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# KUNSTHALLE FRIDERICIANUM

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26/27 March 2010

## **Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique?** Symposium

The two-day symposium *Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique?* intends to put the possibilities, opportunities as well as the impossibilities of critical curating up for discussion based on the presentation of exemplary projects and theoretical analyses. The symposium will focus on art institutions, exhibition formats, and exhibition paradigms. It will include presentations and discussions and additionally serve as a communicative platform enabling curators, students, scholars and artists to engage with curating and its possibilities of meaning production.

More recent kinds of curation developed in the last decades aim in many ways to go beyond traditional curatorial practice, which, in blunt terms, could be called an authoritarian and powerful gesture. Influences on current forms of critical curating include the institutional criticism of the 1970s and 80s, which issued from 1960s anti-art. Among the central points investigated during that time were issues such as overcoming conventional institutional models of work and presentation, departure from concepts such as the art object, artist as genius and singular authorship (including that of the curator), incorporation of everyday elements, overlapping of disciplines and genres, a turning away from the white cube, a move to public spaces and off spaces as well as incorporation of the audience.

Critical curating also involves overcoming entrenched structures and reinventing the institutions museum, exhibition hall and art society, developing socio-politically relevant exhibition formats or challenging cultural-historical facts and myths, as well as politicising the narration of "shown" content concerning gender issues, migration, economy, urbanism and globalisation, to name but a few. This is connected with the wish, among others, of engaging in an effective, "radically democratic" (Mouffe / Laclau)<sup>1</sup> and emancipatory way and linking up with politically active groups, and can be attained by means of radical curatorial decisions as well as curatorial "complicity" with subversive artistic practices.

If we view exhibitions and art projects as an institutional apparatus that allows curators to convey certain meanings and new viewpoints to a broader public, then what is important is how new audi-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mouffe, Chantal; Laclau, Ernesto: *Hegemonie und radikale Demokratie*, Berlin 2000, translation of: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, London 1985.

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ences are addressed, how knowledge circulates and which social spaces and institutions are created and addressed. Thus, criticism through the medium of the institution may have only just begun and we have to take the issue of the messages of exhibitions seriously.

So what are the opportunities, possibilities and impossibilities of critical curating? How and for whom are programmes shaped, which deviations from formats change content?

**Hypotheses and questions:**

The activity of curating is currently entering a phase of increasing institutionalization. However, the establishment and dissemination of critical formats itself has to be an object of criticism to thwart the pressure for economic utilisation and counteract the emergence of new hierarchical structures.

In which ways can institution, public, curator and artist (artistic activity) interrelate if critical curating is striven for? Where can the various facets of curatorial responsibility be positioned in critical discourse?

What role does the socio-political context play regarding curatorial criticism?

What role does the economic aspect of critical curating, for example, play against the backdrop of a global economic crisis?

Are curatorial deviations currently being adapted to a different hierarchical framework and made to conform to the market? Isn't art de facto again centring on and being marketed around an authorial figure (the curator)? And isn't the white cube being conjured up again everywhere?

Is present curatorial activity able at all to exercise criticism of the institution and social conditions and make them noticeable? What is the current potential of the institution as a medium of expressing socio-political criticism?

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[www.fridericianum-kassel.de/symposium](http://www.fridericianum-kassel.de/symposium)

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