exhibitions of the past years have also involved people from a wide range of fields, both in the process of developing the concept and in the realisation of the exhibition. What is more, these participants have been provided the option of changing their positions within these temporary contexts. Theoreticians and artists have begun to work together to develop theoretical and visual forms of articulation. Alongside the classical counterpublic strategy which became established in the 1970s, it was and is possible to try out new public, production and distribution models, using the conveyance format of the 'exhibition': models that take on the clearest contours in projects which transcended the boundaries of Europe. The communities that formed in the context of the respective projects (for example in *Kültür* in 1996–1997 or *MoneyNations* in 1998–2000) only came to exist in the process of the project development; the same was true of the related forms of communication.¹¹ *MoneyNations* conducted a communicative process with culture producers from Central and Southern Europe by way of the Internet and personal contacts. On that basis, it generated not only an exhibition in the more classical sense about discourses on EU-European border production and border crossing, but also a whole series of other activities. These included: a conference in which artists, filmmakers and political initiatives from South-eastern Europe participated, a seminar with radio producers from ex-Yugoslavia, a video producers' network and, most significantly, a mailing list which went on to facilitate the active exchange of information between antiracist projects, events and initiatives for a period of over four years. A kind of supranational community of artists, scholars and political activists thus emerged from the project. Thus, it did not merely serve to illus-

11] Also see the annual reports of the Shedhalle, 1994–1998, and the publications *Kültür* and *MoneyNations* as well as information available online www.moneynations.ch.

trate, but rather it generated a potential for new speaker positions and cultural practices on the sidelines of hegemonic discourses. The imagined public of the art space is not rejected as being 'alienating' and neutralising but becomes productive and reinterpretable for new micro-cultural and micro-political contexts. The development of a specific and particular narrative also turns projects like these into a kind of reference for the non-participants who have only 'heard about it'. Thus, in addition to the collective experience, projects like these even go so far as to chart an imaginary map of alternative cultural practices and ideas for transdisciplinary knowledge spaces, pointing beyond the symbolic space of the exhibition.

The art scholar Irit Rogoff therefore assumes that art no longer presents, illustrates, analyses or translates already existing knowledge, using other means or media. Rather, art represents both a research mode of its own, as well as a means of 'knowledge production' in and of itself. "Art and visual culture are thus capable of producing new knowledge as well as new types of knowledge which can help us to gain a new perspective on important themes, for example 'terror' (...)." ¹²

Although Irit Rogoff endeavours here to describe a core aspect of the new form of cultural production, this assumption is as general as it is problematic, because it obscures the actual political context of the development. On the one hand, it is no longer possible to describe art as something uniform. The practices of the post-modern age have distinguished themselves from one another to the extent that, in addition to painting, photography, video installations, etc. there are also project exhibitions of the kind developed by artists themselves, and artistic works produced solely for these frameworks. And 'art' is a non-uniform production mode, ranging from the individual artist's art work to various forms of collaboration between artists, or even cooperation between persons from different fields of knowledge. Moreover, not all of the 'players' involved in the representation possess the same social status. On the contrary, the format of the project exhibition, to which I refer explicitly as an artistic practice and not as 'art', shows how the struggles and protests of feminist, black and diasporic culture producers intersect with and complement the demands of their political movements. And it also testifies to the fact that a new aesthetic format cannot simply be explained on the basis of art-immanent argumentation, as Rogoff suggests. With the establishment of cultural discourses, feminist artists, theoreticians and activists provided the decisive impulses for new socio-spatial cultural practices. To envision now exploiting them, as the 'better' knowledge producers, for subjects like 'terror' does not exactly correspond to the self-empowerment they imply.

With this text I hope I have shown that feminist art practices and the antiracist perspective they generate (as theorised in the 1980s and '90s by women from the non-Western and diasporic context) emerged from concrete demands and social struggles which are increasingly concealed today in the reception of feminist art practice. That which operates today as a thematic exhibition, in which issues such as gender, area planning, economy and migration are treated curatorially, no longer has much to do with the feminist practice of the project exhibition. The purely representation-oriented thematic exhibitions neither question selection criteria and working conditions based on hierarchies and the division of labour, nor do they establish new publics and interdisciplinary accesses. They do manage to show works by artists presented as 'exceptional' in that they have 'made it' in the art scene, and even to include non-European artists, but at the same time they obscure the conditions under which the demands are still being voiced. And this is the case despite the fact that, within the art scene and the criticism of feminist art, a decisive discourse has finally become established. The focus on an alternative utilisation of the art space, on the other hand, is indicative of the fact that, in that space, our image of the public was challenged and revised. For that reason, the antagonisms one brings upon oneself with the existing concepts of the art space's public are no excuse for not understanding this space as one in which new publics could be invented. On the contrary, it is precisely the artificiality, the stage character, the performative quality of the art space which is the prerequisite for opening it up to other forms, practices and meanings of co-ownership and participation, inclusion and exclusion, and adopting those forms, practices and meanings in practice.

12] Irit Rogoff in Ursula Biemann (ed.) *Geografie und die Politik der Mobilität*, Zürich 2003, p. 33